Bad Romance: Dracula, Twilight, and Rape Culture
by 100indecisions

Summary

My no-kidding master's thesis, the tl;dr version of which can be summarized as "Twilight sucks, but not because teenage girls love it or because it contains sparkling vampires". Actual abstract: "Despite being generally received as wholesome entertainment, Stephenie Meyer’s Twilight series implicitly supports rape culture by subtly reinforcing dangerous ideas about romance and relationships. In order to demonstrate the pervasive nature of these attitudes at work in the Twilight series, this paper first describes the concept itself and the crucial features of the beliefs that support it. Dracula—and, more importantly, the prevailing cultural perceptions about Stoker’s novel—functions as an important intertext for Twilight thanks to its status as one of the earliest popular vampire novels, and I use it to show how these attitudes can normalize certain assumptions about sexuality in a context generally assumed to involve a clear sexual interpretation. My examination of the books in Meyer’s modern vampire narrative takes this idea further, arguing that the same attitudes applied to Dracula provide an even more subtle representation of the mindsets that comprise and perpetuate rape culture."

Notes
I originally finished and defended this thesis in summer 2011, and it didn't occur to me for a long time that AO3 might be a good place to post it. A few things have changed since then in my understanding of these issues, and I'll address those briefly at the end of the relevant chapters. The first few chapters reflect how I divided up my actual thesis, but then we get to the part where the analysis of *Twilight* is like 75% of the paper's entire length and I figured I'd better break that up a bit too. Sources, including links to a couple really good blog posts on rape culture that didn't make it into my actual bibliography, can be found in the "Works Cited" chapter.
Introduction and Literature Review

With his left hand he held both Mrs Harker's hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension; his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. Her white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man’s bare breast which was shown by his torn-open dress. The attitude of the two had a terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten’s nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink.

Bram Stoker, *Dracula*

[Edward] got out and walked around the car to open my door. He held out his hand. I sat stubbornly in my seat, arms folded, feeling a secret twinge of smugness. The lot was crowded with people in formal dress: witnesses. He couldn’t remove me forcibly from the car as he might have if we’d been alone.

Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight*

Vampires have become nearly ubiquitous in modern popular culture. Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* books remain best-sellers, and they continue to spawn spinoffs from other authors eager to cash in on the phenomenon. The movies based on these books keep breaking box-office records, and every new trend in young-adult literature draws inevitable comparisons to the massive popularity of Meyer’s sparkling bloodsuckers. The franchise has been said to owe much of its popularity to its so-called “abstinence porn,” a sexualized portrayal of abstinence that creates erotically charged scenes in which the characters go little further than hand-holding (Seltzer). At the same time, vampires seem inherently connected to ideas about sexuality, repressed and otherwise, an attitude that can be traced back at least to ideas about Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, one of the first vampire stories that earned wide popularity. Both popular and academic perceptions of *Dracula* seem to see this original popular vampire story as the genesis of the vampire/sex connection, as evidenced by the articles that continue to appear on the subject of sexuality in Stoker’s novel and the interpretations presented in recent film adaptations; in fact, the idea as a whole almost seems natural. Perhaps Stoker’s Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker, frustrated by the repressive mores of their era, actually welcomed Dracula’s bites and took pleasure in a transgressive act that still allowed them to retain the identity of pure, virginal women untainted by sexual desire.

Judging by the mostly uncritical acceptance of the treatment of women and relationships in popular modern novels like *Twilight*, it is easy to argue that too little has changed since Victorian times. The cultural perceptions of *Dracula* that have turned Lucy and Mina from terrified, violated victims to willing participants translates a bit differently in the *Twilight* series, but the attitudes presented are just as unhealthy: the repeated image is one of supernatural, near-invincible males who are essentially allowed to treat the young female protagonist as an object to be protected, physically moved around, and sometimes ignored, all because these males supposedly love her and know what is best for her. In this way, Meyer’s books—often perceived and lauded as wholesome entertainment for their unusual emphasis on abstinence—implicitly support what some have labeled “rape culture” by subtly normalizing and reinforcing dangerous ideas about romance and relationships. Perhaps just as significantly, the popularity of the series demonstrates that these attitudes are still alive and well in modern society, despite the great strides made in the struggle for equality for women. In order to demonstrate the pervasive nature of these rape-culture attitudes at work in the *Twilight* series, I will first describe the concept of “rape culture” itself and the crucial features of the beliefs that support it even in nonsexual situations. *Dracula* functions as an
important intertext for *Twilight* thanks to its status as one of the earliest popular vampire novels, and I will extend this analysis to the prevailing cultural perceptions of Stoker’s novel to show how these attitudes can normalize certain assumptions about sexuality in a context generally assumed to involve a clear sexual interpretation. My examination of the four books in Meyer’s modern and wildly popular vampire narrative takes this idea further, arguing that the same attitudes applied to *Dracula* provide an even more subtle (and, therefore, more insidious) representation of the mindsets that comprise and perpetuate rape culture.

One of the earliest usages of the term “rape culture” comes from Dianne Herman’s chapter of the same name in *Women: A Feminist Perspective*, published in 1984. She describes the similarity between ideas of normal heterosexual relations and rape:

Normal heterosexual relations are pictured as consisting of an aggressive male forcing himself on a female who seems to fear sex but unconsciously wants to be overpowered. …Thus it is very difficult in our society to differentiate rape from “normal” heterosexual relations. Indeed, our culture can be characterized as a rape culture because the image of heterosexual intercourse is based on a rape model of sexuality. (21)

When Herman wrote this article, rape was one of the most unreported and unconvicted crimes in the country, and it remains so today, in large part because the credibility of rape victims is questioned more than that of victims of any other crime. Herman describes police officers actually asking such questions as “How many orgasms did you have?” and “Didn’t I pick you up last week for prostitution?” (28), further reinforcing these cultural ideas that conflate rape with appropriate, consensual sex. Because men are viewed as sexual aggressors, this aggressiveness is seen as a necessary element of their masculinity; at the same time, the argument goes, women are taught to play “hard to get” and to flirt by initially rebuffing suitors even if they are actually interested, but they are also taught that it is unfeminine to be rude or cold. These attitudes combine to teach men that “no” does not mean “no” and that they have a right to assert their masculinity through forced sex if necessary, and that women can consent through their clothing or behavior even if they have actually said “no.” When rape occurs, the rapist often defends his actions and blames the victim, perhaps for turning him on or not fighting him strenuously enough, and society tends to take the same stance—as, in many cases, do the victims themselves. It is difficult to find justice for a crime like this when even the victim has been conditioned to believe that she was fully or partly responsible.

Published shortly before Herman’s article, Shotland and Goodstein’s study on perceptions of rape presents many of the same facts, even if it does not use the specific term “rape culture.” Their article describes the factors that were more and less likely to result in others seeing a given situation as rape. In particular, they referred to previous studies that backed up their analysis, most of which showed that the majority of participants did not consider acquaintance rape to be actual rape; in fact, a 1976 report showed that less than 20 percent of a sample of adult women who read a description of a forced-sex incident on a date labeled it as rape. Another study found that subjects tended to be sexually aroused to the same degree by written descriptions of acquaintance rape and consensual sex, while this correlation did not occur with descriptions of rape by a stranger (220). Acquaintance rape, then, might well be seen “as within the realm of normative sex acts.” Other studies indicated that even women who had actually experienced acquaintance rape were far less likely to label the encounter as rape, simply because the rapist was known to them.

Shotland and Goodstein’s study attempted to discover why acquaintance rape is far less likely to be perceived as genuine rape. The answer, they said, seemed related again to ideas of what was normal among couples who were dating or were otherwise familiar with each other:
Several authors suggest that it is commonly accepted for a woman to conceal her genuine interest in sexual contact and merely suggest her intentions in subtle or symbolic ways. …Conversely, cultural beliefs about the dating situation hold that a woman is expected to resist a man’s advances at least in the beginning stages of a sexual encounter, even though she may be responsive and ultimately consent to having sexual relations. …It appears that some men may underrate a woman’s verbal protests and overrate her expressions of friendliness in their attempts to facilitate a sexual encounter. (221)

It is this complex of beliefs that lies at the root of many real-life sexual attacks, providing the rationale for such behavior before any sexual encounter occurs and setting the tone for the vast majority of interactions between males and females, regardless of context. The expectation that women will flirt by pretending reluctance—or even respond to a man’s advances at all—leads into the idea that a lack of stated consent is unimportant and that a woman’s time, attention, and/or sexuality should always be available to any interested male; the structure of aggressive male and passive female implies the same kinds of thought patterns, as well as blurring the lines between appropriate sexual aggressiveness and actual violence. No situation in the books discussed here involves these exact circumstances as a precursor to a forced sexual encounter, but the perceptions of Dracula and the text of the Twilight series do demonstrate many of the attitudes that allow such actions: diminished importance of consent, physical objectification, victim-blaming, male privilege, and links between violence and sexuality.
The attitudes about sexuality expressed in *Dracula*—and, more to the point, by modern adaptations and perceptions of the original novel—function as one such example. Academic viewpoints on Stoker’s book seem to assume a sexual interpretation as a given, to the point that Kathleen Spencer begins her article “Purity and Danger: Dracula, the Urban Gothic, and the Late Victorian Degeneracy Crisis” by saying that the text’s “sexual substrata has become something of a cottage industry of late” (197). The sexual symbolism present in the novel has been interpreted in a number of different ways, from speculation that it actually represents closeted homosexuality to the view of Dracula’s attacks on Mina and Lucy as “disguised rapes” (Bentley, abstract). Brooke Allen’s introduction to the edition of *Dracula* used here also points out these aspects of the book, reading sexual symbolism into the phallic stake used to destroy the undead Lucy (“As nearly every modern reader remarks, Arthur and the undead Lucy here enact a terrible parody of the sex act, ending in the ‘little death’ of orgasm” [xxiv]) and the blood Dracula forces Mina to drink (“No sexually experienced adult could fail to note that Dracula and Mina are mimicking the act of fellatio” [xxv]), but like many other academic interpretations of the text, it does not interrogate these assumptions or take them much further than the speculation that this metaphorical sexuality may have contributed to the book’s original popularity. David Skal’s *Hollywood Gothic* seems to agree, stating, “‘Dracula’ can be read—in our time, at least—as an almost transparent metaphor for the Victorian confusion, guilt, and anger over the ‘proper’ role of women. The attack of the vampire—a male’s act of oral, infantile rage—succeeds in sexualizing women, who, according to the double standard of the time, must then be punished and purified through more sex and violence (penetrated by stakes, etc.)” (31). He quotes Andrea Dworkin’s even more strongly worded analysis of the novel, found in her book *Intercourse*:

> The women are transformed into predators, great foul parasites. … As humans, they begin to learn sex in dying. And the men, the human suitors and husbands … are given a new kind of sex, too … watching the women die. [The story] goes beyond metaphor…: the throat as a female genital; sex and death as synonyms; killing as a sex act; slow dying as sensuality; men watching the slow dying, and the watching is sexual; mutilation of the female body as male heroism and adventure; callous, ruthless, predatory lust as the one-note meaning of sexual desire. (30)

Although this interpretation of Stoker’s novel decries the apparently anti-feminist attitudes of the era in which it was written, the repeated emphasis on this sexual reading is somewhat troubling, displaying just as much about the critics as the original text itself. The insistence on seeing phallic symbolism in the staking and biting is itself a kind of phallocentrism that again ignores the actual role of the women in the story, and Helene Meyer sums up this idea neatly in *Femicidal Fears: Narratives of the Female Gothic Experience*, saying, “Paradoxically, while cultural feminism seeks to empower women, it often naturalizes them as victims” (110). She refers to another passage from Dworkin’s *Intercourse*, one that equates heterosexual sex with war and claims, “There is never a real privacy of the body that can coexist with intercourse: with being entered. … A human being has a body that is inviolate; and when it is violated, it is abused.” Meyers finds this statement useful in its own historic context but cautions, “as a theory of female victimization, it makes all women into Gothic heroines, virgins awaiting, fearing, and, perhaps, desiring their defilement” (11). The same, it seems, must happen to Lucy and Mina whenever the sexual aspects of their experiences are overemphasized.

Francis Ford Coppola’s heavily sexualized 1992 film adaptation complicates the issue by creating backstory between Dracula’s character and someone who looks like Mina and is possibly implied to be her in a past life, giving some legitimacy to whatever attraction Mina might feel toward the
count. At the same time, however, viewers are still presented with scenes designed to be erotic that
showcase a supernatural entity committing a significant physical violation on a passive and
essentially helpless partner without that person’s consent. Even in the book, Jonathan Harker is
shown to feel simultaneous attraction and revulsion toward the vampire brides, and the film depicts
this particular scene with reasonable fidelity. However, Mina and Lucy are clearly presented as
terrified, unwilling victims in Stoker’s novel, while in the film, Lucy is at best lured to the vampire
in a state of sleepwalking confusion in a way that cannot possibly have involved genuine consent.
The sex/biting scene that occurs as a result has overtones of bestiality that, combined with now-
outdated special effects, might function primarily as a turn-off for modern viewers—but it is still
presented as erotic, as sex not rape, as an instance of flirting with danger that Lucy did not initiate
but seems to have enjoyed in some way nonetheless. It is only a slight extension of typical victim-
blaming when the more sexually liberated Lucy is then turned into a monster herself and must be
destroyed by her fiancé, a reading of the situation that is curiously opposite to that presented in the
original novel: as Stoker wrote it, the pure and virginal Lucy proved more susceptible to Dracula’s
attacks than the married—and therefore more sexually experienced—Mina Harker (Allen xxvii).
The modern adaptation could easily be seen as more liberated, with its added innuendo and fairly
explicit sex scenes, but on a structural level it carries a different message entirely: Lucy is
promiscuous, enjoying sexual attention from multiple men and succumbing quickly to Dracula’s
bites, and she dies. Mina is proper and somewhat more repressed, and her encounters with the
vampire carry the weight of the odd mystical connection they share, allowing an extra-sexual
validity to her actions that Lucy does not have … and she lives.

The overall emphasis on the sexual aspects of the story nearly earned the film an NC-17 rating,
according to the Internet Movie Database, which could be explained as a deliberate reinterpretation
—but it functions as a highly useful portrayal of the ways Stoker’s novel is perceived today by
fitting what seems to be the prevailing popular opinion on Mina and Lucy’s desires and prompting
reactions that indicate little to no awareness of the discrepancy between the film and the novel.
Allen’s notes on adaptations of Dracula include a paragraph on Bram Stoker’s Dracula,
praising the film’s high production values and “dark, textured landscapes”; she adds that the film “includes
a few departures from Stoker’s novel” (408) but only references the addition of the Count’s
backstory and makes absolutely no mention of its sexual aspects, in terms of faithfulness to the
original or otherwise, implying that this particular element matched her own perception of the
book to the extent that she did not notice the difference. In a short list of questions designed to
challenge readers’ ways of thinking about the book, she comments that “Dracula’s blood-sucking
is often described as a disguised form of sexual assault, with the victim unconsciously willing”
(413), again demonstrating a tendency to accept dubious or nonexistent consent as a natural
component of any sexual aspect found in the text.

At least in that example, the troubling messages about female sexuality are conveyed only
implicitly, and even then they may well have been unintentional on the part of the writers.
Somewhat more to the point is the treatment of Dracula’s women in Demons, a short-lived
supernatural show that aired on the BBC in 2009. The show does not represent any kind of critical
examination of Dracula or vampires in general, of course; Mina Harker is one of its primary
characters, and the premise of the show involves destroying the undead, but it is primarily good for
entertainment, not insight. However, the show’s treatment of the actual text of Dracula—while
somewhat inaccurate in odd ways—is highly relevant in portraying modern perceptions of
Dracula’s sexual elements. Of particular interest is a scene in the episode “Suckers” in which
Ruby, the protagonist’s girlfriend, reads Dracula for research: despite apparently having no real
concept of the book’s content before reading it, she reacts in a way that is much more in line with
common perceptions of the text than with an unbiased reading of the text itself. “First of all, Mina
is a slapper,” Ruby says, using a British slang term for a loose woman, roughly equivalent to
“tramp” or “slut.” How did she come to this conclusion? “She let Dracula suck her blood night after
night after night!” This seems to be a common attitude about Stoker’s novel, but even if one accepts the general ideas of sexual symbolism in the book, it is still difficult to read Mina’s enjoyment of Dracula’s attacks in the text itself—and it seems curious that the questionable accuracy displayed by the portrayals of Mina in this show and Coppola’s film rarely seem to strike critics and viewers as problematic or at least inaccurate.
The connection between these ideas of rape culture and the *Twilight* series may seem tenuous at best, considering the books’ odd combination of Victorian and modern viewpoints on sex and the fact that the encounters that come the closest to actual rape (a gang of men stalking Bella in Port Angeles, Jacob’s forcing a kiss on her in *Eclipse*) are generally presented as negative. The difficulty with this perspective is that it only examines these situations as isolated incidents rather than viewing them in the greater context of the series as a whole, the prevailing attitudes in the suddenly popular subgenre of paranormal young-adult romance, and existing ideas in general about acceptable behavior in relationships. For that matter, the majority of sources that contribute to rape culture would almost certainly not support rape as such but still implicitly help propagate these cultural attitudes and ideas, and close analysis of many texts—modern, paranormal, and otherwise—can reveal that these concepts are far more pervasive than most would like to believe. The same cultural perceptions that seem to have twisted the normal understanding of *Dracula* perform a subtler function in the *Twilight* series, primarily going unnoticed by both popular and academic commentators. The books have received only a few academic treatments in the first place, possibly because they are relatively new or because of their status as popular novels rather than literary works, and the articles on the topic that do exist all seem inclined toward defending the series from critics rather than examining the patterns actually established in the text.

Anna Silver’s article “*Twilight* Is Not Good For Maidens: Gender, Sexuality, and the Family in Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* Series” is one of the few examples of peer-reviewed work on the novels, published as part of *Studies in the Novel*’s special issue on young-adult literature. Silver address some aspects of the books’ treatment of gender and sexuality and examines the text from a feminist viewpoint, studying its perspective on ideology, motherhood, sex, and identity. She spends much of her time arguing against the popular conception of the *Twilight* fan as passive, uncritical consumer, however. She argues, “While it is certainly appropriate and important, then, to identify and critique aspects of Meyer’s work from a feminist perspective, it is also essential that critics not create an imaginary, wholly passive reader of *Twilight*” (137), a standpoint that is certainly valuable if the majority of *Twilight* readers do not, in fact, fit the characteristics of this “imaginary” reader. Based on evidence Silver supplies elsewhere in her article and the series’ rampant popularity in general, it is difficult to conceive of this passive reader as entirely imaginary, and the idea that *Twilight* fans are more critical consumers than might be expected seems just as damaging as the opposite assumption. If *Twilight* readers can easily separate reality from fantasy and understand that a real-life Edward would not be a dream come true, no discussion on the topic is necessary, but the bulk of fan behavior points to a very different conclusion. Preemptively deciding that the conversation is not needed, then, may only allow these damaging, unhealthy ideas about sexuality and relationships to continue gaining purchase in the culture.

Catherine Strong’s paper “‘... it sucked because it was written for teenage girls’—*Twilight*, Anti-Fans and Symbolic Violence” represents another of the few academic discussions of *Twilight*, and its topic and argument are almost diametrically opposed to mine in a way that helps demonstrate necessity for this kind of study. Here, Strong examines the psychology of the anti-fan and argues that Meyer’s books inspire hate because of their feminine nature, and that those who hate *Twilight* are committing symbolic violence on teenage girls as a group. While this interpretation may have some valid aspects, the books might well receive far less criticism if they comprised innocent, romantic fluff rather than troubling messages about normative relationships between men and women. In fact, I would argue that these messages are themselves a form of violence that is being
perpetrated against the very demographic Strong attempts to defend. [See notes at end.]

Although it was written well before the Twilight books, the anthology Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women makes a similar argument on behalf of romance novels in general, with romance-novelist contributors claiming that their genre actually empowers women because it portrays female characters triumphing over and taming frightening, powerful men. Krentz and others make the point that readers are perfectly able to tell the difference between reality and romantic fantasy and that the implication that romance novels are dangerous because they cannot is itself damaging and insulting (2), a similar line of thinking as those expressed in Silver’s and Strong’s papers. Later in the same book, Susan Elizabeth Phillips says, “Book sales make it obvious that I am not the only woman in America who wants to read about this arrogant, domineering rogue—a man who, in real life, any intelligent woman would throw out the door in ten minutes flat” (56). None of these authors seem to acknowledge the ways in which the books they defend can still help normalize and perpetuate the attitudes and beliefs that do create genuine problems for people in the real world, even if the novels do so inadvertently—any overview of crime statistics about rape, domestic violence, abuse, and similar kinds of gender-oriented assault would indicate that real people do accept these messages about what is appropriate in relationships and sexuality and that these stories do play out in real life, but they never end with the happily-ever-after of the romance novel. In the genre of young-adult books, that danger is further magnified by the impressionable nature of the target audience.

Despite having been written primarily for a non-academic audience, Twilight and Philosophy: Vampires, Vegetarians, and the Pursuit of Immortality, a collection of essays edited by Rebecca Housel and J. Jeremy Wisnewski, presents possibly the most varied and critical approach to Meyer’s books. It includes eighteen articles on various topics in the Twilight series, such as the personhood of vampires, Twilight and religion, the moral questions raised by Edward’s mind-reading ability, and the ethics of “vegetarian” vampirism. Particularly relevant in this case are Abigail Meyers’ “Edward Cullen and Bella Swan: Byronic and Feminist Heroes…or Not,” Leah McClimans and J. Jeremy Wisnewski’s “Undead Patriarchy and the Possibility of Love,” and Rebecca Housel’s “The ‘Real’ Danger: Fact vs. Fiction for the Girl Audience,” all of which examine an angle on the issues of gender roles and sexuality in the text. None seem to take the discussion far enough, however, and even Housel’s essay—which compares Edward’s behavior with that of real-world abusers and stalkers—primarily relies on incidents that are somewhat mitigated in the actual context of the novels’ plots and genre conventions, such as Bella’s longing for death (181) that comes as a result of Edward’s actions (what she really wants, of course, is vampiric immortality, which involves death only in the last stage of transition), thereby weakening her argument significantly for any Twilight fan familiar enough with the series to notice. In addition, she concludes that Jacob is in fact the perfect boyfriend for Bella, despite the behavior displayed that matches well with Edward’s and an actual instance of sexual assault, described in more detail later. Similarly, Mcclimans and Wisnewski argue that Edward is controlling and represents oppressive patriarchy, but they conclude by saying that Bella is strong enough to demand he stop behaving that way, and the couple’s ability to communicate helps them toward a truly equal relationship. According to the actual text, Edward has always been perfect and romantic, so even when he stalks and controls Bella, his love for her is provided as a legitimate excuse.

Chapter End Notes

"Here, Strong examines the psychology of the anti-fan..." Okay. This is the only part
where I really have to disagree with myself from two years ago. Some of the criticism of Meyer's books--the reasonable, thoughtful criticism--does tend to take these elements to task, and if the books didn't contain so many problematic elements, then sure, that kind of criticism wouldn't be as prevalent. However, the vast majority of hate for *Twilight* and its ilk is...not that. People do hate *Twilight* because it was written for teenage girls, and people hate teenage girls because as a group they're viewed as an acceptable target for jokes in a way that, say, teenage boys aren't. And that's not okay. Mock *Twilight* all you want for its shoddy construction, weak writing, threadbare plots, and thin characterization; by all means, don't let it off the hook for the gross messages it's perpetuating, because that conversation absolutely needs to happen. Those are valid criticisms that this series absolutely has coming. But don't use it as a smokescreen for bashing teenage girls or women in general, because that's gross too.
The fact remains that both Edward the vampire and Jacob the werewolf display classic characteristics of abusive boyfriends and the mindsets that constitute rape culture; both are convinced that they are acting in Bella’s best interests, even if those actions go directly against Bella’s explicitly stated wishes (this particular situation shows up repeatedly in large and small matters alike). Edward gets more leeway here than Jacob does because he is Bella’s designated True Love, but in most cases, the text presents their behavior as falling within the bounds of an acceptable, normal romantic relationship, which could condition young readers to accept abusive, controlling behavior if it is supposedly for their own good. In many ways, the behavior presented as abusive by some critics of the series does not function as the most useful example, because it’s often mitigated within the fantasy-based world of the text. However, there are no extenuating circumstances that excuse the normalization of Edward and Jacob repeatedly treating Bella as an object, and existing arguments that attempt to defend the demographic that finds the Twilight series most appealing may in fact do more harm than good by failing to critically analyze the distinct patterns established by the text and what these patterns may convey to readers or reveal about modern culture as a whole.

The series begins in Twilight with 17-year-old Bella Swan moving from Phoenix, Arizona, to rainy Forks, Washington, to live with her father. At her new school, she meets a family of unusually beautiful adopted siblings, including a strange boy named Edward Cullen who seems to hate her—but she gradually discovers the truth, that he and his “family” are all vampires who have sworn off human blood, and Edward’s seemingly hostile reaction was really a result of his intense desire to feed on her and equally intense effort to resist this temptation, as well as his general frustration with his inability to read her mind, as his vampire abilities allow him to do with everyone else. His self-control allows them to be together as they fall in love, despite the obstacles presented by his thirst and a small pack of rogue vampires who nearly kill Bella before Edward can intervene. New Moon picks up shortly after the first book left off, with Edward and Bella having established a committed relationship, until disaster strikes at Bella’s 18th birthday party, where a drop of her blood from a paper cut proves too tempting for Edward’s adopted brother Jasper to resist. Edward saves her from Jasper’s attack, but the incident forces him to reevaluate his relationship with Bella, and he breaks up with her and leaves Forks for her safety, despite the intense pain this separation causes both of them. Bella’s reaction is essentially a months-long catatonic state, eventually assuaged by her growing friendship with Jacob Black, a boy from the nearby Quileute reservation—but new conflicts arise from his desire to be more than friends and the fact that the presence of vampires in the area has triggered a previously dormant werewolf gene in several of the tribe’s young men, including Jacob. Tensions escalate as the age-old enmity between vampires and the Quileute werewolves flares up again, fueled by the depredations of the rogue vampires who have again come after Bella. All ends well with the rogue vampires temporarily defeated and Bella and Edward reunited, Edward finally convinced that he cannot survive without Bella in his life.

Eclipse deals with the fallout from New Moon, with continued tension between the werewolves and the Cullens and Bella forced to choose between her friendship with Jacob and her love for Edward. Bella’s desire to become a vampire—mandated by the Volturi, a council of ruling vampires in Italy—against Edward’s objections adds fuel to the fire, but the Cullens and Quileute werewolves eventually form an uneasy alliance to destroy the band of rogue vampires for good, and Edward and Bella reach a compromise that he will make her immortal if she agrees to marry him. Breaking Dawn begins with Edward and Bella’s wedding and honeymoon, during which Bella unexpectedly becomes pregnant with a human-vampire hybrid whose rapid growth in the womb seriously threatens Bella’s life, forcing Edward to turn her into a vampire immediately after the birth to save
her. Their beautiful daughter, Renesmee, continues to develop rapidly both mentally and physically, and at Jacob’s first sight of her, his affections transfer from Bella to her child by “imprinting” on her, an intense form of bonding unique to werewolves. Increasing conflicts with the ruling council of vampires threaten the new life Bella has started to build with Edward and Renesmee, but ultimately her newly acquired vampiric powers allow her to save her family and friends, and the book’s “happily ever after” is quite literal as Edward and Bella look forward to eternity with one another.

On the surface, the Twilight series may appear harmless or even positive, and it has often been viewed this way, judging from the articles about the series’ unusual approach to sexuality when compared with similarly popular vampire stories. In fact, the Edward-Bella romance could seem like a parent’s dream: Bella is in no danger of an unplanned pregnancy or STDs with a boyfriend who seems to prize her virginity more than she does and goes out of his way to draw careful lines for their physical relationship. His concern is more for her comparatively fragile body than for the usual dangers of teen sex, but the overall effect is the same. He only agrees to have sex with her after their wedding, and even then it comes as something of a hard-won privilege for Bella, who wants to experience sex as a human despite the risk. Edward, despite his “razor-sharp, venom-coated teeth” (New Moon 16) and superhuman strength, is the ultimate safe boyfriend where sex is concerned, determined to preserve Bella’s “virtue” (Eclipse 453). Even for those who might disagree with Edward’s—or Meyer’s—apparent old-fashioned values, the attitude expressed toward sex can seem a refreshing change from the hook-up culture that confronts modern teens.

The idea that the Twilight series helps perpetuate rape culture might seem hard to accept for that very reason. Far from forcing himself on her, Edward resists his own desires as well as Bella’s, convinced that any sexual encounter would be deadly for her. He is going against her persistent and increasingly clear desires in this particular matter—in fact, the promise that they will at least attempt to have sex before he turns her into a vampire is the primary reason Bella reluctantly agrees to marry him when she does (Eclipse 455)—but he is doing it for her protection, out of his overwhelming love and concern for her, so how can this attitude be construed as negative? No rape occurs, and the end result of the characters’ behavior is a happily-ever-after ending that leaves all the major players satisfied; by this point, at least, Edward and the newly immortal (and therefore far less breakable) Bella have a mutually fulfilling sex life that takes both of their desires into consideration and seems representative of a much healthier relationship in general.

The problem here is not simply with the arc of the primary relationship described in the series or with the consequences of that relationship to the characters themselves; rather, the difficulty lies in the patterns of behavior Meyer establishes for these characters and what these narrative patterns convey about normative behavior in male/female interactions and relationships. Taken individually, many of the otherwise disturbing elements that many critics have pointed out in the series can be explained at least in part by the books’ supernatural setting or its adherence to young-adult genre conventions: supernatural creatures such as vampires and werewolves will almost necessarily be stronger than any ordinary humans who share that world, making some of the physical disparity between Bella and the men who love her somewhat inevitable, and the life-or-death intensity displayed in the characters’ romantic attachments seems representative of the passionate emotions many teenagers and young adults experience. However, these behaviors form distinct patterns that cannot be entirely justified by such genre conventions. The novels are structured in ways that repeatedly demonstrate the attitudes central to rape-supportive culture: characters diminish the importance of consent, treat women as objects, place blame on the victims of various attacks, privilege males and male agency despite the series’ emphasis on the female gaze, and link violence with sexuality in troubling ways. Attitudes portrayed over and over in the Twilight series match up neatly with those seen in real-life social interactions between men and women, enculturated attitudes that translate into the perpetuation of rape culture and the socially
enforced behaviors taught from childhood that still govern the way people act when rape actually occurs. Meyer’s novels are disturbing not for their explicit statements on romantic and sexual relationships but for what the interactions depicted say about normal, acceptable behavior between men and women.
Twilight: Analysis - Violence and Sexuality

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The link between violence and sexuality in Meyer’s books is obvious enough, at least on the surface: her series focuses on the love story between a human and a vampire, and a key part of that story is the vampire’s struggle with his desire to kill the girl and drink her blood—as one might expect in any vampire/human relationship. With Edward and Bella, the situation is magnified beyond what might be normal for the paranormal-romance genre because Bella’s blood smells particularly appealing to Edward, such that his first whiff of her scent nearly overthrows his commitment to abstain from human blood and his eighty-some years of self-control in this area. To some extent, his ability to deny his own nature for Bella’s sake is never really in doubt—Bella certainly trusts his ability to control himself even when her own self-preservation instinct ought to raise some red flags, but at least the reader can depend on genre conventions and the overall tone of the books to predict that this love story will not end tragically. For some readers, the danger likely makes the attraction between the heroine and hero even more emotionally intense. Anne Stuart’s essay in Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women emphasizes the critical nature of this appeal to the vampire romances she loves to read and write, but she goes further, describing the physical danger as well: “For…those who love my books and for me, the threat is what makes it work. And if her triumph at the end is death in his arms, then we know that at least they have eternity. For me, the threat of death at the hands of love is the most potent fantasy of all” (87). This is part of the fantasy, she says—“Only if you’re prepared to risk everything can you gain everything,” and only in the romance fantasy can women do both safely—but the explicit connection of deadly violence and sexual magnetism seems troubling. Part of the appeal in Edward’s case seems to be the self-control he displays and his ability to beat the odds and resist desires that come from the very core of what he is, all because he loves Bella just that much. Edward is so determined not to harm Bella that he assumes responsibility for keeping their physical relationship safe for his comparatively fragile girlfriend and even leaves her for her own protection in New Moon despite the pain this act causes him.

The fact remains that the only males the series presents as truly attractive options for Bella are supernatural creatures who can—and do—cause her harm whether they mean to or not. Bella finds Edward attractive even when he is most threatening, when he is displaying his destructive abilities to her and describing the violent aspects of his history: “I sat without moving, more frightened of him than I had ever been. I’d never seen him so completely freed of that carefully cultivated facade. He’d never been less human … or more beautiful” (Twilight 264). She remains drawn to him even when he frightens her and she knows she should stay away. In the beginning, Edward’s superhuman abilities form at least part of the basis for his appeal for the very practical reason that his strength lets him save Bella from an out-of-control van in the school parking lot (56), but he almost immediately uses that same strength in an attempt to scare her away and convince her of the danger he poses. His display works, but only to an extent: Bella is simultaneously unnerved and fascinated, as shown in the quote above, and she declares that she loves him and trusts him not to hurt her…or perhaps more to the point, she “would rather die than stay away from you” (274) and apparently sees the danger he poses as an acceptable risk. She is more convinced than Edward is of his ability to resist the temptation her blood offers him, but her need to stay with him seems to stem more from an attachment that verges on addiction than any logical reasons for trusting Edward’s goodness.

Almost from the beginning of their acquaintance with each other, Edward becomes the sole focus of Bella’s life (251) to the point that she is willing to accept the significant risk of violence and the
actual occurrence of violence itself later in the story. “That was nothing,” she says of Jasper’s attack on her in the early pages of *New Moon* (69), desperate in part to downplay the incident because Edward wants to take the blame for any possible danger that might result from her association with vampires, but her attitude seems fairly consistent. Edward does manage to control his predatory instincts where Bella is concerned, but despite his own fears of harming his girlfriend, he uses his physical strength against her in ways that are not actually violent but that come far too close for a supposedly responsible vampire uncertain about his level of self-control, playfully tackling Bella at one point (345) and very deliberately enjoying the scent of the blood beneath her skin at others (“Just because I’m resisting the wine doesn’t mean I can’t appreciate the bouquet” [306]), as if adding a further element of risk to their relationship adds some kind of savor to this already dangerous romance.

Bella’s later relationship with Jacob begins as less clearly dangerous and volatile; she has always been comfortable with him and can barely conceive of him belonging in the supernatural world she has already discovered. He is her comfort, her “safe harbor” (*New Moon* 411), a refuge from reminders of the vampires hunting her and the one that left her—so the contrast is even more pronounced when Jacob’s latent werewolf genes kick in and he becomes angry and hot-tempered, an additional physical threat to Bella regardless of his intentions. He has no desire to hurt Bella, he says (218), but he is even less aware of and careful with his strength than Edward is, frequently holding a little too tight when he hugs her: “He … grabbed me up in another vice-tight hug. …I struggled to get free. ‘Cut it out, Jake!’ I gasped breathlessly” (*Eclipse* 237).

The idea of lycanthropy as a manifestation of a person’s animalistic side is not a new or uncommon one, so the fact that these werewolves’ early transformations are associated with strong negative emotion is no more original or uncommon than virtually indestructible vampires. The fact remains that this is a choice on the part of the author, not some kind of requirement for werewolves in fiction, and more importantly, the hair-trigger temper (324) that seems to constitute the emotional basis of Jacob and his fellow shapeshifters strays uncomfortably close to the “I’m sorry I made you hit me” attitude so common for victims of domestic violence. Jacob and the other wolves try to keep a handle on their tempers to avoid harming the people they care about, but a portion of the responsibility for the maintenance of this precarious self-control rests on the vulnerable humans who associate with these supernatural beings.

Bella herself is never injured by any of the wolves, although this is due partly to luck and partly to her care in the way she speaks to Jacob when the topic of conversation turns toward anything that angers him: “‘Jacob,’ I pleaded, making my tone soft and even” (*New Moon* 307). She is not the only human who experiences the threat of violence or violence itself at the hands of superhuman beings, either. One subplot involves the disfiguring facial scars that werewolf chief Sam accidentally inflicts on his fiancée—she is not blamed for having angered him, but the fact remains that Sam’s loss of temper resulted in a permanent injury to a woman who simply had the misfortune of being nearby, and the emphasis of this story is on the guilt and remorse Sam suffers as a result rather than on the woman herself. “Sam lost control for a split second,” Jacob tells Bella, “and she was standing too close. And now there’s nothing he can ever do to put it right again. I hear his thoughts—I know what that feels like” (345). Even Bella, reflecting on the situation, reacts with a shudder not at the possibility that this could happen to her or at the terror Emily must have felt, but “at the thought of how Sam must have felt every time he looked at Emily's face” (340); and later, “I’d seen the pain in Sam’s eyes when he looked at what he’d done to Emily” (*Eclipse* 175). Once again, Meyer has chosen to take an element of potential violence that is understandable in the context of this created world and formed a pattern of incidents with the protagonist or another woman responsible for making the man’s self-control easier and being endangered if she fails. “Be very careful, Bella,” she hears Edward’s voice say in her head when Jacob starts to get angry. “Don’t push him too far. You need to calm him down” (307, emphasis
added). Jacob even tells her, “If I get too mad … too upset … you might get hurt” (311) and refers to an earlier almost-incident in terms that subtly shift the emphasis to Bella’s role in triggering a dangerous reaction: “I swore I wasn't going to get mad, no matter what you said to me. But…I just got so upset that I was going to lose you…that you couldn't deal with what I am…” (312).

Chapter End Notes

A thing I didn't know until quite some time after I finished my thesis and wish I'd known then, because it's pretty damn relevant and I would've included it even if it's extra-textual: it's never mentioned in the book, but apparently Meyer says that the reason Sam lost control, phased, and mauled Emily was that Emily, in refusing him again and telling him to go back to Leah, said he was just like the father who'd abandoned him when he was a child. The idea is that the mention of his father pushed him over the edge and presumably would have done so coming from anyone else as well, but uh...Meyer's still created a situation in which a woman said something (fairly reasonable, in this case, considering Emily didn't know about imprinting at the time) that prompted a man to hulk out and brutally injure her. Sure, Sam hates himself for it, but that's still what happened. The description in New Moon already did some subtle victim-blaming in saying that she was standing too close, not that he was (interestingly, that's exactly what this got changed to in the film version), but then you get this extra information and it's really mega not subtle anymore.
Even if one accepts this element of risk as inevitable in any fictional vampire/human relationship, other troubling elements in the books are less easily excused by genre conventions. For a series primarily targeted toward and enjoyed by girls and women, the importance often placed on male action and female passivity is striking, and comparing the books against a checklist of male privilege brings to light another disturbing pattern of behavior. Cultural and social expectations that privilege men over women in relationships and in more casual interactions show up repeatedly in the *Twilight* series, both in subtle and blatant ways, resulting in general female passivity and a strong pattern of inequality in male/female relationships. The physical disparity between Bella and the men she finds attractive (who, conveniently, are of roughly equivalent strength thanks to their supernatural characteristics) is immediately obvious, emphasized by frequent references to the heavy objects they carry without effort, the trees they accidentally snap, or the care they have to take in dealing with ordinary fragile humans. This sort of inequality comes with the territory of the genre, to some extent; less standard are the relationship dynamics displayed in more ordinary ways, such as the fact that Bella almost never drives her own truck when any male character is available to take the wheel. Occasionally this becomes a minor point of contention between Edward and Bella—his superhuman senses and reflexes mean he can drive safely at far higher speeds than humans can, but when Bella is alarmed by his speeding down dark roads at 100-plus miles per hour, he finds her reaction anywhere from amusing to tiresome and rarely agrees to slow down. Her truck barely reaches 55 mph, a source of general frustration for Edward, so being allowed to drive them anywhere seems to be a significant concession on Edward’s part (*Twilight* 253).

More disturbing is the repeated motif of women belonging to and being defined by the men in their lives. This possessiveness goes both ways—Bella frequently refers to Edward as hers (*New Moon* 527) in the narration and sometimes calls her werewolf friend “my Jacob” to distinguish between his friendly behavior and the anger that seemed to come with his transformation into a werewolf (*Eclipse* 512)—but the major balance of examples trend toward women as belongings. The subject of werewolf imprinting—a kind of love-at-first-sight attachment from a werewolf to the object of his sudden affections—is a thorny one (122); while the characters are aware of its problematic aspects, the phenomenon is portrayed as essentially a positive one that provides women with their perfect match, but Jacob’s original description of the process of imprinting focuses almost entirely on the dramatic shift in perspective experienced by the werewolf in question rather than on a mutual attraction and matching of souls. He tells Bella, “It’s not like love at first sight, really. It’s more like...gravity moves. When you see her, suddenly it’s not the earth holding you here anymore. She does. And nothing matters more than her” (176). In addition, the primary example he describes involves pack leader Sam and female werewolf Leah, who had been high-school sweethearts and tried to maintain their relationship through Sam’s difficult transition into the tribe’s first werewolf in decades—until he met and imprinted on Leah’s cousin Emily. This phenomenon, described as outside Sam’s control, meant breaking all his promises to Leah and turning his former girlfriend into a “bitter harpy” with no choice in the matter and no real compensation, and she is shown in a negative light throughout the rest of the books as if her anger and resentment are her own fault (*Eclipse* 622). Emily was free to choose someone else, of course, but “it’s hard to resist that level of commitment and adoration” (123), similar to his statement about the object of another werewolf’s imprinting: “Of course [she gets a choice]. But why wouldn’t she choose him, in the end? He’ll be her perfect match” (176), and there ends Jacob’s speculation on the woman’s part of things.

Bella finds this phenomenon disturbing, particularly when two very relevant examples involve very young girls who will essentially be raised by the men who will later become their lovers, but it is not much of a stretch from Bella’s own pattern of thinking in terms of who and what she is. Early
on, she describes her decision to trust Edward in terms that are similar to those used the explanations of imprinting: she says at one point, “I didn't know if there ever was a choice, really. I was already in too deep” (*Twilight* 139), and again later, “My decision was made, made before I’d ever consciously chosen and I was committed to seeing it through. Because there was nothing more terrifying to me, more excruciating, than the thought of turning away from him. It was an impossibility” (248). In *Eclipse*, she even explicitly compares her attachment to Edward to imprinting: “I want to love you and make you happy. And I can’t, and it’s killing me. It’s like Sam and Emily, Jake — I never had a choice” (600). Even earlier in the series, Bella accepts the werewolves’ title of “the vampire girl” for her, and later in *New Moon*, when her relationship with Jacob has progressed beyond casual friendship, she says of Emily, “It wasn’t hard to be with her—after all, we were both wolf girls now” (350). Emily and Bella are not themselves werewolves, of course; Bella is simply defining them both by their association with the men in their lives. This is especially distinct in her case, since there seems to be no in-between for Bella, no personality trait or hobby or passion that she uses to define herself—first she is a vampire girl because her boyfriend is a vampire, and then she is a wolf girl because a werewolf is the closest thing she has to a boyfriend. “He couldn’t belong to me, could not be my Jacob, when I belonged to someone else” (*Eclipse* 518, emphasis in original) she says at one point, expressing a similar sentiment about both of them.

If at any point these characters belong only to themselves, the text shows no evidence of this being the case, and Bella’s absolute devastation at Edward’s departure in *New Moon* shows just how much her life and selfhood were based on his. “You are my life,” she tells him near the end of *Twilight*, “the only thing it would hurt me to lose” (474), and her reaction to the breakup is just as hyperbolic without being presented as such: “I couldn’t imagine anything in the world that there was left to be afraid of” (*New Moon* 110), and later, “I’d already lived through the worst thing possible. In comparison with that, why should anything frighten me now? I should be able to look death in the face and laugh” (182). She has no hobbies, no career aspirations, no goals in particular, no real entertainment preferences, no sense of her value or essence as a person separate from Edward, and Bella herself explicitly points this out in a statement so ironically metafictional on the author’s part that it verges on breaking the fourth wall: “It was depressing to realize that I wasn’t the heroine anymore, that my story was over” (106). Later she compares herself to “a lost moon—my planet destroyed in some cataclysmic, disaster-movie scenario of desolation—that continued, nevertheless, to circle in a tight little orbit around the empty space left behind” (201), utterly defined by relationship to Edward and his presence or lack thereof in her life.

The men in question do little to counteract this idea of women as possessions; Edward sometimes provokes Bella simply because he finds her anger amusing, and in the course of his rivalry with Jacob in *Eclipse*, both boys deliberately leave their scent on Bella to claim her and anger the other. She notices them doing this but does not seem to understand why, perhaps because the idea of belonging to someone seems natural to her. Her relationship with her father indicates that her upbringing may have had something to do with this, given that she immediately takes over all cooking and cleaning as soon as she comes to live with him and defines herself by this traditional gender role as well; even before she meets Edward and begins her obsession with him, she exists primarily in relation to others—such as her father—rather than for herself in any meaningful way. Some of the interactions between Bella and Charlie reflect this attitude, including one exchange in *Twilight* that shows Edward and Charlie discussing Bella without actually consulting her wishes:

“So I hear you’re getting my girl to watch baseball. …Well, more power to you, I guess.” Charlie laughed, and Edward joined in.

“Okay.” I stood up. “Enough humor at my expense. Let’s go.” I walked back to the hall and pulled on my jacket. They followed.
“Not too late, Bell.”

“Don’t worry, Charlie, I’ll have her home early,” Edward promised.

“You take care of my girl, all right?”

I groaned, but they ignored me.

“She’ll be safe with me, I promise, sir.” …

I stalked out. They both laughed, and Edward followed me. (359)

Bella’s lack of interest in baseball and then her irritation with the men essentially making plans about her is seen as an amusing joke, despite her presence in the room, and Bella is barely given a chance to make any assurances of her own—Charlie talks about her to Edward, then says one line to Bella herself, which Edward answers for and about her, at which point Bella is again cut out of the conversation entirely to allow Charlie and Edward to discuss her as if she is not there. They both seem to have her best interests in mind, so their patronizing treatment is presented as acceptable, and when Bella takes offense at this and they laugh at her reaction, the reader is invited to find the situation funny as well.
Twilight: Analysis - Victim Blaming

Victim-blaming is another key component of a rape culture, seeing the victim of an attack as wholly or partly responsible, either for bringing on the attack in the first place or for not effectively preventing and resisting it. This attitude can be found a number of times in the Twilight series, sometimes in blatant ways, sometimes more subtly. The internalized victim-blaming that often characterizes rape culture is especially prevalent, although in Bella’s case it normally occurs in the context of the danger she seems to attract in being with the Cullens. When another vampire becomes obsessed with hunting and killing Bella in the final third of Twilight, Edward is frantic to protect her, but his way of stating his concern to Bella has an odd emphasis: he says at one point, “If you let anything happen to yourself—anything at all—I’m holding you personally responsible. Do you understand that?” (388) The same sentiment comes up again: “It is partially your fault.” His voice was wry. ‘If you didn’t smell so appallingly luscious, he might not have bothered” (397). Slightly later, after Bella willingly goes to the vampire hunting her to prevent him from harming her mother and ends up badly injured but alive thanks to Edward’s nick-of-time rescue, he shows his love for her with a similar kind of statement. She apologizes for the difficulty he had in sucking the vampire venom from her blood without losing control and killing her. He calls that ridiculous, but if she wants to apologize, it should be for “very nearly taking yourself away from me forever,” and she complies with another “I’m sorry” (460). Edward replies, “I know why you did it …It was still irrational, of course. You should have waited for me, you should have told me,” and he admits that if she had, he would not have allowed her to go.

Bella’s willingness to sacrifice herself for her mother is supposed to show her courageous and selfless nature, but instead the overall tone of Edward’s reaction seems to be one of anxiety-ridden frustration that Bella keeps finding dangerous situations in which to involve herself. Although he does not scold her for foolish behavior in this particular situation, he does elsewhere, seeming to believe that Bella could get herself killed or injured simply by walking out her front door; at various points he calls her a “magnet for trouble” (Twilight 174), expresses mocking surprise that she made it through an entire weekend unhurt (189), says he is fighting fate in his attempts to keep her alive (191), and calls protecting her “a full-time occupation that requires my constant presence” (211). In their romantic life, Edward takes control of and responsibility for her sexuality as well as his own, keeping them both from crossing the lines he has drawn to protect her physical safety—so he frequently has to pull away and hold her back when she seems to be getting carried away, and Bella generally respects the need for his restraint even if she wants a much more intense physical relationship with him. In the actual narrative, this translates to the implication that if he lost control and killed her, it would be partially her fault, because her lack of self-control makes his that much more difficult. He even uses classic victim-blaming language in his version of their initial encounter: “I felt the unjust hatred for the girl. I hated that she had this unconscious power over me. That she could make me be something I reviled” (Midnight Sun 18). “You’re too desirable for your own good,” he tells her in Eclipse (445).

Bella’s thought processes on the subject tend to mirror Edward’s; when he explains his almost overwhelming desire to kill her, the difficulty of his resistance, and the agony he would experience if he harmed her, she is “filled with compassion for his suffering, even now, as he confessed his craving to take my life” (272) rather than afraid for her safety. She focuses on what she can do to make his self-control easier (“My blood was racing, and I wished I could slow it, sensing that this must make everything so much more difficult” [275]), immediately apologizing when she leans into him and inadvertently heightens his bloodlust (263). “I’m stronger than I thought,” he says the first time Bella responds too strongly to his kiss, and she replies, “I wish I could say the same. I’m sorry” (283). In general, the text presents her fairly natural responses to Edward’s kisses and her desire for further physical intimacy as symptoms of her emotional, hormonal, and less rational
nature: “There really was no excuse for my behavior. Obviously I knew better by now. And yet I couldn't seem to stop from reacting exactly as I had the first time. Instead of keeping safely motionless, my arms reached up to twine tightly around his neck, and I was suddenly welded to his stone figure” (363). While Edward’s reactions lessen in severity somewhat as the series progresses and he becomes more convinced of his ability to maintain control over his thirst, his reaction in this particular scene sums up the overall attitude well: “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.’”

In *New Moon*, Bella sees the disastrous birthday party as her fault as well, since Jasper would not have lost control if no humans had been in the house; Edward finds this absurd, saying quite sensibly, “you gave yourself a paper cut—that hardly deserves the death penalty” (44), but Bella remains convinced that she is to blame, and when Edward then decides to remove himself from her life to prevent a similar or worse incident from happening again, his actions serve to validate her self-blame. Edward’s rejection is unfathomable to her before it happens, not even her idea of the worst thing possible that she could still survive, and because her existence and selfhood are so wrapped up in Edward’s, she sees the end of her life with him as the end of everything (“Love, life, meaning … over” [73]) but also as a natural result of the massive differences between them. He is perfectly, inhumanly beautiful and seemingly flawless; she is only a human girl with nothing to offer, so when he turns her own insecurities against her to convince her he no longer loves her, he only confirms what she has always believed, so she has no argument for him: “‘You’re not good for me, Bella.’ …How well I knew that I wasn’t good enough for him” (70). In essence, although his words argued against the idea that she was at fault for his decision to leave, Edward’s actions convey the very clear message that if she could have been pretty enough, strong enough, smart enough, *good* enough to deserve him, he would not have left her. Edward may not mean her to take his leaving this way, but he is surely aware that she will. When Bella saves Edward from his suicide attempt (his response to mistaken reports of her death) at the end of the book and they are finally reunited, he explains that he only left her to protect her and allow her to experience a normal human life, and he used her feelings of inferiority to break things off out of desperation, knowing she would never let him go and move on otherwise—and then he puts that, too, back on her shoulders, as if Bella should have known better to believe a skilled liar and manipulator telling her something she already believed to be true:

“I’m a good liar, but still, for you to believe me so quickly.” He winced. “That was … excruciating. …I never imagined it would be so easy to do! …I lied, and I’m so sorry —sorry because I hurt you, sorry because it was a worthless effort. …I lied to save you, and it didn’t work. I’m sorry. But how could you believe me? After all the thousand times I’ve told you I love you, how could you let one word break your faith in me?” …He shook my shoulder again, not hard, but enough that my teeth rattled a little.

“Bella,” he sighed. “Really, what were you thinking!”

And so I started to cry. …“I knew it,” I sobbed. “I *knew* I was dreaming.”

“You’re impossible,” he said, and he laughed once—a hard laugh, frustrated. (510)

Even here, when Edward is trying to convince Bella that he truly loves her, cannot live without her, needs her as much as or more than she needs him, and will never leave, he emphasizes *his* pain at her seemingly easy acceptance of his rejection—her reaction to his action and choices that caused the problem in the first place. He had ignored her pleas for him to change his mind and made a unilateral decision based on what he believed was best for her, using his decades of experience and knowledge of human nature (and her nature specifically) to make the lie work, and yet somehow Bella still should have known better.
Some of this attitude is left by the wayside in Eclipse, at least as it affects Bella’s relationship with Edward; the trauma of New Moon has resulted in a turning point for her, getting her to understand that he has been as irreversibly changed by knowing her as she has by him and that he cannot possibly choose to leave her again. But neither the characters nor the author seem to recognize the victim-blaming inherent in some of these passages, so the mindset continues in other ways.

Rosalie, the one member of the Cullen family who has always seemed to hate Edward’s human girlfriend, finally reveals her history and the reason for her apparent dislike, saying that she envies the human life Bella is choosing to discard and cannot stand seeing someone make the wrong decision when she and the other Cullens did not have a chance to choose in the first place. Rosalie’s anger is fully understandable in light of the story she tells, describing the perfect human life that was all she ever wanted and that she would have had, before her fiancé and his friends gang-raped her and left her for dead. Rosalie’s fury and continued sadness at her loss are appropriate reactions, as are Bella’s horror and sympathy, and the story would not stand out as an example of the troubling thought patterns at work in Meyer’s books except for her analysis at the end: “It took some time before I began to blame the beauty for what had happened to me — for me to see the curse of it. To wish that I had been …well, not ugly, but normal. …So I could have been allowed to marry someone who loved me, and have pretty babies. That’s what I’d really wanted, all along” (162). Combined with a throwaway comment earlier in her story—“I wished I’d called my father to escort me home, but the way was so short, it seemed silly”—Rosalie’s view of her own tragedy takes on the subtle overtones of self-blame. She is shown dismissing her own concerns as “silly” but feeling after the fact that she should have known better, that she could have prevented the attack if she had been smarter, and that perhaps the rape would not have happened at all if she had not been so beautiful, implying that while her beauty might not have made it deserved, it was still something of a natural consequence of her appearance.

The book’s other occurrence of actual sexual assault involves Jacob forcibly kissing Bella in an attempt to convince her that she shares his more-than-friendship feelings; his werewolf super-strength means he can barely feel it when she tries to make him stop and is only irritated when she tries to push his face away, so “acting on instinct, I let my hands drop to my side, and shut down. I opened my eyes and didn’t fight, didn’t feel … just waited for him to stop” (331). Her initial resistance and then total lack of reaction apparently are not enough to show Jacob just how unwelcome the kiss was, because he smiles and never expresses any regret for this assault or even a conception of why it might be wrong—and when Bella acts on her anger by punching him in the mouth and ends up cracking a knuckle on his inhumanly tough jaw, Jacob finds her attempt to strike back hilarious and sees the entire experience as a positive one. He is at least sorry that it resulted in an injury to Bella, but he takes no responsibility for a rather natural result to his forced kiss: “I held up my injured hand. He sighed. ‘That wasn’t my fault. You should have known better’” (333, emphasis added). Jacob does not believe he is at fault for sexually assaulting Bella or for being the direct cause of a broken bone, because the kiss itself is not wrong in his eyes, and he sees Bella’s attempt to make her displeasure known as simply foolish because she should have realized she would end up hurt. The reaction of Bella’s father, Charlie, helps legitimize the assault even further. She comes home with Jacob, clearly furious with him, and stomps into the kitchen to ice her injured hand; Charlie seems largely amused when Jacob tells him “She thinks she broke her hand,” and when he discovers why—“Jacob laughed. ‘She hit me’”—he laughs too. “Why did she hit you?” he asks. “Because I kissed her,” Jacob says, unashamed and unrepentant, and Charlie replies, “Good for you, kid” (336). After the events of New Moon, his preference toward Jacob is somewhat understandable, but he is still well aware that Bella has expressed no romantic interest in Jacob, remains committed to Edward, and did not want Jacob to kiss her, and yet he still congratulates Jacob on this sexually aggressive act that was clearly performed without his daughter’s consent.
The kind of objectification that can be observed in the *Twilight* series is not of the typical kind
more common to media that appeals to the male gaze; the books make a point of focusing on a
protagonist who sees herself as very normal, not beautiful, even plain and ordinary, and although
her starstruck reaction to Edward and his adopted family begins with the recognition of their
inhuman beauty, Bella makes a point of emphasizing Edward’s goodness and intelligence when
Jacob implies her attraction comes from the vampire’s wealth and good looks (*Eclipse* 110). Even
though Bella’s connection to him is not supposed to be based on surface things, however, the
overwhelming body of evidence the books present is of vampires whose most consistent and
defining characteristic is their beauty, brought to the reader’s attention with almost every
appearance any of the major vampiric characters make. Edward has smoldering eyes (*Twilight* 213)
and brilliant teeth (333) in a shockingly tempting smile (89) on his perfect face (54, 81, 219, 455),
the velvet (27) voice of an archangel (311), the body of a Greek god (206); readers are reminded
constantly of his physical flawlessness and nearly as often of Alice’s “exquisite” features (246) or
Rosalie’s “breathtaking” beauty (245). Bella’s stated motivation for wanting immortality is the
ability to be with Edward forever because she loves him, but her thoughts on the matter tend more
in the direction that she is “hideous” in comparison with the vampires she meets (*New Moon* 464),
that she offers no competition to the gorgeous vampire women she knows he has met, that she has
to be turned now, while she is still a teenager, before she gets “old” and Edward no longer wants
her—the idea of turning thirty is far more horrifying to her than that of confronting murderous
vampires (518). Their love is deep and true, the stuff of old-fashioned epics and classic romance
novels, fueled by destiny and selfless attachment rather than hormones or physical attraction, but if
Bella’s almost obsessive awareness of superficial matters as they relate to the vampires and to
herself are any indication, she has a very difficult time separating individual worth from standard
Western ideas of physical beauty and attractiveness. She does not ever appear entirely convinced
that Edward really loves her despite her lack of superhuman strength and beauty and always will,
and her reaction to her own magically acquired “dizzying beauty” is tinged with relief that she
finally looks as if she belongs with the Cullens (*Breaking Dawn* 299). This fixation on the physical
from the protagonist’s perspective drives the books closer to the kind of dehumanizing
objectification that is often crucial to the continuation of rape culture.

Because the books (and, more blatantly, the film adaptations) focus on satisfying the female gaze
rather than performing the more typical acts of turning women into sex objects, the objectification
of women that occurs is more subtle and less obviously problematic, but the attitudes expressed
still represent ones that allow men to see women existing as primarily for their benefit and
convenience, believing they have a right to access any woman’s time, attention, respect, or body at
whatever time they want. In the Twilight books, this attitude primarily takes the form of the male
characters’ and narrator’s beliefs about what kind of behavior is acceptable and right in interactions
with women, particularly when that behavior is based on the man’s idea of what is best for the
woman. In that context, these attitudes are less immediately problematic than those related to the
constant availability of women’s bodies for sex; if Edward and Jacob at least believe they are
acting in Bella’s best interests, the results of their actions are more likely to shelter Bella more than
they should rather than take sexual advantage of her, but the mindsets that allow the former also
tend to allow the latter in real-life interactions and relationships. Even here, Edward’s apparent
belief that he has a right to learn all he can about Bella by any means necessary since his usual
mind-reading tactic is denied him leads to a number of significant invasions of her privacy, none of
which either character seems to see as particularly objectionable. He has no compunctions about
snooping on Bella in other ways, watching her sleep and using his mind-reading talents to eavesdrop
on her conversations with others, and he seems to see this as his self-evident right—he does not
even consider following her wishes when she asks him to stop but dazzles her into accepting an apology for the eavesdropping that involves no guarantee about future behavior:

“Are you still angry?” he asked as he carefully maneuvered his way out.

“Definitely.”

He sighed. “Will you forgive me if I apologize?”

“Maybe…if you mean it. And if you promise not to do it again,” I insisted.

His eyes were suddenly shrewd. “How about if I mean it, and I agree to let you drive Saturday?” he countered my conditions.

I considered, and decided it was probably the best offer I would get. “Deal,” I agreed. (Twilight 223)

In *Midnight Sun*, an unpublished draft of the events of the first book from Edward’s point of view that was leaked and then made available on Meyer’s website, Edward does tell himself that watching Bella sleep without her knowledge is ungentlemanly and more than a bit strange, but he is too obsessed with finding out more about her to let that stop him for long (106). Bella is upset when she learns about this habitual nighttime surveillance, but she is mortified at what he might have heard her say while she slept rather than angry at this invasion of her privacy (*Twilight* 294), similar to her reaction to the way he spied on her through other students’ thoughts at school. She discovers that he knows the location of the spare key to her house, resulting in this exchange:

“You spied on me?” But somehow I couldn’t infuse my voice with the proper outrage.

I was flattered.

He was unrepentant. “What else is there to do at night?” (292)

The fact that he feels he has a right to know her thoughts simply because he wants to and is willing to stalk her in pursuit of this goal is dangerous ground. Similar in attitude is his way of reaching compromises with Bella, which mostly involves manipulating her into giving him what he wants and not gaining much in return. “It’s not like you didn’t know you were going to win in the end. … You always win,” Bella says grumpily after he establishes that he will only have sex with her and turn her into a vampire after they are married. “Just hedging my bets,” he replies calmly (*Eclipse* 452).

The kind of objectification that lets the male characters make decisions about the women without consulting them ties in with a repeated theme in the books that consent is unimportant, especially if the character making decisions without gaining consent can be said to be doing what is best for another person. Viewing consent as insignificant in smaller matters requires a similar attitude to one seeing a woman’s consent to sex as a matter of interpretation or open debate. In the *Twilight* series, this diminishing of the importance of consent primarily shows up in the way the heroes consistently treat and speak to the heroine, repeatedly displaying a highly paternalistic and almost proprietary attitude toward Bella. This comes up in a number of ways in the text, often with word choices that make explicit the infantilizing effect the men in Bella’s life have on her: Edward cradles Bella “like a small child” (*Twilight* 280), picks her up “like I was a toddler” (297), half-jokingly calls her “an insignificant little girl” (271), “ruffles” (273) and “musses” (367) her hair, implies that he thinks of her as a child (349), and lifts her into his giant truck and buckles her seat belt for her before she has a chance to do either herself (360). “I’m just humoring you with this,” he tells her near the end of *New Moon*, when she decides to involve the other Cullens in the decision about her mortality. “It doesn’t matter in the slightest what they say” (528), which is no surprise,
since he has already made it clear that Bella’s words on the subject matter very little either. The size difference between Bella and Jacob makes her feel like a child with a grown-up when she hugs him (*New Moon* 178 and 308), and later his voice makes him seem older than she is, “like a parent or a teacher” (*Eclipse* 111); in *Breaking Dawn*, when Jacob is trying to convince Bella to abort the baby that is killing her, he says, “What if you just listened to Carlisle like a good girl, and kept yourself alive?” (144). Bella’s own perceptions of herself in relation to Edward and Jacob continue the infantilizing effect: she tries “not to look like a sulky child” when she argues with Edward (*Twilight* 190), says she feels like a five-year-old when Edward puts her feet on his to make her dance (488), and hears Edward’s voice in her head scolding her that her behavior is “reckless and childish and idiotic” (*New Moon* 184, only one of many occurrences). Another argument with Edward makes her feel that she is being treated “as a misbehaving child” (*Eclipse* 56), and the compromise in *Eclipse* that allows her to visit Jacob makes her feel “like a child being exchanged by custodial guardians” (235 and 318). Edward’s narration in *Midnight Sun* gives more evidence for his perspective on her: “her voice was childlike when she was being stubborn” (61), “she had her hands folded under her cheek like a small child” (153), and her anger is “endearing” because she is “like a furious kitten, soft and harmless, and so unaware of her own vulnerability” (74).

These particular examples are the most blatant, but the same attitude shows up repeatedly in other ways throughout the series. “Don’t be difficult,” Edward tells Bella at one point, as if he is scolding a child, trying to preemptively shut down her argument against going to the prom, which he arranged without her knowledge or consent and against her explicit wishes (*Twilight* 484); she even tells him later, “In what strange parallel dimension would I ever have gone to prom of my own free will? If you weren't a thousand times stronger than me, I would never have let you get away with this” (495). In *Eclipse*, he uses the same sort of language in discussions about Bella’s desire for physical intimacy with him, her frustration at being monitored to keep her from visiting the werewolves, and her fairly reasonable wish to visit Jacob. If Edward has made up his mind about something, he responds with flat refusals that seem to derive their authority either from his parent-like belief that he knows best and it is his right to make and enforce these decisions, or from his ability to physically move her wherever he wants to (as in the prom example, also quoted in this paper’s epigraph). In one particular instance, Edward’s reaction to Bella’s plea for a compromise on his prohibition against sex while she is still human is perfectly representative of his tone in virtually every other similar interaction between them: “He pushed me away at once, his face heavily disapproving. ‘Be reasonable, Bella. …We’re not having this discussion’” (*Eclipse* 443). Even their arguments about Bella’s desire to become a vampire have the same paternal tone: “He rolled his eyes and set his lips. ‘Bella, we’re not having this discussion anymore. I refuse to damn you to an eternity of night and that’s the end of it’” (*Twilight* 476). At one point Edward’s controlling behavior extends to temporarily disabling her truck to prevent her from going to visit Jacob (*Eclipse* 63), and although Bella is furious about this, she forgives him almost immediately and opens her bedroom window to let him spend the night with her rather than on the (metaphorical, in this case) couch, because she and the text still see this obsessively controlling behavior as simply an inconvenient display of Edward’s love and protectiveness toward her.

Bella fights Edward’s rules sometimes, but the dynamic between them in these cases continues to reflect a parent-child relationship rather than that of equal romantic partners; she knows as well as Edward does that he can enforce the rules he sets and she can do little or nothing to change them, because his decisions are unwavering and his physical strength so far outbalances Bella’s that any attempt on her part to act differently than he will allow is pointless. She manages to visit Jacob a few times in the face of Edward’s disapproval in *Eclipse*, for instance, but she primarily does so by trying to sneak off to the reservation in a scene that feels much more like one about a teenager going to visit a boyfriend her parents dislike (*Eclipse* 62). They do move a little closer to genuine compromise later in the book, with Edward realizing that Bella has a right to visit her friend and that she may have a point on the sex issue, but Bella’s reaction to the former is telling: she can only
respond with a stunned “Wow” when he says he is willing to trust her judgment on the werewolves in general and Jacob in particular (231), a more appropriate response if the situation involved a meek child offered an unexpected concession and show of trust from an overprotective, controlling father. Even here, he is presented as self-evidently more rational and more deserving of authority than Bella is, so the parent-child dynamic is presented as almost natural.

Equally troubling are the repeated instances that show Edward treating Bella as a literal object and moving her around or making decisions for her against her stated wishes, most of which are presented as either entirely unproblematic or further proof that Edward really does know best. The number of times that the phrase “He ignored me” or variants thereof appears in **Twilight** alone is startling. One significant example occurs early on in **Twilight**, before Edward and Bella have reached any kind of official relationship status:

We were near the parking lot now. I veered left, toward my truck. Something caught my jacket, yanking me back.

“Where do you think you’re going?” he asked, outraged. He was gripping a fistful of my jacket in one hand.

I was confused. “I’m going home.”

“Didn’t you hear me promise to take you safely home? Do you think I’m going to let you drive in your condition?” His voice was still indignant. … He was towing me toward his car now, pulling me by my jacket. It was all I could do to keep from falling backward. He’d probably just drag me along anyway if I did.

“Let go!” I insisted. He ignored me. I staggered along sideways across the wet sidewalk until we reached the Volvo. Then he finally freed me — I stumbled against the passenger door.

“You are so pushy!” I grumbled.

“It’s open,” was all he responded. He got in the driver’s side.

“I am perfectly capable of driving myself home!” I stood by the car, fuming. …

“Get in, Bella.”

I didn’t answer. I was mentally calculating my chances of reaching the truck before he could catch me. I had to admit, they weren’t good.

“I’ll just drag you back,” he threatened, guessing my plan.

I tried to maintain what dignity I could as I got into his car. “This is completely unnecessary,” I said stiffly. (104)

Bella is annoyed by his behavior rather than frightened, despite the fact that this scene sounds more reminiscent of a standard abusive relationship than of the soul-deep true love they supposedly share. Edward refuses to listen to her and physically forces her to do what he wants, and the text presents this as acceptable because again, it is a sign of how much he cares for her: he is worried after her fainting spell in class, so in his mind, ignoring her protests and making her get into his car is justified. Perhaps more troubling, his actions are ultimately justified in Bella’s mind as well, because she accepts his right to demonstrate his concern this way. Much later, after Edward has spent the night at Bella’s house, a similarly structured scene occurs: “He threw me over his stone shoulder, gently, but with a swiftness that left me breathless. I protested as he carried
me easily down the stairs, but he ignored me. He sat me right side up on a chair” (315). In this instance Bella is not even annoyed, thrilled instead that he seems to be in a good mood, even though he again ignored her protests to move her around as he saw fit.

Several chapters later, the rogue vampire’s sudden determination to hunt and kill Bella leads to a tense scene between Bella, Edward, and two of the other Cullens; Edward is determined to take her away to safety, so Bella’s fear for her father and for the consequences to the Cullens of an apparent kidnapping go completely unrecognized:

We reached the Jeep in an impossibly short time, and Edward barely slowed as he flung me in the backseat.

“Strap her in,” he ordered [his adopted brother] Emmett.

… “Where are we going?” I asked.

No one answered. No one even looked at me.

“Dammit, Edward! Where are you taking me?”

… “Turn around! You have to take me home!” I shouted. I struggled with the stupid harness, tearing at the straps.

“Emmett,” Edward said grimly.

And Emmett secured my hands in his steely grasp.

“No! Edward! No, you can’t do this.”

“I have to, Bella, now please be quiet.”

… “I’m not leaving Charlie!” I yelled.

He ignored me completely.

“We have to take her back,” Emmett finally spoke.

“No.” Edward was absolute.

… “Listen,” I pleaded. “You take me back.”

“No,” he interrupted.

… “I demand that you take me home.” I tried to sound firm.

Edward pressed his fingers to his temples and squeezed his eyes shut.

“Please,” I said in a much smaller voice. (380-5)

In this particular instance, Bella does get her way, but only because Emmett and Alice manage to convince Edward to give Bella a chance to explain her own plan. The results hardly change the situation: Edward is taking her to an unknown location against her will and is again explicitly ignoring Bella’s protests (or, for that matter, her right to have an opinion on the subject at all), acting on little more than the vampires’ vastly superior physical strength and his own conviction that he knows best, and both Bella and the text accept the principle of this because his frightening behavior is yet again an expression of how deeply he cares about her.
Near the end of the book, Bella is in the hospital and would far rather talk to Edward than accept more sedating pain medication; he hints at his inclination to leave her for her own safety and responds to her resulting panic by saying, “I won’t [leave you]. Now relax before I call the nurse back to sedate you” (471). A few pages later, when he decides that Bella is not well enough to continue her argument that he should make her a vampire, he follows through with his threat and calls for a nurse. “No!” Bella says, but “he ignored me. ‘I think we’re ready for more pain medication,’ he said calmly, ignoring my furious expression” (477). Once more, Bella’s desires are overridden, based on Edward’s belief that he wants only what is best for her and that he has a better idea of what that is than she does, and because this is his justification, his refusal to accept her “no” strikes neither of them as problematic. These examples do not involve a lack of consent to sex, of course, but the attitudes in question are similar.

The situation between Bella and Edward in this respect improves considerably in the final section of *Breaking Dawn* when she has at last become a vampire, but before that, it is much the same: she wants to keep the strange baby that is killing her, and Edward is so desperate to save her and do what he feels is best that she turns to the baby-obsessed Rosalie for physical protection, legitimately concerned that Edward will drug her unconscious and abort the baby. Edward is not the only one who wants to commit a fairly significant physical violation against Bella’s explicit wishes, either; when Jacob comes to visit in the section of the book written from his point of view and is horrified to see how gravely ill (and hugely pregnant) she is, he finds Edward’s claim that he has been unable to terminate the pregnancy ridiculous:

> “Just back up a second. She won’t *let* you.” The sarcasm was acid on my tongue. “Did you ever notice that she’s exactly as strong as a normal hundred-and-ten pound human girl? How stupid are you vamps? Hold her down and knock her out with drugs.”

> “I wanted to,” Edward whispered. “Carlisle would have … [but] her bodyguard complicated things.” (132)

Bella does get her way in this case, mostly because Rosalie is there to prevent any harm to the fetus rather than because Edward respects her wishes, and because she is dying, she also finally gets her way on the matter of being turned into a vampire. For the final section of *Breaking Dawn*, then, the vast physical disparity between Edward and Bella is removed, completely preventing Edward from moving her around or holding her in place as he often did when she was human. Even then, the original decisions about whether she is safe enough, as a newborn vampire, to be allowed near her half-human child are made by others rather than by Bella herself (337), despite many clear indications that she can control herself.

As a vampire, Bella proves herself and earns respect among the other Cullens that she never had before, so by the end of the series her relationship with Edward seems to be a reasonably healthy one, but the thousands of pages in between still establish consistent and disturbing patterns of behavior and thinking, whether those patterns threaten to reinforce to the teenage girls in the series’ target demographic ideas about relationships that are highly dangerous in the real world, or the patterns simply reveal existing attitudes already at work in readers and filmgoers who love the *Twilight* series. Either way, in reinforcing these attitudes, *Twilight* itself is guilty of perpetuating rape culture against the girls and women who have fallen in love with it.


Strong, Catherine. “… it sucked because it was written for teenage girls”—Twilight, Anti-Fans and Symbolic Violence.” The Future of Sociology: The Annual Conference of the Australian


Chapter End Notes

A couple other sources that introduced me to a lot of these ideas but didn't actually make it into the paper, largely because they weren't academic: "Bad Romance (or, YA & Rape Culture)" (I swear I really tried to figure out a title that didn't involve the exact same lyrics) and Harriet J's "Another post about rape" (linked in the first post, which is how I got there).

Works inspired by this one: [podmetal] bad romance: dracula, twilight, and rape culture by Annapods

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!