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**WHY BARBIE WILL NEVER BE PRESIDENT:
POPULAR CULTURE PEDAGOGIES AND THE
POLITICAL GLASS CEILING IN AMERICA**

A Thesis in

Communications

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines representations of women in popular culture pedagogies within the context of the private versus public spheres as it relates to American politics. The analysis utilizes critical discourse analysis and binary oppositions to study three popular culture texts: Barbie as a cultural icon, the five cinematic blockbusters from the *Twilight* saga, and two popular television series, *Commander in Chief* and *24*. The study reveals that popular culture pedagogies unconstructively influence women's participation in American politics. These social discourses function as myths that reinforce the domesticity of women; through which they learn to accept the role of homemaker as a premier and destined vocation in life. These discourses suggest the attractiveness of the domestic fantasy as more attainable than the achieving the office of the presidency; thus reproducing a socially conditioned, patriarchal political dominance over women in the United States.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

*“...be courageous, be free: play at being men, write as they do;
but never get far away from them; live under their gaze,
compensate for your novels by your children; enjoy your freedom,
but be sure to come back to your condition.”*

--Roland Barthes (Mythologies, 56)

This quote from Barthes' 1957 book expertly frames the same social climate in the United States today that existed almost six decades when he wrote this passage. At the time, Barthes provided a critical reflection on the cultural environment which appeared to permit women to exercise creativity in the public space; when in actuality, their freedom was tied to their domestic roles inside of the home. Within his argument, Barthes states that women are not truly free to develop professionally or to become businesswomen in the purest sense. Instead, they are tied to the supposed natural order of domesticity and femininity. Society dictates to women and reassures men:

But make no mistake: women must not suppose they can enjoy the advantages of this arrangement without first submitting to the eternal status of femininity. Women are on earth to give men children; let them write all they like, let them ornament their condition, but on no account must they leave it: their biblical destiny is not to be disturbed by the

advantage which has been shared by them, and they must forthwith pay, by the tribute of their maternity, for this bohemianism naturally attached to the writer's life. (56)

While Barthes specifically references women novelists in his statement, the validity and power of his argument may be applied to any occupation in which women desire to exercise their cognitive and social responsibilities outside of the home. Barthes speaks to the oppressive, patriarchal temperament of the naturalness of life: an expectation for the domesticity of women as caretakers of the home and producers of children. Women enjoy autonomy, so long as they enjoy it within the confines of their home or within a proscribed sector of the public sphere deemed appropriate by men. Women may express their individuality, but men define the scope of their creativity. They must remember that men and women are made differently and exist for divergent purposes. Society reminds women: "your order is free on condition that it depends on his; your freedom is a luxury, possible only if you first acknowledge the obligations of your nature" (Barthes 58). In a patriarchal culture, like the one present in America, men define the world in which women exist; and forms of soft power, like control over media production, serve to reinforce this paradigm as both natural and eternal. The specific order of the world and its naturalness presents in surreptitious and insidious ways. However such power arrangements, of which men's dominance over women illustrates just one instance, are socially constructed. These social conventions materialize as common sense to members of society, allowing for their prolongation. The supposed natural role of women in a domestic setting only serves to reproduce the order of things; to advance patriarchy in a seemingly progressive society.

Nevertheless, one could argue for the advancement of women since Barthes presented his analysis in the mid-1950s. Substantiation might include statistics that demonstrate an increasing number of women have entered the work force. Or, validation may include a list of triumphs by women that brought quality with men in various capacities not previously experienced. This line of reasoning provides a fragment of truth; but in reality, women have not experienced significant progression into the American public sphere nor gained true equality with men. To illustrate this point, consider women's professional occupations. Data from the US Census Bureau reveals that in 1950 the top job for women was a secretarial position. Six decades later, the 2010 census reveals the leading occupation for women remained the same (Kurtz). Although the title evolved over the years, to variations like "office professional" or "administrative assistance", this role continues to position women as helper or supporter. Margaret Heide describes many of the professional roles assumed by women as "pink-collar jobs" which are usually lower-paying, "as the legacy of the industrial era remains with its ideology of a primary male 'family wage' and a 'supplemental' female wage" (31).

The current professional world functions, as Barthes calls it, a "gynoeceum": a feminine setting where women believe they are free and equal, yet they are only liberated within a space created by men (58). Another illustration can be found in the gender wage gap still prevalent today. According to the Center for American Progress, women who worked full time in 2010 only earned 77 percent of what men earned; and even though women outpace men in attaining college degrees, that still isn't enough to close the disparity. Even more disturbing is that over 40% of this wage gap cannot be explained; as

there is no measurable reason for the inequality, which alludes to gender-based pay discrimination (Glynn and Powers).

The aforementioned examples provide just a few instances of the stagnant position of women in the public realm. Another significant gap surfaces when one examines women's participation in the political sphere. It is imperative to first establish that using all-encompassing statements carry an inherent risk, as exceptions and contradictions exist. However, the interest for this study is not with the exceptions, rather with the dominant paradigm that positions women in the domestic, private sphere.

Barthes' argument undoubtedly transfers to a debate over the advancement of women in the political, public realm. According to the US Census Bureau, women comprise 50.8 percent of the population; yet, representation by women in political office is dismal. A mere 20 percent of women held seats in the US Senate ("Women in the U.S. Senate 1922-2013") and 18.3 percent in the US Congress during the 2013 term ("Women in the U.S. Congress 2013"); 23.4 percent of women held statewide elective executive offices across the country ("Statewide Elective Executive Women 2013"); and only five women served as governor ("Statewide Elective Executive Women 2013"). At a time when women comprise approximately half of America's population, but less than a fifth of its governing body, the nation faces critical social and political issues.

This disparity did not occur by accident. In Paula Baker's essay, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920", she follows the history of women in the political domain and discusses the social resistance to women participating in American politics during the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century:

Suffragists believed that the conduct and content of electoral politics—voting and holding office—would benefit from women’s special talents. But for others, woman suffrage was not only inappropriate but dangerous. It represented a radical departure from the familiar world of separate spheres, a departure that would bring, they feared, social disorder, political disaster, and, most important, women’s loss of position as society’s moral arbiter and enforcer. (620)

Society believed that women belonged in the home where they could exercise moral influence, preserve national virtue, and maintain social order. “Woman was selfless and sentimental, nurturing and pious. She was the perfect counterpart to materialistic and competitive man, whose strength and rationality suited him for the rough and violent public world” (Baker 620). Though activism and the suffrage movement offered women the opportunity to gain political equality; the cultural ideology regarding women in the public sphere evolved only superficially. Even as women obtained the right to vote and hold electoral offices, the primary expansion of women into politics occurred as they ascribed political and moral authority in the private sphere through motherhood (Baker 625). Shannon Hart, in her essay titled “Female Leadership and the ‘Cult of Domesticity’”, defines the perspective that women should remain in the private sphere, the “Cult of Domesticity”. This philosophy, which arose in the 1800s, believed:

Women were designed by God to serve humanity through their roles as wives and mothers; the future of the Republic and society depended upon women’s fulfillment of their duties within their sphere; [and] God’s design

of women's bodies and minds made them uniquely qualified to understand, enjoy, and care for children. (132).

The logic followed that women were expected be passive and subordinate to men, while will maintaining moral superiority over them in the home. Additionally, a woman's role was solely that of wife and mother, and the church and society viewed these roles are critical to the health and future of the nation (Hart 132).

Since that time, the United States continues to foster this paradigm of domesticity and defy inclusive participation of women in the political sphere. While the media portrays the spectacle of some notable female accomplishments in politics, such as Nancy Pelosi serving as Minority Leader of the US House of Representatives or Hilary Clinton serving as Secretary of State with the Obama administration, to name a few; these anomalies do not accurately portray the current gender disparity in the United States, especially at Federal level. America lags considerably behind the rest of the world in this regard, with 90 countries now surpassing the United States in the percentage of women holding elected offices in the national legislature (Lawless and Fox 1). America also falls below the international average of 20.4 percent for women in national legislative roles ("Women in National Parliaments") with a dismal show of 18.3 percent ("Women in the U.S. Congress 2013"). Even the judicial branch displays this gender disparity with only three of the nine positions on the US Supreme Court filled by women. Furthermore, during this present era of political history, a woman has yet to hold the highest office of executive leadership in the United States government: president. A small number of women have attempted to run for that office, with few considered viable candidates. Since 1872, just 13 women campaigned for the presidency. Only two, Hilary Rodham

Clinton in 2008 and Michele Bachmann in 2012, received national attention but never made it past their party's primary elections ("Women Presidential and Vice Presidential Candidates").

While several factors contribute to this disparity, this thesis contends that popular culture pedagogies unconstructively influence women's participation in American politics. These social discourses function as myths that reinforce the domesticity of women; through which they learn to accept the role of homemaker as a premier, destined vocation in life. Moreover, these discourses suggest the attractiveness of the domestic fantasy as more attainable than the achieving the office of the presidency. To reiterate Barthes illustration, should women choose to enter the political realm, they will pay through their domesticity and maternity for the "bohemianism naturally attached" to this role outside of the home (56).

Social and Academic Significance

If one examines the current political culture in America, they would find a copious amount of research that examines women's participation in government. Focusing on women in elected positions, these analyses reveal that women perform well when campaigning for office or other positions of leadership. Yet, the majority of the female population simply does not participate in the domain of American politics (Conway, Fine, and Paxton et al.). Two studies in particular, by authors Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox, examined this phenomenon in an effort to uncover the source of the

systemic issue. In their 2012 report titled “Men Rule: The Continued Under-Representation of Women in U.S. Politics”, the Lawless and Fox state:

Study after study finds that, when women run for office, they perform just as well as their male counterparts. No differences emerge in women and men’s fundraising receipts, vote totals, or electoral success. Yet women remain severely under-represented in U.S. political institutions. We argue that the reason for women’s under-representation is that they do not run for office. There is a substantial gap in political ambition; men tend to have it, and women don’t. (ii)

As part of their research in this study, Lawless and Fox identify seven factors that contribute to this lack of ambition by women to participate in politics, including: perceived gender bias against female candidates; feelings of under-qualification; lower confidence and competitive drive compared to their male counterparts; lack of support to run for office; and a feeling of responsibility to care for their family and home (“Men Rule” ii). Lawless and Fox continued their research and examined a younger demographic to understand the perceptions of college students who were just entering the professional realm. In their findings, this 2013 report titled “Girls Just Wanna Not Run: The Gender Gap in Young Americans’ Political Ambition”, adds five additional factors to why women lack a desire for a career in politics, including: young men are more likely than young women to be socialized by their parents to attain a career in politics; young women are less likely than men to be exposed to political information; young men are conditioned for competition more than young women; young women are less likely to

receive encouragement to run for office; and young women are less likely to think they are qualified, even once they have established a career (“Girls Just Wanna Not Run” ii).

All of these factors point to women’s *perceptions* and *gender socializations* regarding politics in America. However, the researchers fail to identify any of the underlying causes for these symptoms. Lawless and Fox are not alone in their limitation. Numerous researchers report similar statistics that affirm the conclusion ascertained by Lawless and Fox: women lack interest and ambition for a career in politics. Yet these studies are short-sighted as they fail to examine the influencing factors that cause these perceptions and gender socializing conditions, which ultimately result in low participation by women in American politics.

Diminutive research exists that seeks to identify influencing social factors, beyond just that of the physical objectification and misrepresentation of women in media. In an essay that endeavors to provide some reasoning behind this trend of low participation, M. Margaret Conway utilizes a sociological theory in her article, “Women and Political Participation”, where she claims that America’s patriarchal culture produces a social norm in which women are presented with a limited pool of careers to choose from, such as a nurse, teacher, or secretary (231). Conway does note that since the suffrage movement, women began to engage in political activities, such as letter writing, attending council meetings, or signing petitions. Yet, Conway affirms that women are much less likely to hold an elected office as compared to men (231). While her essay provides some theoretical background, looking at the pressure of home and social gatekeepers which deter women in the candidate selection process, Conway fails to reason how American culture systematically reproduces these limitations for women.

It is critical that research looks deeper and examines the pedagogical influences behind women's lack of interest in the political sphere. The foundation of American democratic freedom rests in the ability of its governing body to represent its people, and women are significantly under-represented. For women to break the glass ceiling of American politics, society must achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural hurdles that avert women from considering a career in politics. For the academic community, and in particular critical cultural studies, scholars bear a responsibility to examine the relations of power which continue to position women as the subordinate gender. Systemic issues require a holistic approach to understanding the root cause of the problem. At the conclusion of their 2013 report, Lawless and Fox call for an examination of the premier agents for political socialization—family, peers, school, and *media* [emphasis added]—and the way in which these agents facilitate men's interest yet detract from women's. The researchers state that a better understanding this socialization will help narrow the gender gap in political ambition (“Girls Just Wanna Not Run” 17). As such, this thesis contributes to the body of knowledge that aims to liberate women and bring equality to the gender disparity in American politics.

Chapter 2

THEORETICAL FRAMINGS AND RELATED LITERATURE

Scholars have studied the trend of women's under-representation in American politics since the mid-1950s (Paxton, Kunovich, and Hughes). The principal conclusion from this body of research confirms that few women hold elective offices in the United States government, especially at the executive level, due to a lack of participation and interest in the political sphere. Researchers and political experts cite a variety of reasons for this low trend, from lack of ambition (Lawless and Fox) to social and economic influencers (Conway). Yet, little research exists which addresses the informal pedagogical influence of culture on women's perceptions of a political vocation and the impact to their personal lives. This thesis presents an alternative proposition which points to popular culture myths as a social, informal educative force that reproduces an ideology of politics as a male-dominated profession. Through cultural icons and fictional narratives, popular culture reproduces and reinforces an oppressive ideology that women are most successful as consumers and thrive in their maternity, realizing personal and social gratification from buying into domestic fantasies. Through their compelling nature, these social discourses affect women's decisions as they consider future professions, including political vocations.

According to bell hooks in *Reel to Real*, popular culture "constitutes a new frontier providing a sense of movement, of pulling away from the familiar and journeying into and beyond the world of the other" (2). These discourses, through their fictional

narratives, provide more than just modes of entertainment; they teach members of society how to act and what to think regarding critical matters. Furthermore, hooks states that whether we like it or not these discourses assume “a pedagogical role in the lives of many people. It may not be the intent of a filmmaker [or other originator of a media text] to teach audiences anything, but that does not mean that lessons are not learned” (2). People learn from popular culture texts like toys, television and movies; and these texts, through their stories and characters, shape social values on issues like race, gender, sexuality, and class. Ideologies are, in part, shaped and molded by authors, writers, directors, actors, and other production staff—not to mention advertisers and the production companies that provide financial backing. Cultural critic, Henry Giroux, asserts that media and its stories have considerable power and influence in our everyday lives:

At issue for parents, educators, and others is how culture, especially media culture, has become a substantial, if not the primary, educational force in regulating the meanings, values, and tastes that set the norms that offer up and legitimate particular subject positions—what it means to claim an identity as a male, female, white, black, citizen, noncitizen. (2-3)

Media discourses are shaping, for generations of audiences, what it means to be a woman in America today and their role in society.

Popular culture pedagogies provide one method through which society’s members comprehend and make meaning of the world. This bears considerable consequence, especially when society lacks a reference foundation for reality, such as a woman in the role of president of the United States. Within this relationship, a potent source of information and meaning is tied to television, movies, and cultural icons. In some

instances, fiction becomes more real than the real. hooks argues that entertainment, of which popular culture is paramount, provides an environment where audiences relax their critical minds, and texts employ particular visions upon their cognitive processes. Even the critical consumer experiences moments of seduction or allows an intentional suspension of reality. “They have the power over us and we have no power over them” (hooks 4).

Mary Lynn Kittelson, editor of *The Soul of Popular Culture: Looking at Contemporary Heroes, Myths and Monsters*, supports the argument by hooks that popular culture contains within its discourses layers of meaning that reveal significant truths about American society:

On this cultural level, just like on the individual level, there is a great deal more going on than we pick up consciously. Our thesis is that in the popular culture and in the issues that engage us, we can discover information, patterns, and propensities that express the psyche, the soul, and the deep places of meaning in the culture. [...] These subliminal layers, these less conscious levels of meaning and energy, are central to the way that the culture perceives and acts. The very fact that a great number of us participate widely in popular culture and in social issues and events means that the energy they carry is vital, not only expressing, but also influencing and even guiding our lives. (1)

Kittelson contends that the soul of a society and its most vivid images are found in popular culture; and this complex relationship works itself out in often obscure ways. The power of popular culture resides in its ability to engage with society’s members,

influencing and responding to contestations of the collective psyche. People craft their personal and social identities through these images and stories. Upon deeper analysis and unmasking the surface meaning, these cultural texts “reveal us to ourselves” (Kittelson 3). Concealed within its content, the imagination of culture reveals a social struggle over values, policies, beliefs, and ideologies. The images of culture flash in front of audiences, relentlessly penetrating their conscious and unconscious minds. Society grapples over fundamental issues within the spectacles and events of popular culture. “If we pay attention to the less conscious aspects of cultural life, we may also get a better sense of where we are going,” says Kittelson, who also asserts that we should recognize the immense value of examining “the less conscious stories and images of our culture, in the behind-the-scenes images and myths” (5). The argument presented by hooks, Giroux, and Kittelson is one of great importance. Popular culture, besides its entertainment value, offers a copious and multifarious area of study that divulges society’s fears, desires, struggles, and triumphs; while also working as an informal pedagogical tool to educate and shape the ideologies of the public.

The focus then shifts to examining how popular culture discourses create and propagate meaning for audiences. I will utilize several theoretical perspectives within critical cultural studies to establish this connection. Drawing upon the perspective of semiology, I will examine popular culture texts through the lens of narratological myths. Kittelson contends that society struggles with its issues through myths, which carry the recurrent, essential storylines of a culture:

These mythic themes, which express our deepest goals and values, give dramatic credence to our everyday lives in the shape of their settings,

characters, and plots. They operate like our own individual dreams do, through the power of imagination, as they work on and play with issues in our inner and outer lives. With their archetypal background invisibly informing them, these cultural images and imaginings allow us to try out different modes, different roles. They play out challenges and problems, ones we may not be quite conscious of, pulling us deeper into one angle, trying out this scenario or that. (7)

Roland Barthes describes myth as a system of communication, a message, from society to its members (217). It is a form of meaning-making which is not confined to just speech, but encompasses any discourse that carries a message or conveys representations (218). Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, in their book *Practices of Looking*, interpret Barthes' concept of myth as the hidden cultural values, beliefs, rules, and conventions which are specific to a certain group and appear universal to the whole of society. A myth allows for its deep connotations to appear as literal or common sense (19). By examining popular cultural texts within the framework of narratological myths, this study will expose the social struggle over women's position in the public versus private sphere within these texts; and by doing so will more closely examine the ideological messages imbedded within the narratives, which appear as natural.

Myths contain layers of meaning created through the process of signification. Arguably, any object or media text may develop into a myth once signification occurs. In his essay, "The Rediscovery of 'Ideology': Return of the Repressed in Media Studies", Stuart Hall describes signification as the coded meanings which influence how individuals perceive and act upon particular situations. Hall says that significations "enter

into controversial and conflicting social issues as a real and positive social force, affecting their outcomes”; they are “the means by which collective social understandings are created—and thus the means by which consent of particular outcomes can be effectively mobilized” (123).

The way in which situations are defined in social discourses affect current and future behaviors of the collective social mind. Meaning does not originate out of a vacuum. Meaning must be created and is done so through media texts and other forms of popular culture discourse, which are signifying practices. These signifying practices are neither impartial nor innocuous; instead they materialize from ideology. Hall states that, “Meaning is a social production, a practice. The world has to be *made to mean*. Language and symbolization is the means by which meaning is produced” (Hall, “Rediscovery of Ideology” 121). Ideology creates meaning through a system of coding reality that is not always recognized by society. One way meaning is created and conveyed occurs through popular culture narratives, and these stories often significantly impact on our lives. The influence of narratives in our everyday lives is underscored by Robin Redmon Wright, in her article “Narratives from Popular Culture: Critical Implications for Adult Education”:

Entertaining, engaging stories become popular. They become narratives that shape our cultures. Popular cultural narratives are embedded in our daily existence. They take particular forms such as epics, fables, parables, biographies, fairy tales, bildungsroman, tragedies, comedies, or dramas. They are worked into genres, mediums, and venues that appeal to the entire spectrum of personalities. There are metanarratives that become so pervasive in popular culture that they shape our accepted “norms”. (49)

Myths also contain within them representations, another concept from Hall, who contends that the production of meaning occurs through language, an organized system that contains signs to symbolize real and imaginary ideas, objects, people, events, feelings, etc (“Representation” 28). According to Hall, representation is an “essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It *does* involve the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things” (“Representation” 15). Representation links together objects, concepts, and image signs to produce cultural meaning in language (Hall 19). Meaning is created and exchanged through numerous channels in the United States; one of which is the entertainment industry and its infinite source of signifying (meaning-producing) practices. Each photo, magazine, book, song, television show, character, movie, and other social discourses create meaning in culture and shape how members of its society view the world. These systems of representation do not reflect the reality that currently exists, as much as they “organize, construct, and mediate our understanding of reality, emotion, and imagination” (Sturken and Cartwright 13). Thus, representation is the process through which individuals construct and understand the world around them. Analyzing popular culture texts through the lens of meaning making representations offers this study an insight into society’s view of women in the political sphere and how that meaning is reproduced through everyday channels to maintain dominant ideologies.

Additionally, I apply the framework of Marxist feminism, which seeks to understand the organization of social relations and social structures that impact women. As defined by Lana Rakow in her essay, “Feminist Approaches to Popular Culture: Giving Patriarchy Its Due”, this type of feminist approach “requires us to stand back from

popular culture to see the larger set of social and economic arrangements that produce culture and to see their implications for women's position and experience" (193).

Applying a feminist approach to this study affords the opportunity to examine how popular culture positions women in a socially subordinate role, and the impact of social myths to restrict women's access to the public sphere by confining them to the private sphere (Rakow 194). The social and economic arrangements which impact women in the United States, including popular culture discourses, are numerous. Rather than examine each structure as an isolated factor that affects the experiences of women; they should be studied as threads woven together to create a tapestry of the female experience in American culture. "Feminist cultural theory [...] locates popular culture within a broader context of women's relationships to the means of symbolic production and expression and within a larger struggle to understand and change social relations and organization" (Rakow 195). Feminist theory aims to change the social imbalance women experience at all levels.

Finally in my analysis, I will apply Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which is interested in relations of power; specifically how dominant social groups acquire power over subordinate social groups and maintain their power as natural. James Lull, a media and cultural studies scholar, describes the media agency as an ideology-producing super structure that reproduces and strengthens power for the dominant group. According to Lull, communications technology is an all-encompassing and powerful ideological medium (33). Media introduces unique elements into the cultural conscious, which society accepts as common and natural (34). Lull continues that "the most potent effect of mass media is how they subtly influence their audiences to perceive social roles and

routine personal activities” (34). For hegemony to succeed, the ideologies of the dominant group must appear as a natural and normal part of reality. Lull states that because “information and entertainment technology is so thoroughly integrated into the everyday realities of modern societies, mass media’s social influence is not always recognized, discussed, or criticized [...] Hegemony, therefore, can easily go undetected” (34). To sustain their hegemonic influence, dominant groups must continually work to maintain their power through “the major information-diffusing, socializing agencies of society” (Lull 35). Popular culture is one compelling force that infiltrates almost every activity of everyday life in American culture. This study examines media discourses as potential tools of repression that restrain women from political participation in the United States. As such, examining these discourses within the framework of hegemony sheds light upon the ways a patriarchal culture reproduces its power over women by positioning them within the private sphere.

The discussion then returns to Barthes concept of social myths. The complexity and naturalness of myth is precisely the genesis of its efficacy. Barthes asserts that a myth “hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion” (240). Undoubtedly society is comprised of intelligent, discerning individuals. Thus, the myth aims not to dupe the audience with devious messages that involve trickery or some other manner of deceit. Rather, discourses successfully function as myths because they transform meaning into form and present motive as reason (Barthes 240). Myths tolerate multiple meanings and interpretations, allowing for compromise and eternal continuation. In actuality, myths embrace contradiction and ascribe new meaning to that contradiction. Simply stated:

Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them natural and eternal justification, it gives them clarity which is not that of explanations but that of statement of fact. (Barthes 255-256)

It is this statement of fact which serves the dominant interests of society and maintains hegemonic ideologies. Myths depoliticize issues. They surround and create the world that people connect with each and every day. This world is not that of reality, but of meanings and interpretations, of symbols and representations, of negotiations and contradictions. This world holds incredible consequence for its citizens.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Selected Texts and Guiding Questions

The central task of this thesis is to show that selected popular culture discourses function as myths which strengthen the political glass ceiling for women in the United States by reinforcing their female domesticity and suggesting that fantasies are more attainable than achieving the presidency. Three popular culture discourses were chosen for analysis within the scope of this study: 1) Barbie®, an American icon and cultural signifier; 2) the *Twilight* saga, a recent popular culture literary and cinematic phenomenon; and 3) *Commander in Chief* and *24*, representing popular television discourses that feature women in presidential roles. The selection of each popular discourse was based on their immense popularity and recognition with the American public, their success and accolades within the entertainment and consumer industry, and their capacity to function as cultural influencers for women. As such, I utilized the following questions to guide this study:

- 1) What ideologies concerning women's private and public roles are imbedded in each of the three popular culture discourses?
- 2) What characteristics of the fictional female protagonists are represented in the three popular culture discourses?

- 3) What are the implications of these representations on women's social identity construction and involvement in the political sphere?
- 4) Do these popular culture discourses reinforce or subvert women in executive leadership, specifically in the role of United States president?

Cultural Icon: Barbie®

I chose Barbie as the first popular culture discourse because of its pedagogical with children and its continuing didactic function through adulthood. This iconic symbol embodies more than just a toy or a benign doll for little girls to play out imaginative scenarios; Barbie represents a powerful cultural signifier. "Barbie provides a mirror of ourselves and society in the same way any commodity does: it is an alluring albeit idealized reflection which obliquely addresses social contradictions but evades or appears to resolve their most profound incongruities" (Pearson and Mullins 227). Barbie is a cultural icon that embodies both toy and myth. Roland Barthes challenge the academic and intellectual to examine the influence of toys on the social development of children. He states that a "toy *always signifies something*, and that something is always entirely socialized, constituted by the myths or techniques of modern adult life" (59). Barthes contends that toys "*literally* prefigure the universe of adult functions" and prepares children to accept these functions in their adulthood (59). More than simply mimicking the functions of an adult, a toy naturalizes these responsibilities and conditions children for their future social roles. Barthes emphasizes that engagement with these toys eliminates the possibility for children to create their own worlds, and in essence,

determine their own future. Toys eradicate the opportunity for unique maturity in life, outside the confines of a prescribed adult experience. The child serves only as user of the toy, imagining play within the toy's socialized boundaries. Children are robbed of the occasion to invent their own worlds. The world of play is "prepared for [the child] without adventure, without surprise, and without joy" (60). Toys come with prescribed materials and supporting narratives that dictate the scope of imagination a child may exercise. The argument by Barthes helps to explain the continued fascination with Barbie by many women well into their adulthood. It is this predetermined scope of Barbie as toy and female signifier that is relevant for this study.

Since 1959, Mattel has found great success marketing Barbie to girls throughout the United States (Pearson and Mullins 225). Through continual product evolution and extensive marketing efforts, Barbie now enjoys the position of cultural icon and the symbol of American girlhood; exemplified by the toy's continued success as a top-selling commodity, as well as the plethora of studies written by scholars and critics on the toy's social implications. Shirley R. Steinberg explains the cultural idolization with the doll:

Everyone loves Barbie and Barbie loves everyone. Barbie proves to us that if we try hard enough, we can own anything and everything. Barbie always succeeds. She becomes whatever she sets her mind to. She influences generations of children and adults and exists as a perpetual reminder of all that is good, wholesome, and pink in our lives. Barbie is a true American. She stands for the family values that our country holds dear. (150)

Mattel has capitalized on the “We Girls Can Do Anything!” attitude and quintessence of the American dream, with various slogans and girl-power catchphrases on the toy’s packaging and for specific product campaigns (Steinberg 151). Moreover, Barbie’s resume of professional occupations is quite extensive, including over 130 careers and a few, periodic bouts in the political realm. Barbie first ran for president in 1992 with Mattel’s release of a limited edition doll that focused more on fashion than advancing social change (Zaslow and Schoenberg 97). In the decades that followed, Mattel also released a special edition Barbie for the presidential elections in 2000, 2004, 2008, and mostly recently in 2012 under the Barbie® I Can Be...™ career-focused product line. In a news release from Mattel, Inc., the company announced that the doll would “represent girls of all ages on her road to the ‘Pink House,’ serving as the ‘B Party™’ candidate” and that she would launch an all-out “glam-paign” to run as the only female candidate with the hopes of inspiring girls to undertake leadership roles in their communities (Mattel News Release). In partnership with The White House Project®—a national non-profit organization, which is now defunct, but once aimed at advancing women’s leadership in business and politics—Mattel launched a full promotion that included the time-honored doll plus several accompanying print and electronic texts, including updates through social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Tumblr. Mattel asserted in their advertising: “Over the last 20 years, Barbie’s pink place in the presidential spotlight has helped shape the look of women in politics for girls, drive conversation and, of course, add a touch of glam to the ‘Doll-ocracy’” (Mattel News Release). Considering Barbie’s continued prominence in American culture, combined

with the claim by Mattel that the toy has greatly influenced women in politics, it serves as only natural to examine the messages and meaning connected to the toy.

For the purposes of examination within this study, the following texts were chosen from the Barbie® I Can Be...™ President product line: 1) the Barbie® I Can Be...™ President B Party™ doll and packaging, 2) the Barbie for President™ website: <http://barbie.com/barbieforpresident>, 3) the Barbie for President™ Leadership Packet consisting of a three-page activity handout, and 4) the Barbie® I Can Be...™ President Step Into Reading® book. I purchased the doll and book from an online retailer; while the website and leadership packet were publicly available for online access and viewing during the analysis.

Cinematic Blockbusters: The *Twilight* Saga

The second popular culture discourse chosen for this study was the *Twilight* saga; specifically the five cinematic adaptations of four novels by the American author Stephenie Meyer. Exploding onto the market in 2005, the permeation of the *Twilight* saga into American popular culture is difficult to ignore. Young girls throughout the United States are passionately investing their time and energy in this fictional saga. Ginny Whitehouse, in her article “*Twilight* as a Cultural Force”, contends that *Twilight* saga has immensely affected popular culture in America and drawn upon the whole hose of entertainment mass media, including novels, movies, magazines, music, and more (240). She asserts that “*Twilight* has been spoofed and criticized, but it remains a compelling cultural force influencing public perception” (240). The sheer magnitude of the saga’s

popularity is exemplified through the fact that the novels and their film adaptations occupy a myriad of top-selling positions in the entertainment industry.

More than just lucrative book sales and blockbuster movies, marketers are branding a multitude of *Twilight*-related merchandise. Advertising companies recognize the immense pool of smitten fans and continue to produce every conceivable product for interested consumers. Ruth Mortimer, in her assessment of *Why Brands are Staking a Claim on Twilight Saga*, states that “when reality means frozen pay and job insecurity, brands are cashing in on people’s desire for escapism through the supernatural. When it comes to the vampire-themed book and film series *Twilight*, it seems that marketers are truly smitten” (n.p.). The market is saturated with *Twilight* branded goods like fast food meals, movie soundtracks, smart phone apps, fan conventions, apparel, replica movie props, and more.

Similar to Mattel’s Barbie, part of the *Twilight* saga’s immense success falls within its appeal to a broad demographic, as the companies and products associated with the saga range from children to adults (Mortimer n.p.). In fact, Mattel launched a series of Barbie Twilight figures targeted at young girls and mature doll collectors, while Volvo utilized product placement of their vehicle in the films to reach a the maternal demographic. The narratives package the magic and fantasy of children’s stories and reproduce them in a context more appropriate for the teen and adult audiences, encompassing the “desires, yearnings, and aspirations of women in the early twenty-first century” (Zack 122). To answer why the Twilight saga appeals to such a wide audience, Rebecca Housel and J. Jeremy Wisnewski, editors of *Twilight and Philosophy: Vampires, Vegetarians, and the Pursuit of Immortality*, state:

The *Twilight* saga is full of love and death, as well as a host of other topics central to the way we understand and navigate the world. Philosophical issues permeate the pages of the *Twilight* books [and films]. Bella and Edward are a mirror for our greatest fears and hopes—for all that can go right with our lives and all that can go wrong. They are the human condition writ large, there for our reflection and exploration. (2)

Quite tellingly, the general public connects with the *Twilight* stories and its characters, especially teenage girls. For a deeper understanding of the impact of these popular culture discourses on adolescents, Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel delve into the complexities of teenage entertainments in their discussion of *The Young Audience*. They say that young adults experience a confusing time of transition and seek out ways that they can work through the “natural tensions of adolescence” (46). Teenagers search for avenues to express their emotions and navigate the difficult journey of evolving from a child into an adult. Anna Silver also documents this transition in her analysis of the *Twilight* series:

Adolescence is a transitional point between childhood and adulthood during which adolescents cope with the often uncomfortable transformations of their bodies and with events that typically occur for the first time during teen years, including first sexual experiences, exposure to alcohol and drugs, and the complex social world of high school. (123)

Silver says that teenagers seek out ways to control their lives and use fantasy and fiction as one way to derive cultural meaning and value during their adolescence (136). Young adults connect with teenage entertainments, like the *Twilight* saga, because the

stories mirror “attitudes and sentiments which are already there, and at the same time provides an expressive field and a set of symbols through which these attitudes can be projected” (Hall and Whannel 47). The *Twilight* saga functions as a fantasy, offering young audiences an escape from reality. Teenagers get lost in the audacious situations and romanticized characters, which represents “in dramatic and exaggerated fashion, the conflicts in their own lives” (Silver 136). Audiences find comfort in watching the characters struggle with similar situations and new, strange emotions. Hall and Whannel document this effect in their writing:

These emotions, symbols, and situations drawn off from the provided teenage culture contain elements both of emotional realism and of fantasy fulfillment. There is a strong impulse at this age to identify with these collective representations and to use them as guiding fictions. Such symbolic fictions are the folklore by means of which the teenager, in part, shapes and composes his mental picture of the world. (48)

While the academic community recognizes popularity of the *Twilight* saga’s and has begun to study its potential social impact on wide-range of topics; little research exists which seeks to understand this phenomenon’s influence on women in the public sphere. While the *Twilight* narratives may not directly contain issues regarding women in politics, they do possess influential narratives that convey social meaning to women and their role in American culture. Society has much to learn about the yearnings of young women, as well as the role these social myths have on forming those desires (Zack 123).

For the purposes of this study, the following movies were chosen for analysis:

Twilight (2008), *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* (2009), *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*

(2010), *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 1* (2011), and *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 2* (2012). All movies were available electronically. I purchased each film in DVD format and viewed multiple times during the analysis.

Television Series: *Commander in Chief* and *24*

The television series *Commander in Chief* and *24* were chosen as the final popular culture discourses for analysis. While they present different storylines, these television series offer the commonality of featuring female characters in the capacity of United States president. In addition, both television shows were popular with audiences, while also receiving praise from critics, influential celebrity backing, and cinematic award recognition. The significance of the impact of a fictional female president in popular culture texts cannot be overstated. Kenneth Mulligan and Philip Habel examined the effects of fiction on political beliefs in America and stated that “for the majority of the public, because today’s media environment offers ever more opportunities to navigate away from the news, citizens are spending considerable time with entertainment” (123). Americans invest considerable time engaging with mass media. Indeed, entertainment has replaced news and functions as a pedagogical tool for informing audiences on the expectations for the private and political spaces. Mulligan and Habel continue with their argument saying that “entertainment media can expand our horizons and introduce us vicariously to new feelings and experiences—all without leaving our homes” (123); new experiences that also include a woman as president of the United States. While audiences may understand the stories they watch on television are fiction, “emerging literature has

shown that fiction can effect learning and real world beliefs for adults” (Mulligan and Habel 124). When audiences lack a frame of reference for experiences in the real world, they turn to fiction to understand and comprehend the consequences of such an experience. Furthermore, audiences are accepting of the messages they encounter in popular culture because entertainment is low-effort. “People typically turn to fiction to be entering and not informed, [thus] one should expect that people do not scrutinize the messages they receive” (Mulligan and Habel 127). Audiences may subconsciously accept the meanings created by popular culture television pedagogies like *Commander in Chief* and *24* without critically examining their ideological underpinnings. Not that people lack the intellect for such an examination, rather they “may be cognitively busy following the story and could lack the mental resources necessary to evaluate the information in fiction” (Mulligan and Habel 127). This elevates the importance and consideration for examining the few media texts which actually feature a woman president.

Patricia Phalen, Jennie Kim, and Julia Osellame examined the role of imagined presidencies in popular culture and reflected on the effect on audiences from the characters portrayed on television: “the roles they play in their fictional worlds serve to both imitate and express public thought” (533). Media texts featuring presidential characters serve as a cultural force which influences the assessment of reality in the political sphere. They connect the imagined with the real for audiences, especially in unfamiliar situations. People connect with characters and “the power of visual storytelling gives audiences a memorable image of dominant characters. These characters are framed on two levels: externally observable traits and virtues or flaws that we can identify through a character’s choices and interpretations” (535). In essence, audiences

formulate a perception of the qualities and skills required to find success as president, as well as stories illustrate some of the potential stresses and encounters experienced by in that position.

The importance for studying media texts like *Commander in Chief* and *24* is expertly summated by Jeff Smith, author of *The Presidents We Imagine*: “a nation *is* its stories” (4). A nation’s stories convey deep meaning and reflect the values and ideologies of the people, as contradictory as they often appear. Smith asserts the importance of studying both non-fictional and fictional stories about its president, as this individual embodies a nation’s hopes and fears, strengths and weaknesses, righteousness and guilt (4). People project themselves upon their leader and form a mental picture for what they expect from this individual. Smith believes that people are moved by these mental formations of the presidency; by the imaginings of what the office represents and the individual fulfilling that role (5). He concludes by saying, the “stories that Americans tell and have told about presidents are part of what makes America the nation that it is” (9). Thus, stories like *Commander in Chief* and *24* function as more than fictional tales to entertain the masses. They convey significant information about America’s culture and view on women in executive leadership roles in the political sphere.

For the purposes of this study, the following texts were chosen for analysis: All 18 episodes of the only season for *Commander in Chief*, the two-hour television movie *24: Redemption*, all 24 episodes from Season 7 of *24* (also known as *24: Day 7*), and all 24 episodes from the final season of *24* (also known as *24: Day 8*). Both series were available for access electronically. I purchased each respective season in DVD format

and viewed all episodes consecutively over a two-week period, then chose specific episodes to view again during the analysis.

Methods of Analysis

To better understand the impact of these media texts on the construction and maintenance of women's domesticity and their prevention from obtaining high-level success in politics, I examined the selected popular culture discourses utilizing a qualitative, interpretive textual analysis. A study of this nature seeks to examine the implicit, connotative meanings of texts, given that each discourse functions as a social narrative which contributes to a larger cultural story. This approach analyzes correlating themes and underlying ideologies amongst texts to deduce their potential cultural impact. Peter Larsen, in his discussion of audience research studies and textual analysis, says that the text is "an indeterminate field of meaning in which intentions and possible effects intersect. The task of the analyst is to bring out the whole range of possible meanings" (122). Additionally, Larsen states that texts "are also said to be historically determined" and that they represent the common ideologies of a given period (123). Each discourse contains layers of meaning and these representations convey messages to their audiences. As such, this study utilized two methodological approaches to examine the aforementioned texts within the context of social myths and expose their underlying ideologies.

Critical Discourse Analysis

In analyzing Barbie as an American icon and cultural signifier, this study employed a critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine the visual and written language propagated by Mattel to the American public. CDA is a method of analyzing the way people and institutions use language, including images and written word, that specifically focuses on social problems and critically analyzing power relations between dominant and subordinate groups (Richardson 1). First, I employed a lexical analysis to examine words within the chosen texts and how they convey “the imprint of society and of value judgments in particular” (Richardson 47); both their denotative and connotative meanings. For instance, the language used in naming the product, Barbie® I Can Be...™ President, disempowers the imagination of girls. The name implies that only Barbie can be president, not the young girls who engage with the toy. Therefore girls are not provided the opportunity to embody the role of president even in play. The specific language used to communicate messages through the Barbie® I Can Be...™ President texts inevitably frame meaning in direct and unavoidable ways (Richardson 48). As such, I attempted to interpret the inherent meaning behind specific words utilized in the texts to expose the ideological values embedded within the discourse.

Second, I analyzed the texts through the lens of deliberative rhetoric, as defined by Aristotle. “Rhetoric is never just talk. Rhetoric is political language designed and therefore with the capacity to shape public belief and the decisions and behavior of an audience; it always aims at inciting action in an audience, or at least the disposition to act” (Richardson 186). The study intended to expose the connotated messages of the

Barbie® I Can Be...™ President promotion and the potential for that message to influence both women's participation in politics and society's view of females in the political realm.

Finally, I analyzed the texts as discursive practices. This method examined the encoding and decoding of meaning within the texts, as they are part of a wider social discourse:

Discursive practices focus on how authors of texts draw on already existing discourses and genres to create a text and on how receivers of texts also apply available discourses and genres in the consumption and interpretations of the texts. [...] Hence, discourses are always socially situated: discourse occurs in social settings (of production and consumption) and the construction of discourse relates systematically and predictably to these contextual circumstances. (Richardson 75)

The Barbie® I Can Be...™ President product line draws upon the larger discourse of the Barbie stardom, which began in 1959 and evolved over the decades. Within the Barbie consumer empire, Mattel created the Barbie® I Can Be...™ product line which contains an entirely specific set of discursive practices, for which the president doll is part.

Through the use of lexical analysis, rhetorical analysis, and discursive analysis methods, I could examine the Barbie® I Can Be...™ President texts as a reflection of the social values produced from dominant ideologies and potentially consumed by women in the United States. Considering these texts result from a constellation of pre-existing discursive practices that contribute to the reproduction of current power relations, I

examined the Barbie® I Can Be...™ President texts individually, as well as part of a wider popular culture discursive genre.

Binary Oppositions

Drawing upon the perspective of semiology, this study examined the *Twilight* saga films and episodes of *Commander in Chief* and *24* television series as narratological myths. As previously stated, myths are a form of social discourse that must have an underlying structure in order for society to comprehend its meaning (Wright 270). According to Will Wright, a myth is “a communication from a society to its members: the social concepts and attitudes determined by the history and institutions of a society are communicated to its members through its myths” (Wright 270). To discover the concepts and attitudes within a myth, it is critical to uncover the meaning of a particular myth and how it communicates its meaning to members of society. This interpretive approach seeks to analyze a moving image as a narrative. Thus:

The researcher is able to break down signifying components and structures without breaking up the object of study as a meaningful whole. The usefulness of [narrative] analysis is not only in the revealing of deep structures in texts, but also in the identification of ideological positions and ideological messages within texts. (Hansen et al. 131)

In this study, I applied a paradigmatic approach to examining the texts which considered patterns of oppositions that exist within a story and how those oppositions contribute to the development of the narrative (Hansen et al. 142). For Claude Lévi-

Strauss, the French anthropologist who advanced the concept of binary oppositions in narratological myths, this tool is useful for teasing out and defining the essence of a text and exposing its core points (Hansen et al. 152).

For analysis of the *Twilight* saga, *Commander in Chief* and *24*, I first constructed a list of opposing patterns (binary oppositions) that appeared in each text. Similarities and repeating patterns were identified between texts and common themes were noted. Next, I created a listing of central oppositions which served to structure each narrative, and examined specific scenes within each text that introduced, worked-out, or resolved the oppositions. For example, one central opposition found in all three popular culture texts is strong versus weak. In application for the *Twilight* saga, this binary opposition functions as a foundational underpinning throughout the entire film series; contrasting the female character, Bella Swan, as weaker than her male partner, Edward Cullen. This same opposition also occurs in *Commander in Chief*, with the pilot episode framing the lead female character, President Mackenzie Allen, as a soft, indecisive woman. While in *24*, the key female character, President Allison Taylor, exhibits weak moral integrity. Finally, from the list of central oppositions, I extracted the representations of social conflicts which create ideological meanings and reinforce specific beliefs regarding women in the private and public spheres.

Chapter 4

BARBIE® I CAN BE...™ PRESIDENT

Introduction

In a press release from April 4, 2012 via Business Wire, Mattel, Inc. announced:

Today, Barbie® doll formally threw her pink hat into the presidential campaign ring by unveiling the new 2012 Barbie® I Can Be...™ President doll. The global icon will represent girls of all ages on her road to the “Pink House,” serving as the “B Party™” candidate. Barbie® will hit the campaign trail with a full-scale “glam-paign” alongside her longtime political advisor—The White House Project®. With a designer pink power suit and a new Tumblr blog, Barbie® stands on her own (literally) as this campaign’s sole female candidate. As the unwavering, encouraging voice of the “B Party™,” Barbie’s campaign platform calls for girls of all ages to “B inspired,” “B informed,” and “B involved.”

[...]

“The Barbie brand’s career-focused line of I Can Be... dolls often shine a pink spotlight on professions that are historically underrepresented by women,” said Cathy Cline, Vice President of U.S. Marketing, Mattel’s Girls’ Brands. “We hope that Barbie will inspire girls to be leaders – be it in their schools, classrooms, or communities – with the President doll. We

know that role play often becomes real play...and when better to plant the seed of leadership in a girl's mind than during play time.”

[...]

“We are ecstatic that for the first time Barbie will stand on her own two feet, as all powerful leaders do – and the Barbie for President doll has the perfect platform to debut this feature,” said Tiffany Dufu, President, The White House Project®. “This new feature goes well beyond the toy aisle with a message for girls across the world.” (Mattel News Release)

Mattel's public relations efforts indubitably accentuate their view that Barbie contributes to enhancing the participation of women in the public sphere. Furthermore, the company touts their social contribution towards addressing the issue of women in underrepresented careers, including the presidential office. They even partnered with the White House Project, which unfortunately it closed in beginning of 2013, whose mission was to foster the development of women in leadership roles both in business and in politics. Mattel claims the message disseminated by their company helps advance women in the public sector; yet the ideology they propagate differs from this girl power mantra. Referring again to a statement by Roland Barthes that a “toy *always signifies something*, and that something is always entirely socialized, constituted by the myths or techniques of modern adult life” (59). The Barbie® I Can Be...™ President doll, as a form of popular culture pedagogy, in actual fact presents an insidious myth that is contrary to female empowerment. As the following analysis reveals, the doll and its accompanying marketing artifacts commodifies the presidency and creates a myth that girls may achieve their dreams, so long as those dreams fall within the realm of femininity, fashion, and

maternity. Through its commodification, girls may now purchase the presidency for entertainment purposes and expend their desire for leadership through prescribed play; thus they receive artificial gratification, reaffirming their place in the private sphere, and reproducing the hegemonic patriarchal dominance in American politics.

Analysis

The following examination institutes a lexical, rhetorical, and discursive analysis of the following Barbie® I Can Be...™ President B Party™ texts: 1) doll and packaging, 2) website: <http://barbie.com/barbieforpresident>, 3) leadership packet, and 4) book. These texts contribute to hegemonic myths concerning women in political and social roles. The order of analysis begins with the doll and its packaging, followed by the website to which visitors are directed by instructions on the packaging. Mattel created the landing page for consumers to gain more information on community involvement and to download the leadership packet. Finally, the analysis ends with an examination of the book, which serves as a reading guide for preschool-age children through grade 1.

Doll and Packaging

As anticipated, Mattel expertly packaged the Barbie doll to maximize impact and feminine appeal. Situated in glamour and spectacle, Barbie awaits young girls to interact with her in a pink fantasy world, or for a more mature demographic to collect and idolize her. Splashed across the front, in Barbie's signature pink color pallet, is the slogan:

“Barbie® I Can Be...™ President – B Party™” (*B Party™ Doll*). Let’s pause for a moment to examine the message contained within the language of this catchphrase. Mattel claims in their news release that role play is critical for planting the seed of presidential leadership in a child. In actual fact, play in this situation is constructed so that girls must embody Barbie in order to play the role of president. They must personify the Barbie character and not the role of president. Interestingly, girls do not receive the message: “Barbie Says You Can Be President” or a similar active invitation; instead Barbie is the one who can be president. This illusionary play is deceiving as the narrative positions girls to first become Barbie; an impossibility as the character is a plastic doll which only exists within Mattel’s imaginary Dream House world. Additionally, the narrative locates Barbie as the center of attention and play. To illustrate this point, the side of the box states: “Right now, it’s her moment to lead, but just imagine—one day you too could be president!” (*B Party™ Doll*). The message removes girls entirely from imaginary play as president. It’s Barbie’s time for the spotlight, and perhaps one day girls may become president. Yet, the specific language structures play so that the role of president is never obtainable for girls, as the opportunity forever resides in the future, never materializing in the present. Furthermore, the language of the myth presents a connotation that Barbie herself is not active in her role as president. The narrative fails to follow through with Barbie winning the presidency and fulfilling her duties. She is frozen in a state of always campaigning for the job; therefore she will remain perpetually in the spotlight, completely removing girls from the opportunity of attaining this presidential role. They can only cheer Barbie on as she campaigns, but never wins the job. Thus, girls engage in role play where a political glass ceiling is present even in their imaginary

world. This contradicts Mattel's claim of female empowerment and supposedly advancing girls to enter a career in politics.

The illustrative language used on the packaging further contributes to this myth, whereby the specific words employed carry a meaning which at the denotative level appears motivational and empowering but when examined at the connotative level reveals their oppressive ideology. To begin, the presidency is further removed from girls' role play as the narrative on the packaging fails to indicate Barbie is running for president of the *United States*. The only insinuation her campaign may involve a run for the Oval Office lies with the addition of the White House Project's logo in two positions on the packaging, which simply conveys that this organization supports Barbie. In fact, no insignias, markings, or other text indicate this campaign actually relates to the United States Presidency or other executive governmental office. While leadership roles in any capacity certainly warrant the respect of society and their importance should not be understated, Mattel specifically markets this product under the illusion that it relates to the president of the United States, indicated by the language within their press release. However, upon examining the narrative on the packaging, the presidency Barbie seeks could represent any generic position. As revealed in the forthcoming analysis of the Step Into Reading® book, Barbie's candidacy is for class president of her high school. If play offers the critical opportunity for girls to envision themselves as the leader of the United States, then Barbie should already occupy the presidential office. Yet, she's not addressed as President Barbie who lives in the White House, leads the United States, and realizes great achievements for her country. Instead, she simply exists in pageant politics as candidate Barbie who lives in the Pink House, leads a doll-ocracy, and travels around

with her glam-paign. Fashion, glamour, and spectacle are the values represented in the message to girls, eliminating the reality of politics and leadership, and thus reinforcing the political class ceiling for women in America.

Another example of this mythical speech is illustrated by a feature unique to this Barbie doll. Mattel highlights that the toy literally stands on its own, thanks to a well-crafted pair of shoes. At the denotative level, the message reads as one of empowerment that Barbie, like any leader (which she ironically is not), can stand on her own without any superfluous supporting measures. The treacherous connotation here is that Barbie owes her autonomy to a fashion accessory; thus literally commodifying the power of an independent woman and attributing her success to a consumer product and perpetuating the stereotype that a woman must own the perfect fashion accessory in order to succeed. The representation of Barbie within this discourse formulates a meaning that the platform she stands on is not one of social advancement, but of pink, weighted plastic shoes. Her relevance and achievement reside not in her intellect or leadership qualities, but with a smart fashion accessory. This discourse trivializes the idea of women in the political sphere by attaching a consumerist mind-set to their achievements and amputates women's intelligence, confidence, and competencies from the list of required skills for political office. Find a great pair of shoes and the job is yours, well someday...actually...never.

This superficial message is further reinforced by the B Party campaign platform plastered on the back of the doll's packaging. The official statement reads: "If you can dream it, you can be it! B a dreamer. B inspired. B informed. B confident. B involved" (*B Party™ Doll*). Repeatedly, girls receive the message about dreaming, to focus on the

imaginary and abscond from reality. The quixotic language produces a misleading representation that political efficacy involves idealistic thinking and nebulous actions. Children's play certainly involves fantasy and encourages imagination, but one must not confuse imaginary play with vague romanticism. To understand the nefarious message disseminated by the B Party platform, the following examination focuses on each message in greater detail and the connotations embedded within them.

The first message "B a dreamer" includes a tagline that states: "Imagine all the fabulous things you can do. The sky's the limit." (*B Party™ Doll*). This message persuades its audience to focus on the glamorous aspects of life. The particular word "fabulous" summons connotations of fashion, entertainment, and spectacle. The visual representation of this can be found with specific images printed on the packaging. The most explicit example is the podium that Barbie stands next to, a jewel-encrusted garish prop which further exaggerates the commodification of the political process. Several more images in the scene metaphorically drip with glitz and glamour. On the denotative level, these images convey the pageantry to which Barbie is known; while on the connotative level, the signification creates a meaning that women are simply objects for the male gaze and visual consumption—a display of excess and exhibition of beauty. This begs the question, is fighting poverty or demanding gender and economic equality for disparate groups "fabulous"? Rather than offer girls a substantial, authentic vision for the future, they are persuaded to fantasize about inconsequential things.

The next message in the B Party platform "B inspired" emphasizes narcissistic femininity in the tagline: "Pick your passion & get creative! The future's up to you!" (*B Party™ Doll*). Instead of directing girls to draw inspiration from influential women in

their communities or seek out a need to address in their local community, the language stresses an internal focus and underscores the traditionally held “feminine” qualities of passion and creativity. At the denotative level, the language encourages girls to choose a subject of interest, something which motivates them. While this notion is not inherently faulty, the message conveyed at the connotative level positions women to seek out pleasure rather than political service. Moreover, this message builds upon a discourse which creates fallacious expectations for a career in politics. The rhetoric creates a representation that a girl holds the power to mold a future in politics; yet in reality, women will face tough challenges and situations that require more than just a mindset of inspiration and creativity. Characteristics, such as determination, assertiveness, and endurance, all contribute to a successful political career, which the B Party mantra fails to accentuate.

The third message in the B Party platform “B informed” focuses on knowledge acquisition and states in the tagline: “Learn how you can make a difference. The more you know, the more you can do!” (*B Party™ Doll*). At the denotative level, this language conveys the positive effects of educational awareness, playing on the idea that knowledge is power. Conversely, at that connotative level the nonspecific nature of the message offers no guidance for girls; ambiguity begets futility. Girls are encouraged to acquire knowledge about leadership, but provided no resources other than to visit the *Barbie for President™* website (<http://barbie.com/barbieforpresident>) for more information.

Ironically, the site actually contains several links to shop for more toys. Revealed in the forthcoming analysis, this website is simply a static landing—effectively a dead end. The only other resource for girls on the packing is the website for The White House Project

(www.whitehouseproject.org); which, as previously stated, is closed as of February 2013.

This empty message, void of any tangible meaning, signifies to girls that knowledge is an abyss of ambiguous information which carries no concrete effect or active participation.

The fourth message in the B Party platform “B confident” offers paradoxical meaning when examined within the context of the whole campaign. The tagline states: “Believe in yourself. Reach for the stars!” (*B Party™ Doll*). At the denotative level, the language signifies self-assurance and an impetus for action. However, at the connotative level this contradicts an earlier message where girls are told that the sky is the limit. Thus, girls receive inconsistent messaging where they should imagine themselves as president; but they are reaching for something they cannot attain. Furthermore, Barbie, with unnatural proportions and immortal youth imparts a representation that girls should have confidence in themselves but utilize an unattainable standard with which to compare. This mythical language reproduces the political glass ceiling as it calls for girls to envision a limitless future (“reach for the stars” and become president), but in reality the systemic cultural ideologies in place prevent them from achieving those goals (“the sky is the limit”, thus the presidency is an impossible dream). Girls are presented with a message that confidence is an illusion predestined for Barbie and her doll-acracy.

The fifth message in the B Party platform “B involved” encourages girls to become active in their community. The message leads in with an important call for girls to be engaged, but once again the meaning is trivialized by a tagline that focuses on pleasure: “Get active in your community. There are so many fun ways to help!” (*B Party™ Doll*). At the denotative level, the message promotes social awareness and emphasizes action; but on the connotative level, the discourse signifies that community

involvement entails entertainment and pleasure, which is more important than the satisfaction of helping a neighbor. Girls are encouraged to find “fun” ways to help their community. This rhetoric creates the representation that service and leadership ought to be enjoyable; and that girls should discount the challenges which bring less pleasure. The mythical language in this instance signifies that community service which is not enjoyable should be avoided. It presents a signification that discourages girls from participating in the public sphere; because while a career in political is personally fulfilling, it is also sated with challenges and adversity that are not “fun”.

Finally the last message, not officially part of the B Party platform, calls for girls to “B president” (*B Party™ Doll*). The message here imparts no tagline, other than a directive for girls to visit the *Barbie for President™* website, which serves as a static landing page. The most critical message, calling for girls to “B president”, provides no further explanatory language or call to action. In fact, rather than dedicating valuable real estate of the packaging to helpful resources, Mattel allocates a large section to praising the designer behind candidate Barbie’s fashion:

Just like Barbie®, Chris Benz has a flair for fashion. Often called the “prince of color,” he’s known for his bright palette and fabulously fun designs. Winner of the prestigious cfda emerging designer award, Benz has dressed many celebrities and fashionistas, and now, he has designed a custom ensemble for the biggest and brightest of them all—BARBIE®! (*B Party™ Doll*)

The emphasis once again highlights the fabulous fashion and celebrity of the Barbie brand. Mattel squanders a potential learning experience to focus on vain details.

This section could have offered girls a motivating story of Barbie at work in her community, tips on how to become an effective leader, or highlight real girls who are making a difference. Furthermore, Barbie is positioned under the style directive of a male designer. At the denotative level, this message reinforces the iconic essence of Barbie, an ostensibly innocent representation; nonetheless, on the connotative level, this message reinforces the hegemonic positioning of women in a subordinate position under men. Barbie, known her clothing and accessories, owes her fashions sense to an award-winning male designer. Why was she not backed from a prominent female leader or another influential woman, or at least a prominent female fashion designer? The message further reinforces the frivolity and commodification of women in politics by focusing on fashion instead of a woman's character, experience, and intellect. This frivolity and commodification reaches a heightened level of absurdity as the background image printed inside the packaging displays a miniature dog, serving as Barbie's secret service-like protection. This detrimental signification posits that women are not to be taken seriously. They pose no challenge to the political race and therefore are without need for proper protection from professional security.

The rhetoric employed via the language on the packaging, while seemingly innocent, perpetuates a discourse that girls should aspire for a life of frivolity and fashion. This holds serious consequences for the future of women in the political sphere, which demands more than the ability to daydream and play dress-up. Barbie fails to break with a manifesto of pageantry and celebrity. This scenario of play, scripted from beginning to end, builds from a cultural discourse that girls are subject to glamorization and objectified as dolls for men to dress up in pretty clothes and gaze upon. Girls have no opportunity for

authentic role play in which they can truly embody a leader and impact their community. Barbie® I Can Be...™ President – B Party™ doll signifies, at the deepest level of the myth, the denotative and connotative boxing-in of women to a garish spectacle of pageantry and quixotic discourse.

Website

To supplement the Barbie® I Can Be...™ President B Party™ doll, Mattel developed an associated *Barbie for President™* webpage for girls to visit and learn how they can be a leader in their community. Contrary to what the directions state, visitors to the website will find a static landing page mimicking the design from the packaging, but void of any substantial information. In examining this text, the significant meaning resides more with what is *not* said. Other than a repetition of the B Party mantra—minus the “B president” message—the webpage provides no information, tools, or other resources for girls. Visitors may choose from only two options: 1) download the leadership packet, or 2) click a link to shop for Barbie products. All other selections redirect visitors to play games, watch videos, and view careers for other I Can Be...™ professions (*Barbie for President™ Website*). The website is deceiving as these additional links appear related to the I Can Be...™ President product line. Thus, it warrants a brief review of the additional options presented to girls on this website.

Choosing either the link for interactive games, videos, or careers, visitors are redirected to a webpage that offers an assortment of virtual activities from four categories: professional, artsy, nurturing, and sporty (*Barbie for President™ Website*).

Upon searching each category, the I Can Be...™ President career is not one of the available options. Instead, girls are presented with careers that position women as objects like cheerleader or rock star, emphasize the maternal as in babysitter or kid doctor, or highlight marginal professions like pizza chef or swim instructor. None of the careers listed relate to leadership roles in any capacity whether in the private or public sphere, as the I Can Be...™ President packaging indicates. Girls receive a deceiving message that they can learn to become leaders by visiting this website, yet they are redirected to other activities which reinforce trivial, stereotypical professions for women. Additionally, none of the games, videos, or careers encourages girls to volunteer and get involved in their local community. Furthermore, visitors to the central Barbie® I Can Be...™ website cannot access the *Barbie for President*™ web page from any associated links. Visitors must key-in the URL as listed on package, eliminating the opportunity for girls to access this role-play scenario directly from the Barbie site. The landing page emerges as entirely contradictory to Mattel's statement in their news release that this product is meant to inspire girls to lead:

“The Barbie brand’s career-focused line of I Can Be...dolls often shine a pink spotlight on professions that are historically underrepresented by women,” said Cathy Cline, Vice President of U.S. Marketing, Mattel’s Girls’ Brands. “We hope that Barbie will inspire girls to be leaders – be it in their schools, classrooms, or communities – with the President doll. We know that role play often becomes real play...and when better to plant the seed of leadership in a girl’s mind than during play time.” (Mattel News Release)

Mattel's superficial rhetoric presents one example of the way in which corporations negotiate the struggle between maintaining the hegemonic patriarchal views of American culture and addressing the resistance posed by feminist interests. At the denotative level, the language of the webpage (with emphasis from the toy's packaging) supposedly empowers girls and transforms their play into a conditioning exercise for future leadership; yet the texts offer trifling messages and conduits to other conventional activities which, at the connotative level, reinforce the subjective position of women in society and maintains the ideology that women find their greatest achievements and satisfaction in the private or maternal realm. The toy's packaging builds a chimera that leadership is exciting and full of adventure. However the signifying practice of the website creates a representation for girls that political work is lackluster, thus creating an instinctive correlation that the "fun" of politics resides in the pageantry of the campaign and not in leading or serving their community. At the enigmatic, connotative level of the myth, girls are habituated through play to career hop from the political world to a one dominated by consumerism, femininity, and maternity.

Leadership Packet

The pitiable Barbie® I Can Be...™ President resources continue with the leadership packet, a three-page document available for download from the *Barbie for President*™ website. The leadership packet consists of repetitive information and subtle product marketing. Page one depicts a photo of the Barbie® I Can Be...™ President doll in her signature pink outfit, situated in a pageant-like stance waving to an imaginary

crowd with the B mantra repeated next to the image: “If you can dream it, you can be it! B a dreamer. B inspired. B informed. B confident. B involved. You can B President!” (*Barbie for President™ Leadership Packet 1*). This mantra provides a worthless pedagogy that relentlessly hammers the message for girls to be something, anything other than themselves. The emphasis on the “B” and the way in which the discourse frames the message creates a dangerous representation to disseminate to girls. One can almost hear the chant: “B, B, B, B, B...B Barbie”. Even the call for girls to be president is marred by the “B” brand, again commodifying the presidency by trade-marking it with a consumer product. Page two and three provide printable activities that invite girls to hand materials out to their friends and family. The trepidation regarding these two activities derives from the insidious way Mattel constructs play so girls are used as instruments of inside advertising. The rhetoric states that the activities provide a means for leadership training; when in reality, girls turn into young consumers and product promoters, peddling a commodity instead of ascertaining what it truly means to lead.

The “Vote for Barbie Stickers” activity on page two features four duplicate graphics that display a head shot of Barbie with the words “Vote for Barbie! B-Party 2012!” around the photo (*Barbie for President™ Leadership Packet 2*). With assistance from their parents, girls are instructed to print the page on sticker paper, cut out each graphic, and distribute copies to their friends in support of Barbie and the B Party campaign. While this activity appears harmless, it possesses a troublesome representation for girls. Barbie again demands the center of attention, as girls are instructed to show their backing for the doll’s campaign and “Vote for Barbie!” Rather than provide a teaching lesson where girls may develop and practice the skills needed for a career in

politics, they are positioned as cheerleaders and promoters of the Barbie brand: “[...] show your support for Barbie and the B-Party!” (*Barbie for President™ Leadership Packet 2*). On the denotative level, the activity and instructions appear to present girls with an opportunity for engaging in a political activity (i.e., campaigning for office). Though at the connotative level, girls are again situated as spectators in the political process and, in fact, promoting a consumer product. They never presented with the opportunity to truly embrace the possibility of becoming president. This play scenario repeats an ongoing message similar among all of the Barbie® I Can Be...™ President activities; feigning the importance of girls actively participating in politics. In fact, the signification creates meaning that positions girls in a state of never breaking through the political glass ceiling, even in play.

On page three, the “What do you *Believe* in?” coloring activity provides girls with the occasion to contemplate and record topics they deem important. The page features six cards with various black and white images for coloring, and the words “I Believe In...” printed on the card with a line to write a completing thought. The instructions state: “Barbie believes everyone should follow their dreams! Color and fill in the cards below to share your beliefs!” (*Barbie for President™ Leadership Packet 3*). The information directs girls to cut out each and give one with their friends as a way of sharing their ideas for a better future. The activity begins with a propitious concept, encouraging girls to consider areas which are important to them and share those ideas with others, but the representation creates a circuitous meaning in which girls are once again situated as passive spectators, rather than leaders. The instructions stop short of instructing girls to act upon their beliefs, other than pass the cards out to friends. At the denotative level, this

activity emphasizes the importance of believing in a better future. However at the connotative level, the activity traps girls into a fantasy of reverie. Instead of an active call for leadership engagement and commitment, the activity insidiously uses girls as mini-marketers spreading the Barbie brand to friends.

As a pedagogical discourse, the leadership packet in no way promotes girls to pursue a career in public leadership, whether in the real world or in play. While the activities utilize language that carries an essence of political engagement, girls are provided with prescribed play that offers no real impact on their lives, other than to reinforce and market the Barbie brand. The leadership packet falls short on its commitment to provide an educational resource for girls to learn how to lead; instead functioning as an oppressive signifying practice that teaches girls to pursue politics through emulating Barbie and dreaming for a better future.

Step Into Reading® Book

The final discourse in the series of Barbie® I Can Be...™ President products is the *Step Into Reading®* book, a literary resource aimed at helping children from preschool-age through grade 1 with basic vocabulary, short sentences, and simple words. Written by Christy Webster and illustrated by Kellee Riley, the story and accompanying images follow the presidential theme of the previous Barbie® I Can Be...™ President artifacts. While the preceding texts only allude to the prospect that Barbie may be running for a position other than president of the United States, the book solidifies this suggestion. The introductory page graphically depicts Barbie daydreaming that she is

standing in front of the White House as Commander in Chief. Furthermore the very first sentence of the book reads, “Barbie wants to be class president” (Webster). Immediately, the narrative eliminates the possibility of Barbie as president of the United States by setting the context of the story in a high school setting.

Given that signifying leadership in any capacity, especially within the context of story, is important for children to engage with, it’s worth the venture to examine the written and graphic language of this particular narrative to ascertain the representations presented to readers of the book. The first point of interest resides with the reasoning behind Barbie’s desire to become her class president. The story reads, “Barbie wants to make her school the best” (Webster). At the denotative level, the message offers a simple, constructive objective; but upon closer examination the connotative meaning creates a competitive goal whereby Barbie aims for a superlative school. Her reasoning focuses on a contest rather than serving her classmates.

Continuing to the next scene, Barbie’s challenger, Raquelle, is introduced. Of particular significance is the fact that Barbie campaigns against another female. In the real world of politics dominated by men, women must believe they can succeed in a race against a male opponent. By eliminating this from the story, girls are compelled to visualize a scenario in which they may only find success against another female; further pitting women against each another in a patriarchal culture. The narrative further develops this representation later in the story after Barbie wins the campaign. The story reads: “Barbie asks Raquelle to be vice president. Raquelle says yes. They will be a great team!” (Webster). Considering she campaigns in opposition to another female and then invites the same girl to serve as her vice president, Barbie is never seen exerting an

authoritative role over a man. The underlying connotative meaning suggests that it's safe for women to attain leadership roles in politics, so long as she's within, using Roland Barthes' metaphor, a gynoeceum: a feminine world where women believe they are free and equal, yet they are only liberated within a space created by men (58).

The third point of interest returns to the ongoing assertion that the Barbie® I Can Be...™ President narrative predominately focuses on spectacle and pageantry in politics. The story accentuates the campaigning process, especially the use of profligate decorations and post-victory parties. The story reads, "Barbie has more votes! She wins! Barbie will be class president! Her friends throw her a party" (Webster). While campaigning for office and celebrating a democratic win are both valid components to a career in politics, a crucial aspect of fulfilling the leadership role is omitted from the book. The narrative fails to depict Barbie satisfying her duties as class president, neither highlighting her successes nor her impact on the school.

The narrative abruptly shifts to a unique guest visiting Barbie: "After election day, a special visitor comes to Barbie school. It is the president of the United States!" (Webster). In a surprising revelation, the president is a woman. Barbie spends the day with her important visitor and inquires as to "what it is like to be president" (Webster). The president responds that she "lives in the White House. She makes laws. She meets other leaders. She leads the country" (Webster). In this scene, Barbie receives information, albeit incorrect since the presidential office does not make the laws, guidance, and encouragement that she will make a good leader. Barbie then imagines herself as one day serving as president of the United States. This critical moment in the story reinforces the importance of visualizing future possibilities for women in politics.

The narrative builds toward a promising conclusion. But the vision of Barbie as America's president is ephemeral when the story reminds readers her dream is too far reaching: "Someday Barbie could be president of the United States! For now, Barbie will work hard for her school" (Webster). At the denotative level, the message appears to encourage girls that even Barbie holds great aspirations for the future. Yet on the connotative level, by positioning Barbie as her class president and simply dreaming for a future in American politics, the hegemonic disparity in American politics is maintained. In fact, the story ends with Barbie and the president on stage, waving to a crowd in what has become Barbie's most successful role throughout the Barbie® I Can Be...™ President texts—an object for visual spectacle.

Summary

When examining the Barbie® I Can Be...™ President texts as a single discourse and pedagogical tool, it becomes quite apparent that the product line does not construct play that encourages girls to seek a career in politics, as Mattel's news release states. The secondary significations construct and reinforce a myth that the feminist agenda may be satiated by equivocal gestures that only conditionally promote the girl power manta: I can be anything. The deceit of the gynoeceum is that women believe they are advancing in society, when in actual fact they are betrayed by the feminine world created via a patriarchal culture to maintain its delicate hegemonic balance. Within this discourse, Barbie maintains her iconic role as pageant beauty and ultra feminine woman for visual consumption. Liesbet van Zoonen, feminist scholar of media and popular culture,

describes this as a myth of femininity whereby the focus of visual pleasure resides with the masculine spectator, and “epitome of the male fetish” (93).

Furthermore, the issue becomes more tragic when one considers how the presidency is commodified through the discourse, not to inspire girls to lead, but to sell a product and build brand loyalty. The presidency is reduced to a spectacle, complete with provocative fashion, subjugation of the male gaze, and negligible emphasis on the qualities and skills required for a run in political office. Girls receive no genuine information, education, tools, or resources in which to ascertain the meaning of political leadership. The discourse of the texts reinforces ethereal characteristics of femininity through soliciting girls to dream; rather than exacting them to take action. The constructed play never permits girls to visualize themselves as president of the United States. Only Barbie can only dream of that role; and that is all she ever does is dream.

Chapter 5

CINEMATIC BLOCKBUSTERS: THE *TWILIGHT* SAGA

Introduction

“That’s the story: Who the people are dictates what happens to them.

I mean, there are outside forces that can come in, but how the characters respond to them eventually determines where they’re going to be. Once you know who they are, there’s no way to change what their future is—it just is what it is.” (Meyer 17)

This declaration by Stephenie Meyer, in an interview for *The Twilight Saga: The Official Illustrated Guide*, poignantly encapsulates the supremacy of character interactions and how they structure specific narratives. Their seminal function shapes the story and ultimately constitutes the message. It seems that for Meyer, author of the bestselling *Twilight* saga, her characters are predetermined based on the natural order of life in the narrative. Examining the ways in which these fictional characters conflict with each other reveals their underlying codes, as well as the conceptual, social underpinnings of the story. The following examination focuses on these character conflicts, described as binary oppositions, in the five cinematic adaptations of Meyer’s *Twilight* series. The analysis includes a brief synopsis of each film, followed by a listing of the central oppositions relevant to this study, and an in-depth review of each opposition utilizing specific scenes for illustration. The analysis also includes a discussion of the oppositions

in context of social conflicts and the potential ideological meanings represented to audiences.

Analysis

Twilight (2008) offers a new approach to the teen romantic drama. Directed by Catherine Hardwicke from a screenplay by Melissa Rosenberg, the film is based on the first novel by Stephenie Meyer. It is the story of 17-year old Bella Swan who moves to Forks, Washington to live with her father, Charlie. The town holds little interest for her until she meets the Cullen family and becomes captivated by the youngest son, 17-year old Edward. Bella soon discovers Edward's dark secret, he's a vampire. However, unlike the rest of the vampire species, Edward and the rest of the Cullen family do not drink human blood. Their abstention allows the Cullens to maintain close contact with humans. Rather quickly, Edward and Bella fall in love. As the story unfolds, Edward struggles to control his own bloodlust while also protecting Bella from a coterie of undead characters. Critics often depict the film as a new twist on the classic story of star-crossed lovers.

The Twilight Saga: New Moon (2009) is the film sequel, based on the second book by Meyer. Directed by Chris Weitz from a screenplay by Melissa Rosenberg, the movie continues with the romance between Bella and Edward; which grows steadily more intense as ancient secrets and perilous situations threaten to destroy their relationship. When Edward leaves Bella in an effort to keep her safe, she acts out in progressively reckless ways to illicit hallucinations of Edward in order to experience his presence again. At the apex of the story, Bella is saved by her friend, Jacob, and will

uncover mysteries of the supernatural world that position her in dangerous situations. Bella discovers that Jacob and several members of his Native American tribe are werewolves. The film closes with Edward returning and proposing marriage to Bella.

The Twilight Saga: Eclipse (2010) is the third installment of the film series, based on the third book by Meyer. Directed by David Slade from a screenplay by Melissa Rosenberg, the movie positions Bella in a world of danger as neighboring Seattle is ravaged by a string of murders, as a malicious vampire, Victoria, plots to kill Bella. In the midst of the growing tension and danger, Bella must choose between her love for Edward or Jacob, knowing that her choice may potentially ignite an ancient struggle between the vampire and werewolf worlds. As her high school graduation day approaches, Bella faces the most important decision of her life; whether or not to marry Edward and become a vampire herself.

The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part I (2011) is the fourth installment of the film series, based on the first part of the final book by Meyer. Directed by Bill Condon from a screenplay by Melissa Rosenberg, the movie begins with Bella and Edward preparing to marry. After the wedding, they choose to consummate their marriage during the honeymoon despite the physical danger it posits for Bella as she is still human. To their dismay, the impossible happens and Bella becomes pregnant. Half vampire and half human, the fetus is strong and grows at an accelerated rate. Bella struggles to survive the pregnancy and the birth nearly kills her. Edward manages to save Bella with his venom and she is transformed into a vampire. The movie ends with the werewolves closing-in to the Cullen home as they consider the child a threat to the local townspeople.

The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 2 (2012) is the final installment of the film series, based on the second part of the final book by Meyer. Again directed by Bill Condon with screenplay by Melissa Rosenberg, the movie begins precisely where the previous film ended. Bella just gave birth under perilous conditions. She wakes to a new world as a vampire and faces the disheartening news that her baby continues to grow at an accelerated rate and may not live as long as expected. Additionally, Bella faces the crucial challenge of protecting her family against the threat of the Volturi, an ancient vampire coven. In this closing chapter of the saga, Bella's journey is one of exploration as a new wife, mother, and vampire.

The following examination institutes a critical textual analysis of the *Twilight* films as narratological myths using the concept of binary oppositions to draw out representations of social conflicts and their ideological underpinnings regarding women in the private and public spheres. Binary oppositions are identified when the image of something or a character in the story is structurally opposed to the image of something else or another character. The conflict of images and characters represent conceptual differences, not because of any inherent properties they possess, but due to the domain in which the story resides and their contrast with one another (Wright 272). In analysis of the *Twilight* films, three central oppositions were identified as applicable for this study: strong/weak, maternal/professional, and private/public. These oppositions are closely connected, influencing and shaping the next.

Strong/Weak Opposition

The strong/weak opposition functions as a foundational underpinning throughout the entire film series, specifically with Bella positioned as a weak human and Edward as a strong vampire, both physically and morally. This opposition is first introduced in *Twilight* when Edward saves Bella from being crushed by an out-of-control van in their high school parking lot. In this scene, Edward exerts his supernatural physical power by allowing the van to strike him instead of Bella, stopping the van and pushing it away with just his hand. Bella can only watch the scene transpire, completely vulnerable to outside forces. These instances of rescue continue throughout the film, often manifesting in more covert ways presenting Bella in the role of damsel in distress, the fragile object in need of Edward's constant saving. Take for instance, the scene during a class field trip. Bella slips on the concrete floor and Edward must catch her arm so she does not fall. The incident occurs briefly, but perfectly illustrates Edward's constant presence to save the incapable Bella from harm. It begs the question, how did she survive before moving to Forks where Edward could care for her? In a more dramatic scene, when shopping at a bookstore in Port Angeles, Bella is stalked by a group of men intent on harming her. Only once Edward appears to confront the group and rescue Bella is she finally safe from the sexual predators. Finally, at the climax of the movie Bella is kidnapped by a psychotic vampire, James, intent on torturing and killing her. Edward appears just in time to save her after an epic fight scene with James. Nevertheless, Edward must exert a final act of strength by denying his intense bloodlust and sucking James' venom from a bite on

Bella's arm. Once again, Bella is completely powerless to these outside forces, an object for Edward to act upon and save over and over again.

The narrative continues to work out the strong/weak opposition through the subsequent films. In the opening act of *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*, Bella's physical weakness is dramatized during a scene in which the Cullen family celebrates her 18th birthday. Bella opens a present and, in an exaggerated fashion, cuts herself on the wrapping paper. Edward must protect her before his vampire brother, Jasper, attacks Bella, because he smells her blood. Throughout the rest of the movie, Edward continues to look after Bella through her hallucinations, provoked by wild, reckless activities like motorcycle riding and cliff diving. At the climax of the movie, Edward must once again rescue her from harm through an epic fight scene in which he faces the Volturi, a powerful ruling vampire coven. Not surprisingly, Bella watches in horror, disempowered by her human frailty, as Edward protects her from harm.

In *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*, Bella encounters continual physical threats from a deranged vampire, Victoria, who intends to kill her. Edward is ever present, the subject saving the object from harm. In one disturbing scene, while the Cullen family prepares to fight Victoria and her army of new vampires, Bella is literally carried by her friend Jacob, a werewolf, to a safe encampment. While the intent is to mask her human scent, one cannot ignore the significance that the only way to accomplish this is by a man carrying Bella, cradled like a child in his arms. In the final act, Edward participates in another epic fight. This time, he battles Victoria in an effort to save his damsel in distress, Bella. At the culmination of the fight, Bella cuts her arm to draw blood and distract Victoria. Bella

possesses no power, other than to expose her human fragility and sacrifice her body. In that moment, Edward destroys Victoria while Bella observes in shock.

The emphasis on Bella's weakness and Edward's strength is further teased out in *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn- Part 1*. This time Bella faces more than just imminent attacks from rival vampire covens, she faces physical threat by Edward, her new husband. The couple agrees to consummate their marriage during the honeymoon, a particularly dangerous endeavor as Bella is still human. The scene following their consummation provides a particularly disturbing visual representation of this danger. Bella wakes in a room destroyed by Edward's passion and she is covered in bruises from his touch. The physical battery of Bella continues once she becomes pregnant, as the half-vampire, half-human fetus is stronger than the mother who carries it. Scene after scene situates Bella as fragile and weak, overcome by the physical strength of the baby she carries, the child literally breaks Bella's bones and robs her of nutrition. The epitome of this physical battery occurs at the climax of the final act when Bella gives birth. The fetus tries to beat its way out of Bella, as it suffocates from a detached umbilical cord. As it struggles, the baby breaks Bella's back and renders her helpless. Edward rescues the baby by administering a rather gruesome cesarean section. He then saves Bella by injecting her with his venom, hoping to transform her into a vampire.

The disparity between Bella's physical weakness and Edward's strength is finally resolved in the last film, *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 2*. No longer a fragile human, Bella relishes in her new-found supernatural strength as a vampire. She is now Edward's equal and even possesses heightened physical abilities. The balance of power tips in her favor as Bella now functions as protector of her daughter, husband, and

extended vampire family. In the final act of the film, Bella leads her family in an epic battle against the Volturi where she uses her physical strength and mental power to defeat her foes. The movie ends with Bella, the vampire heroine, ruling as wife and mother.

The same weak/strong opposition is coded on another level with the moral polarity of Bella as the weaker partner, unable to control her hormonal reactions; contrasted with Edward as the stronger companion, laboring to maintain ethical superiority. First introduced in *Twilight*, Edward struggles to continually control his bloodlust for Bella, while she succumbs to her teenage hormonal urges. The relationship is best exemplified by the scene in which Bella and Edward first kiss. Edward tells Bella to close her eyes while he places a chaste kiss on her lips. Bella, overcome by desire, launches herself at Edward. Edward retreats and states that he must control himself around Bella. She reluctantly accepts his admonishment and chastises herself for her lack of self discipline around Edward. The object becomes a horny and immoral adolescent girl, unable to control her passion for the beautiful male vampire.

Throughout the series, this dichotomy of moral positions continues with Bella struggling to control her human desires around Edward, while he remains sound in his convictions to maintain Bella's purity. In *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*, Edward and Bella spend a night together in which she attempts to sleep with him. Edward refuses and claims that maintaining her sexual purity is one rule that he does not want to break. Edward proposes to marry Bella first before they share any intimate connection. In *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 2*, after Bella and Edward have consummated their marriage on the honeymoon and Bella experiences superficial physical injuries from the experience, Edward refuses to sleep with her again despite her continual attempts to

seduce him. She plays the role of seductress, tempting Edward to renege against his moral convictions.

The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 2 resolves the disparity between Bella's moral weakness and Edward's ethical strength. Once Bella transforms from human to vampire, she sheds her human susceptibility for moral misgivings and becomes the principled wife and parent. During a scene in which she fears her imminent death in a fight against the Volturi, Bella takes necessary action to protect her daughter by preparing an escape plan without the knowledge of Edward. She embodies the pillar of strength for the family and determines their future course.

In summary, the strong/weak opposition presents an interesting look at the social views of women and men in the real world. If one considers Bella as a representation of women and Edward as a representation of men, together they demonstrate the troubling gender dynamics in American culture. The media continually portrays women as the weaker sex, unable to protect themselves without the assistance of a male counterpart. Bella requires constant attention to her safety, as Edward defends her from incessant physical and moral threats. Only after Bella becomes a vampire, transformed by Edward as his final saving act, can she protect herself from danger. In fact, throughout the first four movies Bella deeply yearns to become a vampire and Edward's equal. This offers a disturbing look at one interpretation of gender equality: that women must become like men in order to be viewed as equal. On a denotative level, Bella simply becomes a supernatural creature which provides her physical power and immortality; but when examined on the connotative level, the narrative reveals her desire to become like Edward, a man. Only at this point does she retain the strength and skills to survive in the

world and lead her family to victory. The myth yields a distressing message that women, in their current form, are unable to lead. Only men possess the strength, power, and proficiency to handle real world situations which require moral dexterity and physical aptitude. Therefore, women must become like men—which of course is an impossibility—to find success, gratification, and self-acceptance in the public sphere.

Maternal/Professional Opposition

The maternal/professional opposition offers a glimpse in to the social struggle over women's role in the home versus professional realm. This opposition is coded in several ways, both at the denotative and connotative level, throughout the saga. The opposition is first introduced in the final scene of *Twilight* during Bella's high school prom when she asks Edward to make her a vampire. He promptly refuses and declares that she has many more human experiences to encounter first. The interest here lies in Bella's complete disregard for her future after high school, effectively wishing it away in a desire to become a vampire and remain 17 forever. While Edward encourages her to experience life as a human and consider future aspirations; Bella's singular ambition centers on gaining immortality to remain with Edward forever. This scene not only emphasizes youth and beauty, but generates a signification that women must change their physical bodies and ambitions to be equal with their male partners.

The saga continues the struggle with this opposition in the subsequent movies as well. Bella desperately seeks to relinquish her mortality for a vampire life. Repeatedly, Bella displays insecurity with her human femininity, views herself lacking as compared

to Edward, and discounts any prospects for a life beyond her teenage years. In the opening act of *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*, after Edward leaves in an attempt to keep Bella safe, yet her only focus is to stay in the town of Forks so as to preserve her memory of Edward. She evades friends and family, subsisting in a cocoon of memories. Without Edward, Bella ceases to exist as a person, never progressing in life. When Edward returns, Bella resurfaces from her emotional coma and proceeds with her fanatical obsession to become a vampire.

This sub-plot carries over into *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*, where in several scenes Edward attempts to persuade Bella that she must attend college and experience an adult life. His requests are continually dismissed, as Bella writes off any thought of an advanced education or professional career. While one could attribute Bella's behavior to juvenile love and distraction, the underlying connotation should not be overlooked. Millions of girls may receive the message that education and careers are inconsequential goals for women to consider. In fact in *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 1*, Bella decides against college altogether. She marries Edward to fulfill her dream of becoming a vampire; and when she becomes pregnant, Bella states that she her purpose in life was to become a mother. The critique is not directed at Bella's desire for motherhood, rather that this role is the only function for her life.

For Bella, this opposition is finally resolved in *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 2*. From the moment the film begins, the story emphasizes Bella's newfound beauty and power as a vampire, as well as her success and fortitude as a mother. The opening scene focuses on Bella's striking physical appearance, vampire powers, and natural maternal instincts. As the story unfolds, Bella finds extraordinary success in her

motherhood, with several scenes depicting her in loving, protective, and naturally maternal ways. This new Bella is a stark contrast to the previous four movies in which she was awkward and unsure of herself, wondering through life without purpose. At the close of the film, Bella declares that it was her destiny to become a vampire, wife, and mother; this is the calling she was born into. At the denotative level, the story presents a reassuring representation of the teenage transition from awkward adolescent to confident adult. However, on the connotative level, a second signification creates the myth that women will find great success in their maternity and should remain focused on fulfilling this purpose rather than pursuing an education and career.

Although not as prominent, this opposition is also coded with the positioning of Bella in the role of caregiver for her father, demonstrating a natural domesticity in her relationship with him and around their home. When Bella first moves to Forks to live with Charlie in *Twilight*, she quickly assumes the role of housewife, cooking and cleaning up after him throughout the movie. In a scene during their weekly dinner out at a local restaurant, Bella scolds Charlie for eating poorly; and when he expresses concern over her negligible social life, she dismisses him and claims that he worries about her too much. Throughout the film, the story positions Bella in a role similar to a concerning mother or loving wife. In the final act of *Twilight*, when a malicious vampire stalks Bella, she demands that her father is first protected before her own safety, as he is helpless without her intervention.

This pattern continues through the next three movies and becomes especially apparent in *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 2*, with Bella as new vampire and mother. She assumes an even more protective, parental role over her father. When

Charlie first encounters Bella as a new vampire, she's careful to shield him from gaining too much knowledge of her supernatural world, maintaining his innocence. While the concern for her father's well being does not necessarily lend itself solely to a maternal perspective, when considered in the context of the metanarrative, it is apparent that Bella fulfills the role of caregiver. This applies to the relationship with her mother, Renee, as well. While Renee does not play a large part in the series, the interaction between mother and daughter is quite profound. In many instances the roles are reversed with Bella caring for Renee in the same manner a parent would care for her child. For example, in *Twilight*, when Renee calls to check-in from a pay phone, Bella chides her mother for losing the power cord to her cell phone. Bella also redirects the questioning to how Renee is enjoying the road trip with her new husband.

Finally, this opposition is coded with the other characters in the *Twilight* saga. First examining Renee, in the beginning of *Twilight* she is described as an erratic and hare-brained mother who holds no professional ambition, other than following her new husband around the country in search of his dreams as a minor league ball player. At the denotative level, Renee appears to represent a capricious character with unorthodox conduct. Moving to the connotative level, she represents the ideals of a traditional patriarchal society, supporting her partner as he fulfills his professional aspirations and acting as the dutiful wife. Young women are presented with a message which reinforces the value that a dedicated wife will suppress her own ambitions to champion those of her husband.

The other important mother-figure in Bella's life is Esme, Edward's vampire pseudo-mother. Mid-way through *Twilight*, Edward introduces Bella to his family and

she encounters Esme. Other than described as a loving mother, Esme holds no career, professional ambitions, or philanthropic interests. Her function is that of Carlisle's wife and the Cullen family's mother. She acts subserviently to Carlisle, with diminutive personality. Even her human history is quite vague and barren. The only information audiences receive is in a scene where Edward recounts how Carlisle, the patriarch head of the family and creator of the Cullen coven, transforms Esme into a vampire so she could become his partner. On the denotative level, Esme appears as a tender-loving wife and mother, all of which are admirable qualities. However, if one considers the second signification, she holds no purpose other than to serve her husband and family. This connotation becomes more troubling when examines her responsibilities, or lack thereof. Since vampires do not eat human food, Esme needs not to prepare any meals. Her "children" are actually adult vampires who simply look like teenagers, and therefore care for themselves. She merely exists as a representation of maternity. This is in stark contrast to Carlisle who spent his entire existence pursuing a career in medicine, while also caring for his vampire family. When recounting his family's history to Bella in *Twilight*, Edward describes Carlisle as wise, intelligent, and moral, with fervor for protecting and healing humans. Carlisle's history and career is also highlighted in *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*, when in the opening act, Carlisle is depicted holding court with the Volturi, the governing vampire coven. The other male vampire characters in the Cullen family also hold distinctive human histories, which emphasized their personal careers; compared to the female characters whose human histories were trivial and influenced my men. For instance in *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*, Jasper, a member of the Cullen family, recounts his human history to Bella. He lived during Civil War times and

served as the youngest general in the Confederate army. He became a vampire only after being seduced by a group of provocative female vampires. When the Cullen family is threatened by an army of young vampires created by Victoria, Jasper utilizes his previous military training and leads the Cullen coven to victory. Contrast this with Jasper's vampire mate, Alice, whose personal history is virtually non-existent. The only mention of her human background occurs in *Twilight*, when it is mentioned briefly that she spent the majority of her youth in a mental institution and an unknown vampire transformed her sometime in the 1960s. While Alice does possess an exceptional vampire power—visions of the future—she has no other distinguishing qualities or characteristics. Her role in the Cullen family is trivialized by her stereotypical role of a pixy who loves fashion, accessories, and make-up. This superficiality continues with Rosalie, another female vampire in the Cullen family. When Rosalie recounts her human history to Bell in *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*, she remarks that her only objective in life was to marry, have children, and grow old with a husband. Instead, she was betrayed by her fiancé, brutally raped, and left for dead; but not before Carlisle transformed her into a vampire. Rosalie took revenge and killed her ex-fiancé, wearing a wedding dress for dramatic effect. She possesses no extraordinary vampire powers and functions as the conventional blond who also likes stereotypical feminine things.

The Volturi coven presents an even more disconcerting look at the representations of gender roles. The Volturi govern the supernatural vampire world; effectively ruling as monarchs who establish law, determine guilt or innocence, and institute justice. The three vampires who hold the most authority are men, described as refined beings with a preference for studying medicine, science, and the arts. Female vampires in the Volturi

clan function as secretarial assistants, objects for the male gaze, or otherwise are non-existent. In fact, only one of the semi-powerful Volturi is female. Jane, who possesses an extraordinary physical power, is visually depicted as a young girl. When she appears in *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*, *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse* and *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 2*, she looks like a school girl, dressed in a little black cloak, white tights, black shoes, and her hair in braids. She speaks in a small voice and, other than her menacing eye-makeup, she presents no commanding characteristics. Her role with the Volturi is reduced to that of a youngster with puerile tendencies who likes inflict pain on suspecting vampires.

In summary, the maternal/professional opposition imparts an unsettling view of the roles men and women play in American culture, as represented in this highly popular film series. The female characters signify maternal qualities, yearning for marriage and motherhood, while portraying a heightened femininity. The male characters seek after careers which fulfill meaningful or authoritative roles. As previously mentioned, the critique expressed in this opposition focuses not on women's desire for motherhood; rather that the narrative creates a myth in which maternity is the sole function for women.

Private/Public Opposition

The private/public opposition revisits several of the previous scenes mentioned, as well as the character descriptions and interactions, but within the context of discussing women's position in the private sphere and men in the public sphere. This opposition is coded on the connotative level by contrasting the human world with the supernatural one,

specifically examining Bella's journey from mortal to vampire. In the *Twilight* saga, the human world offers a representation of the public sphere in current social context, while the supernatural world offers a representation of the private sphere. To expound upon this point, consider that the human world in the saga encompasses all of the community interactions. What transpires in the human world is not a secret; life proceeds as expected and actually dictates parameters for the supernatural world. For instance, in *Twilight*, Edward informs Bella that vampires must remain either invisible to humans or anonymous in their mystical condition. Vampires travel as nomads, or they don human façades to remain undetected. The vampire world is a private one, in which only its members are aware of the happenings that occur within its imperceptible boundaries. The supernatural world also mirrors the private sphere in that its composition consists of small vampire covens, similar to family units. Other than the epic confrontation in *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 2*, there is no large gathering of vampires or social interaction of any kind. Their world only exists in private.

The focus then shifts to examining Bella's experiences in the human (public) and supernatural (private) worlds. While she is still human living amongst her normal community, Bella is continually exposed to danger; whether that is of ordinary or supernatural causes. The narrative positions her as vulnerable and powerless. As previously described in *Twilight*, Bella faces perilous situations with her vampire interactions, from out-of-control vans threatening to crush her, to a group of men attempting to rape her, to her boyfriend craving her blood, to a crazed vampire hunting her every move. Bella is also uncoordinated and accident prone. Three instances easily illustrate this fact: on her first day of school when she practically injures a fellow

classmate in gym class and states that the coaches shouldn't let her participate; on a field trip when she slips in a greenhouse and Edward has to catch her before she falls; and after a winter storm when she slips on the sidewalk outside of her house and falls. Time and time again, Bella is a hazard to own well being. She fulfills the damsel in distress trope.

The narrative continues working out this opposition in the subsequent movies. Bella's debility is especially apparent in *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*, as she risks her personal safety in extreme ways in order to illicit hallucinations of Edward. She attempts motorcycling riding, only to fall off and incur a head injury. Later she cliff dives and, because she does not have the strength to swim against the ocean current, she almost drowns. In both instances Jacob saves her, which offers a representation that Bella cannot function in the human (public) world without the assistance of the men in her life. Indeed, Bella herself states this to Edward at the beginning of the film when she says that Edward cannot protect her from everything. She will age, get hurt, and eventually acquire an illness that will kill her. Transforming Bella into a vampire, entering the supernatural (private) world, is the only way to keep her safe. In *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*, Bella's propensity to attract danger reaches a pinnacle when Victoria, a malicious vampire, amasses an army to hunt and kill her. Edward must hide Bella in a secluded place and protectively watch over her. This constant care is a recurrent theme through this third film, as Bella is passed between vampire and werewolf homes; reaffirming that in private world will she remain safe.

Only when Bella becomes a vampire and enters the supernatural (private) world permanently does she gain immortality, remarkable strength, and vampire power. In *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 2*, Bella fully embraces this life and completely

withdraws from engagement with the human world, other than a few interactions with her father. As a new vampire, she is the strongest among the Cullen family, both over men and women. The significance of this should not be understated. Bella, in her private vampire world, is now the matriarch of the family who exudes beauty, strength, self-assurance, and leadership in the home. She is physically sound with all traces of her inept human self gone.

The film accentuates this fact through a scene in which Bella arm wrestles Emmett, another member of the Cullen family whose size and strength dominates most vampires. Petite Bella, in her all her vampire physical strength, easily beats the mammoth Emmett. After which she crushes a boulder with her bare hands while the family gazes on with praise and admiration. Moreover, Bella's self-assurance is demonstrated in several scenes when she exhibits discipline in tempting situations. For instance, in a scene when she hunts for animals with Edward, she comes across the scent of a human but stops herself before she attacks and kills the man. Edward asserts that even the most experienced, conditioned vampire could not stop mid-hunt the way Bella did. As a vampire, she is now Edward's equal, possessing the same beauty and strength. The power balance now tips in her favor, as she leads her family.

The private/public opposition is also coded with the signification of Bella's intellect in the film saga. In her humanity (public sphere), Bella's mind is closed and, ironically, the only part of her which is protected. This also means that she cannot fully utilize her full mental proficiency and power. For example in *Twilight*, Edward discovers he cannot read Bella's mind, as he can with all other humans and vampires. Of course, Bella attributes this discrepancy to something wrong with her mind, exhibiting her severe

lack of self-consciousness. In *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*, the film reveals that even Aro, one of the powerful Volturi monarchs, also cannot read Bella's mind. Yet, when Bella is transformed into a vampire and enters the supernatural world (private sphere) her mental prowess is unleashed. In the final act of *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 2*, Bella literally saves her family from the Volturi with her mental power. Bella has the ability to create a mental shield which, when outwardly exerted, creates an invisible defense that no other vampire power can penetrate. Her mental shield causes the Volturi to retreat with their army and give the Cullen coven their victory. She now becomes the protector. While Bella could utilize her intelligence and mental power for good in the human world (public sphere), such as Carlisle's passion for the medical profession, the movie ends without any indication that Bella has ambitions for anything beyond the home. Audiences are left with an image of Bella solely as wife and mother, attending to the needs of her family.

The private/public opposition presents a myth that women find great success in the private sphere, especially in the roles of wives and mothers. They are the matriarchs, acquiring great beauty, confidence, and influence. Furthermore, in the home they possess the capability to protect themselves and their families from danger. However, in the public sphere, women are vulnerable, insecure, and require male intervention and protection to survive. On a denotative level, Bella appears as a typical teenager who experiences the discomfiture of adolescence. When examined on the connotative level, the narrative reveals the message that girls should remain in the private sphere where they find maximum success and make the most impact. Females are encouraged to be the leader in the home, not of their community.

Summary

When examining the *Twilight* saga as an immensely popular film series which chronicles the life of an average teenage girl, examination of the narrative reveals a message that dissuades female audiences from exploring a life outside of maternity. While some scholars may argue that Bella exhibits feminist propensities, the secondary significations reinforce the myth that girl power is best exercised in the home. This conjures the image of Rosie the Riveter asserting, “We Can Do It!” encouraging females to exert their autonomy and leadership within the confines of Barthes’ gynoeceum. This myth supports America’s hegemonic patriarchal culture, charging men with responsibility of sustaining the public sphere. Furthermore, the critique becomes ever stronger when examining women in the political realm, specifically executive leadership. The *Twilight* discourse completely removes women from the public sphere; instead providing them with a fantasy that again encourages girls to dream about the impossible, rather than visualizing themselves in real settings.

The potential impact for society occurs if females desire to emulate the values of Bella in the *Twilight* saga and remain solely in the private domain. Many scholars have studied the influential relationship between the media and its female audiences (Heide, Zoonen). For example, Jackie Stacey, in her work *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*, examined the relationships between feminine values and audience reception in a patriarchal culture. Stacey asserts that female spectators experience feminine fascinations with female stars, often “imagining themselves taking on the roles and identities of the stars in the cinema” (145). Or expanded beyond the fantasy, some

female spectators even adopt the discourse of the female character as part of their reality (159). With the immense popularity of the *Twilight* saga and the strong adoration of its fans, it is not hard to imagine the countless women who may idolize and mimic the actions and behaviors of Bella.

Finally, instead of striving for leadership roles or even those which impact their community, female audiences are presented with a fantasy in which to envision themselves as modern day damsels in distress, needing an imaginary male hero to save them from their tedious, ordinary lives. They can marry their prince and have exceptional children, all without leaving their private, protected home.

Chapter 6

TELEVISION SERIES: *COMMANDER IN CHIEF* AND *24*

“I’ve lost my family. I’ve lost everyone.”

--President Allison Taylor (24: Day 7)

Introduction

The following examination focuses on two popular television series: *Commander in Chief* and *24*. *Commander in Chief* began broadcasting in September 2005 and featured actress Geena Davis in the role of President Mackenzie Allen. The series begins with Allen serving as the first female vice president for the United States. She was chosen by the sitting president, “Teddy” Bridges, during his presidential campaign in an effort to secure the popular female vote. Through a dramatic turn of events, Allen assumes the position of Commander in Chief after Bridges dies of a cerebral aneurysm. However just before Bridges passes, he asks Allen to resign in an effort to keep her from assuming the presidential office. Allen rejects Bridges’ request and assumes office, becoming the first woman president. Over the next 17 episodes, Allen faces many challenges with leading a country, while balancing her role as wife and mother to three children. Major sub-plots include Allen’s daily fight against misogynistic comments by her colleagues in Washington D.C., as well as underhanded attacks from the speaker of the House who attempts to remove Allen from office. While the series only lasted one season, Davis was recognized for her excellent performance with a Best Actress Golden Globe award (“63rd Golden Globe Award Winners”).

The second television series, *24*, first premiered in 2001 and spanned eight seasons. The series features actor Kiefer Sutherland who plays Jack Bauer, an agent for the United States government's fictional Counter Terrorist Unit (CTU). Every episode in a season represents one hour in complete 24-hour day. The following analysis focused solely *24: Redemption*, a movie based on the series, Season 7, and Season 8; all of which feature a fictional female character as president of the United States.

24: Redemption (2008) is a 2-hour television movie event that takes place between the sixth and seventh season of the series. The movie begins with the inauguration day of President Allison Taylor, played by actress Cherry Jones. While the center of the plot focuses on thrilling adventures of Jack Bauer as he tries to stop a ruthless warlord in Africa from drafting children into his militia army, the sub-plot lays the foundation for Taylor's administration. Of note, the narrative does not mention if Taylor is the first female president of the United States.

Season 7 (2009), also known as *24: Day 7*, begins with Jack Bauer testifying before a Senate hearing subcommittee. Bauer is defending himself against accusations that he used torture to accomplish his missions with CTU. The FBI interrupts the hearing to request Bauer's help with preventing a terrorist attack planned for Washington D.C. Throughout the season, audiences are presented with a complex and dynamic plot. While Bauer functions as the protagonist in this narrative, President Taylor also plays a significant role in the story. Taylor faces intense, problematical situations like terrorists plotting to kill hundreds of thousands of Americans; the kidnapping of her husband for political ransom; the murder of her son to cover up a conspiracy; terrorists holding her hostage in the White House; and finally, prosecuting her own daughter for murder. Jones

was recognized for her excellent performance with an Emmy for Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Drama Series (“2009 Prime Time Emmy Awards”).

Season 8 (2010), the final season which is also known as *24: Day 8*, takes place in New York City. Bauer assists CTU with averting the assassination of Omar Hassan, president of the fictional Islamic Republic of Kamistan (IRK). Hassan wishes to enter into a peace agreement with President Taylor and the United States. In addition to protecting the continuance of the peace summit, Bauer must work to prevent a radiological attack against upper Manhattan and fight the Russian government. Customary to previous seasons, the show presents a layered plot that unfolds with Bauer as the central character. President Taylor again plays a significant role in the story. In this final season, Taylor faces attacks on her personal morals and ideologies when forces from inside and outside of her administration attempt to derail the peace summit. The sub-plot follows Taylor’s fixation with leaving a legacy as part of her presidency.

Analysis

While *Commander in Chief* and *24* present different storylines, they share the similarity of featuring women in the role of president of the United States. These shows present audiences with dichotomous representations of the female characters, President Mackenzie Allen and President Allison Taylor. On the positive side, these characters denote strong, intelligent, and authoritative characters. The narratives position Allen and Taylor as commanding leaders who excel in their professional positions. They each display a unique ability to gain the trust and admiration of their staff, the American

public, and world leaders. Allen and Taylor exhibit confidence and fortitude in leading during critical situations; while also demonstrating dignified humility by asking for advice and counsel when they experience moments of uncertainty with critical decisions or inexperience in particular subjects. Both characters are passionate about fostering change in the United States and rising above the partisan culture in Washington D.C. Each woman is also driven by a specific personal agenda which aims to create a positive legacy through their administrations.

However, Allen and Taylor pay a steep price for their careers. In a chilling end to Season 7, Allen says, "I've lost my family. I've lost everyone". Her haunting expression and tone convey the desperation of her situation. Both Allen and Taylor's families suffer, albeit in different ways, because of their presidencies. An examination of the narratives reveals that at the connotative level the stories are in fact repressive of females in the political sphere. The shows share a similar myth that while women have the potential for securing the highest level of leadership in the country, they are forced to sacrifice their personal lives in return; whether they surrender their family, morals, or both. The myth creates a meaning that to assume the presidency; they will lose something of great personal worth. One may argue that tragedy, conflict, and challenging situations are not exclusively tied to representations of women presidents. Many narratives have positioned male presidents in grievous and disastrous circumstances as well. Yet, when considered within context of political and media history, there is a huge frame of reference for representations of male presidents, including 44 real presidents and an abundance of male fictional characters in film and television as well. Contrast that with women, where there has never been a female president and only a handful of fictional characters in film and

on television. This disparity creates a significant gap between the discourse accessible for representations of men and women in presidential characters. The potency of bad, corrupt, or suffering male presidential characters diminishes with the existence of numerous good, honorable, and moral ones. In comparison, there are very few representations of female presidential characters. Thus, the potency of each female character increases exponentially, as more varied or complex representations of women presidents simply do not exist.

Specific to the character of President Allen, the representation conveys the notion that women need not the same qualities or skills as men to become president. Rather, a woman need only to candidate for the vice presidency, as her function is to secure the popular female vote. She must then wait for a tragic event that would cause the sitting president to resign or become incapacitated. Essentially, a woman becomes president by default, with a man leading the way. As for the representation of President Taylor, she begins her presidency with integrity and honesty. However, Taylor soon demonstrates self-destructive, manipulative behavior that contributes to the eventual demise of her professional career. The presidency corrupts her morality and she is left without a family, friends, or a career. Contrast this destructive, tragic end to Taylor's presidency with a male character, President David Palmer, who appeared in the first three seasons of *24*. Palmer also faces extreme situations which cause him to make some morally questionable decisions. Yet he concludes his presidency with honor and actually returns in Season 4 to consult for the next administration. In gallant fashion, Palmer ultimately dies a national hero in Season 5. Similar fates of misfortune experienced in their presidencies, but where Taylor leaves desolate and alone, Palmer leaves a champion.

The concern is that audiences may believe the shows they watch on television represent reality in some capacity. Even if they do recognize the narratives as fiction, they may still be left with a sense of “this is how the world works”. Margaret J. Heide, a feminist scholar in cultural studies, examines how women construct meaning from popular culture and mass media in her book *Television Culture and Women’s Lives: thirtysomething and the Contradictions of Gender*. In her study, Heide asserts that popular culture texts, like movies and television shows, offer a cultural forum in which women identify with female characters, and these narratives organize and shape their understanding of gender roles:

[...] individuals form powerful identifications with film and television characters, much as children form their social identities through symbolic identification with parental and caregiving figures; moreover, film and television could be said to *position* the spectator, as if in a dream, to ‘read’ the film a certain way. (16)

Women, in particular, may consciously or unconsciously reject the idea of campaigning for president on the basis that they are unwilling to make similar personal sacrifices as Allen and Taylor; or they may fear the self-destructive behavior as presented specifically in Taylor’s character. While these are only two texts which portray the negative aspect of women in presidential roles, the potential impact is immense; especially considering so few media discourses exist that feature a woman president. The significance of this disproportion in representations cannot be overstated. The issue is not merely that women are represented differently than men in this role, but they are rarely cast in that role of president; and when they are, so few representations exist that offer a

varied range of interpretations. While male presidents may be cast in a negative light in some narratives, many other positive occurrences exist which provide a wide range of representations. Hence, audiences are presented with a much more comprehensive discourse concerning male leadership as compared to female leadership. Furthermore, these social myths suppress women into traditional gender roles by exaggerating the effects of participating in the public sphere of politics.

The following examination takes a closer look at *Commander in Chief* and *24* as narratological myths, again using the concept of binary oppositions to expound upon the representations mentioned above. As discussed in the previous chapter, binary oppositions contrast two images or characters, and their conflict represents conceptual differences which can then be interpreted to reveal social conflicts and ideological underpinnings. The three central binary oppositions identified in the *Twilight* saga were also prevalent in *Commander in Chief* and *24* as well. To review, the oppositions included: strong/weak, maternal/professional, and private/public.

Commander in Chief

Commander in Chief deals primarily with issues of gender roles and stereotypes, positioning woman as the weaker sex. This strong/weak opposition is first introduced in the pilot episode when Allen is described as a “soft and indecisive woman” who could not possibly lead the country and faces backlash with becoming the first female president. The speaker of the House, Nathan Templeton, urges her to resign from her role as vice president before she can assume the presidency. He views Allen as a weak and emotional

woman without the strength to lead the country. Templeton also calls her vice presidency a “stunt” and scolds her that she should refrain from becoming president simply for the sake of social advancement and women’s rights. On the denotative level, Templeton appears as an arrogant, sexist character who simply desires the presidency for his own personal gain. However, on the connotative level, his words convey a representation that social advancement and women’s rights are of little importance, as an individual should not seek the presidency with the intention of using the office as a proponent for social change. On the contrary, the executive leader of the United States holds considerable power and influence to make considerable changes in society, including issues regarding women’s rights.

The positioning of women as the weaker sex in the strong/weak opposition continues to work itself out through the rest of the season. Allen’s administration expends substantial energy and resources defending her ability to lead as woman, rather than focusing those efforts on leading the county. She spends the greater part of her time in a reactive mode, defending herself, her staff, and family. Important to note, Allen’s chief of staff, Jim Gardner, continually rescues her from politically perilous situations. This damsel in distress trope reappears several more times in the season, framing Allen’s character as one who is strong in her personal character, but weak with experience in Washington politics needs constant saving by the men in her life. The narrative clearly emphasizes that the United States is not prepared for a woman to become president. Even Allen states that she has the skills to handle the job but is not prepared. This posits an interesting character revelation: as vice president, Allen was one seat away from the

presidency and yet never considered assuming that role herself, whether by happenstance or election.

The coding of Allen as politically weak frequently resurfaces in the narrative. The fact that Allen was selected as a vice presidential candidate simply because of her gender and ability to gain the popular female vote is disconcerting. This representation suggests that a woman needs not the intellect or professional achievements, typically expected from a male candidate; rather that she must possess an appealing charisma to gain popularity with the American people. Allen's vice presidency was a pageant show that positioned the female public as weak for simply voting on the "soccer mom" quality, insinuating that women in American vote their leadership based on inconsequential factors. Furthermore, Allen is unaware that she was used by the previous president for the sole purpose of gaining the female vote. Bridges justifies this action by positing that if his need for raw power opens the door for women to advance, then who really cares why Allen was chosen for vice president.

The story conveys on both a denotative level and connotative level that the role of women in politics is a theatrical performance. This narrative emphasizes the subject-object dichotomy in that women are used by men as products to sell an image, meet a target, or secure the illusive female vote. A clear example of this occurs in a scene when Templeton tells Allen that it is time for her to "get off of the stage" so that he can assume the presidency. Despite her intellect and wit, Allen is often oblivious to the manipulations that occur around her and appears dumbfounded. Her character creates the perception that women can be easily manipulated in politics at the executive level, thus reemphasizing women as the weaker sex and unfit for the political sphere.

The maternal/professional opposition offers a look at the struggle for Allen to balance her personal and political life. In each episode, presidential duties pull Allen away from her husband and children. As a result, she suffers from continual remorse at her alleged lack of maternal care. By episode nine, titled *The Mom Who Came to Dinner*, Allen asks her mother, Kate, to move into the White House as Allen is unable to care for her three children in the manner to which they have been accustomed. While Allen does make considerable effort throughout the season to protect her children and provide them with a normal life, they suffer emotional consequences from her presidency. The children are continually harassed by the media, thrust into the spotlight at school, taken advantage of by friends, and isolated in the White House because they are unable to appear in public without being mobbed. In episode three, titled *First Strike*, Allen's oldest daughter, Rebecca, says her mother has failed to protect her from the media and ongoing harassment. In that same episode, Allen's youngest daughter, Amy, wanders into the Oval Office to visit her mom and is promptly turned away because she doesn't have an appointment. In fact, in almost every episode, the children attempt to visit their mother who is either unavailable or preoccupied. In one compelling scene during episode three, Amy is told by the young son of deceased President Bridges' that she will never see her mom again. The little boy says that President Allen will simply be too busy. Children, in their innocence, have a particular way of piercing the heart, and this scene capitalized on that effect. While on the denotative level Allen appears as a loving mother who is simply overwhelmed with her new career; the connotative level creates a signification that although Allen may find success in her career, she fails as a mother and her children endure emotional distress. She simply cannot manage the success in both the maternal

and professional worlds. Interesting to note, the narrative portrays Allen as having no sense of the demands of the job before she assumed the presidency. Apparently her previous careers as a congresswoman, university chancellor, and vice president did not adequately prepare her for the demands of the presidency and ability to effectively balance her maternal and professional responsibilities.

Allen's marriage suffers as well, impacted by her role as president. Rod, Allen's husband, struggles with her role as "leader of the free world" and the expectations of him as first gentleman. He gives Allen an ultimatum that their marriage will only survive as long as he holds a significant position in her administration. When Allen refuses the idea of Rod working alongside her, concerned about a conflict of interest, he explores the possibility of working outside the White House. Rod displays discomfort with the switch of gender roles. As first gentleman, Rod faces continual derision for what is perceived as a feminine, maternal role in supporting the president and acting as host for the White House. Episode two, titled *First Choice*, creates a mockery of the first gentleman's responsibilities, such as meeting with the staff daily for menu preparations, choosing White House décor, planning dinner parties, selecting the appropriate clothing designers, and other seemingly frivolous activities. The representation is that men are too good for these tasks, as they are traditionally intended for women who supposedly excel in this function. This point is illustrated by the White House social coordinator, Nora, who states that the preceding first lady and many before her were highly successful in their role as hostesses for the White House. Nora's statement reproduces the view that women are naturally skilled at these trivial tasks, while men are adept at administering the more critical, demanding responsibilities of the presidency.

The private/public opposition is primarily coded with gender representations in the show. Throughout the season, Allen's authority as president is most often challenged because she is a woman. She faces continual sexist, stereotypical comments from both allies and foes, including her husband, children, colleagues, and the media. Some examples of these chauvinistic comments include: "she's just a girl", which infantilizes her and posits Allen as naïve and incompetent for a profession in politics; "doesn't have the balls", literally points to Allen's physiological inadequacy in which having testicles is superior, but also signifying that she is weak in character, unlike men who can handle the demands of politics; or "women are so easy to deal with if you remember they aren't men", signifying that women are simplistic and have to be dealt with rather than respected as an equal part of the population. While these sexist comments may reflect the type of struggles women experience in actual positions of leadership, and thus may play a role in framing the story within realistic experiences, the more disturbing insight is the way that Allen responds to the comments. Instead of addressing the infraction and defending her position in the political sphere, Allen retorts with similar humor that degrades women. Perhaps meant as backhanded sarcasm to neutralize the offending situation, her behavior suggests that this type of misogynistic conduct is expected and tolerated in American culture. Allen fails to set a positive example of how women should handle sexist comments and situations in the workplace.

Allen's children also struggle with role reversal of their parents, with their mother as president and father as first gentleman. During episode five and six, Horace, Allen's son, views his father as emasculated. He states that his father is a national joke and loses respect for Rod as a male role model simply because his father is fulfilling a traditional

female position. Instead of addressing the concern of his son, Rod accepts the harsh criticism, which only serves to confirm Horace's reservations. Rod fails to effectively navigate the situation and provide Horace with an alternative view that customary gender roles are frequently stereotypical and not an accurate measure of achievement for men or women. Instead, Rod pursues a position as the commissioner of baseball to impress his son and gratify a personal desire for professional achievement. While on the denotative level these struggles function as dramatic conflicts in the story and thus seem like harmless narrative devices; the connotative meaning holds deeper consequences. The representation to audiences is that if women are to secure positions in executive leadership, their male partners may struggle with perceived social disparity, unless they obtain a position of cultural significance to counter the power imbalance.

To further illustrate this point, in episode 18 titled *Unfinished Business*, a disturbing scene arises when Kate, Allen's mother, discusses the idea of feminism with Rebecca. Kate oversimplifies the subject and proposes a precarious definition. In response to Rebecca's challenge that feminists are women who hate men, Kate replies, "We love men. We just want them to love us back". Unknowingly, Kate's language contributes to a patriarchal discourse by claiming that the goal and objective of feminism is to convince men to love women—and not just love women, but to love them back. This scene represents a conditional arrangement whereby women need men to reciprocate their affection and validate their emotional existence; and by doing so, women will gain equal rights with men. All of these conflicts result from the unexpected trade in gender roles, with Allen functioning primarily in the public sphere and Rod in the private sphere.

This myth creates a meaning that society cannot deal with women who leave their traditional maternal roles and seek achievement in the public, political realm.

A highlight of the series is Allen's commitment to equality for women. Her first action as president, during the pilot episode, is an executive order to rescue a Nigerian woman who is being sentenced to death for having sex outside of marriage. When challenged on her decision as meddling in another country's internal affairs, Allen responds, "If you think I'll see a woman tortured and executed for having sex, you're sorely mistaken". Additionally in the last episode of the season, Allen desires to amend the constitution so that it guarantees women have equal rights as men. Her family, staff, and Washington colleagues are divided on her determination to pass the Equal Rights Amendment; but despite their influence and meddling, Allen remains committed to advancing the women's equality movement. While the narrative clearly represents the United States as a patriarchal society which is seemingly unprepared for a woman president; the few bright moments of resistance displayed by Allen offer a refreshing reprieve from the overwhelming oppressive, hegemonic ideologies in the narrative.

At the conclusion the season, one can resolve that Allen flourished in her role as president. Her character presents female audiences with an intelligent, strong leader who is compassionate and faces opposition with integrity and honesty. Allen is also a proponent of social change and strives to bring equality to American women. Conversely, the narrative represents Allen as a failing mother. Her children suffer emotionally under her presidency. Allen's marriage struggles to withstand the pressures of her job and overcome the stereotypes and expectations of traditional gender roles. At times, her administration is so intently focused on responding to issues surrounding her position as

first female president that there is little time to focus on other matters. The narrative ultimately creates a myth that women must choose either success as a mother or success as a political leader. They simply cannot have both. Contrasting this dichotomous choice with the previous President Teddy Bridges, he not only successfully led the country and earned the admiration of his staff and political colleagues who were loyal even after his death, but he also gained the adoration of his wife and son. Before dying of a serious health condition, Bridges successfully balanced a thriving political career and a stable, loving family.

24: Redemption, 24: Season 7, 24: Season 8

The analysis now shifts to the second television series, *24*, which primarily contends with issues of personal sacrifice and erosion of moral integrity. While *Commander in Chief* committed a significant portion of the narrative to Allen's struggles as the first female president, there is no mention of whether Allison Taylor is the first female president or if she faced any resistance or backlash because of her gender. But as the analysis will reveal, the same oppressive myth exists that positions women to either choose their maternity or a career. While Taylor's authority as a female president is not challenged, unlike in *Commander in Chief*, gender discourses still play a significant factor in the progression of the narrative. An interesting comparison, hardly any discourses of race exist in the *24* narrative for the previous president, David Palmer, who is black. Yet the gender discourses in Taylor's administration frames her entire story. It begs the question, why is Palmer's race so irrelevant while Taylor's gender seems

inescapable? In terms of signification: how is it possible that even when Taylor's gender appears not to be denotated, it is still so heavily connotated?

In *24: Redemption*, the two-hour movie broadcast in 2008, Taylor is inaugurated as president of the United States. Unlike Allen, Taylor is confident and excited. While Taylor does not appear to need the emotional support of her husband, Henry still dotes upon her and reassures Taylor that she is about to become "the most powerful person in the world". He does not focus on her gender, rather her position and ability to influence the world. Unlike Allen's husband, Henry willingly accepts his role as first gentleman. *24: Redemption* merely introduces Taylor's character, and it is not until Season 7 (2009), also known as *24: Day 7*, that her character plays a significant part in the story. It is worth noting that throughout Season 7, Taylor displays strength and resilience in the face of extreme pressure. She maintains a clear understanding of the expectations placed upon her as president, even in the face of personal tragedy. When questioned about her emotional condition after her son's death, Taylor says that grief is a luxury she cannot afford in her position. As a character, Taylor is articulate, commanding, well-respected, and believes in the rule of the law. She is committed to the American people, leading the country with honesty and integrity. However as the narrative unfolds, two binary oppositions—maternal/professional and strong/weak—expose Taylor's unraveling disposition and point to a representation that women cannot function in both the private and public spheres without making sacrifices in one or both areas. The private/public opposition is not prevalent in this series, like with *Commander in Chief*, since Taylor's character functions as a supportive role to the protagonist. The story arc of *24* also

presents a much shorter period of time (1 day or only 24 hours per season) and primarily positions Taylor in the public realm.

The maternal/professional opposition is primarily at work in Season 7, as Taylor suffers immense personal tragedy for her presidency. By the end of the season, her marriage and her family dissolve because of her professional job. The narrative reveals that her son, Roger, was murdered because he uncovered a government conspiracy. Taylor must also choose to prosecute her daughter, Olivia, who avengers her brother's murder by arranging the assignation of his killer. Finally, Taylor's husband is abducted by terrorists, tortured, and almost killed in an attempt to manipulate her foreign policy. Furthermore, she faces intense times of national crisis that require Taylor to choose between fulfilling her role as president and protecting the interests of her family. This opposition is coded in the way the story positions Taylor to renege on her maternal responsibilities in order to fulfill her political duties. The narrative does not afford Taylor the opportunity to succeed in both her maternity and her career. She is forced to choose, at times with great despair.

As Season 7 closes, this opposition continues contrasting Taylor's maternity and professional career with pressure from Henry. He demands that Taylor protects their daughter from federal prosecution by covering up the murder and ignore her commitment to uphold the law. Henry strikes with piercing words, "our family has already paid a steep enough price... your job cost our son his life". He asks Taylor to not cause their family any more personal grief. Faced with an impossible choice, Taylor says with remorse that she had no idea price she would pay for her job or how much her family would suffer; but she swore an oath to the American people to uphold the constitution. To turn her back on

that oath would be the worst kind of hypocrisy. In the end, Taylor remands her daughter to the attorney general, and soon finds she is all alone. The story reveals that Henry divorces Taylor and defames her in the media through their separation. On the denotative level, this opposition is coded in several ways as previously discussed. While audiences will likely recognize the events that occur in Season 7 are excessive and produced for television drama; the connotative meaning is still a serious one to consider. Similar to *Commander in Chief*, the narrative in *24* creates a representation that Taylor fails as a wife and mother. Although in this series, Taylor loses significantly more on a personal level than does Allen. In a striking statement in the last episode of the season, Taylor says that “I’ve lost my family. I’ve lost everyone”. Despite her remarkable undertakings and many successes as president in the season, the narrative presents audiences of *24* with a sense of disparity as Taylor’s personal life falls to pieces. She is left all alone. This conveys a distressing representation that women are simply unable to enjoy success and achievements as a wife, mother, and leader of America. In the country’s history of presidents, many of the male leaders likely struggled to balance their private and public lives. However, the narrative in *24* creates an exaggerated scenario which posits women in a losing situation, discouraging them from even considering a run for presidency. Once again, the severely limited representations of women in presidential roles reduce the availability of alternative meanings for audiences. The discourses concerning male leadership offer audiences a wide range of representations; while the negligible discourses regarding female leadership assign immense weight to the few narratives that exist which feature a woman as president.

The strong/weak opposition is signified through the moral unraveling of Taylor in Season 8 (2010), also known as *24: Day 8*, which follows Taylor's self-destructive behavior. With a failed marriage, deceased son, and incarcerated daughter, Taylor has no family to speak of. Her only motivating factor is to build a positive legacy through her presidential administration. Taylor commits to negotiating a peace treaty that will bring amity to the Middle-East region of the world. When that treaty is threatened, Taylor sacrifices her personal integrity and engages in activities she once abhorred, falling into a pattern of lying, manipulation, and cover-ups. Taylor eventually drives away her closest friend and confidant, Ethan, who resigns as secretary of state over her actions. She conceals a conspiracy that would destroy the treaty, thus threatening her presidential legacy, and uses the idea of a "greater good" to legitimize her unethical actions. Taylor's mandate becomes "peace must and will prevail; no matter the cost, no matter the compromises". On the denotative level, Taylor's actions demonstrated that she will literally employ all means necessary to achieve her dream, which is frightening even if the analysis stopped there. But the myth creates an even more disturbing connotation when considering the effect the presidency had on Taylor. The myth conveys that for a woman the presidency will erode their personal virtue and ethics. Yet men who face similar situations, like the previous President David Palmer, will likely weather the experience with a positive outcome.

As the final season unfolds, Taylor slides further into a web of deception and moral depravity. She attempts to censor the media by securing evidence and arresting a reporter under the banner of national security. She betrays the trust of a fellow female president, Dalia Hassan, by covering up who murdered Hassan's husband. Taylor then

threatens Hassan with a military invasion in an effort to preserve the peace treaty. Her corrupt decisions and self-destructive behavior destroys Taylor's presidency. In a moment of moral clarity, Taylor rectifies her mistakes, resigns from the presidency, and remands herself to the attorney general to face any consequences from her actions. Taylor was so obsessed with a false agenda for peace, that she sacrificed every principle she ever stood for. As the series concludes, President Taylor is left with nothing. Her family and friends have deserted her, her professional career dissolved, and her legacy is forever tarnished. This representation of Taylor offers a highly potent image of female leadership. Over the course of the entire series, *24* featured four male presidents: David Palmer in Seasons 1-3, John Keeler and Charles Logan in Seasons 4-5, and Wayne Palmer in Season 6. While each of these presidents offered differing representations, some positive and some negative, the series ends with the theatrical failure of a female president. With no other woman president to dilute the negative representation, audiences are left with only the moral unraveling of Taylor, as she desperately grasps to the remaining shreds of her political life. The myth again conveys to audiences that to fulfill the role of president requires great personal sacrifices, particularly for women. They risk the potential of losing everything, and who wants to take that risk, especially when family, friends, moral integrity are on the line?

Summary

While *Commander in Chief* and *24* were created for entertainment purposes, their effects run much deeper than simple enjoyment for the general population. These

narratives exemplify social discourses that reproduce patriarchal control over women, suppressing the female populace to revert to their familiar, acceptable sphere of the home and non-threatening professional careers instead of entering the realm of political engagement and community leadership. The issue is not necessarily just with the representations and connotated meanings in these popular culture narratives, but with their potential repressive influence on female audiences. Liesbet Van Zoonen, a feminist scholar in media studies, addresses this concern in her work *Entertain the Citizen: When Politics and Popular Culture Converge*. Zoonen's interest resides with the way in which entertaining political performances, such as *Commander in Chief* and *24*, affect an audiences capacity and aspiration to perform as citizens: "In the context of citizenship, the first issue is not what entertaining politics does to citizens, but what citizens do with entertaining politics, for citizenship is not something that pertains if it is not expressed in everyday talk and actions, both in the public and private domain" (123).

The preceding analysis exposes the social anxiety dramatized in these narratives, which wrestles with the issue of women leaving the private realm and entering the public space; the contestation of women assuming an authoritative role over men. This social anxiety plays out in each of the two popular culture discourses examined. This assessment coincides with Margaret Heide's work which recognizes the media discourses draw upon social anxieties and creates deep meanings which offer one of the essential sources that individuals draw upon to make sense of their world, especially women (1). The underlying ideologies exposed in the preceding analysis offers audiences a disturbing negotiation of this conflict by creating a meaning that women face detrimental consequences should they consider a position in high-level politics. But why must

women choose either success in their personal lives or achievement in their professional endeavors? Historically, countless men have found harmony and success with both ventures. There is no inevitable reason that women cannot experience the same measure of success; except that this myth offers a fabricated expectation which is reproduced in American popular culture pedagogies.

Revisiting feminist theory, women's subordinate position in culture is connected to social values that restrict "women's access to the public world by confining them to the private sphere" (Rakow 194). Television shows like *Commander in Chief* and *24* condition women to remain in their respective roles as caretaker of the home and family. These traditional roles are not an inevitable end, rather a means to maintain hegemony over women in the United States and suppress the feminine resistance that inspires women to campaign for elective offices. The potential consequence of social myths like *Commander in Chief* and *24* is that future generations of American women will be conditioned to accept the impracticality of a female president. Or worse, women may believe this lack of equality with men is acceptable. Yet hope is not lost and pockets of resistance intermittently emerge. Each time a female candidate emerges in politics or one is fictionalized in media, hegemony is challenged. Stuart Hall says that hegemony "fails when dominant ideology is weaker than social resistance" (Lull 35). In other words, society must come together to defy these cultural norms. From academic researchers exposing representations in social and political discourses to audiences recognizing the oppressive meanings represented in popular culture texts, the power to change the future of women in politics lies in the hands of the people. When the American public

challenges the mass media ideological machine, society begins to advance true political equality for women in the United States.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

The previous examination of popular culture pedagogies through the lens of critical cultural studies reveals a disturbing discourse that besieges women with a message that their social position belongs in the home—the private, domestic sphere. Collectively, these pedagogies construct a myth which addresses the social anxiety in America regarding women in the workplace; mainly that they do not belong in positions of executive power over men, whether in industry or in politics. The patriarchal stimulus of these pedagogies is revealed when one considers that the focus of their narratives is on the role of women and the surrounding contestation, rather than confronting the anxiety and fears of men. While men's position in society is solidified and undeviating, women continually challenge this gender arrangement as the persistence of the feminist movement illustrates. Thus, the role of the myth is to depoliticize the gender debate. According to Barthes, myths work not to hide from the conflict or dilemma at hand, but to distort and naturalize the issue. Specifically, Barthes says:

This is why myth is experienced as innocent speech: not because its intentions are hidden—if they were hidden, they could not be efficacious—but because they are so naturalized. In fact, what allows the reader to consume myth innocently is that he [or she] does not see it as a semiological system but as an inductive one. (242)

Myths organize the cultural system so that what is socially constructed appears as the natural order of life. Furthermore, myths are effective because they offer comprise

and allow for multiple meanings and interpretations. Consequently, a pedagogy may read as female empowerment at one level of signification when it actually functions as repressive to women in society when examined at the second-level signification—at the level of myth. Thus, because of their ability to transform meaning into nature and negotiate these cultural conflicts, these myths are eternal and continue to serve the dominant interests of society. Dominant power is maintained by negotiating meaning and reproducing the hegemonic ideologies in America through the entertainment and pleasure of popular culture.

The pedagogies of mythology in this study exposed three key messages for women regarding their role in politics and the public sphere. First, the myth discourages women from fully participating and engaging in the professional, public sphere and reinforces their objectification by men. The Barbie® I Can Be...™ President product line by Mattel presents young females with an initial message of girl power, but packaged in a discourse of stereotypical femininity and frivolity. In this pedagogy, the myth negotiates the gender issue by conceding that girls can be president within the confines of fantasy, removing all anchors of reality from the narrative. This Barbie popular cultural text offers an illusion that girls can obtain the office of the presidency; while in actual fact, the myth naturalizes the oppressive message that females should remain under the male gaze as objects for visual consumption. Barbie teaches girls that to run for public office is similar to a pageant show, in which performance and appearance reigns supreme. Education, intellectual development, and social awareness are neither important nor required.

In the second message, the myth romanticizes the retreat by women to their domesticity and the great reward which awaits them if they fulfill this purpose. The

Twilight saga films offer a fantasy that maneuvers women to scale back their power and agency in the professional, public realm and retreat to the domestic, private one. The female protagonist, Bella, withdraws from the real world in which she finds continued emotional and physical pain. There she feels like an outcast, not belonging or succeeding in her human life, and requires the constant care, intervention, and protection by her male counterparts. For all intents and purposes, in this world she is powerless. Yet, when Bella embraces her femininity, domesticity, and motherhood, she is transformed. Bella is empowered and in control of her life—the very things feminism seeks for women. In this pedagogy, the myth negotiates the gender issue by conceding that women may experience the power of domestic goddess (Bella's vampire character does exude a certain divinity); while in actual fact, the myth naturalizes the oppressive message that women will not succeed should they remain in the in the public sphere. The *Twilight* saga teaches the female population that they are exposed and vulnerable outside the home.

In the third and final message, the myth implies the negative consequences associated with women's choice to balance the roles of mother in the domestic life and leader in the political realm. *Commander in Chief* and *24* offer a fantasy which initially appears as progressive with two women featured as president of the United States; but this social achievement is immersed in a discourse of personal tragedies and moral struggles for the characters. In this pedagogy, the myth negotiates the gender issue by conceding that women can become president, though in one instance that occurred by happenstance; however, the myth quickly reminds audiences that a woman may not achieve this level of executive leadership without great sacrifice. The myth naturalizes the intense struggle for women to balance their work and personal lives, constituting this

struggle as inevitable, when in actual fact it is entirely socially constructed. These popular cultural texts teach women that they must choose between success as a wife/mother and professional/leader.

These myths and their attributing popular culture pedagogies contribute to a social discourse which, as Diane Negra states in her book *What a Girl Wants?*, “places a premium on showplace domesticity, with the achievement of a comfortable domestic life also a marker of personal virtue” (128). American culture offers women a re-packaged illusion of power within the boundaries of the home. Negra describes the intoxicating blend of messages: “The sensuousness and craft with which new domestic authorities are associated endow the home with a new power to idealize and eroticize femininity” (132). Women are encouraged to use their intellect and prowess for the betterment of the family. This mythology criminalizes women in the professional realm and criticizes them as self-serving, who fail in their maternal and domestic duties. This mythology also provides entrancing scenes of the hyper-feminine woman rising in attraction as she more closely aligns with traditional stereotypes. The unfortunate consequence for women in America is that popular culture pedagogies work against their efforts to advance in the public sphere, specifically against those seeking a position in high-level politics. Their future opportunities in leadership roles are reduced to superficial functions or linked to terrible personal consequences; yet their domesticity is glorified. Heroine of the home becomes more attractive than achieving the office of the presidency, reinforcing the political glass ceiling in America. Unless there is a transformation in dominant cultural views and mainstream society values women in the political sphere, Barbie will never be president and neither will a woman in the United States.

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