

Lauren Adkins

May 15, 2013

Love is Overtaking Me

PART ONE: Romance & Sin City

*She would say to her beau, wedded life is so slow
For this is the way that I feel:
I want to be loved like the girls on the film
I want to have heroes galore
I want to be Queen like you see on the screen
With Princes and Knights by the score.¹*

The city of Las Vegas, heralded as the capital of the Western entertainment industry, is a phenomenon existing between reality and fiction. Some have labeled the glittering, neon opulence of the famed Las Vegas Strip a hyper-reality. However, the city seems to make no attempt to disguise its artificiality, boasting easily recognizable, miniature versions of world-renowned tourist destinations such as Rome (*Caesar's Palace*), Venice (*The Venetian*), Paris (*The Paris Hotel*), and New York City (*New York, New York*).² Las Vegas presents itself as a cathedral of consumption, thriving almost exclusively upon the money of tourists seeking a vacation from their everyday lives. Sin City's business is savvy, overtly aware that in our consumer culture people believe that spending will buy happiness, personal transformation, and, most importantly, self-fulfillment. Advertising reinforces this belief, placing emphasis on seeking a life (or in Las Vegas's case, a vacation) filled with aesthetically pleasing images and objects, of which the city itself seems to be a three-dimensional, 24/7 advertisement. "Advertising has a tremendous hold on how we conceive of the Utopian good life, including our desires, fantasies, wants, and dreams, providing meaning in a myth-like way that helps us make sense of our world," writes

¹ popular American song from 1915; part of the St. Vincent Collection at the Archives of the National Museum of American History. Eva Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 1.

² Dave Hickey, Libby Lumpkin, Ralph Rugoff, Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, interview by Alex Farquharson, "The Summit," *The Magic Hour: The Convergence of Art and Las Vegas*, 2001:40-50.

marketing scholar Jonathan Schroeder.³ A tactic often employed in advertising is the depiction of romantic fantasy; some scholars have noted a connection between romantic love and the love of goods.⁴ Sociologist Eva Illouz notes that people seek to escape a world laden with bureaucracy and mundanity for a “romantic utopia.” We now live in a world where the “romanticization of commodities and the commodification of romance” go hand in hand.⁵ *Love is Overtaking Me* attempts to demonstrate the fantasies of consumerism, romance, and the resulting sense of unfulfillment through a series of performative artworks. The performances, namely the bachelorette party, wedding ceremony, and wedding reception, are simulations of real events experienced by thousands of women each year. The recreations of these familiar events exist as collaborative explorations of desire and social expectation within the consumer-driven, neon-lit environment endemic to Las Vegas.

There is perhaps no entity in today’s popular entertainment industry that displays the connection between consumerism, romance, and fantasy more directly than the corporate success of *The Twilight Saga*. The statistics are staggering and undeniable; the Saga’s four books have sold more than 85 million copies worldwide, been translated into 37 languages, and collectively spent 143 weeks on the *New York Times* best-seller list.⁶ Summit Entertainment, the possessor of the franchise, markets *Twilight*-themed *everything*, from underwear to umbrellas, specifically to girls and women. The series itself has become the latest in a long line of feminized cultural products. Love and consumption, then, share a common bond; both are widely considered to be areas of focus and expertise for women.⁷ From girlhood, we consume the goods that support a kind of love culture, marked by all manifestations of romantic fantasy, from fairy tales and Barbie dolls to romance novels and popular magazines like *Seventeen* and

³ Cele C. Otnes, and Elizabeth H. Pleck, *Cinderella Dreams: The Allure of the Lavish Wedding*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003). 10.

⁴ Cele C. Otnes, and Elizabeth H. Pleck, 4.

⁵ Eva Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 26.

⁶ Melissa A. Click, ““Rabid”, “obsessed”, and “frenzied”: Understanding Twilight Fangirls and the Gendered Politics of Fandom,” *Flow*, <http://flowtv.org/2009/12/rabid-obsessed-and-frenzied-understanding-twilight-fangirls-and-the-gendered-politics-of-fandom-melissa-click-university-of-missouri/> (accessed 12/6/2012).

⁷ Cele C. Otnes, and Elizabeth H. Pleck, 9.

Cosmopolitan, which offer tips on “How to Snag the Perfect Guy” in every issue. Similar to the advertising world, the *Twilight Saga* capitalizes on the power of the romantic myth not only through its external commercial value but also within the source text itself.

Myths create a vision of what “ought” to be rather than what “is”.⁸ Traditionally, myths are thought to inform cultural existence, offering a guide by which to live.⁹ For example, “it is through hearing about wicked stepmothers, lost children, good but misguided kings...that children learn or mis-learn what a child and what a parent is”.¹⁰ “What makes myths so powerful is their plausibility; they are culturally and historically bound ideals which are so firmly embedded in society as to seem real,” writes Tricia Clasen, referencing Barthes’ *Mythologies* in her essay titled *Taking a Bite Out of Love: The Myth of Romantic Love in the Twilight Series*.¹¹ These myths become such a powerful part of our collective consciousness that we accept them as human nature even if we learn they are unrealistic, or even proven to be fictitious.¹² Through the absorption of this constant stream of mediated myths, we begin to compare our own relationships to a vast bank of ideas of what they’re meant to be. Therefore, even if readers realize the ideals of love presented in a story such as *Twilight* are not realistic, romantic myths may nevertheless influence cultural perceptions of ideal relationships.

Depictions of love seem to invade every popular media outlet: film, television, literature, music, advertising. The image of romantic love has completely saturated our culture, and without knowing how it happened, it has also become a major existential goal in our lives. A key cultural script in the United States is that if shopping doesn’t fulfill your deepest needs, heterosexual romantic love will, and in many

⁸ David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960).

⁹ “Taking a Bite Out of Love: The Myth of Romantic Love in the Twilight Series,” chap. 7 in *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media, & the Vampire Franchise*, ed. Melissa A. Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2010).

¹⁰ A. MacIntyre, *After virtue: A study in moral theory*, (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1981).

¹¹ “Taking a Bite Out of Love: The Myth of Romantic Love in the Twilight Series,” chap. 7 in *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media, & the Vampire Franchise*, ed. Melissa A. Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2010), 121.

¹² “Taking a Bite Out of Love: The Myth of Romantic Love in the Twilight Series,” 121.

cases, the two are linked.¹³ Romantic, heterosexual love is thought to deliver ultimate happiness and satisfaction, and, most importantly, a sense of self-worth. Textual analyses of U.S. girls' magazines, including *Seventeen* and *YM*, reinforce this theme of seeking relationships with men as a way of achieving self-worth.¹⁴ E-harmony's current slogan? "From single to soul mate." Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* echoes these ideologies in many ways, hardly bothering to disguise itself as the ultimate American dream. The story revolves around the female protagonist, Bella Swan, who meets a mysterious family of vampires called the Cullens, who are all gifted with supernatural abilities, inconceivably strong, and wealthy. *Twilight*, perhaps, reaches the consumer at heart by offering not only a glimpse of complete and destined love, but also adventure, riches, and everlasting life and beauty—all objects of advertising. We all want to be considered beautiful, to live for all time and never age, to possess unlimited money and power, to love and to be loved, truly and wholly and forever, and for that love to never be complicated or boring. For me, *Twilight* represents a tidy package of all of these fantasies, and for Bella, it all starts with Edward Cullen, who has a profound impact on her life the moment he enters it (as "the one") and eventually satisfies her every desire. Early on in the series, Bella worries that she could not possibly be interesting or attractive enough to keep Edward's attention. However, when she expresses this concern, Edward argues, "Your hold is permanent and unbreakable.. Never doubt that."¹⁵

The popularity of the series is noteworthy on its own, but the public reaction to *Twilight* is striking. Five years after the release of the first film, the popular press continues to be bewildered by the outrageous success of a series targeting a female audience. At its heart *Twilight* is a story of true love prevailing against all odds, and *Love is Overtaking Me* began with a desire to analyze and enact this narrative. In the beginning, the idea was centered in the exploration of a popular cultural fantasy that's both specific to me and shared by many other girls and women: finding "true love." The phenomenal sales of the *Twilight* series, and its fans' all-consuming intensity, suggest that the series fills an important void in

¹³ Suzanna Rose, "Heterosexism and the study of women's romantic and friend relationships," *Journal of Social Issues*, 56, no. 2 (2000): 315-328.

¹⁴ "Taking a Bite Out of Love: The Myth of Romantic Love in the Twilight Series," chap. 7 in *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media, & the Vampire Franchise*, ed. Melissa A. Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2010), 121.

¹⁵ Stephenie Meyer, *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*, (New York City: Little, Brown, 2006), 524.

some girls' and women's lives.¹⁶ Certainly, *Twilight* is a contemporary retelling of a classic story that simultaneously deconstructs and reinforces powerful, invasive myths regarding gender and romantic love.¹⁷ One of these myths is that of "love at first sight." Clasen argues that "for Stephenie Meyer, love is not really a choice; more often it feels destined, and moreover, instant attraction is its foundation."¹⁸ In the saga's first book, Bella is immediately captivated by Edward when he first enters the lunch room, and later on, when Edward first encounters Bella, he is overwhelmed by the power of her scent. What they feel at their initial meeting is not considered love, but the strength of Edward and Bella's connection exhibits the same principles as "love at first sight." "It evokes a sense that they are destined for each other," observe Behm-Morawitz, Click, and Aubrey in a sociological study on the impact of the *Twilight* narrative on fans' relationships.¹⁹ With *Twilight*, the idea is that romantic love should be easy, unconditional, and everlasting. Combined with the power of Summit Entertainment's cunning marketing, which employs all the usual tactics of seductive advertising, it's no wonder that finding romantic love is our greatest collective wish. This concept is echoed seemingly everywhere: romantic comedies, pop songs, commercials. I couldn't begin to count the number of times I've overheard a woman, experiencing conflict in her real life relationship, say "I guess he just isn't the one." Romantic love seems to be in the forefronts of our minds, especially for myself and my peers—if we're not in love, we feel we're missing out on life's most important and rewarding experience.

As many visual depictions of romance as there are in our culture, it goes without saying that the ritual of the wedding, as the culmination of the typical romantic storyline, is perhaps equally as pervasive.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, Melissa A. Click, and Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, "Relating to Twilight: Fans' Responses to Love and Romance in the Vampire Franchise," chap. 8 in *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media, & the Vampire Franchise*, ed. Melissa A. Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2010), 153.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, Melissa A. Click, and Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, "Relating to Twilight: Fans' Responses to Love and Romance in the Vampire Franchise," chap. 8 in *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media, & the Vampire Franchise*, ed. Melissa A. Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2010).

¹⁸ "Taking a Bite Out of Love: The Myth of Romantic Love in the Twilight Series," chap. 7 in *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media, & the Vampire Franchise*, ed. Melissa A. Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2010), 121.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, Melissa A. Click, and Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, "Relating to Twilight: Fans' Responses to Love and Romance in the Vampire Franchise," 143.

There are, and have been for decades, television programs centered upon following couples through the stages of wedding planning, films focused on weddings or the experience of being a bride, an increasing number of magazines dedicated solely to advice for the bride-to-be, coverage of celebrity ceremonies, and wedding-themed toys and costumes for young girls. It then follows that one of the most defining moments of the *Twilight* series is the scene in which Bella and Edward finally tie the knot. The outrageous lavishness of the ceremony is not to be dismissed; Meyer describes the setting in detail— an ethereal, beautiful Northwestern forest strung with thousands of lights and flowers. As a cultural ritual that stands out in many people’s lives and is thought to inspire great excitement in the imaginations of young girls, the *Twilight* wedding struck a chord in the popular press. Headlines focused on the elegant decor of the film’s ceremony graced the front pages of most weekly women’s magazines in America. Inside, readers could find out the designer of Bella’s dress, where to find similar styles (“Get this look!”), and how to copy the film’s set decoration, among other guides for brides-to-be. A wedding to the brooding, mysterious Edward Cullen seemed to be the ultimate display of indulgence in this collective romantic fantasy, as well as an investigation of the consumerist culture unique to Sin City.

Throughout the last two decades, the Las Vegas wedding industry experienced so much growth that it earned itself the title of the wedding capital of the world. The industry seems to echo the juxtaposition of the strange and the familiar found on the famous Strip, the Northern end of which houses most of the city’s fifty-five wedding chapels.²⁰ Las Vegas reportedly hosts over 350 weddings a day, and the Northern end of the famed Las Vegas Boulevard is dedicated almost solely to wedding chapels—or, in my experience, businesses more accurately described as wedding *factories*, herding couples one after the other through identical ceremonies. The average ceremony lasts approximately fifteen minutes, and couples are scheduled to be wed every thirty minutes. Identical limousines fill the parking lots, waiting to shuffle off the next rice-covered couple exiting the doors. Photographers place each couple in exactly the same setting in exactly the same pose. Brides in long white gowns parade around like clones of one another. Why are we as a culture so fascinated by weddings? Why are we equally absorbed by those staged not as fairy tales but as absurdities? The answer seems obvious in a city like Las Vegas, where in

²⁰ Cele C. Otnes, and Elizabeth H. Pleck, 237.

the span of about five minutes you can see 400ft tall jet streams of water synchronized to Elton John's "Tiny Dancer," men dressed as Kiss look-a-likes, and driving billboards advertising prostitution. Las Vegas is a city that prides itself upon offering fantastical experience and extravagance beyond imagination. American sociologist George Ritzer observed that, much like millions of women's experiences of reading *Twilight*, "Vegas is one of the magical tourist destinations that enables sightseers to reenchant their mundane lives."²¹ Just as I close the book and grudgingly reenter my reality, tourists visiting Las Vegas in search of experiences reminiscent of the 2009 film *The Hangover* board flights back to their routine lives, leaving the fantasy behind. What happens in Las Vegas stays in Las Vegas, right?

Both the typical Vegas bachelorette party and wedding ceremony are often carried out with preconceived and expected theatricality. I relied upon Baudrillard's notion of the "sign," or the simulacrum, to decide how to simulate these events in ways that would be both familiar and easily recognizable to participants and the public at large. Universal signs of the bachelorette party like tiaras and sashes were utilized for the bachelorette party, and of course signs of a traditional, lavish wedding, like a multi-tiered white cake and abundant flowers, were employed to help create the reception. A crucial part of *Love is Overtaking Me* was to willingly submerge myself in the experience of being a bride-to-be. Indeed, planning a wedding and reception on one's own can at times feel like a second—or a third, in my case—job, requiring endless and tedious attention. Throughout October, November, and December of 2012 I followed blogs of real-life brides who collected diets, recipes, and workout routines designed to deliver them to the altar in their best shape. I constantly surveilled myself, kept track of what I ate, made sure I was as active as possible (even if sometimes that just meant parking in the farthest spot from the door), collected images of potential white dresses, hairstyles, and makeup tutorials. This activity speaks to the larger dialogue concerning beauty standards and body image, which permeate our culture in images of fashion, advertising, and the popular media. Brides-to-be are perhaps some of the most preyed upon by societal pressure to conform to pre-existing standards of beauty and behavior, and I was no exception.²² I juggled planning, organizing, appointments, phone calls, extensive press interest, my full-time job, and

²¹ Cele C. Otnes, and Elizabeth H. Pleck, 241.

²² Susan Douglas, *Enlightened Sexism*, (New York City: Times Books), 214.

my responsibilities as a graduate student. Months of non-stop planning began to manifest as physical symptoms of extreme stress in the forms of anxiety attacks, sleep deprivation, and prolonged migraines. I became so emotionally overwhelmed that I began seeing a therapist. The psychological twists and turns I experienced throughout the six-month duration of the performance call to mind the physical demands of “endurance art”—a type of performance art in which the artist voluntarily experiences physical trauma or deprivation. One of the most talked about performance artists working in the endurance vein is Chris Burden, who often in his famed performance pieces willingly inflicts physical harm upon himself. For example, in 1971’s *Shoot*, an assistant was instructed to shoot him in his left arm from a distance of about fifteen feet.²³

As in Burden’s work, vulnerability of the self is an important theme in *Love is Overtaking Me*. Though the work did not involve any immediate physical danger, it did at times become almost unbearably stressful. However, where Burden’s performances are hailed as conceptually rich and powerful, and Burden himself is often described as a heroic survivor of his own work, *Love is Overtaking Me* was largely dismissed by the public as a cry for attention. This is in keeping with the widely expressed opinion that *Twilight* itself is mindless drivel not worthy of critical analysis, and that its fans, almost exclusively female, are not considered active media users like their male counterparts but instead as passive media consumers.²⁴ Largely, the media have belittled and ridiculed the attention *Twilight* fans have bestowed upon the series and the actors involved. Writers in the popular press often use gendered words with negative connotations to describe fan activity—words like “fever,” “hysteria,” “madness,” and “obsession.”²⁵ The *New York Times* described *Twilight* fans as “on the rabid side.”²⁶ The *Boston Globe*

²³ Peter Noever, "Assault on Art," Chris Burden: Beyond the Limits, ed. Peter Noever, MAK (Vienna: MAK, Cantz Verlag, 1996), 8-12.

²⁴ Melissa A. Click, "'Rabid', 'obsessed', and 'frenzied': Understanding Twilight Fangirls and the Gendered Politics of Fandom," *Flow*, <http://flowtv.org/2009/12/rabid-obsessed-and-frenzied-understanding-twilight-fangirls-and-the-gendered-politics-of-fandom-melissa-click-university-of-missouri/> (accessed 12/6/2012).

²⁵ Melissa A. Click, "'Rabid', 'obsessed', and 'frenzied': Understanding Twilight Fangirls and the Gendered Politics of Fandom."

²⁶ Terrence Rafferty, "Love and pain and the teenage vampire thing.." *The New York Times*, 11 02, 2008.

suggested fans' interest in the films' stars was "enthusiasm bordering on hysteria."²⁷ Similarly, when word about *Love is Overtaking Me* began to spread, I myself experienced a gendered attack by the press. "Normal-looking young woman is marrying a cardboard 'Twilight' vampire," read the headline of an MSN Now article published December 4, 2012, nearly two months prior to the ceremony. Even articles which included the fact that the wedding was performance art garnered extremely negative responses. The public's vitriol toward female fandom, particularly that of *Twilight*, is so intense that very few readers were willing to find integrity in the project and dismissed it outright. I also faced backlash from strangers via social networking platforms like Twitter and Facebook. "Mental slut," read one comment on the *Daily Mail's* Facebook post of their article. I documented many more comments of a similar nature, some violent. "It should be legal to kill Twilight fans," read a comment on the website of one British tabloid article. According to Melissa Click, professor of Communications at the University of Missouri, "...These reports of girls and women seemingly out of their minds and out of control disparage female fans' pleasures and curtail serious explorations of the strong appeal of the series."²⁸ This is not to say, however, that the series is without flaws. Like any other fictional series, it is certainly flawed, but its popularity has placed a spotlight on female desire; I believe this makes people uncomfortable.

In conclusion, *Love is Overtaking Me* is an attempt to speak to the personal connections I've experienced to the *Twilight Saga* and its fans—an investigation into what it means to indulge in a shared cultural fantasy as part of a widely scorned female fandom. The performance pieces that comprised the works as well as the final exhibition allowed me to indulge in a theatrical vacation from my own reality, forcing me to internalize and examine common female rituals first-hand. Working from the unique positions of both devoted fan and artist, and through the usage of symbols recognized across ages, cultures, and experiences, my hope was to connect with the public in a way that is atypical within the art world. On my bookcase at home, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* occupy the same shelf as Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight Saga*. In my opinion, the texts

²⁷ Lynda Gorov, "As Jacob Black in the new 'Twilight' film, Taylor Lautner is ready for the attention and the hysteria.." *The Boston Globe*, 11 15, 2009.

²⁸ Melissa A. Click, "'Rabid', 'obsessed', and 'frenzied': Understanding Twilight Fangirls and the Gendered Politics of Fandom."

are linked, crucial reflections of the times in which they were written. I would argue that, despite what the mass media, the internet, or your boyfriend might have you believe, *Twilight*, its fans, and its market matter.

PART TWO: Interviews

Q: how come you don't want the ceremony [video] out there? :(

A: *Twilight* is sensational, the Internet is cruel, and I want to preserve the integrity of the work.

[The following text is a compilation of two interviews conducted December 2012 and February 2013. The interspersed bracketed texts are excerpts from my personal journal, which I kept throughout the process of the project, beginning in October 2012.]

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November 13, 2012, 11:20am

[[I'm feeling completely overwhelmed already. I'm just so tired of talking about the story, and it's hardly begun. The wedding planning is exhausting. Constant self-surveillance is exhausting... but something in me wants to do this.]]

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[transcribed from KNPR's *State of Nevada*, aired December 18, 2012]

KNPR: *...Sometimes performance art is meant to be shocking... Would you call your performance shocking?*

LA: I don't think I would call it shocking, especially in Las Vegas.

KNPR: *Is it confrontational? Sometimes performance art can be that, too.*

LA: It's not confrontational for the audience, I don't think. It's confrontational for me, personally.

KNPR: *So this performance is part of your master's thesis... I remember you telling me this is kind of looking at this female fantasy of love through kind of its tie in with fandom, but in your own words, how would you describe your thesis?*

LA: I would describe it as... an analysis or an exploration, of multiple things... It started out as sort of an exploration of my own expectations of romance in my own personal life, and sort of the ways that I saw that reflected in peers, especially my generation. And also it's very closely tied to the notion of female fandom and the... dismissal and ridicule of female fandom by the public and the media.

KNPR: *So for this piece, and this is the part that I think most people now know about you anyways, from headlines in tabloids and reputable newspapers is that... you've set up a ceremony. You're going to marry, at a chapel here in Las Vegas, you're going to marry a cardboard cut out of the actor Robert Pattinson; it's his character Edward Cullen from Twilight, and I'm wondering... of all things you could do for a performance piece, where did this idea come from?*

LA: ...It makes sense for the trajectory of my work. I started working with themes of romance and sort of investigating love in general, you know, years ago. I don't know if that comes from a general fascination with it since childhood, or...

KNPR: *Is it mostly from a female perspective?*

LA: It is, yes. You know, I don't think being a bride to be can really be separated from the female experience, so... One day I was in my studio with a friend, and we were looking at some of my work which had used images of Edward Cullen and of other... pretty famous teen girl sort of icons... and my friend looked at me and said, "...well if you love him so much, why don't you just marry him?" and we sorta looked at each other like... "No, really! No, really, you should!" And so it really spun from there.

KNPR: *...Coming back to how the media responded to you. So, you put this project together, you got permission to do this thesis, and now you have to raise money to pay for this... the first outlet that called you was I believe a tabloid from Great Britain? So what happened there?*

LA: I had gotten a call from a press agency based in London, actually, and at this point, you know, word hadn't really gotten out about the project... but as I've said many times, I was not expecting any sort of crazy media reaction the way I've gotten. So they call me, and at first I thought, you know, it was a scam, or something, and they ask if I'd be interested in doing an interview with this tabloid that they work with, and I said sure, because I thought it would be fun, you know, and an interesting experience, and it definitely was... So I agreed to do it, we did the interview, and it was published about a week later.

KNPR: *And when you read it, what did you think?*

LA: I thought it was hilarious. It was... it was a tabloid version of the story, which is what I was expecting. Of course they conveniently left out the part about it being a thesis project or performance art of any kind, and...

KNPR: *But you had to have known that, right? I mean, here you have a young woman, and she's basically saying, you know what I'm going to have an actual wedding with a cardboard cutout of someone I happen to admire... You know the tabloids were gonna jump on that.*

LA: Sure, absolutely... and especially because it is such a popular series, which I think is really notable on its own, but I guess I wasn't expecting it to spiral out of control. I did the one interview, and it was fun, and the story was really funny and great for the project in terms of research because I am really interested in, you know, the media portrayal of girls and women like me, and so they really just played right into... that research that I've been doing about the public dismissal of female fandom, and sort of this portrayal of us as these... They use this Victorian-era, gendered words like "hysteria" and "crazy, obsessed, feverish," and words like that, which is really interesting.

KNPR: *Did you feel insulted?*

LA: No, I wouldn't say I felt insulted... I don't typically read tabloids; I know that they can be pretty salacious... It was not insulting to me; I really thought it was funny and interesting.

KNPR: *...So part of this performance piece is the experience that you have. It's not just a ceremony—you're trying to live as a bride to be. You're planning this wedding, you're getting the dress, the invitations out, you have a ring you wear... and you have again this cardboard cutout... So I'm wondering—do you find yourself at any point losing yourself in the research? You're so into the role that you have to stop and say wait a minute this is just research... I mean, how far do you take it?*

LA: You know, I think for a while... especially during my experience of reading the series and during all of the movie releases and things like that, it was really easy to step into this role, especially with my friends that I would go to the premieres with... you know, really easy to step into that sort of lovey-dovey kind of persona. It was really easy also to sort of revert back to a teenage kind of mentality; we were all so excited and giggly, and that was really fun, but I do find myself internalizing the research... I really do feel like a bride to be in a lot of ways.

KNPR: *Well you're in the process now of ordering your dress...*

LA: Yes, yes, so I've had to get my measurements taken, and you know of course there's a big problem in the media... with representations of women in general, and a lot of body issues and that type of thing, and I've read a lot of blogs of brides to be... who are blogging about diets and work outs and things like that, and I find myself thinking about those things a lot... I know that I'm going to be on camera... and I think it's also a result of the media, sort of worrying about weight or having great makeup and great hair and a great dress and all that sort of stuff, so I really have internalized a lot of that... I really do feel like I'm getting married.

KNPR: *When this is all done, what is it that you hope people—whether it's your professors or classmates or future students—what do you hope it is they will get from your thesis?*

LA: Well, I hope that people will take away from it... that I think it's great for us to be critically engaged with the media we consume. So I think it's great not to be just a passive viewer, a passive consumer... and I think that... that's a huge part of the research, is, you know, showing that female-targeted series can be critically engaged with. I think traditionally series that are targeting females are written off as, you know, silly and they're not taken seriously, but I'm hoping to inspire some critical thinking in terms of female fandom and what female fandom enjoys.

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November 16, 2012, 2:23am

[[... It's late, but I have to write this part of me down, while it's alive and well, thriving and winning out against the side that's jaded and cynical and pushes back so forcefully and so often. I want this part to win... Lezlie and I saw Breaking Dawn Pt II tonight and discussed it on the way home... We agreed that something about it filled us with hope, made us believe... The theater was packed, and we sat next to two middle-aged women, friends who were obviously big fans and had come together, just as Lezlie and I had. I thought, could this be us in 20 years? I wondered if they were single, divorced, married. If they'd ever been in love, if their partners scoffed at them for going to see Twilight on opening night. I wondered how that love measures up to what they imagined as young women, if it's satisfying, and if so, how much?]]

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[transcribed from Memphis-based arts blog *The Electric Beef*, February 14, 2013]

The Electric Beef: *Congratulations on your big day performance. Did everything go according to plan?*

Lauren Adkins: Thank you! There were a few minor hiccups, and in hindsight a few things I might change, but for the most part everything went perfectly. I felt exactly the way I'd imagine a bride (not marrying a cardboard cut out) would feel; I was heading to the chapel, getting dressed, toasting with my wedding party, and then seemingly being rushed down the aisle. It was a blur.

TEB: *Was the performance documented? Through what media? To what extent does the role documentation have on the "Love is Overtaking Me" piece?*

L.A.: Yes, both the bachelorette party and the wedding ceremony were documented, via audio, video, photography, and collected/found objects. Documentation is secondary to the months-long performance and all it has included, but it's obviously an important means of representing the overall experience.

TEB: *Your website includes everything from photography to sound and video files. Why did you decide that performance was the best option for your thesis?*

LA: The wedding performance is actually only one part of my thesis. The exhibition itself will include video, audio, photography, sculpture, installation, and a few more mini-performances. I'm also writing a thesis paper that will act in part as an artist statement to accompany the exhibition. The decision to include performance really felt quite natural to me—there didn't seem to be any other way to carry out the work with authenticity, which is important to me. Any other medium felt like the easy way out. This particular performance was difficult for me, but I think that's a big reason why it had to be performance. I've experimented with performance before, but not quite like this. Before, my audience was usually composed of strangers, or the performance was experienced primarily through documentation like the photo and video works you mentioned.

TEB: *What was the ultimate goal of the performance other than your thesis project and now that the ceremony has ended, do you think that people received the message?*

LA: It was important to me to allow myself to be vulnerable to the audience, who I really see as willing participants in the performance, if not performers themselves. I wanted to create a meaningful, shared, and familiar event that could at the same time uncannily recontextualize that familiarity. I hope I was successful.

TEB: *As far as the bachelorette party goes: What did that entail and why was it an important part of the work? Also, I understand that much, if not all, of the party and ceremony for the performance was paid for by a fundraiser through indiegogo.com. How was the bachelorette party not just an artist and her friends having a good time on fundraising dole?*

LA: The party entailed a lot of the events you might expect to witness at a typical bachelorette party. We invited a stripper, we bar hopped, we danced, we talked to people. In some part, the bachelorette party was just as you say—an artist and her friends having a good time—and I don't find art and fun to be mutually exclusive. However, when pitching the idea to potential participants, I stressed that though the party was meant to be experienced as naturally as possible, it was also meant to be a performance, and that each bachelorette would become a performance artist of sorts for the duration of the party. It was really a great opportunity to be able to gather a group of women together to plan this event with purpose. I'm most appreciative of our group meetings and conversations, in which we really analyzed all that a bachelorette party is expected to be.

Again, the goal was to recontextualize a familiar ritual while maintaining both the authenticity and integrity of the experience. I also tailored the event to provide a good amount of interaction between myself and the girls and the people we encountered that night. As a collaborative effort, we created custom scavenger hunts with typical bachelorette tasks like "Get a guy to buy you and the bride a drink," but interspersed unusual tasks, like "Record a man reciting these lines from Twilight..." The bachelorettes and I came away with photographs, audio, video, and objects that are records of our night. Some of these will be included in the exhibition.

J.S-C: *It is interesting to me when women make work that is considered to be controversial, the questions revert to: do you consider yourself to be a feminist artist? Do you think that it is accurate if someone were to place you in that category?*

L.A.C.: Here I have to quote multidisciplinary artist Frieda Raye-Green, who said it far better than I ever could in the comments section of an *Art Fag City* article called “Enough With Dude-Centric Net Art Shows.” She wrote, “I know that in the past I have been wary of bringing up this issue because my art is not a particularly gender-focused project, and I know of my several female artist friends that would probably identify with that sentiment. But I think not doing so is dangerous. It is not embarrassing to be a female artist who is conscious of being a female artist and doing so does not have to shackle the content of your work to some sort of over conversation about ‘femaleness’ or even feminism. Being informed does not pigeonhole you or your creative self.” So in short, yes, I would consider myself a feminist artist, but I feel that’s an oversimplification.

TEB: *I recently had a friend point out to me that he was uncomfortable with the objectification of men in the film Magic Mike. The film made him realize that women are probably equally uncomfortable with constantly being portrayed as objects. Do you think that female fandom is brushed off as ‘crazy’ because of the objectification of men?*

LA: I didn’t see the film, but I imagine *Magic Mike* probably has something in common with *Twilight* in that both put a spotlight on female sexual desire. On screen, male sexual desire is taken seriously, while female desire is often warped into some kind of mystified, doe-eyed swooning (if it’s present at all). Films don’t often focus on women’s sexual desires, and if they do, it’s often a male fantasy of that desire. The portrayal of (heteronormative) male desire in film and television is so common it goes unnoticed—it’s the norm—but when a film or show puts the spotlight on the female equivalent, people are suddenly uncomfortable. Without having seen *Magic Mike*, I can’t say for sure, but this is certainly the case for *Twilight*. A story focused on a young girl’s desire becomes the brunt of jokes, and usually worse—scorned, loathed, dismissed as mindless drivel—and fans take the beating.

TEB: *Is sexual orientation relevant to the discussion of your work?*

LA: I think everyone can identify with romantic expectation, regardless of gender or sexual orientation; it’s part of the fabric of the culture in which we’re raised. Some people have been quick to use the work as a commentary on gay marriage, as in “I can’t marry my partner of 5 years, but this girl can marry a piece of cardboard?!” I’ve said this before, but part of the wedding performance (and the entirety of this experience) is the authenticity of it. Whether I like it or not, that includes the so-called “conventions” of marriage as they exist, and for now, in Nevada marriage is only legal between a man and a woman.

TEB: *Do you think that this work can challenge people to think about their ideas of a romantic relationship? How?*

LA: I hope it challenges people to think about how the media we consume shapes us, particularly film and television. I’ve noticed it most in my expectations of romance, but there’s still a kind of schizophrenic split there. One half of me, through research and analysis, knows my expectations are unrealistic. The other half still hopes “true love” is out there, and that I’ll find it somehow (preferably a *la Serendipity* with John Cusack and Kate Beckinsale). Eharmony.com’s current slogan? “From single to soul mate.” The idea of romantic love has completely saturated our culture, and without knowing how it’s happened, it’s become a major existential goal in our lives. It’s thought to deliver ultimate happiness and satisfaction, and, most importantly, a sense of self-worth. I think this expectation can be dangerous, and I think the popular media serve it to us day after day, year after year.

TEB: *Aside from popular movies and television, who or what has inspired you throughout the making of this work and for your work in general?*

LA: Wow, a lot of things and people. Life in general. My personal romantic experiences. Sad, heartsick songs you listen to after a breakup. Twilight criticism. The music of Taylor Swift, Justin Bieber, etc., and anonymous Tumblr art, all of which keep my inner teen alive and give me insight into the contemporary American girl's psyche. Authors and feminist media scholars who've guided my thinking and research, like Lynn Comella, Susan Douglas, and Michelle Click, just to name a few. Those strangers who took the time to email or tweet or message me with kind words instead of insults, and all the friends who encouraged me (repeatedly) to keep going. Last but not least—Kalup Linzy, Martin Kersels, and Lilly McElroy, artists whose performative works remind me not to take myself or my practice too seriously.

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