

## **Vampires, Werewolves, and Oppression: *Twilight* and Female Gender Stereotypes**

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This paper rhetorically analyzes the issue of femininity in the four books of Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series. It argues that the image of women—particularly in the context of relationships—presented in the series is oppressive to women because it shows domestic violence by their male partners as acceptable, portrays its female protagonist in a stereotypical manner, and endorses unequal relationships in which the woman is at a disadvantage. These findings are troubling because of the series' immense popularity and the ways in which media representations of women can affect young women's conceptions of acceptable female roles.

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Stephenie Meyer's four-book *Twilight* series has become immensely popular, selling over 116 million copies worldwide as of March 2011 (Memmott). The series has become a particular obsession with many young women, who are enchanted by its tale of true love between a human girl and a vampire. In fact, in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Caitlin Flanagan calls the books "contenders for the most popular teen-girl novels of all time" (110). When Stephenie Meyer gives a reading, "lineups of 2,000 or more teen girls, many dressed as vampires, are the standard," and in 2009 over 69,000 diehard *Twilight* fans, known as "twihards"—many of them young women—made the "pilgrimage" to the small town of Forks, Washington, where the series is set (Bethune; Henheffer).

However, this popularity is cause for concern, as the series displays worrying gender ideology that strictly conforms to gender stereotypes. This paper will argue that the image of women and relationships presented in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series is oppressive to women because it legitimizes violence against women by their male partners, portrays its heroine as stereotypically feminine, and glorifies unequal relationships in which the woman is dependent on the man. This is a troubling phenomenon considering the effect that media can have on women's conceptions of acceptable feminine behavior, and the way many young women have made the series central to their lives.

In examining the *Twilight* series, this paper employs a *feminist* rhetorical mode of criticism and analysis, which shares two basic principles of feminism in general. First, feminist criticism sees women as oppressed by a patriarchal culture that subordinates "women's interests . . . to those of men," and in which "women are seen as inferior to men" (Foss 166). Second, feminist criticism argues that cultural practices—including, but not limited to, the generation of rhetorical texts (like the *Twilight* series)—create and develop oppressive gender relations. Thus, as a mode of analysis, feminist rhetorical criticism seeks to "discover how the rhetorical construction of gender [in a given artifact(s)] is used as a means of oppression" (Foss 168). In approaching the

*Twilight* series from a feminist perspective, this paper examines how the books reinforce traditional and oppressive female roles and stereotypes through word choice and the development of the characters and their relationships with one another.

The effect of the media on women has been the topic of much scholarship. A particularly ubiquitous topic is the effect of advertising—and the images of acceptable femininity that it sells with its products—on young women’s self-esteem, self-image, and conceptions of femininity. This discussion is germane to the discussion of the *Twilight* series because, as in advertisements and other mass media, the books are also selling both physical items and an ideology. The series is selling itself, bumper stickers, T-shirts, movie tickets, and, more importantly, a conception of what it means to be a woman and in a relationship. Thus the books tap into the same cultural messages that are consistently presented to young women in other forms of media, and readers should react to them in similar ways.

While advertisements or the *Twilight* series might seem harmless, women can actually react to them in profound ways, and the cumulative effect of cultural messages conveyed through the media can cause real damage. According to a report by the American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, exposure to sexualized female “ideals” in the media has been correlated with disordered eating, lower self-esteem, and feelings of anxiety. Furthermore, frequent exposure to sexualizing media images “affects how girls conceptualize femininity and sexuality,” with those who consume media images more often “offer[ing] stronger endorsement of sexual stereotypes” (Zurbriggen et al.). In Jean Kilbourne’s film *Killing Us Softly 3*, she presents a quote from a 1991 editorial in *Advertising Age* that admits that “sexism, sexual harassment, and the cultural portrayal of women in advertising are inextricably linked” (Jhally and Kilbourne). What this analysis of the *Twilight* series allows us to consider is how these same messages function in similar ways in fiction, thus reinforcing cultural ideals of women as weak, passive, and moving within narrowly defined roles.

Critics of the series do not always agree on what exactly *Twilight* is selling, but common themes include an old-fashioned conception of female passivity and domesticity, and an ideology surrounding sexuality, marriage, and childbearing that fits with the Mormon Church, of which Stephenie Meyer is a member (Flanagan 117). While the current analysis reinforces many of these past criticisms, analyses of the series have often overlooked the pervasive overtones of male dominance of women, and the ways that Meyer rhetorically sanctions such dominance—including her promotion of domestic abuse.

The first way that the *Twilight* series’ portrayal of women and relationships is oppressive to women is in its legitimation of violence against women in relationships, equating romantic excitement with fear and the threat of violence and portraying acts of violence as acceptable parts of loving relationships. The romantic tension between Bella, *Twilight*’s heroine and narrator, and Edward, her vampire love interest, is always related to the fact that Edward thirsts for her blood and could kill her if he lost his self-control for even a moment. In *Twilight*, the first book of the series, Edward explicitly tells Bella this when he’s explaining to her why the two of them cannot be physically intimate: “I could kill you quite easily, Bella, simply by accident. . . . I could reach out, meaning to touch your face, and crush your skull by mistake. You don’t realize how incredibly *breakable* you are. I can never, never afford to lose any kind of control when I’m with you” (310). Instead of being disturbed by this threatening news, Bella finds it romantic, and a page later tells him that she has “never felt like this about anyone before, not even close” (311).

In fact, throughout the text, Bella's fear is synonymous with romantic excitement. Bella explicitly says that this threat is romantic to her when she tells the reader, after describing the chills she feels at the thought of being alone with Edward, that she "couldn't feel the right kind of fear"—that is, the kind that would cause her to come to her senses and fear for her life (*Twilight* 141). Instead, she feels only romantic excitement. Early on in their budding romance, Edward tells her, "I'm not a good friend for you," and Bella notes that "[b]ehind his smile, the warning was real" (*Twilight* 88). The tension in this scene, which is meant to be romantic, is described in terms of Bella's fear: Bella tells the reader that she is "trying to ignore the sudden trembling in my stomach and keep my voice even" (*Twilight* 89). The overall impression the reader gets of their early courtship is one of threat and danger—and this would be particularly salient for the young women for whom this series is written. Flanagan argues that "the *Twilight* series so resonates with girls because it perfectly encapsulates the giddiness and the rapture—and the menace—that inherently accompany romance and sex for them" (117). In other words, relationships and sexuality are new, and therefore scary, for young women, and *Twilight* exploits this by making the budding relationship between Bella and Edward explicitly and physically threatening. By appealing to young women's desire for love in this way, the series reinforces stereotypes and promotes dangerous relationships.

The romantic excitement related to the development of Bella's relationship with her other love interest, young werewolf Jacob, is also suffused with violence. He warns her in much the same way as Edward does: "I'm not supposed to be around you, Bella. . . . [I]t's not safe for *you*. If I get too mad . . . too upset . . . you might get hurt" (*New Moon* 311). Later, his romantic advances are also described in violent terms. When he first kisses her, Bella says that he does so "angrily, roughly," holding the back of her head in a way that "[makes] escape impossible" (*Eclipse* 330). "His lips forced mine open," she says, and by the time the kiss is over it is hard not to draw the conclusion that Bella has been assaulted (*Eclipse* 331). The next time they kiss is very similar: Jacob kisses her "with an eagerness that [is] not far from violence," and Bella goes on to describe him "[grabbing] roughly," "shaking me," and "dragging me to him" (*Eclipse* 536). Instead of stopping him or fearing for her physical safety, she responds by kissing him back, and afterwards concludes that she is "in love with him," later describing him as her "soul mate" (528, 599). In short, Bella's responsiveness to fear and threats of violence in her relationships with Edward and Jacob implies that women are attracted to violence. To use the words of Jean Kilbourne, it "eroticizes violence against women," and presents violence and dominance as romantic (Jhally and Kilbourne). This teaches a young woman that it is okay for a man to threaten or physically harm her—which is dangerous, considering that battery is the leading cause of injury to women in America (Kilbourne 277). *Twilight* contributes to the ideology that leads to this high rate of battery by portraying it as something desirable.

The second way that the series legitimizes violence against women is that it portrays violent acts against women as acceptable within the context of loving relationships. In some cases there is only a hint of violence, as when Bella finds it "flattering" that Edward has been breaking into her house and stalking her (*Twilight* 292). However, actual violence is also portrayed as acceptable in the series: this is primarily shown through Bella's reactions to such violence. For example, the morning after Edward and Bella have sex for the first time on their honeymoon, Bella is left with "large, purplish bruises" covering her arms and extending to her shoulders and ribs—bruises, Edward shows her, whose shapes exactly match his fingers (*Breaking Dawn* 89). This

should be cause for concern, as Bella has basically been battered by her husband during sex, but instead, Bella describes their first sexual encounter as “wonderful and perfect,” and refuses to hold Edward responsible for the damage (*Breaking Dawn* 92). She describes herself as “so happy” (*Breaking Dawn* 90). Edward is angry with himself, but he expresses his anger by distancing himself from her—his voice is “hard,” his face is “severe and cold,” and at one point in their conversation he becomes completely unresponsive (*Breaking Dawn* 87, 90). He even goes so far as to berate her for allowing him to have sex with her, asking her with a “livid” expression, “Did you *expect* this, Bella?” (*Breaking Dawn* 92). Much of his anger seems to stem from the fact that she is “the means of his ability to prove his self-control,” and once he loses that self-control, his anger reflects back onto her for putting him in that situation (Seifert). When Edward implicitly blames Bella for his violence against her, he is also referencing the cultural belief that all women are temptresses (Kilbourne 281). This interaction between the couple after their sexual encounter normalizes battering and implies that men should not be held responsible for their actions.

Furthermore, when Bella discovers that Sam Uley, the leader of the werewolves, has shockingly disfigured his fiancé Emily during a moment of anger, she does not see it as cause for alarm. Bella describes Emily’s injuries in detail, saying that the “right side of her face was scarred from hairline to chin by three thick, red lines, livid in color though they were long healed” and that when Emily’s sleeves are pushed up, Bella “could see that the scars extended all the way down her arm to the back of her right hand” (*New Moon* 331, 333). Jacob tells Bella that “Sam lost control of his temper for just one second . . . and [Emily] was standing too close” (*New Moon* 345). Again the idea of men as unable to control themselves—and therefore as blameless for their actions—is presented. As horrific as Emily’s injuries are, Bella is disturbed only briefly, and goes on to describe the relationship she observes between Sam and Emily as “[singing] out loud with joy and life and true love” (*New Moon* 333). It does not seem to occur to her that this relationship, which she perceives as being based on *true love*, is abusive and extremely dangerous to Emily’s physical safety. Only Sam’s apparently tenuous grasp on his self-control is keeping Emily from being grievously hurt. Even when Bella *does* consider Sam’s brutal behavior, she does not hold him responsible for the deed, just as she does not hold Edward responsible for hurting her on their honeymoon. Instead, she sympathizes with him, stating, “I shuddered at the thought of how Sam must have felt every time he looked at Emily’s face” (*New Moon* 340). By focusing on how Sam “must have felt,” instead of on the undeniable truth of what he has done, she essentially absolves him of all blame for harming his then-girlfriend. This normalization of abuse and refusal to blame its perpetrator could be very harmful for a young woman who, entering into the world of romance and sexuality, has internalized the idea that healthy, loving relationships can allow for physical abuse.

In addition to legitimizing violence against women, the *Twilight* series also oppresses women by portraying Bella as stereotypically feminine, characterizing her as delicate, having stereotypical interests, and being fulfilled only by traditional female roles. First, Bella is consistently characterized as fragile, both in her appearance and her reactions. This delicacy is hinted at in the passages that normalize violence against women—because fragility and passivity are equated with acceptable womanhood, allowing oneself to be hurt is a way of affirming that femininity. However, Bella’s fragility is shown in a more straightforward way throughout the series. For instance, at the beginning of *Twilight*, Bella says of herself, “I was ivory-skinned. . . . I had

always been slender, but soft somehow, obviously not an athlete” (10). Her pale skin is an ideal of female beauty from the past, and her thinness an indication of her delicacy. Even in this brief description, the text makes it very clear that Bella is not strong—instead, she is “soft,” and “obviously” lacks physical strength. Her delicacy and paleness are also emphasized at later points in the series: for example, when Jacob describes her as “a porcelain doll” (*New Moon* 179). In addition to her physical characteristics, her delicate female constitution is indicated by certain key reactions. For example, she consistently swoons when Edward kisses her: at one point she literally collapses when his lips touch hers (*Twilight* 319). Later, at the end of *Twilight*, when Edward kisses her while she is in the hospital, she notes that the beeping of her heart monitor accelerates and then completely ceases (*Twilight* 463). Furthermore, Bella is also extremely squeamish: at the sight of blood she becomes so faint that she can hardly walk (*Twilight* 95–96; *Eclipse* 219). Her reactions show that she is easily overwhelmed and has no control over her emotions and actions, demonstrating that she needs protection and justifying Edward’s domination of her.

Second, Bella is also stereotypically feminine in her interests and activities. To begin with, she is constantly cooking and cleaning the house for her father. For instance, as soon as she arrives in Forks to live with him, she says, “I requested that I be assigned kitchen detail for the duration of my stay,” and from that point on it is frequently mentioned that she, like a good woman, is cooking dinner (*Twilight* 31). This is not something that Bella does purely for the enjoyment of it, but because she wants to be “good”—that is, because she feels obligated as a woman to do such tasks. Her feeling of obligation is clear later on in the series, when she has neglected this duty because she has been spending time with Jacob. She says that she spent the afternoon making lasagna because she “was being good, trying to atone for all the pizza” her father has been forced to order in her absence (*New Moon* 167). Meyer mentions these instances only in passing, as though Bella’s obligation to cook is something that the reader should take for granted. Furthermore, Meyer emphasizes in the series that Bella is *not* interested in cars, motorcycles, or sports, and is not interested in them precisely because they are supposed to be masculine. For example, when Jacob and his friends are excitedly discussing the motorcycle Jacob is repairing for her, Bella makes the comment “I figured I’d have to have a Y chromosome to really understand the excitement” (*New Moon* 139). Later, when she is at lunch and is trying to pick up threads of conversation, she notes that “Mike and Conner were talking sports, so I gave up on that one at once” (*New Moon* 154). Bella’s way of dismissing stereotypically male interests as irrelevant to herself demonstrates to young readers that it is unacceptable, as a woman, to have these interests, and keeps femininity in its traditional, well-defined box.

Finally, Bella is portrayed as stereotypically feminine in that she finds fulfillment and strength only when she assumes the traditional female roles of wife and mother. Bella’s dreams come true when she is turned into a vampire directly after giving birth to her daughter Renesmee in *Breaking Dawn*. The very fact of her becoming a vampire adheres to a feminine ideal for her, as it is closely tied with self-sacrifice and protecting her child—she allows Edward to turn her into a vampire because she needs “to let her human self die in order to save their half-vampire baby” (Seifert). In her article from *Studies in the Novel*, “Twilight Is Not Good for Maidens,” Anna Silver notes how Bella’s transformation is further connected to traditional female roles: “[B]ecause her transformation into a vampire is so closely connected with becoming a mother, Bella’s vampirism is . . . closely tied, symbolically, to motherhood” (132). Therefore, when Bella

says that she was “born to be a vampire,” she is essentially saying that she was born to be a wife and mother (*Breaking Dawn* 524). Furthermore, as a vampire, she essentially becomes perfect. Among other things, she says that she is “stronger than Edward,” her voice is “like singing,” and she is even smarter: she has “so much room in my head,” and her mind is “good at all kinds of calculations” (*Breaking Dawn* 393, 394, 397, 520). She also becomes “indisputably beautiful” (*Breaking Dawn* 403). This emphasis on the suddenly leveled playing field between Bella and Edward may seem relatively progressive, but the reality is that all of these improvements convey a misguided separate-but-equal mentality about men and women—Bella can “find true equality” with Edward, a man, if she embraces her femininity and takes on the role of wife and mother (Silver 132). Bella’s newfound abilities go further: as a vampire she gains the power to “shield” herself and others from attack by other gifted vampires—a protective power that is a supernatural manifestation of the caretaking wife/mother role (*Breaking Dawn* 600). The message to young readers is that women find happiness and fulfillment only in traditional female roles, again narrowing conceptions of “acceptable womanhood” down to domesticity and childbearing.

This message in particular is carried beyond Bella’s character, as it is also a major trait of many of the other supernatural females. In the series, female vampires and werewolves are always sterile, while the males experience no reproductive repercussions, and many of the supernatural females spend a great deal of time agonizing over the loss of their fertility. For example, Leah, the only female werewolf, stops having her period after her transformations begin. She bitterly describes herself as a “freak” and a “genetic dead end,” and Jacob speculates that she may have become the only female werewolf in existence because she is not “as female as she should be” (*Breaking Dawn* 317–18). Rosalie and Esme, two of the primary female vampires, also have backstories that accentuate the tragedy of their sterile state and demonstrate their yearning for children. Esme, the mother figure of the Cullen coven, became a vampire after trying to kill herself when her baby died a few days after birth (*Twilight* 368). She says that she “never got over her mothering instincts,” and thinks of Edward and his “siblings” as her children (*Twilight* 363). Even though she cannot reproduce, the urge to mother is so strong that she has “made do” with these “substitutes” (*Eclipse* 167). Rosalie, another female member of the coven, feels the loss of potential children even more keenly than Esme. Relaying her story to Bella, Rosalie says that when she was a human she “yearned for my own little baby,” and that she “felt truly jealous” for the first time in her life when her friend had a son (*Eclipse* 156). After a near-death experience and her transformation into a vampire, Rosalie strongly feels the loss of her fertility—in fact, this is often her driving personality trait. All three of these characters demonstrate the stereotype of women as nurturing caregivers who are fulfilled only through childrearing, again defining a narrow role of what it means to be a woman.

The examples of these three women who long for children but cannot have them because they are superhuman show both the inferiority and the stereotyping of women in the *Twilight* series. Since becoming a supernatural being is one of the primary ways that characters become strong and capable in the series, the fact that females lose their reproductive identity in gaining supernatural abilities indicates that women are not naturally strong. To the contrary, a woman cannot be strong in the series without losing a large part of what makes her female. The supernatural women’s reaction to this loss—obsessing over not being able to have children and questioning their femininity—demonstrates that women are left unfulfilled when they cannot be mothers. This introduces a narrow conception of femininity that devalues a plethora of meaningful choices

that a young woman might make, merely because they are unrelated to the family or to caring for children. It also incidentally devalues career-oriented goals, which are so often juxtaposed with family life. Under this ideological scheme, a successful female lawyer who is single and childless would be a complete failure—and that message is problematic in a world where women are already at an economic disadvantage. Like advertising, which frequently portrays women in a domestic context, these books function to keep women in traditional roles.

Finally, in addition to legitimizing violence against women and portraying Bella as stereotypically feminine, the *Twilight* series oppresses women by glorifying unequal relationships in which the woman is dependent on the man, as the books emphasize Edward's superiority to Bella, show that Bella's happiness is dependent on Edward, and portray relationships in which the male is either literally or metaphorically the adult, while the female is childlike. This dependency is closely related to the stereotypically feminine portrayal of Bella throughout the series: because Bella is a fragile caretaker, Edward must take up the opposing role of protector.

Throughout the series, Bella frequently notes that Edward is superior to her in terms of strength, appearance, and intelligence. Early on in *Twilight*, Bella notes that Edward is "able to lift full-sized vans with one hand," and throughout the rest of the series he performs various feats of strength and dexterity that serve as a stark contrast to Bella's weakness (*Twilight* 79). Their relative strengths are frequently contrasted, with references, for example, to Edward "breaking my grip effortlessly" (*Twilight* 363). Bella also frequently compares her appearance, which she considers to be "absolutely ordinary," to Edward's "bewildering perfection" (*Twilight* 210). These comparisons later progress to self-disparagement, as when she describes herself as "hideous" next to Edward (*New Moon* 464). Furthermore, Edward is more intelligent than Bella: for example, while they are doing homework together, Bella says that Edward "finished in minutes," while she "slogged laboriously" through the work (*Eclipse* 50). More generally, Bella notes that Edward is "good at just about everything," a point that is made in various instances in the saga (*Breaking Dawn* 76). While many of these skills are explained away by Edward's vampirism and age, the fact remains that Edward, as the man, is superior, and that their relationship is far from an equal partnership. Instead, their relationship is one in which Bella keenly feels that she "[isn't] good enough for" Edward, and is never able to match his prowess (*New Moon* 70). She even tells Edward that she readily accepted it when he said he did not love her because "it never made sense for you to love me" (*New Moon* 511). Many young readers idealize Edward and Bella's relationship as one of perfect "true love," so it is problematic that within this relationship Bella consistently feels inadequate and anxious about her ability to keep Edward's interest. Since this is their ideal, young women may not realize that their relationship is hopelessly lopsided—and might therefore accept such an unhealthy relationship in their own lives.

The text also makes it abundantly clear that Bella's happiness is directly dependent on Edward. In *New Moon*, Edward has left Bella for her own protection, and Bella becomes practically catatonic without him. She has nightmares "every night," and describes her pain at the separation as a "hole in my chest" (*New Moon* 122, 123). She is described, by herself and by others, as "lifeless" (*New Moon* 99). When Bella begins hearing Edward's voice in her head, warning her to stop when she is doing something dangerous, she deliberately involves herself in hazardous situations because she is desperate for connection to him. She literally jumps off a cliff in order to hear Edward's voice, which she describes (as she is about to step off the cliff) as "the most perfect of all voices" (*New Moon* 358). She even explicitly says that her life revolves

around Edward when she compares herself to “a lost moon” whose planet has been destroyed (*New Moon* 201). The impression that Bella has no happiness or ambition in life beyond being with Edward is further strengthened throughout the series, especially regarding the issue of college. Near the beginning of *Eclipse*, for instance, Bella receives an acceptance letter from a college in Alaska. She is completely apathetic about this and is reluctant to discuss it with her father, mentioning that she chose the college only because the sky in Alaska is overcast for the majority of the year, making it easier for Edward to live there (*Eclipse* 16). Only a page later we see a complete change in Bella’s attitude as Edward arrives: when she hears him knocking at the door, she is “ridiculously eager” to answer and describes him as her “personal miracle” (*Eclipse* 17). By the end of the series, college is no longer even mentioned, as Bella has happily given it up in favor of marrying Edward and bearing his child. Her attitude towards college is a clear example of her dependence on Edward and her apathy towards anything that does not involve him. The message to young readers is that the only thing that is important is a relationship with a man, and that career and educational goals can legitimately be set aside in favor of that relationship.

Additionally, in the primary relationship of the saga, Bella is consistently described as childlike, while Edward is portrayed as the adult. In *Twilight*, Bella describes Edward “cradling me in his arms like a small child” (280). Later, he picks her up by “gripping the tops of my arms” as though she were “a toddler” (*Twilight* 297). When Edward forces her to let him drive her home even though she wants to drive herself, she sulks, her face “in full pout mode,” as though she is a willful child who did not get her way (*Twilight* 104). Likewise, in *Eclipse*, Edward explicitly asks his adopted sister Alice to “babysit Bella” for him when he has business to take care of (421). He even expresses disapproval when she asks for a Coke, knowing her “low tolerance for caffeine,” exactly as a parent would do (*New Moon* 494).

This dynamic is not, however, limited to Bella and Edward’s relationship, and is not even limited to the metaphorical. The child-adult dynamic between women and men takes a more literal—and disturbing—turn when Meyer describes the werewolves’ imprinting, a process by which they are bonded to their perfect mate. This can happen when the mate is any age: Jacob’s friend Quil, for example, imprints on a two-year-old. Jacob explains to Bella that “Quil will be the best, kindest big brother any kid ever had . . . and then, when she’s grown up, they’ll be as happy as Emily and Sam” (*Eclipse* 176). This situation is the ultimate literal expression of what is found throughout the books: the woman in the relationship is childlike, dependent on the man for guidance and protection, as though he were a father or older brother. The woman also does not have the choice to live independently from a man in this scenario: instead, it is assumed that the woman (or in this case, little girl) will one day need a man, and the characters see nothing wrong with preemptively providing her with one while she is still a young child. Again, this sends the message to young women that a relationship with a man is of paramount importance, superseding other goals or aspirations.

In the *Twilight* series, the image of women—and particularly women in the context of relationships—is oppressive to women in a variety of ways that oppose feminist ideals and set women back to the heyday of sexism. The series legitimizes violence against women, depicts Bella in a stereotypical way, and glorifies an inequality in relationships that puts women at a disadvantage. *Twilight* may seem trivial, but it is part of a larger cultural phenomenon of mass media images that subordinate and oppress women, and indeed its frivolity may allow its mes-



sage to work more effectively. While it may be true that young readers “might not yet have developed the critical apparatus of the adult reader,” even audiences with well-honed critical skills may let the messages of *Twilight* fly under the radar because they fail to take the books seriously (Silver 122). The first steps in combating the messages that *Twilight* is reinforcing is to take them seriously, to think critically about why the series resonates so much with women and girls, and to start a conversation about why the popularity of these books is so problematic.

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