Consent is Sexy: Gender, Sexual Identity and Sex Positivism in MTV's Young Adult Television Series Teen Wolf (2011–).

Evie Kendal and Zachary Kendal

The dominance of sexual violence and gender inequality in young adult paranormal series, including Stephenie Meyer’s The Twilight Saga (2005–2008) and Richelle Mead’s Vampire Academy series (2007–2010), reflects a disturbing trend in the way issues of sex and gender are communicated in popular culture. MTV’s television series Teen Wolf (2011–), on the other hand, is noteworthy for its positive representation of healthy sexual relationships. In this article we will explore how Teen Wolf functions as a feminist and queer-friendly text, paying particular attention to how it deals with issues of consent, gender equality and sexual identity. In doing this, we will explore how the characters in the series approach conversations about consent without “killing the mood” and how youth sexuality is discussed without imposing conservative, heteronormative rhetoric or resorting to “slut-shaming.”
Consent and unequal power relations in paranormal romance

The presence of gothic creatures, such as vampires and werewolves, in romantic stories has often been a means of increasing tension between love interests through an underlying threat of violence. The standard formula involves a powerful male supernatural creature that must constantly exercise physical restraint to avoid injuring or killing the much weaker female human partner. This radically unbalanced power relation requires a tremendous amount of trust on the part of the weaker party and a heroic level of self-control for the monster. Such a repression of natural urges typically encompasses both sexual and violent behaviours, although in young adult series the animalistic drive of the monster often serves as a stand-in for sexual desire itself. Angela Ndalianis writes of paranormal romance: “the rules of more traditional romance fiction are tested, stretched and often totally subverted. Romance, sex and desire almost always converge with violence, blood and flesh.” While there are countless romantic combinations used in the sub-genre, with some even inverting the typical gender roles and making the monster female, the dominant messages of young adult paranormal romance remain: the male-identified vampire or werewolf cannot help himself and some degree of physical or sexual violence is inevitable, as it is simply part of his nature. It is typically the more vulnerable female partner that is burdened with the responsibility of either avoiding or accepting the violence, while the stronger male character is valorised for the mere attempt at self-control.

This dynamic is demonstrated in the following encounter from Meyer’s Eclipse between the human first-person narrator Bella and her werewolf friend Jacob:

He still had my chin – his fingers holding too tight, till it hurt – and I saw the resolve in his eyes.

“N –” I started to object, but it was too late.

His lips crushed mine, stopping my protest. He kissed me angrily, roughly, his other hand gripping tight around the back of my neck, making escape impossible. . . .

Acting on instinct, I let my hands drop to my side, and shut down. I opened my eyes and didn’t fight, didn’t feel . . . just waited for him to stop.2

Although this scene is depicting a sexual assault it is treated as a normal occurrence. This scene also supports Adrienne Rich’s argument that we
are living in a culture that assumes the adolescent male sex drive “once triggered cannot take responsibility for itself or take no for an answer.”

Be Bella’s reaction is clearly not indicative of consent and Jacob uses his superior physical strength to force her into submission. Such representations of sexual assault are symptomatic of rape culture, as even after Bella describes this event as “an assault” Jacob never faces any consequences, is congratulated by Bella’s father—“Good for you, kid”—and remains completely oblivious to the violence of his actions. Bella excuses Jacob’s behaviour in this and similar instances, eventually allowing him to claim her own daughter as a mate, on the understanding that werewolves’ sexual “imprinting,” like the human male libido, is uncontrollable. Myra J. Hird and Sue Jackson capture the underlying issue at stake regarding such gendered assumptions in real-world adolescent relationships, stating:

Heteronormativity manufactures a set of oppositional relations between femininity and masculinity that conditions the practice of male sexual coercion of young women. As a discourse, heteronormativity is sustained by a number of assumptions including: heterosexuality is biologically derived; men persistently desire sex . . . and men initiate sexual activity. . . . In order for male heterosexuality to be active, initiating and constant, female heterosexuality must paradoxically be defined by its absence. This means women supposedly respond to, rather than initiate, sexual activity.

Bella is shown to have no other option than to passively wait for Jacob to stop, rather than actively rejecting his unwanted sexual attention, establishing her as an object for his desires rather than the agent of her own sexual identity. As a role model for young women, Bella is a throwback to the old gothic heroines of the eighteenth century, both in Meyer’s book series and the movie franchise associated with it. Bella’s character incorporates many of the elements of Janice Radway’s influential categorisation of the gothic heroine: although not literally orphaned at the beginning of the narrative, Bella has been left with her estranged father following her mother’s remarriage; from the outset Bella is convinced of her “unexceptional appearance” despite assurances by other characters that she is very attractive; and at the end of the narrative she will succumb to the “cult of domesticity” by marrying the sexually repressed vampire Edward. As with all gothic heroines there is also an obsession with Bella remaining a virgin until marriage, an obsession justified in The Twilight Saga through Edward’s puritanical upbringing in the early twentieth century.

Bella and Edward’s relationship represents the ever-present threat of violence common to paranormal romances. Bella’s blood is a constant dis-
Consent is Sexy

traction to Edward, tempting him to abandon the animal-blood-only dietary choice of his morally upright “vegetarian” family. Anne Helen Peterson writes of their relationship: “Edward must fight his overpowering urge to bite the object of his desire, effectively enacting a very thinly veiled allegory for the suppression of sexual desire.” Following their wedding—when Edward eventually does give in to his sexual desires—Bella is injured by his strength, which was wholly expected by her, although it horrifies Edward. Just as with Jacob, Bella is subservient to the violent passion of another gothic beast, anticipating physical pain but doing nothing to avoid it. Ndalianis notes that:

it’s the vampire in particular, followed by the lycanthrope as a close second, who embodies the licence to give voice to dangerous passion and elicit eroticism. Their bodies trigger an eroticism that encourages the dirty, rough and hot.

In this instance, Edward’s “rough” sexuality is enough to leave bruises all over Bella’s body, yet she craves the passion. As an anti-sexualisation series focused on repressing unsanctioned sexual activity—sex outside of marriage—for young people, it is particularly disturbing that this violent encounter is romanticised and celebrated as appropriate, while Bella’s earlier propositions were considered deviant and subject to the kind of moral panic that often permeates young adult sexual education.

As the gothic heroine, Bella is physically vulnerable and trapped by the seductive power of her vampire lover. While both Edward and Jacob exploit Bella’s vulnerability and commit violence against her, a far more disturbing example of intimate partner violence can be seen in Meyer’s New Moon when Jacob describes how the werewolf Sam brutally attacked his human mate Emily, leaving her severely scarred:

“The hardest part is feeling . . . out of control,” [Jacob] said slowly. “Feeling like I can’t be sure of myself—like maybe you shouldn’t be around me, like maybe nobody should. Like I’m a monster who might hurt somebody. You’ve seen Emily. Sam lost his temper for just one second . . . and she was standing too close. And now there’s nothing he can ever do to put it right again.”

Once again, the audience is expected to sympathise with the attackers, Jacob and Sam, while the victims are implicated in their own abuse. Jacob doesn’t suggest that he should remove himself from Bella, but rather that she “shouldn’t be around” him. Likewise, Emily is blamed for “standing too close” to Sam when he “lost his temper.” Victoria Collins and Dianne Carmody note that it is particularly concerning that these violent relationships
are romanticised in texts predominantly intended for adolescent girls, who already face a high risk of dating violence.\textsuperscript{14} In *Loving with a Vengeance*, Tania Modleski claims that the blurring of the line between affection and violence in romance narratives feeds into cultural assumptions about unequal power relations in heterosexual relationships.\textsuperscript{15} Bella and Emily both embody the dominant cultural teaching that young women are not the authors of their own sexual identity, but rather the canvasses on which men paint their own. These women lack sexual agency and rarely consent to the attention they receive from the more powerful male characters, whether tender or violent.

In addition to the presence of overt sexual coercion and violence in young adult paranormal romance, there are further issues that challenge the legitimacy of any nominal consent that is obtained. The power imbalance between the romantic partners often calls into question how autonomous the decision to engage in sexual activity is for the weaker partner, as does the presence of any supernatural thrall or bonding instinct. Mead’s *Vampire Academy* series, for example, depicts a romance between a sexually experienced schoolteacher, Dimitri, and an underage virgin student, Rose. While in this case both partners are supernatural creatures (dhampir hybrids), Dimitri is much older and more powerful, both physically and socially. Despite a decision not to become involved while still in school, Rose describes their attraction as “just too strong,” claiming that “staying away from each other had turned out to be impossible.”\textsuperscript{16} What follows can be recognised as statutory rape, although it is described in unambiguously romantic terms in the text. After transforming into a Strigoi, an evil vampire, Dimitri kidnaps Rose and keeps her in a drug-addled state while continuing sexual activities with her. Rose’s ability to consent is thus compromised on multiple levels: having already suffered the effect of a “lust charm” and been propositioned by a man in authority over her, Rose is now completely incapacitated and forced into drug addiction. Despite this, Dimitri continues to be depicted as a victim of his own biological drives, rather than as the rapist he is. The relationship is still treated as a romantic one, and as with the traditional romance plot, Rose is eventually rewarded for “standing by her man,” when she discovers she can save Dimitri and turn him back into a dhampir.

For both *The Twilight Saga* and *Vampire Academy* the film adaptations make the violence of the narrative more explicit. Dimitri and Rose are sparring partners whose fighting often takes on an erotic feel, feeding into a confusion regarding physical intimacy and physical violence. Modleski claims such elements account for how romantic heroines could ever be confused regarding whether their male counterparts were planning to kiss
or hit them.\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Vampire Academy} often shows Rose being forcibly pinned to a wall or the floor while Dimitri unleashes his passionate kisses on her, but as in the case of Bella and Edward, this physical overpowering of the female character is normalised as the romantic expression of the dominant male. The fact that Rose is physically restrained when engaged in sexual activity, both before and after Dimitri turns evil, means she cannot freely consent.

In both \textit{The Twilight Saga} and \textit{Vampire Academy} there is no critical discussion of the fact that stronger male characters routinely take advantage of their female partners, and no serious attempts are made to address issues of sexual violence and rape raised by the characters’ actions. Instead, violence and sexual coercion are given a romantic character and the issue of consent is largely ignored.

\textbf{Consent in \textit{Teen Wolf}}

The romance plots of \textit{Teen Wolf} face the same challenges with regards to consent as those present in \textit{Twilight} and \textit{Vampire Academy}, with the central romance of the first three seasons being focused on a newly turned werewolf, Scott, and a human love interest, Allison. However, rather than allowing this potential power imbalance to lead to sexual violence, \textit{Teen Wolf} takes a more sex-positivist approach by promoting enthusiastic consent and a more equal power dynamic. By this approach, consent is never implied for sexual activity but must be actively sought, and ambivalence, like explicit resistance, is recognised as a distinct lack of consent.\textsuperscript{18} Although \textit{Teen Wolf} occasionally has consent between characters conveyed through encouraging nods and significant looks, verbal confirmation is usually preferred as a more respectful and unambiguous means of establishing consent. Partners are also often shown “checking in” with each other during sexual activity in a way that emphasises the need for continued consent. The first sexual encounter between Scott and Allison is one example of this:

Scott: I don’t want you to feel like you have to do anything you don’t want to do.

Allison: I’m not doing anything I don’t want to. Are you?

Scott: Are you seriously asking me that question?\textsuperscript{19}

It should first be noted that Scott’s apparent dismissal of Allison’s question concerning his consent can be regarded as problematic, for although the viewer can interpret it as cheerful banter, it simultaneously reinforces the
view of male sexual interest as constant and unquestioning. What is important here, however, is that each character does still ask for the other’s consent, overcoming fears of dismissal or beliefs that seeking confirmation may be seen as unromantic, which remain serious impediments to the wider uptake of enthusiastic consent as a social practice. In these scenes, both partners “check in” with each other in a way that increases the romance between them without “killing the mood.” This misconception that adolescent males are necessarily always willing to engage in sexual activity, and thus do not need to give consent, is also explicitly challenged in *Teen Wolf* in later episodes. This is demonstrated when Stiles is propositioned by a childhood friend:

Heather: Stiles, I just turned 17 today. And you know what I want for my birthday?

Stiles: A bike?

Heather: To not be a 17-year-old virgin . . . Have you never done it before either?

Stiles: Turned 17? No, not yet. No.

Heather: Stiles?

Stiles: Yeah, maybe that other thing too.

Heather: Do you want to? I mean would you be ok with that?

Stiles: [mocking] Would I be ok with that? I believe so, yeah. [pause] [seriously] No yeah, very.²⁰

Although Stiles seems compelled by sexist socialisation to joke about a male ever rejecting an offer of sex, Heather does not proceed until he gives a serious answer, reinforcing the necessity of gaining consent. According to Moira Carmody and Georgia Ovenden, teaching young adults how to behave ethically regarding matters of sex and sexuality requires an understanding that men also have the right to say no to sex, thereby challenging “assumptions about male sexual drives as inevitable and constant.”²¹ This scene also highlights that special care may be needed when engaging in certain activities for the first time.

In *Teen Wolf* consent for sex is never simply assumed. Wearing provocative clothing (or no clothing at all) is not consent. Kissing someone is not consent. Asking someone to sleep beside you is not consent. Perhaps most notably, saving someone’s life does not guarantee sexual reward. Too often popular culture casts sex as something that can be earned or bought through a sufficiently heroic act, whereupon the male hero receives
the female damsel as a kind of trophy. This is best demonstrated through texts in which the heroine has shown little to no interest in the hero until he proves himself through heroism, something popular culture website TV Tropes names “Standard Hero Reward.” Tracing its origin to the rewarding of Kings’ daughters to brave fairytale heroes, this trope perpetuates the idea that women and their affection can be bartered. *Teen Wolf* makes it clear that this should not be so. For example, Scott’s best friend Stiles has had a crush on the popular and attractive Lydia since third grade, even though she continually chooses other, less respectful, men. Although she acknowledges that Stiles is “the one who always figures it out” and saves their lives, her sexual availability is not a reward he can earn through acts of bravery or cunning. In short, Lydia does not owe Stiles sex just because he is a “nice guy,” and as yet she has not chosen to pursue a relationship with him. Given that cases of sexual violence are often attributed to feelings of male sexual entitlement, this deviation from the norm is significant.

Emphasising the importance of respecting the desires of the other person, *Teen Wolf* also seizes opportunities to condemn the failure to seek consent, thereby challenging the more forceful expressions of passion common in young adult romance series. An example of this is when the villain Matt, having misjudged Allison’s feelings towards him, kisses her without her permission—an action Allison clearly states is “not ok.” Thus, the presumptive and often violent passions that are considered inevitable (even romantic) in other young adult paranormal romances are not tolerated in *Teen Wolf*, in which physical and sexual violence is never portrayed as being romantic or acceptable. The series also emphasises the importance of respecting other people’s boundaries, which includes giving former romantic partners the space they need after a breakup. In the first episode of season three, Scott gets a tattoo to reward himself for not contacting Allison at all during the Summer after they broke up, showing both respect for her wishes and a high level of self-discipline. This action is diametrically opposed to the dominant genre idea that gothic creatures cannot help themselves from pursuing their desires. Scott demonstrates a similar respect for Kira, the new girl he develops feelings for in the second half of season three, when he decides not to ask her out after overhearing that she just wants to make friends and is not currently interested in a boyfriend. The need to respect the other’s wishes and behave responsibly is a recurrent theme in the series.

In *Teen Wolf*, no means no, maybe means no, but, equally importantly, yes means yes. *Teen Wolf* is a series in which it is ok to talk about sex, wet dreams, masturbation, badly timed erections and performances issues.
It is also a series in which parents are more concerned with their teens practicing safe sex than abstinence. Women are not “slut-shamed” for making the first move or having multiple sexual partners. Instead they are encouraged to be explicit about what they want and demand more respect in the face of unwanted sexual advances. And just as the female characters are allowed to enjoy sex and be proactive about their own sexual pleasure, so too are the male characters granted the freedom to prioritise some things above their own libidos. Far from being unable to control himself after being aroused by kissing a beautiful girl at a party, Stiles apologises profusely that he has to go as he has just figured out a part of their enemy’s plan. Before leaving he even makes sure the slightly intoxicated girl isn’t offended and gives her a bottle of water so she stays hydrated. After all, just because Stiles is fighting the influence of a demonic possession at the time is no reason to be rude.

Chantal Bourgault Du Coudray notes that “like other Gothic monsters, the werewolf has been thoroughly constructed as an alien ‘other’ threatening the social body; the negative of a normalized social identity.” The idea of the conflicted self manifesting itself as a monstrous beast—first made popular in ancient religion and myth—found its modern voice in Freudian psychoanalysis, in which the Wolf Man story represented the psychological torment of the rational, cultured (and masculine) identity wrestling with its baser, animalistic nature. According to Du Coudray, lycanthropy stories represent “masculine subjectivity in crisis . . . represented by the eruption of the ‘beast within’” which calls into questions the male’s “social identity and authority.” In cinematic representations of the werewolf, the trauma of this internal struggle is often used to justify beastly attacks of male monsters on helpless female victims. While this is certainly the case in The Twilight Saga, for the werewolves of Teen Wolf there is no such tolerance of male violence. Despite the power available to the series’ heroic werewolves, and the loss of control experienced by the newly turned werewolves, they are always responsible for controlling their own behaviour. As pack leader Derek often quotes, “I’m a predator, but I don’t have to be a killer.” There is always a choice and barring incidences of total mind control, the paranormal creatures of Teen Wolf are always held responsible for their actions, without blame ever being shifted onto anyone else.

Gender and sexual orientation in gothic paranormal romance

Paranormal romances often also use gothic creatures to explore different gender roles and alternative sexualities, including those that have tradition-
ally been considered deviant. Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) started a trend in which female sexual desire, incest, exogamy, adultery and fornication were all equally demonised through association with the vampire’s monstrousness. The lust that drives the Count to pursue the married Mina Harker is presented as a threat to social stability, placing the responsibility to resist the vampire’s thrall on Mina and her single friend Lucy, but not her husband Jonathon, who appears to enjoy his time with Dracula’s harem. Female sexual desire outside of the confines of marriage was considered deviant in the Victorian Era, with female sexuality being tied solely to procreation. According to John Stevenson, Mina and Lucy are therefore considered sexual property and Dracula’s interest in them a sacrilegious form of “sexual theft.” The women of *Dracula* also end up being quite powerless, needing to be rescued by a posse of stake-wielding men. Sadly, 108 years on and Bella Swan is possibly even less empowered than Mina—her sexuality still needs to be controlled by Edward according to the same conservative Victorian standards and she is utterly incapable of protecting herself.

The sexualisation of vampires in literature and mythology is often held in stark contrast to their inability to reproduce through sexual means. They are typically virile, but sterile, with the creation of new vampires coming about by their feeding on humans. Sarah Sceats notes that the non-genital penetration of the vampire’s bite means that the victim can be male or female and of any sexual orientation without threatening the perpetuation of the vampire species. Thus, she sees the vampire as an expression of homosexual culture, one that over time has become less and less negative. However, while homosexual vampires are now quite common in paranormal romance, homosexuality is far more rare among werewolves, who are often presented as being too “earthy” and “natural” for same-sex relationships. Natalie Wilson notes that werewolves are also commonly associated with “murder, rape, cannibalism and incest.” She therefore finds *The Twilight Saga* particularly problematic, as the werewolves are identified as an indigenous people group of low socio-economic status and their animalistic behaviour is contrasted with the sophistication of the wealthier, more cultured Cullen family vampires. The “imprinting” of the male werewolves in *The Twilight Saga*, in which they instinctually bonds with a human female mate, is directly linked to procreative sex, thereby reinforcing not only heteronormative values, but also the sexist assumption that the “natural” position of women is one of submission to more powerful men.

When considering the gendering of gothic monsters, Du Coudray notes that female werewolves have since the nineteenth century been cast as monstrous creatures of “unrepentant hedonism,” a contrast to the psy-
evolutionarily tormented male werewolves who fear loss of social status should their curse be made known.\textsuperscript{35} Again, the male is depicted as being the stronger, more rational being, while the female is weaker, both psychologically and morally. In \textit{The Twilight Saga}, the inferiority of a female werewolf is clearly shown in the character, Leah Clearwater, who is unable to move on from having her heart broken after her boyfriend Sam imprinted on Emily and left her. Becoming increasingly embittered, Leah punishes Sam for his past behavior while also denigrating herself as "a freak—the girlie-wolf—good for nothing else . . . a genetic dead end."\textsuperscript{36} While Jacob can handle being around Bella and Edward with stoicism, Leah abandons her pack to avoid the emotional pain of seeing her beloved with another woman. It is made abundantly clear that a woman is unsuited to having the power and telepathic abilities of a member of the pack, with a female werewolf being such an unnatural occurrence that Leah's father dies of a heart attack from the shock of seeing her transform. When she describes herself as a "genetic dead end" Leah also exposes why the supernatural powers behind werewolf imprinting led to the breakdown of her relationship. As imprinting is considered nature's way of ensuring the werewolf line continues by matching couples with the highest genetic compatibility for reproducing the werewolf gene, Leah's apparent infertility leaves her unable to perform her traditional role of mother to Sam's offspring. Thus Leah is cast aside as a potential mate for Sam as she does not adhere to the heteronormative reproductive ideal.

\textbf{Gender and sexual orientation in \textit{Teen Wolf}}

Like consent, sexual orientation is openly and positively discussed in \textit{Teen Wolf}. From the very beginning of the series we are aware that the lacrosse team's goalkeeper, Danny, is openly gay, but is well accepted by the rest of the team, including the more popular players and the coach. Danny's relationships are also taken as seriously as any of the heterosexual characters in the series and the full range of romantic experiences is shown: he has boyfriends, has his heart broken, finds new love in the gay werewolf Ethan, and goes through all the same awkward dating rituals with him as Scott and Allison did with each other. Importantly, he's not the only gay character in the show and his relationships are depicted in a way that is genuinely romantic, instead of tokenistic. The series also makes it clear it is ok for adolescents to question their own sexuality. When a spate of virgin sacrifices makes Stiles fear for his life, Danny jokingly offers to sleep with him, which Stiles perceives as being "sweet" rather than an affront to his masculine identity.\textsuperscript{37} After fellow partygoer Caitlin tells him she's attracted to both girls.
and boys, Stiles is asked to consider whether he is the same.\textsuperscript{38} This is not the only time Stiles’s sexuality is brought into question and speculation on his potential bisexuality has fueled the popular fan mash-up of “Sterek,” a much-wished-for relationship between Stiles and the male werewolf Derek.\textsuperscript{39} In \textit{Teen Wolf} there is no demand that beasts of nature be heterosexually oriented, and no aspect of their romantic relationships are governed by reproductive duty. This poses a considerable challenge to the sexual norms supported in paranormal romances like \textit{The Twilight Saga} and \textit{Vampire Academy}. As Momin Rahmin and Stevi Jackson note, homosexuality threatens the hierarchy of gender on which heterosexuality as a system is founded. The existence of such a threat, the potential for political change, depends on recognising that the current ordering of gender and sexuality is social rather than natural.\textsuperscript{40} That werewolves can be gay and men’s sexuality be questioned without it challenging their masculinity is evidence of a more progressive stance regarding sexual identity. 

\textit{Teen Wolf} also approaches gender representation very differently to many young adult paranormal romance series. Even when there is potential power imbalance between the series’ male gothic monsters and their female partners, the women are not physically disempowered. In fact, the female characters rescue the male characters roughly half the time, and unlike many other series, this is not because they are better negotiators and can use words to avoid conflict. Allison is an expert archer and was raised by werewolf hunters, Kira develops supernatural powers and the skills of a ninja warrior, Cora and Erica are both powerful werewolves, and the recently introduced Malia is a were-coyote. Admittedly Lydia’s main “superpower” as a banshee is to scream, but in recent episodes she has been honing her supernatural abilities to help solve mysteries and deliver powerful sonic attacks, while her superior intelligence makes her a valued member of the team. These are women who fight alongside their male counterparts, not liabilities that constantly need protecting. These are also women who are not reduced to just one attribute—they can be strong without sacrificing their compassion or emotional vulnerability; they can be beautiful while also being intelligent. Likewise, the male characters are allowed to cry and seek emotional support without being emasculated, they can be healers instead of fighters—Scott’s career aspiration is to be a veterinarian—and they do not feel threatened by the powerful women around them. At one point Scott admits that Allison could “easily kick his ass” if she wanted to.\textsuperscript{41} This equal footing and level of gender equality, very uncom-
mon in paranormal romance, leads to more healthy and reciprocal sexual relationships. Rather than being the passive recipient of Scott’s sexual advances, Allison initiates most of their physical contact throughout their relationship, yet her sexual agency is never used to emasculate her partner. The series also depicts various other challenges to gender norms, including the matriarchal hierarchy of Allison’s family of werewolf hunters, and the “profound honor” Kira’s father found in taking his wife’s surname when they married.42

Another important difference between the romances in *Teen Wolf* and those of *The Twilight Saga* and *Vampire Academy* is that high school love is not considered eternal. As in the real world, teenage couples break up and they do not always get back together. As Scott’s mother Melissa tells him after his breakup with Allison:

> Sweetheart, let me tell you something no teenager ever believes but I swear to you is the absolute truth. You fall in love more than once. It’ll happen again, and it’ll be just as amazing and as extraordinary as the first time. And maybe just as painful. But it’ll happen again I promise.”43

Had Bella received a similar message from her own parents she may not have developed such a hopeless and self-destructive obsession with Edward. With its more realistic portrayal of love, relationship dynamics and breakups, *Teen Wolf* breaks free from the potentially damaging idealism evident in many other young adult romance series.

**Conclusion**

*Teen Wolf*’s use of gothic creatures to explore issues of consent, gender and sexuality is particularly interesting when compared to other young adult paranormal romances, which have often failed to break free from the patriarchal values of the past. Texts such as *The Twilight Saga* and *Vampire Academy*, which permeate popular culture, tend to adhere to gothic generic conventions that free men from responsibility for their actions, support rape culture and cast female sexuality and homosexuality as deviant and destructive. *Teen Wolf* challenges these still-dominant attitudes by presenting more equal relationships and adopting a more positive attitude toward sex and sexuality, emphasising the importance of consent and respect in sexual relationships. Although the series could still improve its portrayal of consent, more consistently acknowledging the need for enthusiastic and serious consent from all parties, overall it makes significant progress over other recent young adult paranormal romance series and functions well as a fem-
inist and queer-friendly text.

Monash University
Evie.Kendal@monash.edu ; Zachary.Kendal@monash.edu

NOTES


4 Meyer, Eclipse, 336.


15 Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance*, 34.
17 Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance*, 34.
21 Carmody and Ovenden, “Putting Ethical Sex into Practice,” 803.
23 Jeff Davis, “More Bad Than Good,” *Teen Wolf*, season 3, episode 14, directed by Tim Andrew, aired 13 January 2014 (MTV, 2014), DVD.
25 Jeff Davis, “Raving,” *Teen Wolf*, season 2, episode 8, directed by Russell Mulcahy, aired 16 July 2012 (MTV, 2013), DVD.
29 Ibid., 55.
30 Ibid., 79-80.


O’Donnell, “Galvanize.”