



JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY

*School of Education and
Communication*

The Fifty Shades of Twilight

A Comparative Literary Analysis of the Relationships Within Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight/Midnight Sun* and *Fifty Shades of Grey/Grey* by E.L James

COURSE: *English for Upper Secondary School Subject Teachers IIIc, 15 credits*

PROGRAM: *Ämneslärarprogrammet med inriktning mot arbete i gymnasieskolan*

WRITER: *Wilda Spethz*

EXAMINER: *Annika Denke*

SUPERVISOR: *Jenny Malmqvist*

TERM: *Autumn 2025*

Abstract

This paper analyzes and compares the relationship between Bella and Edward in *Twilight/Midnight Sun* with the relationship between Anastasia (Ana) and Christian in *Fifty Shades of Grey/Grey* to show that they can be interpreted as each other's opposites.

The analysis has been conducted through a close reading of *Twilight* and *Fifty Shades of Grey*, as well as a brief reading of their male point of view counterparts, *Midnight Sun* and *Grey*. The relationships have been analyzed through dialectical theory separately, and then they have been compared with each other. The results are thereafter discussed and compared to the studies mentioned in the background to highlight differences that go beyond the scope of the theory.

The analysis revealed that Bella and Edward's relationship is dominated by openness and connection, while Ana and Christian's relationship is dominated by closedness and autonomy.

Furthermore, the relationship between Bella and Edward is primarily romantic, while their possibilities for a physical relationship are limited by Edward's vampire nature. Ana and Christian's relationship, on the other hand, is primarily sexual, and Ana continuously craves more emotional intimacy than Christian is willing to or capable of giving her.

Key words: Dialectical theory, Comparative literary analysis, *Twilight*, *Fifty Shades of Grey*

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
1. Introduction	4
2. Background.....	5
2.1. Theoretical framework	10
3. Analysis	11
3.1. Bella Swan and Edward Cullen.....	11
3.2. Anastasia Steele and Christian Grey	17
3.3 Comparison	21
4. Conclusion.....	23
Works cited	24
Primary material	26

1. Introduction

What do Bella Swan and her vampire boyfriend Edward Cullen have in common with the sexually deviant multi-millionaire Christian Grey and his sexual conquest Anastasia (Ana) Steele? They do, in fact, have a lot less in common than one might think, considering that *Fifty Shades of Grey* (where Christian and Ana appear) started as erotic *Twilight* fanfiction (featuring Edward and Bella).

Many studies have been conducted on *The Twilight Saga*. However, previous studies on the relationships within *The Twilight saga* tend to focus on themes of abstinence (e.g., Bliss, 2010), gender and taming female sexuality (e.g., Wilson, 2011), and contemporary youth culture (e.g., McGeough, 2010), to mention a few. Regarding the *Fifty Shades of Grey* franchise, few studies overall have been conducted, and the ones that do appear tend to focus on themes of abuse (e.g., Bonomi, Altenburger, and Walton, 2013) or consensual non-consent (e.g., Tsaros, 2013).

The relationship between Bella and Edward has been analyzed from many different perspectives. Despite this, it has never been directly compared to the relationship between Ana and Christian, even though *Fifty Shades of Grey* started as a *Twilight* fanfiction called *Master of the Universe*.

Another reason as to why it is relevant to compare the two works is that they can both be considered controversial. While *Twilight* has been praised for representing a wholesome teenage romance, it has also been criticized for normalizing and romanticizing controlling and abusive behavior (Collins and Carmody). Many readers consider the *Fifty Shades* franchise to be a harmless fantasy between two consenting adults (Flood). However, *Fifty Shades of Grey* has also been repeatedly criticized for perpetuating abuse. A women's refuge center even referred to the novel as "an instruction manual for an abusive individual to sexually torture a vulnerable young woman" (Flood). Both the article by Collins and Carmody and the article by Flood mention concerns regarding the impact the novels can have on young readers' perceptions of what constitutes acceptable behaviors within a romantic relationship.

To avoid any confusion, this paper will use the term *Twilight* to refer to the first novel by Stephanie Meyer, while *The Twilight Saga* will refer to the entire franchise about Edward and Bella. Likewise, *Fifty Shades of Grey* will refer only to the first novel in the trilogy, while the *Fifty Shades* franchise will refer to all of the books and movies about Ana and Christian. Since both *Twilight* and *Midnight Sun* were written by Meyer, and both *Fifty Shades of Grey* and *Grey* were written by James, the references to the female perspectives (*Twilight* and *Fifty Shades of Grey*) will be marked by an (a), while the male perspectives (*Midnight Sun* and *Grey*) will be marked with a (b) to differentiate between the works of the same author.

By analyzing and comparing the relationships between Bella and Edward in *Twilight/Midnight Sun* and Ana and Christian in *Fifty Shades of Grey/Grey*, I intend to show that the respective relationships in these novels can be interpreted as opposites.

2. Background

On June 2nd, 2003, Stephenie Meyer woke up from a vivid dream where she witnessed a teenage girl and a sparkly vampire having an intense conversation in a meadow. Two things were evident from their conversation. One was that they were falling in love, the other was that the vampire was struggling to refrain from killing the girl to drink her blood. The next day, Meyer sat down by the computer and wrote the scene that would become chapter 13 in her debut novel *Twilight* (Meyer, 1).

Meyer was raised in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly known as the Mormon church. The church developed in the same geographical areas of New England where American temperance movements flourished, and as a result, the church has become a prime example of American purity and abstinence culture (Bliss, 111). The church preaches that humans are born pure and that they should remain as such by avoiding anything that is considered impure. This includes avoiding impure actions such as having sex before marriage or consuming impure substances such as caffeine, alcohol, and tobacco (Toscano, 23).

Twilight could be said to be a story of abstinence. The Cullen family patriarch, Carlisle, has a strong belief in God and chooses, despite his demonic vampire existence, to live as if he will one day be redeemed (Bliss, 113). As such, he enforces a strong moral code on his vampire family, which, among other things, includes abstaining from drinking human blood (Meyer, 107-108c). In *Twilight*, human blood becomes a symbol of addictive substances, especially

drugs and alcohol. Bella's blood is directly compared to a drug in the rather famous quote from Edward, where he says: "Yes, you are *exactly* my brand of heroin" (Meyer, 235a).

Edward would not have been able to abstain from Bella's blood without the support of his family (Bliss, 108). At the start of *Midnight Sun*, he loathes Bella for the desire her blood awakens within him (Meyer, 17b), but he refrains from turning back into a monster because he cannot bear the thought of disappointing Carlisle (Bliss, 113). However, it is common for abstainers to approach temptation to test their resolve. Edward, thus, approaches Bella again to prove to himself that he is worthy of Carlisle's trust. His resolve is further challenged once Bella awakens his sexual desire, and he struggles not only to abstain from her blood but also so as not to break his and Carlisle's shared moral code of not having sex before marriage (Bliss, 114).

Wilson explains that a part of the popularity of the franchise comes from its eroticization of abstinence (123). This can be tied to American youth culture, which is constantly torn between ideals of sexual purity through abstinence and an increasingly sexual media culture (106). This imbalance between purity ideals and sexualization often leads to a depiction of young women as objects of sexual desire and yet deprived of their own sexuality (McGeough, 89). The cultural script for adolescent girls is that they are supposed to crave relationships and intimacy, but they are only supposed to desire sex in relation to pleasing their partners. Female sexuality is furthermore often depicted as a threatening force that needs to be regulated, suppressed, or punished with unwanted pregnancy (Platt, 75).

In the real world, young women are tasked with the responsibility of keeping their virginity intact while warding off males who supposedly always seek sex (Wilson, 113). Wilson argues that the *Twilight* franchise frames male sexuality as dangerous and destructive. Werewolves are depicted as unpredictable and dangerous, having sex with a male vampire will lead to certain death, and even human male sexuality is portrayed as dangerous. This can be seen through how Esme suffered from domestic abuse in her first marriage, and Bella narrowly avoided getting gang raped thanks to Edward's intervention (113).

Wilson further observes that Meyer switches back and forth between representing sexuality as something dangerous and representing it as something natural and desirable (116). This would, in turn, also align with the aforementioned eroticization of abstinence, because, despite all of the points mentioned above, *The Twilight Saga* does not demonize female sexual desire. The saga actually flips the cultural script conveying that young women only agree to sex to

please men by having Bella constantly struggling to control her own sexual desire whenever she is around Edward (McGeough, 89-90).

McGeough describes Bella as being completely ruled by her hormones (88-89). Meyer further uproots the expectations regarding sexuality by presenting Bella as active and full of desire while Edward is portrayed as passive and acting like an unresponsive statue at times (Wilson, 115-116). Bella maintains a strong sexual attraction towards Edward throughout the franchise, and she repeatedly tries to seduce him despite being well aware of the danger she is putting herself in (Wilson, 76). She is the one who becomes the predator in their sexual relationship (Platt 79).

Meanwhile, it is Edward's responsibility to stop them from going too far by maintaining the chaste nature of their relationship (Wilson, 76). Edward desires Bella the same way as she desires him, but his vampire nature makes any sexual acts too dangerous. He could easily injure her by accident if he does not pay attention. He is so cold that they need a blanket between them to cuddle, and his sharp venom-coated teeth and strong thirst for her blood make it too dangerous to even go beyond closed-mouth kissing (Schwartzman, 127). This way, sexual abstinence is constructed as a matter of life and death in *Twilight* (Platt, 77). Wilson also attributes the sexual barrier between Bella and Edward to their human/vampire nature (108-109). In other words, it is only Edward's self-control that stands between their physical attraction and Bella's violent death (Bliss, 77). Seen through this lens, Edward's controlling behaviors become necessary and endearing. Bella recognizes and, for the most part, accepts his control because she knows that he is doing it to keep her safe (Wilson, 114).

Erica Leonard James was taken by the *Twilight* books and admitted to reading them intensely. She was so inspired by Meyer's work that she started writing her own story (Stoller, 75-76). The first version of her story was an Alternate Universe – All Human (AU/AH), *Twilight* fanfiction named *Master of the Universe*, which she posted on fanfiction.net under the username Snowqueens Icedragon. The work was, however, deleted from the Internet Archive due to its erotic content. James would later adapt her fanfiction for the book market and publish it under the title *Fifty Shades of Grey* as an original work (Stoller, 59).

Stoller describes fanfiction as a reinterpretation of an existing text. *Master of the Universe* removes all the supernatural elements in *Twilight* and recontextualizes the human/vampire dynamic into a Dominant/Submissive BDSM (Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and

Submission, Sadism and Masochism) dynamic. In doing so, James foregrounds and challenges the unequal and sometimes abusive dynamic between Bella and Edward (65).

After it was revealed that *Fifty Shades of Grey* started as a fanfiction, the novel was plugged into the academic plagiarism detection program named Turnitin, and the results showed that the novel has an 89% similarity with its predecessor, *Master of the Universe* (Boog). For a reader who is well acquainted with *The Twilight Saga*, it is relatively easy to find instances where James appears to have been inspired by the *Twilight* narrative. It is for the reasons mentioned above that it would be interesting to compare the relationship portrayed in *Fifty Shades of Grey* with that depicted in *Twilight*.

In the Fifty Shades franchise, the central tension is between Christian Grey's version of BDSM and Anastasia Steele's desire for romance. Christian longs for physical closeness, but only on his terms, while Ana desires a normal relationship with a deeper emotional connection than Christian is willing to give her. Ana is a virgin at the start of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, and they spend most of the novel negotiating the contract that Ana refers to as a sex slave contract (Bonomi, Altenburger, and Walton). To understand what is meant by Christian's version of BDSM, an explanation of regular BDSM etiquette is needed.

The practice of BDSM often contains a consensual exchange of power where one partner (the dominant) takes control over the other partner (the submissive) during sexual encounters. Consent is a fundamental feature within BDSM, as mutual enthusiastic consent is what separates BDSM from abuse and sexual assault. Therefore, it is common for practitioners to engage in thorough, explicit negotiations that outline mutually agreed-upon expectations, desires, limits, and safe words. It is considered a serious offence within the BDSM community to perform non-negotiated activities or to push a partner's boundaries if it has not been established in previous negotiation (Dunkley and Brotto).

Even though they do negotiate a contract through most of the novel, Christian continuously performs non-negotiated sexual acts such as edging (James, 121, 135a) and bondage (James, 191-192a). He also repeatedly dismisses and pushes Ana's boundaries, which can be seen anytime they discuss punishments. One example of this is in the following quotation, where Ana wants to take caning off the list as a punishment method:

“We can work up to that.”

“Or not do it at all,” I whisper.

“This is part of the deal, baby, but we’ll work up to all of this. Anastasia, I won’t push you too far.” (James, 259-260a)

A BDSM partner's acceptance or rejection of different acts is to always be respected (Josifkova, 2). It is, therefore, considered problematic when an inexperienced person's only source of information is their partner, as the experienced partner can gain trust and undue influence through pressure and manipulation. This can, in turn, lead the inexperienced partner to partake in practices for the sake of their partner instead of following their own desires (Josifkova, 3).

Healthy BDSM relationships are free of fear and guilt; partners should feel free to stop an activity at any time for any reason, and they should never partake in any activity that makes them uncomfortable. While verbal humiliation and domination may be a part of sexual play, they should not be present in everyday life. Furthermore, manipulation where one partner is told what they should or should not think or feel about a situation should never occur in a sexual scene or otherwise (Josifkova, 3). If a dominant tries to control the everyday life of, or in any way tries to force their dominance upon, their partner, then it is considered abuse (Josifkova, 4).

The BDSM relationship in *Fifty Shades of Grey* cannot be considered healthy. According to Bonomi, Altenburger, and Walton, there is emotional abuse, manipulation, and threatening behavior present in almost every interaction between Ana and Christian. Ana shows signs commonly found in abuse victims, such as anxiety and withholding information about her whereabouts. They also point out that Christian is repeatedly compromising Ana’s consent by giving her alcohol before negotiations and sexual encounters, which is, [in fact](#), considered taboo within the BDSM community (Bonomi, Altenburger, and Walton).

It is important to note that even though Ana and Christian negotiate the contract throughout most of the first novel, Ana never signs the contract, and she repeatedly states reasons why she is not suited to be a submissive. She actively pushes back and tries to steer the relationship towards a more conventional one (Tsaros).

2.1. Theoretical framework

Dialectical theory stems from relational communication research, more specifically, how couples communicate and navigate contradicting needs within their relationship. The theory states that there are constant opposing forces within a relationship that couples must navigate and negotiate to maintain a satisfactory relationship. These oppositional forces are needed within the relationship, but they also contradict each other (Baxter and Simon, 225).

Sometimes a relationship will end up in what is referred to as a dialectical struggle, which is signified by one pole of the contradiction dominating the other. When this happens, couples must apply different strategies to create more of an equilibrium (Baxter and Simon, 228). Studies of dialectical contradictions indicate that most couples who report being happy in their relationship also maintain a relative balance between these opposing needs (Baxter and Simon, 239-240).

Three fundamental contradictions within dialectical theory are Connection – Autonomy, Predictability – Novelty, and Openness – Closedness (Baxter and Simon, 225). Since the main couples in *Twilight* and *Fifty Shades of Grey* have been together for a very short amount of time, the predictability-novelty dialectic tension will not be included in the current study. The openness-closedness and the connection-autonomy dialectic tensions will be explained in more detail below.

The *Autonomy–Connection* contradiction refers to the need for couples to strike a balance between individual freedom and time spent together. If an individual's need for autonomy is not met within the relationship, they will start to feel suffocated or entrapped by their partner. If connection dominates the dialectical struggle, the individuals will become codependent on each other and will start to lose their individual sense of identity. This can also lead to a feeling of sacrificing personal wants and needs in favor of the relationship. If, on the other hand, autonomy dominates the dialectical struggle, then the needs of the relationship will be perceived as secondary to the individual needs of the people involved. This will lead to a lack of connection. If the need for connection is not met within the relationship, one or both parties will feel like they do not spend enough time together. There might be a lack of commitment or fidelity, and the couple may find themselves unable to define their relationship or create common goals (Baxter and Simon, 227, 229).

The *Openness–Closedness* contradiction refers to what partners should or should not tell each other in the relationship. There is a need for honesty and trust within a relationship, but

sometimes it is better if a partner does not disclose some information, as too much honesty can lead to unnecessary fights or uncertainty. An inability to strike a balance within this contradiction will lead to communication breakdowns, which is a common factor behind romantic partners ending their relationship (Baxter and Simon, 288). The most common strategy found to enhance openness is for one partner to communicate directly about the state of the relationship. Meanwhile, the most common strategy to enhance closeness is to avoid talking about the relationship or its problems (Baxter and Simon, 231).

Clasen mentions that Connection- Autonomy is the most common dialectic tension. Meanwhile, Openness-Closedness is identified by couples as the most important dialectic tension since communication is continuously negotiated throughout relationships. Clasen further notes that the value of closedness depends on the consequences of disclosure (130).

3. Analysis

This analysis will be divided into three sections. The first section will explore Bella and Edward's relationship in *Twilight* as analyzed through dialectical theory. The second section will explore the relationship between Christian and Ana in the same manner. The third section will consist of a direct comparison between the relationships, and the findings will be contrasted with the previous studies addressed in the background. Since the novels are opposites in ways that go beyond the scope of dialectical theory, the third section will treat additional differences as well, in particular, the difference in how the novels treat sex and sexuality. The analysis will mainly focus on Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* and E.L. James's *Fifty Shades of Grey*. However, since both authors published their first book from both the female's and the male's perspective, I will occasionally bring in details from *Midnight Sun*, which is *Twilight* from Edward's perspective, and *Grey*, which is *Fifty Shades of Grey* from Christian's perspective.

3.1. Bella Swan and Edward Cullen

Openness - Closedness

At the start of *Twilight*, the lack of disclosure creates an obstacle for Bella and Edward's relationship to develop, but it is simultaneously one of the cornerstones of why it developed at all, since it initially was the mystery of Bella's silent mind that made Edward want to get to know her (Meyer, 39b). The initial interest between Bella and Edward, and the lack of

disclosure between them, are due to his vampire nature. According to vampire law, humanity cannot know that vampires exist; it is every vampire's responsibility to make sure that any human who knows about their existence is silenced (Meyer, 94c). Once Edward's secret is revealed to Bella, their relationship becomes dominated by the openness dialectic.

Edward is a vampire who is forever frozen at the age of 17. Besides his extraordinary physical abilities and bloodthirst common for all vampires, Edward also has the ability to read minds. He can read the mind of every person within a few miles at any time. This means that Edward is used to full disclosure from everyone around him at all times. There is only one exception to his mind-reading ability, one mind that remains completely quiet to him at all times, and that is Bella's (Meyer, 157a).

Edward is repeatedly frustrated by his inability to read her mind, which can be seen already before their first conversation by his increasingly frustrated expressions when he and Bella see each other across the school cafeteria (Meyer, 19, 35a). In the following quotation from *Midnight Sun*, it is possible to discern Edward's reaction to Bella's quiet mind:

I could hear only silence from the place she was sitting. Just... silence.

I felt a moment of unease.

This was nothing I'd ever encountered. Was there something wrong with me? I felt exactly the same as I always did. Worried, I listened harder. (Meyer, 8b)

It was the mystery of her quiet mind that made Edward decide to go to biology class the day of their first conversation. He knew there was still a risk that he would lose control and commit mass murder because of her appetizing smell, but his curiosity over her quiet mind was stronger than his fear of killing her (Meyer, 39b).

Throughout their first conversation, he is repeatedly perplexed by her questions and answers. Edward keeps looking for different strategies to get Bella talking, since he cannot read her mind. One example of this is his realization that he gets more information from her by speaking his assumptions about her life aloud, instead of asking direct questions (Meyer, 48a). He is not quite sure why he is so interested in her. But his growing fascination makes him want to know every meaningless detail of her life so he can figure out who she is (Meyer, 51a).

Meanwhile, in *Twilight*, Bella is perplexed by his intense interest in her life: “I couldn’t fathom his interest, but he continued to stare at me with penetrating eyes, as if my dull life story was somehow vitally important” (Meyer, 41a). He asks questions that no one else has asked her, like why she decided to move to Forks, and she answers all of his questions honestly, as if his eyes are pulling the answers out of her (Meyer, 41-42a). However, Bella also takes note of the fact that Edward uses avoidance tactics anytime she asks him a question. When she asks how he knows that she goes by Bella instead of Isabella, he acts confused and does not answer the question (Meyer, 37a). Later, when she asks him if he wears contacts, he looks puzzled and answers no, but when she says his eyes look different, he just shrugs and looks away (Meyer, 39a).

The closedness side of the contradiction becomes all the more dominant after Edward saves Bella from getting crushed by a car in the parking lot. She asks him how he got to her so fast, and he immediately starts to gaslight her by claiming that he was standing right next to her and pulled her out of the way, even when she tells him she knew where he was standing before the crash (Meyer, 49a). Later, when Bella pulls Edward aside in the hospital and demands an explanation, his manner becomes hostile, as can be seen in the following interaction between Edward and Bella:

“I saved your life – I don’t owe you anything.”

I flinched back from the resentment in his voice. “You promised.”

“Bella, you hit your head, you don’t know what you’re talking about.” His tone was cutting. (Meyer, 54a)

When the gaslighting does not work, he instead tells her that no one would believe her and that she should just be grateful that he saved her life. At last, once he realizes that Bella will not let it go without getting an explanation, he turns around and leaves (Meyer, 55-56a). After this incident, they go six weeks without talking to each other (Meyer, 63a).

In *Midnight Sun*, during their weeks of not talking, Edward constantly keeps track of Bella at school by listening to the thoughts of people around her (Meyer, 101b). He listens in on most of her conversations and makes mental lists about everything he learns about her through her friends. This way, he starts to get a fairly good idea of who she is as a person without disclosing any new information about himself to her, and his feelings for her intensify (Meyer, 104-105b). At last, he realizes that he can no longer stay away and approaches her once again.

In *Twilight*, they agree to become friends even though Edward warns her that he is not a good friend for her. Then he asks her about her theories regarding what he is and gets frustrated with her when she will not tell him what she is thinking. She turns on him and uses sarcasm to call him a hypocrite (Meyer, 77a). Edward still cannot tell her that he is a vampire, but he gives her a hint that he is not a hero; he is dangerous (Meyer, 79-80a).

The next time they meet is the turning point where their dialectic struggle turns from being dominated by closedness to becoming dominated by openness. Edward saves Bella from a group of rapists in Port Angeles, and afterwards, he buys her dinner, and they have a candid conversation where he actually answers Bella's questions. She has figured out on her own that he is some kind of mind-reader, and once he has admitted that, he also admits to following her to Port Angeles because he is trying to keep her alive, as she is a magnet for danger (Meyer, 150-151a).

On the way home from Port Angeles, Bella explains how she realized that he is a vampire (Meyer, 159-160a). Once Edward knows that Bella knows that he is a vampire, he stops evading her questions. He explains why he and his family drink blood from animals instead of humans (Meyer, 163a), and he promises to show her what happens when vampires go outside in sunlight (Meyer, 165a).

After that point, Bella and Edward spend most of their time together talking about their lives. Edward is still bothered by his inability to read her thoughts because he does not think that her reactions to him make sense, which he also tells her: "You take everything so coolly – it's unnatural. It makes me wonder what you're really thinking" (Meyer, 174a). This indicates that he wants even more openness between them than they have so far. Bella realizes that she has never talked so much about herself in her entire life. She worries that her answers will bore him, but he seems completely absorbed by everything she says and keeps asking even more questions. She likes how interested he is in every aspect of her life, even if she does not understand why he wants to know (Meyer, 201a).

During their first date, they go out to the woods alone together. Beforehand, Edward warns Bella that he is dangerous for her. He does this to make sure that she will tell the people in her life that she is spending the day with him, so he will be more motivated to keep her alive. Bella takes the danger seriously, but instead of taking precautions to stay safe, she makes sure that no one knows that she will spend the day with Edward. Bella's thought pattern is that if no one knows that she is with him, then his family will not get in trouble if he kills her.

(Meyer, 223a). This demonstrates that Bella values protecting Edward's vampire secret over protecting her own safety.

Edward discloses more and more about his vampire nature as it is an intrinsic part of his identity, but he also does it to prove that she is justified to be afraid of him (Meyer, 231a). Bella admits that she is afraid, but only because she knows that they will never be able to remain together long-term if she is a human and he is a vampire (Meyer, 233a). This is one of the first instances where they bring up direct communication about the future of their relationship. It is also in this scene that they disclose their mutual love for each other for the first time (Meyer, 240a).

Edward opens up more and more about himself, his family, and their history. He wants her to truly know him, all of him. He introduces her to his family and confesses his dark past to her, for example, that he rebelled against Carlisle and hunted humans for a while. Once again, Bella is not scared by this or second-guesses her choice to date a vampire. She considers it reasonable for him to rebel against the alternative lifestyle, even before he tells her that he only used to haunt bad people like rapists and murderers (Meyer, 298-299a). This demonstrates that she is willing to love him exactly how he is, no matter how monstrous he may seem.

Regarding communication about their physical relationship, they only have one conversation about sex in *Twilight/Midnight Sun*. In this instance, their communication becomes slightly stilted as Bella is embarrassed by her own questions. Edward chooses to adjust his language use to keep the conversation at Bella's comfort level: "I don't think that... *that*..." – I avoided the word *sex* because she did – "would be possible for us" (Meyer, 475b). He proceeds by explaining why it would not be possible for them to have sex and asks her in a nonjudgmental way if she has ever had sex before (Meyer, 271a). By adjusting his way of communicating, he demonstrates that he is a safe place for her to express her thoughts, even when it comes to more sensitive topics.

Connection – Autonomy

At the beginning of the novel, Edward tries to stay away from Bella to keep her safe. However, the mystery of her quiet mind makes it impossible for him to stay away. In *Midnight Sun*, his sister Alice (who can see the future) has predicted that he is destined to either kill her or fall in love with her and turn her into a vampire (Meyer, 96b). After that, he

is constantly torn between wanting to be with her and wanting to keep her safe. He sees himself as a soulless monster, and he cannot stand either option. “I would not destroy Bella’s future. If I was destined to love her, then wasn’t avoiding her the very least I could do?” (Meyer, 101b). This indicates that Edward has a strong desire for connection, but he denies himself in an attempt to keep Bella safe.

However, his resolve crumbles due to jealousy at the thought that she will one day fall in love with another man (Meyer, 109b). Once he realizes that he cannot stay away from her, he becomes fiercely protective and increasingly paranoid that something bad will happen to her: “What if something happened to her in the night? What if I went to school tomorrow, every sense and feeling focused on the space where she should be, and her seat was empty? Abruptly, the risk felt unacceptable” (Meyer, 119b). That night, he runs to her house to make sure a stray meteorite will not fall through her roof and kill her (Meyer, 119b). Once he gets to her house, the paranoia continues, and he decides to climb into her bedroom while she is sleeping to keep her safe. He even kills a hobo spider in her room: “I reached out with one finger and crushed it silently. Perhaps I should have let the creature be, but the thought of anything hurting her was intolerable (Meyer, 123b). His anxiousness indicates that his feeling of connection towards Bella is starting to overtake his sense of identity. He finds himself incapable of spending even a full night away from her.

There is an indication that Bella and Edward's relationship is dominated by connection already by their first date, as they both start showing signs of losing their identity in favor of their relationship. Edward tells her that she is the most important thing to him ever, and Bella answers that her presence in that moment meant that she would rather die than stay away from him (Meyer, 240a). This could be interpreted as Bella and Edward prioritizing each other and the relationship over everything else in their lives.

In the evening, the first day, Edward confesses to her that he has been spying on her and watching her sleep almost every night for a couple of weeks, and Bella is embarrassed but flattered by this (Meyer, 256a). Then they stay in her room, and she asks him to stay the night, which he does (Meyer, 264a). This further proves their mutual desire for connection over autonomy as they show no desire to spend time alone, pursue hobbies, or spend time with family and friends.

At last, close to the end of the novel, Bella declares her desire to become a vampire like him. She wants to spend eternity with him, and she knows that it is the only way that they can

become equal partners. If she remains human, then he will always have to save her, and then she will grow old and die (Meyer, 412a). He tells her that he will not take her life away from her, and she responds with: “You *are* my life. You’re the only thing it would hurt me to lose” (Meyer, 413a). In *Midnight Sun*, Edward reflects that she describes exactly how he feels about her (Meyer, 722b). At this point, they arrive at an impasse. Their connection is so strong that they are both showing clear signs of codependence. Neither Bella nor Edward considers their lives worth living if they cannot be together. However, Edwards's desire to protect Bella makes him take one step away from connection by refusing to turn her into a vampire like him.

3.2. Anastasia Steele and Christian Grey

Openness – Closedness

Christian and Ana consistently experience communication breakdowns in their relationship. Most of their conversations in *Fifty Shades of Grey* are about negotiating the ten-page-long BDSM contract that he wants her to sign (James, 165-175a). They have many discussions regarding punishments. She wants to know why he feels the need to hurt her, and he avoids giving her a satisfying answer. His most common answer is that punishments are a part of the lifestyle, or that he needs them because they give him a sense of control (James, 219, 259a). Meanwhile, Ana is terrified at the thought of pain and punishment (James, 223, 259, 273a). Christian dismisses and manipulates her whenever she tries to express her worries that he will hurt her; one example of this can be seen in the following quotation said by Christian: “No – stop seeing pain everywhere. It’s mainly pleasure. Have I hurt you yet?” (James, 260). Both the avoidance tactics and the communication breakdowns indicate that Ana and Christian’s relationship is dominated by closedness.

Ana does not feel safe talking to Christian face-to-face. Lack of trust in a relationship indicates a failure to balance the openness-closedness dialectic tension. She repeatedly tries to set boundaries for her own comfort, and he continuously disrespects them. The lack of trust becomes particularly visible when she wants to discuss the contract in a public place to stop him from making sexual advances towards her:

“I think we should stay in public, on neutral ground.”

“Do you think that would stop me?” he says softly, a sensual warning.

My eyes widen, and I swallow again.

“I hope so.” (James, 217a)

This quotation demonstrates that he does not provide a safe space for her to express her opinions, and he does not respect her expressed boundaries. Right after the interaction above, he takes her to a private dining room despite her wishes to remain in public (James, 217a). Another sign that Ana does not trust him is that she chooses not to disclose information about her life if she thinks that it will give him influence over her. This can be seen when she refuses to tell him which publishing houses she has applied to for work, so he will not use his power and influence to determine if she gets hired or not (James, 254a).

Christian wants Ana to be open with him, but he is a master of not answering private questions about his own life. As soon as Ana asks more personal questions, like why he is only interested in a BDSM relationship, he starts giving her evasive answers, for example, “It’s the way I am” (James, 103a). One of the most personal conversations they have is on their first unofficial date at a coffee shop, where Christian asks Ana many questions about her family and friends and gets frustrated when she does not tell him as much as he wants:

He frowns at me.

“You are not giving much away, are you?” he says dryly, rubbing his chin as if in deep thought.

“Neither are you.”

“You’ve interviewed me once already, and I can recollect some quite probing questions then.” He smirks at me. (James, 45a)

As demonstrated above, Christian avoids talking about his own life as much as possible. Ana notices that he does not want to talk about himself or his family and wonders why (James, 46a).

There are a few instances when their conversations become more open and honest, and that is when they send each other emails. Ana feels safer expressing herself honestly in writing, which can be seen in how she is more likely to answer his emails with defiance rather than fear, for example, “I haven’t signed yet. So rules, schmules” (James, 297a). Ana also calls him out on his stalker tendencies on two separate occasions (James, 296, 389a). When Ana is on her way to visit her mother in Georgia, she becomes even more honest to the point that Christian comments on it in one of his emails, “Anastasia, I am annoyed that as soon as you

put some distance between us, you communicate openly and honestly with me. Why can't you do that when we're together?" (James, 399a). In Christian's email, he expresses a desire for openness between them that is rarely seen during other occasions (James, 399-400a).

The dialectic struggle of openness-closedness comes to its climax at the end of the novel. Ana makes it clear how much the thought of punishments scares her and asks why Christian feels the need to hurt her. He tells her that she would run away if he told her why (James, 502-503a). She soon realizes that they are incompatible. She decides to give him one last chance by telling her how she feels about him:

"I've fallen in love with you, Christian." His eyes widen again, but this time with pure, undiluted fear.

"No," he breathes as if I've knocked the wind out of him.

Oh no.

"You can't love me, Ana. No... That's wrong." He's horrified. (James, 509a)

The one-sided love confession becomes the last confirmation that their relationship is over, and she breaks up with him (James, 513a).

Connection – Autonomy

Christian continuously tries to spend more time with Ana, which indicates that he is seeking a connection. His way of doing this, however, tends to infringe on Ana's autonomy.

Immediately after their first meeting, Christian starts to stalk Ana. In *Grey*, he hires a private investigator to run a complete background check on her (James, 20-21b). Then, about a week later, he shows up at her workplace in the middle of her shift, where he takes the opportunity to arrange a photoshoot for the article so that he can meet her again (James, 25, 28b). He asks her to stay another night in his apartment after their first sexual encounter, and she has to tell him no several times before he agrees to let her go home in the evening (James, 130a). When she sends him an email stating that she does not want to see him anymore (James, 188a), he shows up at her apartment (James, 189a) and has sex with her to convince her to reconsider (James, 190-196a). Similarly, when she goes to Georgia to visit her mother to get some time away from him to think, he buys a plane ticket and goes to surprise her (James, 421-422b).

Ana is ambivalent regarding whether she wants more connection or more autonomy. She feels like she wants to spend more time with Christian, for example, when he drives her home after

their first weekend together (James, 157), but his lifestyle makes her insecure. Ana desires a normal relationship with emotional intimacy (James, 199), and she only considers his lifestyle because it is the only way she can be with him. This becomes clear in one of her emails to Christian: “You were right when you said I didn’t have a submissive bone in my body... and I agree with you now. Having said that, I want to be with you, and if that’s what I have to do, I would like to try, but I think I’ll suck at it and end up black and blue – and I don’t relish that idea at all” (James, 395a). A part of why she wants to be with him is that he is the only man she has ever had romantic or sexual feelings for (James, 109-110a), and she is scared she will end up alone if she does not accept his offer (James, 176a).

Ana views signing the contract as giving up her free will (James, 104a), which indicates that she wants more autonomy than Christian is offering. There are signs that Ana’s need for autonomy is not met within their relationship, as she starts wishing for more space whenever Christian becomes a little too intense (James, 126a). She also repeatedly has to negotiate spending less time with him. She insists on taking her own car to their contract negotiation in case she needs to make a quick escape (James, 209-211a). She thinks seeing him from Friday to Sunday every week is too much, as she will never have any time to see her friends (James, 175a). She also has to insist on leaving early during their negotiation of the contract after he repeatedly makes unwanted sexual advances towards her; meanwhile, Christian tries to convince her to stay:

“I don’t want you to go.”

“Please... I have to.”

“Why?”

“Because you’ve given me so much to consider... and I need some distance.”

“I could make you stay,” he threatens.

“Yes, you could easily, but I don’t want you to.” (James, 226a)

Christian tries to convince her to stay once more in this scene, but she stands her ground and leaves (James, 226-227a).

The dialectic struggle of connection-autonomy reaches its peak in the last chapter of the novel. Ana agrees to let Christian show her how bad punishments can get in a misguided belief that she can save him from his inner demons if she joins him in the darkness (James, 504a). The pain is just as bad as Ana imagined, and she is horrified to discover that Christian

is getting pleasure out of beating her with a belt (James, 505-506a). This realization becomes a wake-up call to her. “I did follow my heart, and I have a sore ass and an anguished, broken spirit to show for it. I have to go. That’s it... I have to leave. He’s no good for me, and I am no good for him. How can we possibly make this work?” (James, 507-508a). Ana realizes that they are incompatible, so she breaks up with him and leaves his apartment (James, 513a). A lack of commitment, as well as an inability to define the relationship or to create common goals, are common indicators that the need for connection is not met within the relationship. Christian and Ana’s inability to create a satisfying connection ultimately leads to their breakup.

3.3 Comparison

Ana and Christian’s relationship is dominated by closedness and communication breakdowns. Ana is constantly scared of making Christian angry and only feels like she can express herself openly through email. Meanwhile, Christian avoids talking about himself as much as possible. While he occasionally asks Ana about her family or friends, most of their conversations are about sex and negotiating the BDSM contract that he wants her to sign. A healthy BDSM dynamic contains clear communication and mutual respect for expressed boundaries (Dunkley and Brotto). Christian’s tendency to dismiss Ana’s concerns about punishments, and the fact that she is only considering becoming his submissive to please him (James, 395a), would be considered unhealthy and deeply problematic (Josifkova, 2-3). His inability to provide a safe and consensual dynamic between them is one of the main reasons why they regularly face communication breakdowns.

Edward and Bella's relationship in *Twilight*, on the other hand, mostly consists of personal conversations. At first, Edward is not allowed to tell Bella he is a vampire, which prevents him from disclosing much about himself. However, he is endlessly curious about Bella’s life since he cannot hear her thoughts. Once Bella figures out Edward’s secret on her own, he stops being secretive with her, and he even tells her about the darker parts of his history (Meyer, 298-299a). Openness builds trust and honesty within a relationship, and Bella and Edward do not seem to think that there is such a thing as too much openness. They spend several days asking each other questions. Their openness could in part be connected to the chaste nature of their relationship. Their human/vampire dynamic creates a barrier for their physical relationship to develop (Wilson, 76, 108-109). Since Edwards vampire nature makes

even cuddling and kissing challenging (Schwartzman, 127), their main way of creating intimacy becomes conversations and spending quality time together.

Bella and Edward's relationship is further dominated by a mutual desire for connection over autonomy. Once they start dating, their relationship moves very fast, and they start showing signs of codependency within a couple of days. They feel like nothing matters more to them than each other, which in *Twilight* is evidenced by their conversation in the meadow (Meyer, 240a).

Christian and Ana in *Fifty Shades of Grey*, on the other hand, have completely different perspectives on how much time they should spend together. Christian is continuously seeking connection with Ana, but he is only interested in spending time with her when he can dictate the circumstances. He is only interested in a physical relationship, while Ana craves a romantic connection. This creates a dynamic where Ana is continuously overwhelmed by Christian and wishes for distance away from him (James, 126a). This indicates that Ana's need for autonomy is not met within the relationship. Once Ana realizes that it is impossible to have a romantic relationship with Christian, she breaks up with him and leaves (James, 513a), which is common among couples who cannot solve their dialectic struggles (Baxter and Simon, 288).

The last point to be brought up is how sexuality is represented within *Twilight* compared to *Fifty Shades of Grey*

McGeough explains that the cultural script within purity culture is that young women are seen as objects of sexual desire. They are, however, often depicted as lacking a sexual desire of their own (89). Young women are supposed to desire intimacy and romance, but they should only want sex to please their partners (Platt, 75). In *Fifty Shades of Grey*, Ana fits this cultural script. She is almost twenty-two years old, but she had never felt sexual attraction to anyone before Christian awakened her dormant sexuality (James, 109-110a). While she does experience active sexual attraction, her sexuality is solely connected to Christian. This can be seen by how she has never even masturbated or had an orgasm before she had sex with Christian (James, 114a). Ana is further depicted as the one who has to ward off men who cannot control their desire. This can be seen both when her friend José tries to kiss her against her will, when they are both drunk (James, 59a), and when she has to repeatedly tell Christian that she does not want to have sex with him and that she wants to leave during their contract negotiation over dinner (James, 226-227a).

Meanwhile, in *Twilight*, Bella is the one who struggles with controlling her attraction to Edward (Platt, 79). During their first kiss, she takes them both by surprise with her reaction: “Blood boiled under my skin, burned my lips. My breath came in a wild gasp. My fingers knotted in his hair, clutching him to me. My lips parted as I breathed in his heady scent” (Meyer, 247a). During their second kiss, she faints because she forgets to breathe (Meyer, 279a), and during their third kiss, she once again throws her arms around his neck to press in closer and opens her mouth. Edward is chocked by her reaction to say the least, which can be seen in the following quotation: “He staggered back, breaking my grip effortlessly. ‘Damn it, Bella!’ He broke off, gasping. ‘You’ll be the death of me, I swear you will’” (Meyer, 317a). In *Twilight*, it is Bella who cannot control her desire, which makes it Edward’s responsibility to keep their physical relationship from going too far (Wilson, 76).

4. Conclusion

This paper has analyzed and compared the relationships within *Twilight/Midnight Sun* and *Fifty Shades of Grey/Grey*, respectively, and demonstrated that the relationship dynamics and the sexuality depicted within the respective novels could be seen as opposites. The study has made use of relational communication research, more specifically, dialectical theory, to analyze how Bella and Edward versus Christian and Ana negotiate the necessary but contradicting needs of Connection-Autonomy and Openness-Closedness.

Bella and Edward both choose connection over autonomy to a degree where they start to show signs of codependency. They also repeatedly choose openness over closedness, except for when Edward cannot disclose that he is a vampire.

Ana and Christian, on the other hand, struggle to negotiate and balance their respective needs. Christian is striving for connection while Ana is striving for autonomy. Within the openness-closedness dialectic tension, they have a dominance of closedness over openness, which repeatedly leads to a lack of trust and communication breakdowns.

Lastly, the two couples are also opposites regarding sexual desire. Bella and Edward have well-developed emotional intimacy, while their physical relationship is severely restricted both by Edward's dangerous vampire nature and by his early 20th-century moral code. This

creates a dynamic where Bella strives for a more physical relationship while Edward is holding them back.

Christian and Ana, on the other hand, have a relationship that is primarily characterized by sex. Most of their physical encounters include sexual acts, and most of their conversations revolve around sex and the contract that Christian wants Ana to sign. Christian is the driving force behind their physical relationship as he continuously initiates sex and pushes Ana's boundaries to get what he wants. While the physical part of their relationship is well developed, they are lacking in emotional intimacy. Ana is continuously longing for more of an emotional connection throughout the entire novel, and this ultimately leads to them breaking up at the end of the novel.

Works cited

Baxter, Leslie A, & Simon, Eric P. "Relationship Maintenance Strategies and Dialectical Contradictions in Personal Relationships." *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, vol. 10, no. 2, May 1993, pp. 225-242. ResearchGate, DOI: [10.1177/026540759301000204](https://doi.org/10.1177/026540759301000204).

Bliss, Ann V. "Abstinence American Style." *The Twilight Mystique: Critical Essays on the Novels and Films*, edited by Amy M. Clarke and Marijane Osborn, McFarland & Company, Inc, 2010. pp. 107-120.

Bonomi, Amy E., Altenburger, Lauren E, and Walton, Nicole L. "'Double Crap!' Abuse and Harmed Identity in Fifty Shades of Grey." *Journal of Women's Health*, vol. 22, no. 9, September 2013. *Sage Journals*, <https://doi-org.proxy.library.ju.se/10.1089/jwh.2013.4344>.

Boog, Jason. "'Fifty Shades Of Grey': Publishing's Sexiest Trend." *NPR*, 15 March. 2012. <https://www.npr.org/2012/03/15/148605287/fifty-shades-of-grey-publishings-sexiest-trend>.

Clasen, Tricia. "Taking a Bite Out of Love: The Myth of Romantic Love in the *Twilight* Series." *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media & the Vampire Franchise*, edited by Melissa A Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, & Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, Peter Lang Publishing, 2010, pp. 119-134.

Collins, Victoria E, and Carmody, Dianne C. "Deadly Love: Images of Dating Violence in the 'Twilight Saga'." *Affilia*, vol. 26, no. 4, November 2011. *Sage Journals*, <https://doi-org.proxy.library.ju.se/10.1177/0886109911428425>.

Dunkley, Cara R, and Brotto, Lori A. "The Role of Consent in the Context of BDSM." *Sexual Abuse*, vol. 32, no. 6, April 2019. *Sage Journals*, <https://doi-org.proxy.library.ju.se/10.1177/1079063219842847>.

Flood, Alison. "Fifty Shades of Grey condemned as 'manual for sexual torture'." *The Guardian*, 24 August. 2012. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/aug/24/fifty-shades-grey-domestic-violence-campaigners>.

Josifkova, Eva. "Consensual Sadomasochistic Sex (BDSM): The Roots, the Risks, and the Distinctions Between BDSM and Violence." *Current Psychiatry Reports*, vol. 15, no. 9, August 2013, pp. 1-8. *ProQuest*, DOI:10.1007/s11920-013-0392-1.

McGeough, Danielle Dick. "Twilight and Transformations of Flesh: Reading the Body in Contemporary Youth Culture." *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media & the Vampire Franchise*, edited by Melissa A Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, & Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, Peter Lang Publishing, 2010, pp. 87-102.

Meyer, Stephenie. *Twilightsagan – Den officiella illustrerade guiden* (c). B. Wahlströms. 2011.

Meyer, Stephenie. "The Story of Twilight & Getting Published." *STEPHENIE MEYER*, <https://stepheniemeyer.com/the-story-of-twilight-getting-published/> Accessed: April 17th, 2026.

Platt, Carrie Ann. "Cullen Family Values: Gender and Sexual Politics in the Twilight Series." *Bitten by Twilight – Youth Culture, Media & the Vampire Franchise*, edited by Melissa A Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, & Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, Peter Lang Publishing, 2010, pp. 71-86.

Schwartzman, Sarah. "Is Twilight Mormon?" *The Twilight Mystique: Critical Essays on the Novels and Films*, edited by Amy M. Clarke and Marijane Osborn, McFarland & Company, Inc, 2010. pp. 121-136.

Stoller, Bettina. "Filing off the Serial Numbers: Fanfiction and its Adaptation to the Book Market." *Adaptation in the Age of Media Convergence*, edited by Johannes Fehrle Werner

Schäfer-Zell, Amsterdam University Press, 2019, pp. 57-86. *JSTOR*,
<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvpbnqd0.5>.

Toscano, Margaret M. "Mormon Morality and Immorality in Stephenie Meyer's Twilight Series." *Bitten by Twilight – Youth Culture, Media & the Vampire Franchise*, edited by Melissa A Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, & Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, Peter Lang Publishing, 2010, pp. 21-36.

Tsaros, Angelika. "Consensual non-consent: Comparing EL James's Fifty Shades of Grey and Pauline Réage's Story of O" *Sexualities*. Vol. 16, no. 8, December 2013. *Sage Journals*,
<https://doi-org.proxy.library.ju.se/10.1177/1363460713508903>.

Wilson, Natalie. *Seduced by Twilight – the allure and contradictory messages of the popular saga*. McFarland & Company Publishers. 2011.

Primary material

James, Erika Leonard. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Bloom Books. 2012.

--- *Grey*. Norstedts. 2015. (svensk översättning).

Meyer, Stephanie. *Midnight Sun*. Atom. 2020.

--- *Twilight*. Little Brown. 2005.