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## Did Edward use a strap-on?

*Artifice, authenticity and attention or, contemporary art vs. pop culture*

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The 2011 film release of Stephenie Meyer's fourth instalment of *The Twilight Saga* – *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Part 1* – was highly anticipated worldwide, not only because of the *Twilight* series' popularity as a whole, but more so because it's *the film where they do it*. But the physics of that sexual encounter, like many textual acts, remains confusingly unexplained.

Since the birth of the modern vampire in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the violence and intimacy of fang penetrating flesh has been a symbol for sex, and more often than not deviant sex at that. But let's not get carried away. *Twilight's* vampire hero Edward is virginal, virtuous and celibate for over a century; he was unwilling in all three previous films to do the deed with his human lover, Bella, for fear of killing her. Here, bloodlust and sexual desire are inextricably linked; and sex is risky. He fears that sex will equal consumption, and in a way it does, as he impregnates Bella with a vampire child who does eventually kill her. But literally kill her Edward does not. This jump from metaphor to literalisation raises an even more important conundrum: how does he get it up?

With all the vampire fiction around, each has its own interpretation of vampire mythology, but two things remain constant and necessary – vampires drink blood and are dead. Vampires' living deaths includes super human powers such as phenomenal speed, strength, agility, fighting skills and more often than not, some form of mind-control.

Their relationships to sex differ, too. *True Blood* depicts the metaphor of the vampire for sex at its most explicit – where vampires are ‘the best sex’ any man or woman can experience. *The Vampire Diaries* sees teenage vampire Stefan and his human lover Elena experience fairly ‘normal’ sexual interactions, where bloodlust is completely absent. *Angel* and *Buffy* toyed more with the risks of death through post-coital desertion, but it was the vampire, not the human, left changed after the lead characters’ sexual encounter, and *Angel* must be celibate in order to remain ‘good’. But in all of these texts no mention of the blood-racing aspect of male performance is asserted. *True Blood* perhaps comes the closest with this slightly unhelpful dialogue between vampire Bill and human Sookie:

**Bill Compton:** I have no heartbeat. I have no need to breathe. There are no electrical impulses in my body. What animates you no longer animates me.

**Sookie Stackhouse:** What does animate you then? Blood? How do you digest it if nothing works?

**Bill Compton:** Magic?

**Sookie Stackhouse:** Oh, come on Bill! I may look naïve but I’m not, and you – you need to remember that.

**Bill Compton:** You think that it’s not magic that keeps you alive? Just ‘cause you understand the mechanics of how something works, doesn’t make it any less of a miracle ... which is just another word for magic. We’re all kept alive by magic, Sookie. My magic’s just a little different from yours, that’s all.

(And she doesn’t, but Sookie might well reply something like: Well, sure Bill, but *I can* explain the mechanics, so explain yours!)

*True Blood* too, I think, offers the most probable erection-achieving situation, in which vampires feed *whilst* having sex. For our hero Edward, Meyer explains:

Like with vampire skin – which looks similar to human skin and has the same basic function – fluids closely related to seminal fluids still exist in male vampires, which carry genetic information and are capable of bonding with a human ovum. This was not a known fact in the vampire world ... because it's nearly impossible for a vampire to be that near a human and not kill her [sic].

Hmm. Once again erection is evaded. But we know this: the heart does not beat. And erection is something more specific and unique than muscle function – it is most especially about blood flow. And let me be clear: there's nothing wrong with functional diversity. Erection, like any other bodily function, can work in different ways for different people or at different stages of their lives. While few devices exist for this purpose, exist for others they surely do. Rigid and attachable, hollow silicone wide mesh dildos can enable assisted erection, as well as enhanced sensation to both wearer and receiver. Some guys employ stuffing (the insertion of a flaccid penis), or like transguys with smaller dicks, use penis extenders.

I like depictions of the not so smooth aspects of sex. The US version of *Queer As Folk* made condom use both smooth and sexy, while Michelle Tea's novel *Valencia* makes glove use hot. Yet many hetero texts continue to exclude condoms from their sex scenes. *Breaking Dawn* – in both film and book – excuses itself I think from these nitty gritty aspects of sex, because the sex itself is barely detailed. But it seems to me quite possible, and indeed likely, that Edward spent a moment (however lightning fast due to his vampire super speed) hopping into a leather harness, and pushing his hard, yet not upright, ice-white cock through a ring into a hollow, black, vine-like silicone dildo, a hole in the tip to facilitate pregnancy-inducing ejaculation.

Sex is always different. And sexual differences exist not just in desires, practices and bodies, but also in *functions*. That's what *Twilight* precipitated me to think about and, for all its denunciation by intellectual elites, got many people reading, engaging, questioning: isn't that the function of art?