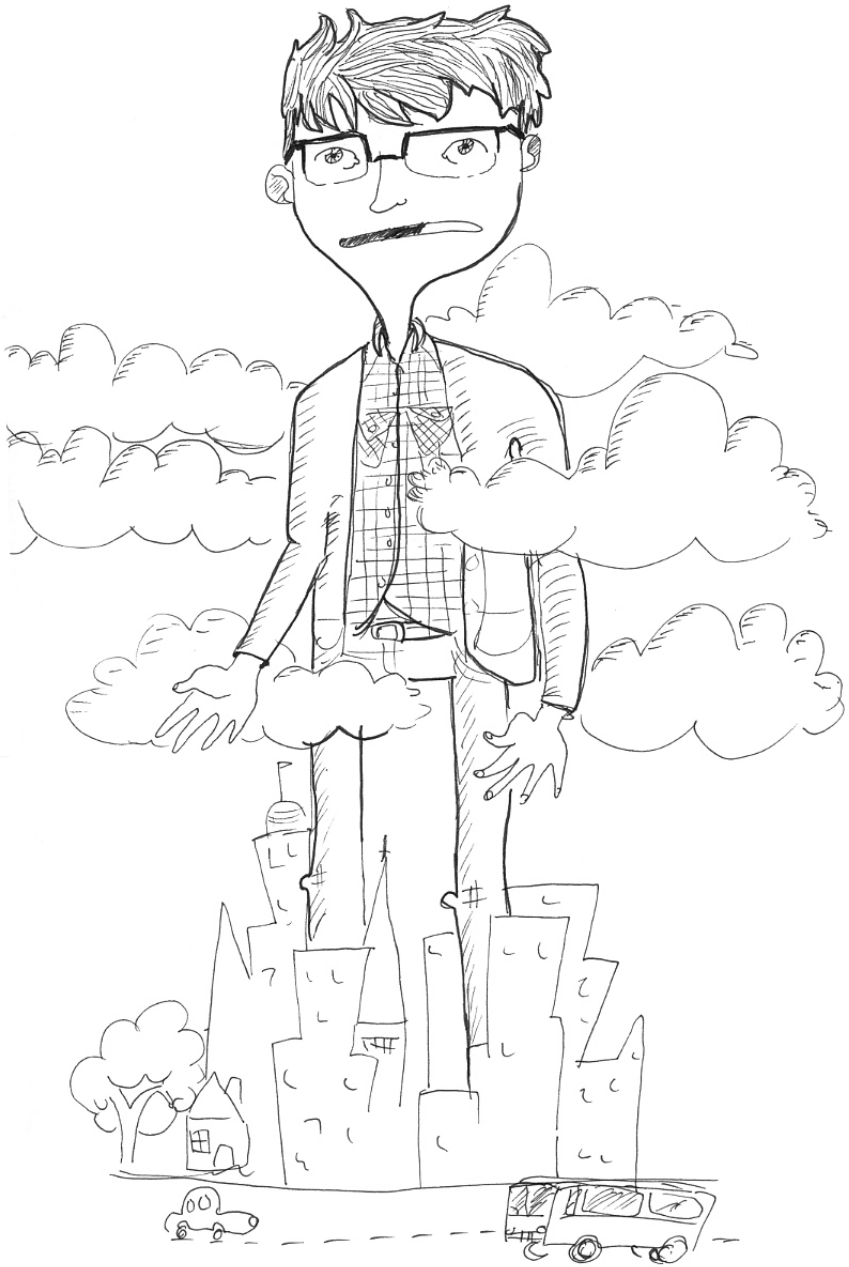




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fall 2009



I HOPE TO TOWER ABOVE THE SKIES.

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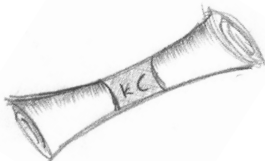
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Cover: Megan Llewellyn

Editors: Lauren Guicheteau, Adrienne Wolter, Whitten
Montgomery

Throughout the magazine are doodles and short statements about anonymous Kenyon students' ambitions, hopes, and dreams.



The Laughing Swing

A little girl laughs, delighted, as her father ties the ropes securely around a sturdy branch of the gnarled oak in the front yard. He has made the swing large and strong enough to hold both of them. A woman stands in the front doorway, watching and smiling.

A teenage couple shares their first kiss sitting on the seasoned wooden board. They laugh quietly at the awkwardness of it; neither knows where to put noses or hands. They manage anyway.

A young man drops to one knee, eyes bright with hope, as his trembling hands offer a small velvet box to the young woman sitting upon the wooden seat. She clutches the ropes wide-eyed. Then tears form in her eyes and she throws her arms around his neck, knocking them both backward into the grass. They laugh together as he slips the ring on her finger.

A heavily pregnant woman leans her head on the rope, smiling contentedly as she caresses her swollen stomach. A man watches from the porch. Their eyes meet, and they laugh softly.

A little boy shrieks as his father swoops him up into his arms and carries him over to plunk him down on the seat. A girl, slightly older than the boy, clambers onto it, too, and they laugh as their father sets them into motion.

An elderly couple shares a tender kiss on the old seat, laughing together as they recall their first. Grandchildren play in the grass at their feet.

No one laughs as flowers are placed at the head of the double grave. But the ancient wooden seat sways in the breeze, and the faint laughter of a little girl echoes softly.

Linda Mullin



The Park
Laura Spiegler



The Truth About Twilight: Sensational or Sexist?

Morgan Peele

I am a *Harry Potter* child. I began reading the books in the third grade and continued until my junior year of high school. Now there is a new kid on the block whom *Business Week* has dubbed “Harry Potter with fangs—and a social network” (*Business Week* 44). I am talking about *Twilight* of course. A book series originally aimed at young teen girls has taken over high school and college campuses as Kenyon students poster their walls with Edward, Bella, and Jacob. Why is this series so popular? And does it truly portray the positive boy-girl relationship that the publishers claim? Is Bella a female role model who young girls should emanate?

No, she is not. But before I get into that, let us examine the appeal of *Twilight* and why so many girls sigh at the mention of Edward Cullen.

The *Twilight* series includes four books: *Twilight*, *New Moon*, *Eclipse*, and *Breaking Dawn*. They depict the relationship between teenage vampire, Edward Cullen, and teenage human, Bella. The famous love triangle begins in *New Moon* when Bella’s friend Jacob evolves into a werewolf shape-shifter intent on destroying vampires. Then things really get complicated as Bella finds herself divided between the natural and supernatural worlds—and two extremely hot guys.

The first famous vampire to grace the world was the bloodthirsty Vlad Dracula. And, although whether or not he was truly a vampire is still under debate, Bram Stoker’s novel has been inspiring terror for generations. Elizabeth Kostova traced the origin of the Dracula legend through her vastly successful 2005 novel *The Historian*. I consider her success to be the first glimmer of the modern vampire mania. Just five months later *Twilight* was published, but it would be two years

before Stephanie Meyer's novels gained recognition. The boy wizard had to defeat Voldemort before the public would be willing to wrap its heart around another fantasy series.

People must have been sincerely missing the lovable wizard because, according to Meyer's personal website, the *Twilight* series has sold over 42 million copies in 39 countries. *The New York Times* movie review of *Twilight* states that the film is intended for young teen girls of the "the hot-not-to-trot abstinence set." I indeed found myself sitting in a theater twittering with middle-school boy-crazy girls. The first *Twilight* movie grossed \$340 million since being released in November 2008, and *New Moon* is scheduled for release November 20.

Meyer's concept of Edward and Bella is nothing new. It is common for writers to create more modern, flashier versions of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Edward and Bella are star-crossed lovers, except this time it is not familial ties that separate them, but death. Cool, isn't it? There is always the threat of death looming over the couple because if Edward loses control for one moment he could kill the one he loves. Thus, Edward controls the relationship. If Bella attempts to deepen that kiss, Edward pushes her away because only he is allowed to control the affection. Bella cannot resist Edward because he is the perfect boy who embodies all that is masculine and desirable. He has a faultlessly sculpted, smooth body, perfect hair, soft kissable lips, and smoldering eyes. Okay girls, you can breathe now. When Bella inhales Edward's scent she falls into an almost hypnotic state where hormones and longing overcome her senses and, like a cheesy paperback romance novel, she falls into his arms. Edward has undeniable power over both Bella's hormones and her mental facilities, thus caging her with desire.

Cage. Bella is caged. Is this a message that teenage girls need to read?

However, whereas Edward is stringently characterized to the point where he makes appearances in my own dreams, Bella remains flat. She is clumsy, mildly attractive, quiet, and generally languid. She spends most of her time trying not to be noticed and tripping on inanimate objects. At a fan party girls dressed up with “fake leg casts in homage to the accident-prone Bella” (Business Week 44). Bella’s clumsiness is heavily emphasized because every time she falls down Edward magically saves her.

Save her. Edward—the god-like, faultless boy—is always there to save her because Bella cannot save herself.

In *Twilight*, Edward must save Bella when she foolishly falls into the evil vampire James’s trap. Edward whisks her away in an attempt to hide her from James, but Bella is easily ensnared. But no fear! Edward is here! Bella winds up in the hospital being nursed by her heroic, perfect boyfriend. In *New Moon* a new, hot male emerges on the scene: Bella’s werewolf/Native American/gorgeous/never-wears-a-shirt best friend, Jacob. Now the fans have two hot guys to moon over. Jacob is also in love with the vulnerable, isolated Bella. Her weakness appeals to him because now he is able to be her protector. He intervenes to save Bella after Edward leaves her. Edward’s absence results in a depression that weighs heavily on readers. Bella cannot survive without a man. It is not until he returns that Bella is happy again. Edward completes her. A man completes her life. Do teenage girls need to be idolizing this message? Essentially, at age seventeen Bella is a walking shell without her vampire boyfriend—unable to function in the world.

Suddenly, the Meyer fan club splits into Team Jacob and Team Edward. Where is team Bella? In *Ms. Magazine’s* article “Talking Back to Twilight” author Carmen D. Sierling states that, “Even though Bella is ostensibly a hero, in truth she is merely an object in the *Twilight* world” (Sierling 1). Hmm...now let’s think: two hot guys and an object equals a fight. The final battle between Edward and Jacob occurs in *Eclipse* when Bella is once again in danger of being eaten by an

evil vampire. This time the two hot immortals fight over who defends Bella. Why can't Bella protect herself? Edward wins, Jacob is sad, and Bella does a lot of blubbering and kissing. When the drama finally ends Bella ardently wants Edward to bite her so she can become a vampire like him, and live happily ever after with her true love.

What about college? Bella is eighteen. She's not particularly dumb academically. However, despite the numerous college applications Edward gives her, Bella remains uninterested. It disgusts me that she will only go to a college that Edward is attending. If Bella had it her way she would not waste four years at a university when she can join Edward in eternal immortal happiness. That would be the life, wouldn't it? No education, no career, no ambitions. Her life revolves around Edward. Yep. Bella's in her place, isn't she? She wants to be at home with her husband.

In today's world, our society is overflowing with extraordinary women who have successful, fulfilling careers and families. Teenage girls should venerate these role models and not a young woman who wants to give up her future in order to be with her man.

This book series is unrealistically old-fashioned. Why doesn't Meyer make her so-called heroine barefoot in the kitchen with a baby on her hip?

Oh wait—she does in *Breaking Dawn*.

In yet another assertion of power Edward promises to sleep with Bella only if she marries him. Bella doesn't want to marry him, but she wants sex so badly that she surrenders to Edward's influence. She is sexually repressed, and grudgingly walks down the aisle to get it. Essentially, Edward is limiting Bella's sexuality in order to get what he wants. Yes, critics praise *Twilight* for its so-called abstinence message, but is it really abstinence when a man promises sexual favors to a woman only if she complies with his demands? Bella literally begs for sex—and it takes her four books to get it. Okay, so Bella gets her sex, Edward gets his marriage, and Bella is finally happy. However, she is not fulfilled until she gives

birth to a mutant, immortal vampire baby. I believe that Bella is only allowed immortality because now she has a family she needs to protect. Thus, a woman's power is to protect her family. Instant family equals instant power. An independent young woman doesn't need any power.

It is less than three weeks until *New Moon* arrives in theaters. Before mothers treat their vampire-crazed daughters to scenes of PG-13 sensual sexism, they need to emphasize that *Twilight* is a fairy tale. Bella is a fictional character who allows a controlling immortal to determine her future. Jacob only wants Bella because he is attracted to her vulnerability—she is easy. Young women do not marry purely for the sex! A man should not have such power over a woman because she is not a puppet. A baby should not be a means to gain power. This is not reality. This is powerfully persuasive sexism wrapped in a supposed abstinence message.

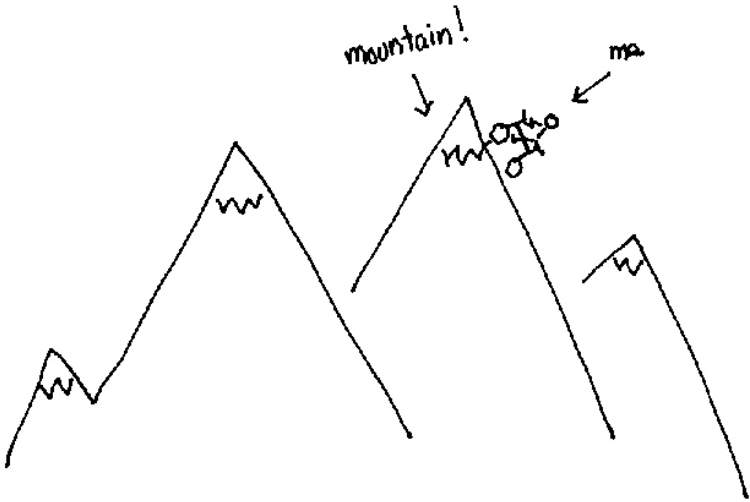
A final question: what if the roles were reversed? What if *Twilight* was about a vampire girl who saves the human boy she loves? Would people be interested?

No, probably not.

*I hope that Palestine will live
in peace one day!*

*I want to help America
by changing its cities.*

*I want to be as cool
as a classics major!*



Up One Frame
Emma Lippincott

Living on a farm in Minnesota with my sister Katie



*Dad,
I want to be just like you.*



Midnight Serenade in G
Elizabeth Bailey

Decision

Hushed voices
filter through walls
like strained coffee,
yellow brown stains
on my skirt.

They're talking about me,
I can tell
in whispers reserved
for the shamed.

Their words spread across
my skirt,
creep up my belly,
center on the
formless fetus inside.

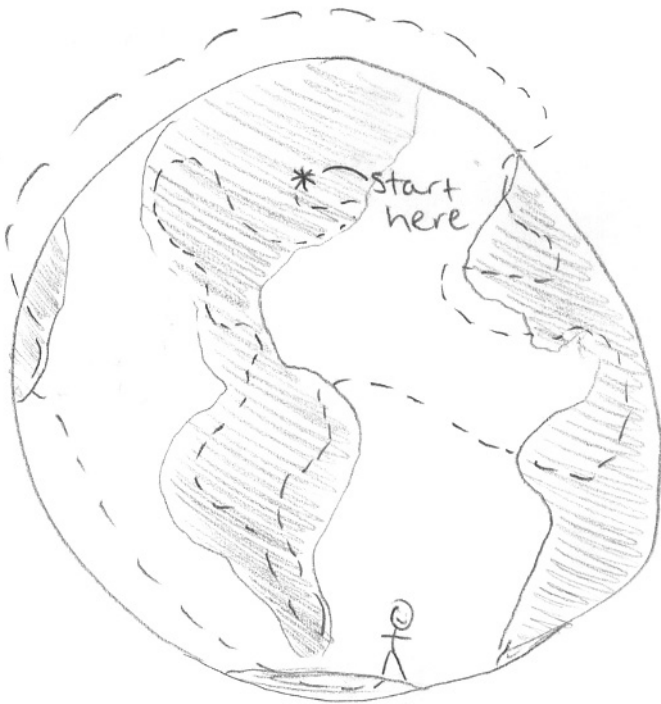
I'm waiting,
outside an office,
to learn
exactly when
life begins.

Melissa Nigro

Love Song (Uncapped Pen)

Carling FitzSimmons

After you left it
on the desk, I picked it up,
rolled it between my fingers
for a moment, stuck the end
firmly in my mouth, and sucked,
and I am not
one bit sorry.



Twin Songs from the Women on the Clotilde

*We brought the shape of the angel with us
in the shapes of women and in the shapes
of ships...*

-Larry Levis

I.

O death,
won't you pass my people o'er?
You can do again what you done before
an' just pass my people o'er,
O death.
O death,
won't you leave them children alone?
They ain't hardly two years grown;
why don't you leave them alone,
O death?
O death,
won't you let these families be?
They don't hurt you none, so set them free
an' leave these families be,
O death.
O death,
Won't you spare us from this night?
if you hold on 'til the mornin' light,
we won't call you none but just and right
if you spare us from this night,
O death.
O death,
won't you shake us from these chains?
We callin' you from pits of shame,
from eyeless nights of endless pain
to take us now, an' free of blame,
just shake us from these chains,
O death.

Carling FitzSimmons

II.

It is not what you think, what you're thinking now, what
you're
singing to your milk-blue eyes. It is not
like that.

It is not like being pressed together in a crowded staircase
or walking for some ways into the forest
until you find yourself surrounded by a thick darkness that
is
full of eyes.

And it is nothing like bursting forth
from a cabinet of mops and brooms into a world that smells
of

strange and wondrous meals:
apple pies, roast fish, corn smothered in butter.

It is holding a hand that belongs to a night with fangs.
It is pressing your breasts and thighs against a fearsome fern
with jagged leaves and trying not to breathe
at all, because each inhalation will slice
you open.

It is trying to sing through a hole in your throat,
it is hearing your sister sob through a hole in her throat,
it is listening for your father whisper through a hole in his
throat,

it is not finding your mother's smell under the acrid
seawater crawling into your nostrils.

And when you emerge, it is like someone has taken the
world

and shaken it with their hands over its mouth,
and somewhere the gods are silently screaming,
buried under these mountains, these cavernous waves.

Body

Vivian Buchanan

She slid off her jeans, one clinging leg at a time, quickly moving on to her tee shirt before her goose bumps made her think better of it. And then, with a quick timid glance ahead to see who was watching (no one was—they were all busying themselves with their charcoals and papers), she unhooked her bra the way she saw them do it in the movies: the back first and then the whole thing coming off at once. Stepping out of her panties just as quickly, she stacked the garments neatly on the floor below the platform on which she stood, shivering, as much for her nerves as for the cold to which she was so susceptible.

“Okay, Andrea,” a voice startled her from behind. “If you could start leaning against the pillow with the blanket like this.” Andrea moved the material with the woman’s motions, marveling at the fact that this was the first time she had ever been naked in front of someone whose name she had forgotten. “There we go. Thanks.”

And with that the occupants of the room began scratching away, marking her upon their surfaces.

She lay upon the hard, black stage, aware of every hair upon her body, radiating with an energy that was both excruciating and ecstatic. On display, her work of art, her life’s passion, herself, was to be judged in the eyes of the girl with oversized sweater over leggings next to the window, the boy with long hair, drawn up in a ponytail, adjacent. Yet they, and even the dark-haired boy in the front row, whom she recognized from her math class, drew up in her not the anxiety she had feared, but a strength that was unfamiliar.

Here she was, in this room, before these people who were to convert her form into contours and

dustings, critique her shape inadvertently as they translated from space to impression. And she couldn't help but recall her own analysis of herself as her eyes roamed mirrors, and windows, depicting her as a body into her as an image, her as a value, her as a comparison. Those reflections breathed frustration and loneliness and even nostalgia back out at her, sharpening the constant pricks of agitation and perfection and desperation that guided her life. But here, in this room, the artists breathed back at her the oxygen she so desperately needed. She felt their eyes touching each inch of her and she breathed deeper and faster, exhilarated with the knowledge that though she was bare for all to see, she was free here. For unlike the mirror, these people did not spray back at her the undesired figure she so badly wanted to escape. They took her in and left her there, in black and white and grey, forming from her raw material something beautiful.

Her thoughts, so used to fast-paced obsessions, circular justifications, attempted to steer her from this moment.

"What should we get for lunch?" Her mother had said. "There's some good salads and sandwiches here." *Damn. Damn, damn, damn,* she had thought to herself. Her mother wasn't supposed to ask about lunch. She was supposed to go about her own business so Andrea could just hold out until dinner. That's what she had planned after having the pancakes that morning. Otherwise she never would have had them.

"I'm not really that hungry yet. I had a big breakfast. And I'm getting an early dinner with Lizzie."

"Andrea," her mother had turned on her, looking her in the eyes. "You have to eat lunch. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner, come on." *Shit.* She had hoped to avoid a confrontation while home for spring break. "How has your eating been at school? Are you still struggling a lot?" *Avoid this conversation. Avoid this subject.*

"Um... I'm working on it. It's just hard having a different schedule here at home... I'll just pick out one of these salads I guess."

"Yeah, they look good, don't they?" And her mother

wheeled the cart towards the cashier, as Andrea's own thoughts had wheeled themselves into the gym parking lot. She would have to eat a salad. But it was okay; she would have time to workout out extra that day.

But Andrea only gave herself that one memory, that one touch upon food and exercise, for she did not want to miss one minute of this. She clung to the artists' gazes, not with her eyes, which she refused to bring to the faces of those before her for fear of blushing, but with every tired muscle in her body, every fiber of herself holding on so dearly to the self she had whittled down to something almost bearable. After weeks, and months, of treadmills and stationary bikes, and tears and thoughts of food, constant thoughts of food, every particle in her body rested, upon that black box where she laid modeling. For once, she was present in that body, experiencing with her pores and her freckles and her nails and her eyelashes the ocean that overflowed from the student's eyes and fingers as they guided their instruments so lovingly, so sharply into her outline. She was on the same side, this time, facing outward, instead of offering solely inward the hostility she could not control. And she wondered whether she would ever move again.



Gender norms will no longer be the norm.



Dans la Fôret

Reena de Lanerolle

On the Border

She stands on the border between insanity and sanity.
She fears that you will leave her, even though you
promised you would not.
She thinks that you are lying.
While she lies.
She lies to prevent this abandonment, that will not
even happen.
She's afraid that you will leave her.
She could not imagine life without you.
She needs you, so that she can feel.
It's not healthy.
She cries when she is alone.
She holds more anger than is ever shown.
She screams loudly without reason.
She runs happily at the slightest good moment.
She wants to be there for you.
Betrayal was not what she wanted.
She has thoughts that she could not balance.
She is trying to heal from this to become a better
person.
She doesn't want to be labeled like this anymore.
She wants to see the world in more than just black
and white.
She knows the beauty is out there, but it's out of
reach.
Forgive her; help her.

Whitten Montgomery

Reclaiming Language (and Kenyon)

Rebecca Chowdhury

I was at an afternoon lecture, slouching in my seat and doodling. We were discussing Greek mythology and I was tuning in and out to the stories about characters that sounded vaguely familiar. Hermes was one of the characters I decided to pay attention to when I heard the professor (Professor X) say, “You know Hermes? The one with those faggoty sandals...” I looked up to see Professor X smiling as several students laughed. As my gaze circled the classroom to ensure that I was hearing correctly and people really were laughing, I met the eyes of a friend sitting next to me.

“Did he really just say that?” she asked me.

“He just said the word ‘faggoty’ right?” I asked.

“Yeah, he did.”

For the next hour of the lecture, I could only think of how a professor, *a professor at Kenyon*, could say something like that and how students, *students at Kenyon*, could laugh at his use of such an offensive word. I had heard that word over and over again throughout high school, but I didn’t expect it to hear anything so offensive at a college that prides itself on its sense of community. Even worse, the term was used by a professor. And it was condoned.

I was so disturbed by the incident that I began to question my decision to come to Kenyon and whether I had been deceived by the admissions office about the environment of the school. Before further altering my impression of Kenyon, I decided to talk to Professor X. When speaking to him during office hours I asked, “During the lecture last week, I thought I heard you describing Hermes’ sandals when you said, ‘those faggoty sandals?’” He nodded his head and replied,

“Yes, you see, I’m gay. And as someone who is gay I thought I would use the word—a really charged word—in a completely ridiculous context. I mean, it was what? To describe sandals. I thought it would show how the word itself is ridiculous and take away some of its strength and its meaning.”

As a member of the LGBTQ community, Professor X was reclaiming language. I was relieved to learn that my impression of the Kenyon community hadn’t been completely inaccurate. Professor X wasn’t intending to offend anyone when he used the word *fag*, in fact, he wasn’t even aware that he came off as homophobic (he assumed we realized or already knew that he was gay). As relieved as I was, the idea of reclaiming language continued to bother me. I couldn’t understand why you would risk being so horribly misinterpreted just to try to take away the offensive nature of a word. On the one hand, I understood the relationship between language and oppression. The words others and we use are one of the ways we encounter oppression on a daily basis. For example, offensive terms like *fag* reinforce the idea that the LGBTQ community is an inferior and abnormal other group. Refraining from using offensive words like *fag* and encouraging others to do the same can challenge the oppression of the LGBTQ community. It helps others understand the power their words have to affect others, and if this can be done in a straightforward, direct way, then why resort to trying to reclaim once offensive language and risk being misjudged to accomplish the same goal?

The entire idea behind reclaiming language can be better understood if we look at some of the other words that are being reclaimed and the reasons behind reclaiming them. Members of the LGBTQ community have begun reclaiming the words “*queer*” and “*dyke*,” and within the feminist movement, some have begun reclaiming the words “*bitch*”

and “ho” amongst many others.

Arguments to reclaim the term queer question the categories into which we are all divided based on our sex, gender and sexuality. Basically, you’re expected to fulfill gender roles, which are based on sex. So biological females are supposed to be feminine which includes acting passive and enjoying shopping and gossiping. Meanwhile, biological males are supposed to be masculine, which includes acting tough and assertive and enjoying watching, and/or playing sports. We expect men and women who generally fulfill these gender roles to be heterosexual, while those who break these rules, like a man who acts feminine, we believe to be abnormal exceptions i.e. homosexuals. Before reclaiming the word queer, it has been proposed that it is redefined to include anyone who sees him or herself as limited by these categories that assume a person’s sexuality and set rules on how they should behave. Redefining and reclaiming the word by the LGBTQ community widens its support base because both homosexuals and heterosexuals can identify as queer and empathize with other members of the group (Drechsler, 2003:273). Also, this reinvention of the word queer provides it with a meaning that raises awareness about the existence of these expectations and the way we’re all limited by them. LGBTQ members’ refraining from using the word queer to not offend people doesn’t have this same affect of increasing awareness, which more than balances out the risks of being misconstrued by using the word.

The idea of abandoning these categories that we are expected to conform to is closely related to the theory behind reclaiming the terms fag, bitch and dyke. Fag and bitch have both been reclaimed to rid words of their ability to degrade any other group. This idea is explained by the editors of Bitch magazine in regards to their title choice:

When it’s being used as an insult, bitch is an epithet hurled at women who speak their minds, who have opinions and don’t shy away from expressing them . . . we stand firm in our belief that if we choose to take the

word [bitch] as a compliment, it loses its power to hurt us. (Bondy, 2009)

When used as an insult, the word bitch promotes gender roles by singling out women who aren't passive and typically feminine. The reclaiming of the word helps combat these sexist ideas and categories. Similarly, reclaiming the word fag rids it of its significance as something that alienates the LGBTQ community members from mainstream society, transforming it into a mere word instead of an epithet.

The term dyke can be transformed into a mere word by reclaiming it and abandoning the connotations attached to it. When used as an insult the word promotes sexism and the view that heterosexuality is normal whereas homosexuality is abnormal, which leads to the oppression of homosexuals. By reclaiming the word, these connotations and the oppressive system they represent are dismissed. Reclaiming the term bitch also rejects sexism and reclaiming fag rejects the idea that homosexuality is deviant.

Each of these words can be used to empower or to oppress. We can grasp its purpose by considering the context it's used in. The meanings of these words are "fluid" because they change based on the context (Remlinger 1997). By recognizing their flexibility, we're also realizing the flexibility of our identities. Just as the words can't be assigned one definition, we can't expect ourselves to fulfill roles and expectations that have been defined for us and not even by us.

These expectations affect all of us, whether its when a woman is insultingly called a bitch for being assertive or a young man who's expected to be interested in sports is teased for being a fag for having atypical interests or a different situation. These roles keep marginalized groups, like women and the LGBTQ community, oppressed and one of the ways they are upheld is through language. By being careful of the words we use and how we use them or maybe reclaiming the language of a marginalized group you belong to we can help overthrow this systemic oppression. As idealistic and

unrealistic as it sounds, we are confronted by these issues in everyday encounters. After all, when Professor X used the word fag, many students did laugh and how many of them knew that he is gay? The students who laughed were doing so despite the seemingly offensive way in which he used the word fag. Unconsciously, through their laughter, they reaffirmed the idea that the people who identify as LGBTQ are abnormal and so they deserved to be marginalized.

If I hadn't spoken to the professor about the incident, I wouldn't be able to view Kenyon in the same light and believe that it's a school that values community. Even though those students who laughed shake this sense of community, it would've been made much weaker if Professor X had meant the word fag offensively. I also would've continued to see reclaiming language as some new age, hippy crap instead of understanding how it can lead to overthrowing oppression. So when someone uses an offensive term, try speaking to him or her about it. What's the worst that can happen? They could completely disregard what you're saying and if you're a woman, they could call you a bitch and if you're a man they could call you a fag, but understanding the oppression and limiting categories that they're promoting by using those terms and feeling unscathed as a result, you can tell them to go fuck themselves. But after all, this is Kenyon, and a conversation like that is most likely not happening.

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contributors

Elizabeth Bailey
Vivian Buchanan
Rebecca Chowdhury
Carling FitzSimmons
Reena de Lanerolle
Emma Lippincott
Megan Llewellyn
Linda Mullin
Whitten Montgomery
Melissa Nigro
Morgan Peele
Laura Spiegler