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## Why must we hate the things teen girls love?

*From 'Twilight' to One Direction, the books, bands and movies popularized by young women are often regarded as less valuable.*



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In the 1960s, female Beatles fans were often mocked just as One Direction fans are today. (Photo: Marty Melville/Getty Images)

This week, Stephenie Meyer released "Life and Death: Twilight Reimagined," a gender-swapped version of "Twilight" told from the perspective of a human teen named Beau who falls for a vampire girl named Edythe.

She says the reimagining of her book was written as a response to critics who argue that Twilight's protagonist is weak, passive and not a good role model for teen girls.

"I'd had people ask me... if Bella was too much a damsel in distress, and so many a time I said she was a human in distress," Meyer told NPR. "This was my ability to really answer it solidly — that there really is no difference when the human is the male."

Naturally, the internet had plenty to say on the topic, but while "Twilight" fans — many of them teenage girls — expressed excitement over a new book in their favorite franchise, numerous others mocked them for it. And it certainly wasn't the first time.

"For many people, the fact that teenage girls like something — whether that something is Taylor Swift or One Direction or 'Twilight' — is a reason to write it off completely," said YA author and blogger Kerry Winfrey.

Winfrey was a teen herself when she learned that simply by liking something, she had the ability to make it uncool.

An avid Chuck Klosterman fan, she was reading one of his books when she came across a line that made her realize she was "definitely The Other when it came to his books. He was talking about hair metal ... and he said something to the effect that hair metal's decline was due, mostly, to teenage girls," she writes. "Because once teenage girls start liking something, it's over."

### The 'hysteria' of female fans



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Notes to One Direction from their fans. (Photo: Getty Images)

While many teens report being mocked for their interests by friends or family members, often it's the media that throws the hardest punches. When Zayn Malik announced he was leaving One Direction earlier this year, fans of the boy band turned to social media to share their heartbreak — and they were judged harshly for it.

"Our thoughts must surely go out to anybody unlucky enough to have given birth to a female child between seven and 14 years ago," writes Stuart Heritage for [The Guardian](#).

This belittling of teenage girls for their interests and fandoms isn't a new phenomenon.

At the height of The Beatles' popularity, Paul Johnson wrote in [New Statesman](#) that, "Those who flock round the Beatles, who scream themselves into hysteria, whose vacant faces flicker over the TV screen, are the least fortunate of their generation, the dull, the idle, the failures."

Often, it's the way in which girls express their love for something that draws this criticism.

On fan pages, forums and sites like Tumblr, girls can share in their obsession, participating in discussions and forging new friendships. They may write excitedly in all caps or post [GIFs](#) to communicate their emotions. They may even use [language](#) that seems foreign to outsiders when sharing their OTPs (one true pairing) or declaring "asdfghjkl" (when you're so excited you can't find the words to describe your feelings).

Teenage fans may line up hours before a movie premiere or scream and cry at a concert along with thousands of other fans. They're excited and they're sharing in that excitement with others, but often their joy is mislabeled as "hysteria."

After attending a One Direction concert this summer, Jonathan Heaf wrote for [GQ](#) that boy bands "turn a butter-wouldn't-melt teenage girl into a rabid, knicker-wetting banshee who will tear off her own ears in hysterical fervour when presented with the objects of her fascinations."

Feminist writer and activist [Bailey Poland](#) says such discussions of teen girls often seem to be ripped from 19th and early 20th century attitudes about female "hysteria."

"There's an underlying assumption that teen girls are not in control of their emotions or interests and become overly excited or upset for no reason," she said. "When the reality is that teen girls are often very intentional about what they're interested in and aware of the social influences behind those media products, and they deliberately use excitement and passion as the foundation for community-building and empathetic development."

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'Twilight' fans at a movie premiere. (Photo: [Jannine L'Amour/Flickr](#))

Mocking teenage girls and portraying their interest as worthless can further reinforce ideas that things created for women and by women are unimportant.

"Everyone loves to make fun of 'Twilight' and how passionate teen girls got behind it," said former librarian and Book Riot editor [Kelly Jensen](#). "More, when 'Twilight' became a phenom among adult women, it continued — this time, we chose to call them 'Twi-Moms' and make fun of their interests, too."

Jensen says belittling adults for reading "Twilight" or other young adult literature is "connected to the idea that work/creative pursuits with an intent to reach teens or children is feminine." She also points out that women who write the genre are frequently overlooked while men are celebrated.

"We know why it is that men like [John Green](#) write Love Stories and women like Sarah Dessen write Romances," she [writes](#). "It's not the quality. It's the way the system is built that makes women the outsiders in the category of fiction *they made*."

Often, the female-written young adult books that are wildly successful are those that feature protagonists with traditionally male characteristics, such as Tris in Veronica Roth's "Divergent" and Katniss in Suzanne Collins' "The Hunger Games."

Jensen says it's because Katniss isn't depicted as a "typical girl" that she has wider appeal. "Because of that, because of how action-driven the story is, it sells to a wider readership. And that's sort of ridiculous, especially since Katniss is a girl. She's a girl who is complex, feeling, romantic, tough, and absolutely layered and deep."

## Boys vs. girls

Just before "Breaking Dawn – Part 2" was released in 2012, Melissa Rosenberg, the screenwriter who penned all four "Twilight" movies, told [Women And Hollywood](#) that there's a double standard when it comes to fantasy films.

"We've seen more than our fair share of bad action movies, bad movies geared toward men or 13-year-old boys. And you know, the reviews are like 'OK that was crappy, but a fun ride.' But no one says 'Oh my god. If you go to see this movie you're a complete xxxing idiot.' And that's the tone. That is the tone with which people attack 'Twilight'."

[Erika Christakis](#), a lecturer at the Yale Child Study Center, made a similar argument in defense of "Twilight," stating that, "Millions of females, like their male counterparts, enjoy their fantasy life straight-up weird, sexy, and implausible. The male species is allowed all manner of violent, creepy, ludicrous and degrading movie tropes, and while we may not embrace them as high art, no one questions them seriously as entertainment."

But even liking forms of entertainment that are considered traditionally male, such as sports, comics and video games can backfire for teenage girls, who are often relegated to "[fake geek girl](#)" status.

"Sports, geekdom, and tech alike are positioned as male-dominated by default — girls aren't expected to be interested in them and accused of faking it when they are," Poland said.

As a teenager, she says her own interests in comics and "Lord of the Rings" were framed as bids for male attention or attempts to invade spaces where she wasn't welcome.

"I felt pressure to downplay my interest in feminine things because they meant I was

taken less seriously and pressure to prove myself to my male peers in other spaces and show that I was 'one of the guys.'"

Teenage girls already struggle with body image in an era of airbrushed models and they often work harder than their [male counterparts](#) to prove they can make it in STEM fields, and Winfrey says that belittling the things they love simply throws another hurdle in their path.

"I remember, very clearly, what it was like to be a teenage girl. To always feel like my opinion didn't matter, to always feel like my very approval of something instantly lessened its cool quotient," she writes. "We make sure [teen girls] know that their interests are vapid and trite. We hate everything they love, on principle. How are they supposed to grow up to be writers, thinkers, artists, lawyers, doctors or anything when they feel subhuman?"

### How can we change this?



Just because she likes dresses doesn't mean she can't like skateboards too. (Photo: De Visu/Shutterstock)

If we want to create a culture that teenage girls feel comfortable in, where they can like what they like without judgment, the solution is simple, says Bailey.

"The next time you have the impulse to dismiss something out of hand because it's popular with teen girls, stop and ask yourself if that dislike is based on who seems to enjoy it the most. Unpacking that attitude internally and changing the ways we interact with teen girls to be more respectful, understanding and empathetic is crucial."

But while some girls may be strongly affected by the demeaning of their interests, Jensen says others will continue to love what they love and fangirl despite the judgment.

"Fortunately, girls are pretty badass and do their own thing anyway. If the teen girls I know — and I worked with teens in libraries for many years — are any indication, they don't let our cultural misogyny get them down."



[Laura Moss](#) writes about a variety of topics with a focus on animals, science, language and culture. But she mostly writes about cats.

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