Chapter 7
“Twilight” Fans Represented in Commercial Paratexts and Inter-Fandoms: Resisting and Repurposing Negative Fan Stereotypes

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One strand of work within fan studies has involved contesting representations of fandom, discerning problematic, pathologizing stereotypes of media fans (see Jenson). Indeed, Henry Jenkins has referred to this type of work as “a central genre in fan studies” (“Afterword” 357). However, it has occasionally been suggested that the need for such scholarship has passed. Media fandom, we are told, is now sufficiently mainstream to have become industrially and culturally normalized:

More than a decade later [than The Adoring Audience and Textual Poachers], the need for such a partisan representation of fandom has disappeared … with the proliferation of multi-channel television and the arrival of new information technologies such as the internet, fandom seems to have become a common and ordinary aspect of everyday life in the industrialized world that is actively fostered and utilized in industry marketing strategies. (Sandvoss 3)

I want to reopen the study of negative fan stereotypes, arguing that Cornel Sandvoss is both right and wrong to see this as an outmoded approach. Right, because fandom has indeed become part of marketing strategies, as I will go on to demonstrate with regard to “Twilight” fandom, but wrong because we cannot deduce from this industrial normalization that wider cultures have embraced such fan identities as uncontroversial.

A number of scholars have already begun to explore this process with regard to “Twilight” fans. Melissa Click, for example, has surveyed mass media coverage of the phenomenon, demonstrating how

*The New York Times* described *Twilight* fans as “on the rabid side” and *USA Today* portrayed fans as “ravenous” and “in a frenzy.” *Entertainment Weekly* reported that an appearance by Robert Pattinson … sent “thousands of besotted girls into fits of red-faced screaming”; *The Boston Globe* suggested that fans’ interest in the films’ stars is “enthusiasm bordering on hysteria.” These reports of girls and women seemingly out of their minds … disparage female fans’ pleasures and curtail serious explorations of the strong appeal of the series (n. pag.)
Such pathologizing representations are strikingly similar to earlier press coverage of the romantic blockbuster Titanic and itsfangirls, who also found themselves depicted via "negative connotations ... in journalistic word choice ... often [being] described in terms of phrase evoking animalized or dehumanized masses" (Nash and Lahti 75–6). Even now, girls' desires and cultures are frequently (though not always univocally) attacked by cultural commentators and the mainstream media. As Click points out, "the Twilight Saga presents an opportunity to disrupt the persistent stereotypes about girls, the media they enjoy, and their cultural activities" (n. pag.). However, as Lisa Bode argues, not all mainstream media reviews of the "Twilight" movies portray fans negatively, even if positive representations are in a distinct minority. More positive mainstream representations occur where commentators link the "Twilight" saga to "nineteenth century romance novels and romantic heroes ... as 'chaste' and 'fervent' [and] ... valued ... as ... a small victory against a perceived insidious sexualising of culture" (Bode, "Tastes," 13–4). This position cuts across political positions, with both right-wing and left-wing broadsheet critics in the UK praising the "Twilight" series for its opposition to sexual expression (on the right) and sexualized capitalism (on the left; see Bode, "Tastes").

I will contribute to the debate over fan representation here by approaching images of "Twilight" fandom through two different strategies, each of which moves beyond studying mass media coverage of such fans. It should be understood that there isn't one thing that can be dubbed "Twilight fandom," so my use of the term must be read as an analytical construct: in actuality, there are many different "Twilight" fandoms, some self-identified and highly visible, others contested and constructed performatively in a series of ways.

First, I'll consider how "Twilight" fans are represented in official "Twilight" DVD extras, and in the Summit-distributed documentary Twilight in Forks. These textual and "paratextual" depictions of fandom (Gray, Show Sold Separately 6) might be expected to show fans in a more positive light, and I will argue that they move from "fandom as pathology," in Joli Jensen's classic (1992) formulation, to what I will instead term "fandom as pedagogy." Here, images of fan community, sociality, and activity are mobilized promotionally in order to discipline fandom. Fans and franchise owners are represented as enjoying a harmonious, reciprocal relationship, expressing gratitude to each other. This symbolic dematerialization of power relations suggests that "Twilight" fans are not negatively stereotyped in commercial, niche paratexts on DVD "Special Editions," yet moments of pathologization remain evident, albeit marginalized. At the same time, this promotion of specific fan activities appears to call the "authenticity" of teen fandom into question for some scholars (see Brooker, Stein; Stevens Aubrey, Walsh, and Click).

Second, I will move on from paratextual images of fandom to consider representations of "Twilight" fandom circulating in the subcultural domains of inter-fandom. How do a range of other fandoms—of Muse, Buffy the Vampire
From Fandom as Pathology to Fandom as Pedagogy: The Consequences of Paratextual Characterization

Paratexts have recently become a major object of study in media scholarship, most clearly in Jonathan Gray’s 2010 book *Show Sold Separately*. Gray draws on the approach of literary theorist Gérard Genette (1997), who analyzed the materials in a book that were not part of its “text” as such—prefaces, introductions, back-cover endorsements. Applying Genette’s stance to a media culture increasingly characterized by hype, promotion, trailers, online buzz, and user-generated content, Gray demonstrates the usefulness of paratextual study. Among his case studies are DVD extras, which “teach us how and why to admire the [given] film” (Show 99), thereby acting as a form of pop-cultural pedagogy. These “studio-sanctioned forms of cinematic knowledge” (Tryon 24) seek to set the terms of

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1 In its mission statement, Comic-Con International describes itself as “a nonprofit educational organization dedicated to creating awareness of, and appreciation for, comics and related popular art forms, primarily through the presentation of conventions and events that celebrate the historic and ongoing contribution of comics to art and culture.”
audience engagement with a text, but they can also mediate fan communities back to themselves (and to other interested audiences who may not be part of the fandom). Such extras have increasingly incorporated representations of fandom (see Barlow 159 and King 53).

By displaying images of fandom in DVD extras, a film can be promoted as an “event” and as having some sort of cultural significance; a commercial release can be discursively converted into a “phenomenon” via the paratextual inclusion of audience representations, particularly where those audiences are dedicated, desiring, passionate fans. As such, both students and scholars of media should be wary of attributing the status of a puzzling or mysterious “phenomenon” to media texts, given that rather than an empirical fact, this can often be a matter of paratextual promotion (linked to wider paratextual take-up in media coverage). Scholarship risks being ensnared in promotional, paratextual agendas if it does not remain critical of such commercial devices.

The “Twilight” films repeatedly use fan representations in their official DVD extras. The Region 2 two-disc “Special Edition” release of Twilight includes two fan-focused features, one entitled “The Comic-Con Phenomenon” (note the discourse of “phenomenalism” already being drawn on here), and another being “UK Premiere Footage” shot in London’s Leicester Square. The “Special Edition” of New Moon also features fan-related extras, this time a documentary dubbed “Fandimonium” and a companion piece exploring “Team Edward vs. Team Jacob: The Ultimate Love Triangle.” These DVD paratexts share a number of attributes. Although fans are referred to as “crazy” by lead actors such as Taylor Lautner, this is within an affectionate frame whereby fans are repeatedly acknowledged: “you guys are our inspiration,” Lautner observes at the 2008 Comic-Con panel featured in “The Comic-Con Phenomenon.” Lead actors and Twilight director Catherine Hardwicke represent themselves as fans, with Edi Gathegi (Laurent) baldly stating that “the book was phenomenal … I became a Twilight fan.”

But as well as seeking to mirror fan engagements, and crediting fandom as the “ultimate driving force” behind Twilight (Kristen Stewart in “Fandimonium”), these DVD extras repeatedly represent fandom as a crowd or collective. Fans are shown as an audience mass (at Comic-Con), as a screaming crowd (at the premiere), and as waiting communally in various cinema and Comic-Con queues. Fans are most commonly represented in front of the camera in groups or pairs—even single fans speaking to camera often have friends or fellow fans visible around them, with the notable exception of questioners at Comic-Con, who are framed in close-up. More typically, fandom is socially and communally framed, and fans are usually not named in these DVD extras. Fan sentiments are markedly neither individualized nor attributed; fans are part of a throng, a gathering, or a screaming crowd. By strong contrast, creative personnel working on the movies are carefully introduced (at the premiere) and captioned with names and characters/roles in other DVD extras. The only fan to be individualized in this way in Region 2 DVD paratexts is “Ky Wildermuth, Contest Winner,” who as such is symbolically promoted into the cast and crew; his prize was to appear on-screen.
in *New Moon*, and this elevation in status extends to how he is represented in the DVD paratext “Fandimonium.” Stars and producers are constantly individualized as unique selves, reinforcing their celebrity status, while fans are unnamed and rendered representative or indicative. Fans are not pathologized in this semiotic move, but they are nonetheless systematically denied the selfhood conferred on “media folk,” and their position as secondary is thus tacitly and ideologically reinforced. For all the stars’ protestations of “we’re here because of you” (Rachel Lefevre, who plays Victoria in *Twilight and New Moon*, in “Fandimonium”), fans are given a voice but not an identity-position from which to speak, other than the category of “fan in the crowd.” Fandom is othered, even while it is appealed to and seemingly acknowledged as powerful.

The UK premiere footage also captures this sense of “media folk” interacting somewhat awkwardly with fandom. Here, Alex Zane interviews cast and crew in front of a crowd of screaming fans. Director Hardwicke shifts between answering Zane and addressing the crowd of fans, a move that requires her to turn away physically from her media interviewer. She thus becomes literally caught in the uneasy position of addressing two different audiences—supposedly participating in a media event, but also seeking to acknowledge fans. The crowd also refuses to accept the role of passive audience allocated to it, as at one point a fan shouts out an answer to a question put to Pattinson, calling out that he is “fit.” This leads Zane to intone, with mock solemnity, “You are not allowed to answer for Robert this evening.” Pattinson laughs and good-humoredly incorporates the fan intervention into his media interview, but again the tension between planned “media event” and spontaneous fan participation is palpable.

Fan activity is carnivalesque or unruly here, momentarily refuting the position granted to it by a controlled publicity exercise. But other DVD extras, through their formatting and editing, restore a sense of Summit’s publicity control over fandom. *Twilight*’s “Comic-Con Phenomenon” ends with a fan excitedly saying “Summit Entertainment, thank you so much for this movie,” while *New Moon*’s “Fandimonium” ends with a simple closing caption “THANK YOU,” evidently addressed from the “Twilight” franchise to its fandom. These constructions of gratitude dematerialize any sense of fan critique, or disempowerment, as well as glossing over otherings of media folk versus fan audiences. A sense of reciprocity is created; fans thank Summit on the *Twilight* disc, and Summit subsequently returns these thanks via an extra on *New Moon*.

By focusing on Comic-Con events and premieres, these DVD extras constantly reinforce pre-release marketing strategies used by Summit Entertainment, which had already focused on a range of personal appearances by the stars: “[Nancy] Kirkpatrick [president for worldwide marketing at Summit] stressed the power of these personal appearances when she told *Successful Promotions* magazine (a trade publication) that Summit ‘felt that live cast appearances would be essential in maintaining massive buzz and excitement’ for the franchise” (Stevens Aubrey, Walsh, and Click 234). Paratexts representing fans as screaming crowds or excited Comic-Con attendees thus mediate, and extend to non-present audiences, the affective impact of these events:
live cast appearances are a win-win situation for both the fans and for Summit. For the fans, the acts of worship in proximity to the teen idols are communal, social acts... that allow young girls to engage in an activity that is outside the scope of cultural norms of passive femininity. For Summit, screaming girls translate into loyalties to the franchise and an excitement that is spread to others, especially girls. Thus, the use of personal appearances in the extensive publicity campaign for Twilight allowed Summit to thoroughly cultivate and profit from teen fans' idolization of the actors. (Stevens Aubrey, Walus, and Click 235)

DVD extras extend this “cultivation” of fan idolization, enabling opportunities for mimetic fandom, audiences emulating the represented fan behaviors and practices. One area where this is especially notable is in the DVD extra “Team Edward vs Team Jacob” on New Moon. This functions to promote these reading positions, converting fandom into a call for new audiences to join the heteronormative game (Kalviknes Bore and Williams 197–8). And by interpellating “shipping” audiences, the extra also fits into other merchandizing paratexts, resonating with “products that allow fans to demonstrate their allegiance to... certain aspects and characters. In short, merchandise in this category signals one’s status as a fan... and allow[s] fans to demonstrate loyalty... e.g. Team Edward, Team Jacob” (Stevens Aubrey, Walus, and Click 237). “Shippers” are those fans who read the text via a specific character pairing or relationship (hence the term “‘shipper”), but by addressing this specific type of fan activity, “Team Edward vs Team Jacob,” along with other merchandise, seeks to reinforce, popularize, and extend this aspect of fan culture.

In a sense, then, these fan-focused DVD extras can be read less as pathologizing fandom (though it is symbolically othered in some ways) and more as a pedagogy of fandom. Fans are implicitly directed to scream at their idols so as to form part of the community; as one fan recounts in “The Comic-Con Phenomenon,” “we screamed. It was awesome.” And fans are directed to read the series via “Teams,” as well as being positioned, rather politely, within a symbolic relationship of reciprocated gratitude. Some (highly limited) fan unruliness is represented, but only that which reinforces the “idol” status of Pattinson or Lautner.

These DVD extras signpost co-opted fan behaviors, operating in a way that is akin to Will Brooker’s observations on Dawson’s Creek and teen fans, and Louisa Stein’s work on Kyle XY and “millennial” fandom. Both scholars argue that participation in fandom is “shaped from ‘above’” (Brooker 468) by corporate paratexts, whereby a “corporate-sponsored, -promoted, and -guided version of fandomness, packaged as contemporary youth identity” works to strengthen brand loyalty (Stein 128). And as Roberta Pearson has also recently argued, “corporate content may... create a ‘false’ sense of community. While ancillary content may mimic fan practices... real fan communities can only grow from the grassroots” (92). For these academics, teens seem to be recurrently linked to less authentic fandoms, and to fan activities that are pre-defined by corporate/publicity strategies. However, marketing-led pedagogies of fandom cannot be viewed as
somewhat mediating, or leading to, less authentic fandoms, since the "grassroots" itself—as Jenkins shows in Textual Poachers—has frequently been premised on fan "socialization" and initiation. That is to say, supposedly "grassroots" fandom is itself mimetic, as it is learned and emulated via an "apprenticeship," just as "Twilight" fandom can be viewed as potentially mimetic of paratextual, corporate coverage, or of marketing strategies focused on merchandising and personal appearances.

Paratexts representing "Twilight" fandom can also become full-fledged texts, such as the 83-minute documentary Twilight in Forks, rights to which were acquired by Summit. Twilight in Forks was then branded so as to link it to the official DVD release of New Moon, which it accompanied in the US, with both being released on 20 March 2010. However, the "textual" authenticity of the film was queried in some quarters, with Cinematical blogger Monika Bartyzel writing that it was "not a documentary in the strict sense of the word. It's not an investigative passion project, nor a film focused on the art and exploration of a story. It's a marketing supplement meant to feed fandom" (n. pag.). As Gray notes, in some cases the overly visible presence of marketing devalues a text, as "hype betrays a text's industrial roots too obviously for some audiences, thereby disqualifying it" (Show 114).

Twilight in Forks opens with a section on "Fans." This follows a prologue of sorts in which residents of Forks, including Michael Curing of the Chamber of Commerce, discuss vampires as if they were real. Playfully blurring fantasy and reality, the text begins by reading the "Twilight" phenomenon into and onto the geography and history of Forks, Washington, the town in which Stephenie Meyer chose to set Bella's narrative. This "as-if" admixture of fantasy and reality then leads into representations of fans, this time named as participants within the documentary form. A range of fan narratives is presented; female fans happen upon filming and get a chance to meet Pattinson; they appear onscreen with photographs of themselves and Pattinson. Male "Twilight" fans are portrayed, confessing their presence "in secret in the fandom," and Twilight Moms are also represented. Of particular note is a senior writer for MTV, Larry Carroll, who recounts his relationship to "Twilight" fandom after covering the subject journalistically. Carroll repeatedly compares "Twilight" fans to other media fandoms, asserting that "Twilight" fandom is more generous, patient, and tolerant than "Star Wars fans or Star Trek fans or comic book geeks," before subsequently opining, "It's very easy for mainstream culture to write off Star Trek fans or Star Wars fans or Harry Potter fans as quote-unquote freaks, and as somebody who's met a lot of Trekkies and Star Wars fans, comic book fans, I've seen some people that I might tend to call freaks as well, but the "Twilight" fans are a unique breed." This non-pathologization of "Twilight" fandom is not at all premised on a challenge to negative fan stereotypes, but occurs as a relocation of the pathologized fan. While Twilighters are redeemed through exceptionalism, being a "special breed" and "unique," the notion that fans are weird or deviant is simultaneously reinforced (and see the following section on inter-fandom for more on this strategy).
The documentary also flirts at one point with representing “Twilight” fans as deviant, with Forks High School graduate Sean Weekes noting that “some of the ‘Twilight’ people, the tourists that come here for ‘Twilight,’ some of them are a little too into the books” and are supposedly unable to tell fantasy from reality. Ironically, this deviance is playfully enacted by the format of the documentary, which formally undermines the content of this specific interview. But Weekes’s ambivalence can nonetheless be heard in the phrase “the ‘Twilight’ people,” which lumps together and others “Twilight”-related tourists. Fan pathologization is hence readable here as a specific outcome of tension between residents and tourists, rather than as a wholesale devaluation of the fan culture. Such pathologization is also momentary, working against the predominant framing of “Twilight” fans as legitimately interested in the locale of Forks.

In this text and other official Summit paratexts, “Twilight” fans are represented in ways that do not reflect “twentieth century beliefs about modernity” (Jenson 4). Jenson argues that negative fan stereotypes—such as the frenzied, hysterical crowd—depict a dark side to modernity by coding anxieties over weakened self-identity within an atomized society and mass culture. However, these patterns of meaning are missing in “Twilight”’s twenty-first-century, industrial imaging. Instead, paratextual representations of fandom play out media culture’s corporate emphasis on consumer “teams” and passionate audiences. Fans are shown how to behave; “bad” fandoms are firmly positioned outside the “Twilight” brand and linked to other branded narratives. Rather than media influence being a threat or a problem, these corporate paratexts are premised on the assumption that media influence can operate mimetically on desiring consumers. This is a marketing aim rather than a cultural anxiety. And fan identities are emphasized, pedagogically, as passionate yet polite, as unruly yet organized into teams, as a “mass” collective that is valued by media personnel yet symbolically subordinated to unique celebrity individualism. If narratives of self are suspended or disrupted by fandom’s carnivalesque “screaming crowd,” then valued, secured self identities are re-presented via Pattinson, Stewart, Lautner, Hardwicke, Meyer, et al.

Thus far I have considered how the paratexts of “Special Edition” DVDs and other marketing texts pedagogically represent fan audiences by resisting pathologization. Paratextual images of “Twilight” fans do not wholly replay the stereotyping of female teen fans present elsewhere in mass media coverage. However, Summit paratexts nevertheless symbolically subordinate female teen “Twilight” fans to elevated “idols” and media personnel, while also presenting a rigid template of what their fandom should be (heteronormative, politely grateful, consuming via “Teams”). Official paratexts also occasionally fall back into moments of stereotyping, as well as conserving the notion that media fandom is generally deviant, versus the exceptionalism of the “Twilight” phenomenon.

In the following section I address how “Twilight” fans are represented by and in other media fandoms. If knowledge of “Twilight” promo events at Comic-Con came solely from Summit’s marketing materials, one might be forgiven for assuming that this promotional activity was a harmonious, uncontroversial meeting of the
"Twilight" phenomenon and Comic-Con. However, Comic-Con has not always been a hospitable home for "Twilight" fandom. This history raises the issue of how "Twilight" fans are represented by a range of other media fandoms, and in ways that are radically different from Summit's paratextual marketing. Though these representations remain outside the mainstream of mass media coverage (Click n. pag.), they nevertheless return to and repurpose negative fan stereotypes. As a consequence, contemporary fan-cultural representations of other fandoms can be just as problematic as the mass media othering of fans that cultural studies has spent decades critiquing (Jenkins, Poachers; Jenson). Negative stereotyping isn't just something done to fans by the journalistic commonsense of media institutions; it is also enacted by and between fan groups.

From Anti-Fandom to Inter-Fandom: Pathologizing Stereotypes of Fans, By Fans

If a classic genre of fan studies' work involves studying fan stereotypes in mass media coverage, then a more recent addition involves the "anti-fan" (Gray, "Audiences"). Anti-fans are those who viscerally dislike specific texts, often without much experience of them, basing their distaste on trailers, textual snippets, or other paratextual sources. Anti-fans carry out "distant readings" and perform their moral and cultural opposition to particular media products. The "Twilight" phenomenon evidently has no shortage of anti-fans (Sheffield and Merlo; see also Chapters 9 and 10 in the present volume) as well as displaying tensions within its own fan ranks. For example, some teens describe Twilight Moms (an older generation of fans) as "creepy." According to Bode, "The demonising of the Twilight Mom or adult female Twilight fan for the younger fans is ... an attempt to quarantine the film and books from unhip older contaminating cultural meanings, by patrolling the borders of a youth culture that is imagined as intense, sexy, and vital, as well as defining acceptable adult behaviour" ("Tainted" 6). Here, Bode considers intra-fandom distinctions; sections of "Twilight" fandom are pathologized and stereotyped by other "Twilight" fans, this time along an axis of generation rather than via gendered readings per se. Although such intra-fandom plays out a struggle over cultural identity (sexualized, "edgy" teen identity versus the supposedly desexualized, responsible "adult"), I want to consider a different identity struggle. My interest lies instead in inter-fandom, that is, relationships between different media fandoms, whereby one fan culture defines itself against and negatively stereotypes another. These inter-fandoms also differ from what Vivi Theodoropoulou calls "the anti-fan within the fan ... where fandom is a precondition of anti-fandom. ... These are cases where two fan objects are clear-cut or traditional rivals, thus inviting fans to become anti-fans of the 'rival' object of admiration" (316).

This "anti-fan within the fan" approximates most closely to sports fans who have traditional rivals, such as Liverpool vs. Everton FC in Britain or the Yankees vs. the Red Sox in the US. Here, liking one fan object means disliking
a prescribed “opponent,” and is part of the socialization of becoming a fan. It is a pedagogically prescribed anti-fandom, if you like. Theodoropoulos argues that media fandoms can sometimes display analogous modes of anti-fandom, pointing out that “in cases of textual proximity, binary oppositions that invite anti-fandom may be established. Star Wars’ fans dislike of Star Trek is a recorded case” (318). However, these anti-fandoms are neither as fixed nor as strongly learned as those surrounding rival sports teams. I would argue that such inter-fandom relations are, instead, more contingent, less binding upon fans, and less prescribed by “tradition.” While Theodoropoulos’s argument works well for many sports fandoms, it does not readily transfer to media fans; I would argue that their inter-fandom relations call for specific theorization. Examining representations of “Twilight” fans thus involves going beyond established narratives and concepts of “anti-fandom.”

“Twilight” fandom was brought into heightened proximity with a range of other media fandoms by virtue of its promotion at Comic-Con in 2008 and 2009. This presence resulted in a “brouhaha over New Moon at Comic-Con 2009” whereby female fans were represented as out-of-place: “franchises and fan activities are assumed to be for fanboys. Thus, the girls and women who showed up to support New Moon at Comic-Con ‘mined’ the fan convention” for many male attendees” (Click n. pag.).

“Twilight” fans were pathologized through Comic-Con’s inter-fandom reactions, as Jessica Sheffield and Elyse Merlo consider in further detail:

[The] was directed at fans of the vampire series, who filled up seats in panels completely unrelated to Twilight to ensure they would be present for the coveted Twilight event. . . . [M]any members of other fandoms felt the Twilight fans were particularly unwelcome. . . . Reelz Channel’s Movic News (2009) reported that some people “just didn’t think that Twilight, with all its hordes of screaming fan-girls, had any place at Comic-Con.” This characterization of Twilight fans is emblematic of a troubling gendered tendency to represent the (mostly) female Twilight fandom as unworthy of entry to traditional fandom spaces. (207)

However, Sheffield and Merlo do not dwell on this inter-fandom but move on to consider more conventional forms of anti-fandom, including websites set up to critique the “Twilight” phenomenon such as the “Twilight Sucks! Forum . . . [and] The Venom Apple” (212). They thus do not consider how inter-fandom moves beyond the conceptual frame of anti-fandom, operating as a more contested, contingent, and multiple set of readings. Instead, the “Comic-Con confrontation” is positioned as “just one example of this . . . particularly active anti-fandom, which can be seen both in mainstream media accounts of clashes between fans and anti-fans and in . . . online forums” (219). Though they refer to inter-fandom, Sheffield and Merlo downplay it, rendering it emblematic of processes occurring elsewhere rather than analyzing it as a specific set of cultural practices in its own right.

Inter-fandom highlights the extent to which “Twilight” fans may be negatively stereotyped not just by the “anti” and in mainstream media coverage, but also
by other media fans. This inter-fandom stereotyping is profoundly ironic, as it suggests that fan cultures who may themselves historically have been victims of pathologizing stereotypes (Jenkins, *Poachers*) are now in some instances turning those patterns of stereotyping onto other, younger fans and fandoms. And this issue also raises the question of age, something that Sheffield and Merlo neglect to mention in their interpretation of Comic-Con as “emblematic of a troubling gendered tendency,” just as Click similarly interprets this contertemps as one of fanboys versus fangirls (n. pag.). Of course, it is gendered, but it is “gender plus,” that is, gender plus age or generation.

Disdain for younger media fandoms has been implied through negative stereotyping in fan culture for some time, as witnessed by the term “feral fandom.” Highly problematic, this language from the 1990s has not achieved wide usage in fan culture, often being displaced by more neutral terms such as “gateway” or “threshold” fandom—but “feral” evidently connotes the wildness of un tutored or unsocialized fans, unaware of long-established media fandoms. “Feral,” as fanlore.org recounts, means

Someone who … came into fandom without having to go through a gatekeeper. … Feral Fandom is the newest term, really only coming into its own post Internet, and the breakdown of the gatekeeper system. Most fandoms now develop their own culture, practices and vocabulary independent of media fandom. The “feral” nature of any fandom … is especially revealed when its members come into contact with other independent fandoms, resulting in cultural conflicts. (n. pag.)

*Xena* and “Harry Potter” have been seen as creating “feral” or “threshold” fandoms in that they brought new, younger fans into media fandom and its activities. The “Twilight” phenomenon can, of course, also be viewed in this light, inspiring new generations of fans who are likely to be unaware of media fandom’s established cultures. The pathologizing notion of Twilighters “invading” Comic-Con is hence not only gendered, it also delegitimizes the activities of new fans who are younger and supposedly not socialized within normative fandom. Bode argues, for example, that

*Twilight* fans were accused of “invading” the event in their thousands, irritating the regular annual attendees … [such as] comic book, science fiction, fantasy and horror fans. To the sound of loud boos, cat-calls and laughter, film director Kevin Smith … chastised his audience for their hostility towards the *Twilight* fans, saying: “How dare you pass judgment on those 12 year old girls who like vampires! They need to be encouraged, because in six years time they’ll be 18 year old girls who like vampires and are into all sorts of goth-permissive and what-not!” (“Tastes” 716)

“Regular” attendees are offended by “invading” newbies. The gender of these intruders is, in Kevin Smith’s address, marked out as less of a problem than their age. In a few years’ time, this femininity may become desirable rather than threatening to heterosexual male fans, as Bode notes when she observes that
Smith holds out the ... promise to his audience that the threat posed by this kind of fan is only temporary. ... In this way, the teen girl, along with her tastes and affective investments, is repositioned as ultimately non-threatening to the [fan] social order. As the 12-year-old girl grows to maturity, she will both come to make distinctions between good and bad vampire texts, and leave *Twilight* behind. She will become sexual and perhaps turn into an object of desire herself for male cult media fans. (“Tastes” 716)

The range of “traditional” fans at Comic-Con includes horror and SF/fantasy fandoms who have positioned the “Twilight” series as a “bad” vampire text for the way in which it violates the generic conventions of daylight-fearing, evil monsters (Bode, “Tastes”). This specific othering of the “Twilight” phenomenon (and its readers/audiences) by horror fans indicates that there was not one Comic-Con response to “invading” Twilighters but rather a coalition of differentiated and partly contested inter-fandoms at work, as Smith’s address suggests. However, what these inter-fandoms tended to share was a pathologizing of “Twilight” fandom as implicitly “feral” (untutored and unsocialized as a result of age and newness to the scene), as problematically gendered, and as lacking in genre knowledge. Hence “Twilight” was again positioned as “somehow less authentic than other fandoms” (Sheffield and Merlo 220), this time not by scholars critiquing its corporate containment, but by other media fans. Along axes of gender and generation, “Twilight” fans are once more negatively stereotyped, albeit by older, male fans rather than the mainstream mass media.

The inter-fandom pathologizing of “Twilight” has not been restricted to Comic-Con’s spatial collisions and proximities. It has also been evident in online fandoms for texts such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. This fan community might be expected to share textual and generic interests with “Twilight” fans, since *Buffy* also exploits vampire-meets-romance storylines, such as *Buffy*’s relationships with Angel and Spike. Rather than manifesting fellow fan feeling, however, some *Buffy* fans strongly critique the “Twilight” phenomenon and its following. As Julia Kirsty Merrett notes, *Buffy* fans

[distinguish] themselves from other groups of fans, “othering” fans in different communities. ... This is exemplified by the following thread concerning Twilight fans and the marketing of “Edward underwear” ... “By the look of this, those Twilight fans will do anything to feel like they have Edward’s mouth in the general area of their crotch” [post 1] ... “I feel kinda sorry for the guy. Don’t think it’s exactly a good feeling knowing there are crazies walking around with your face on their crotch” [post 2]. (224)

One *Buffy* fan even compares her own consumption to this example, but in order to ward off the taint of “obsessiveness”: “I used to think about buying Mrs Marsters panties on eBay, but I found out at that moment that I wasn’t quite that obsessed” [post 5] (Merrett 225). Merrett argues on the basis of this online material drawn from *Buffy*-boards that pathologizations of fandom are “persistent ... within and outside of fandom. ... Even within fandom, there is a feeling of one group being more strange, more obsessive or less tasteful than another” (225).
It is not only tastefulness that is challenged here, however; it is also, of course, a sexualized image of “Twilight” fandom that is positioned negatively. “Twilight” fandom is devalued for its susceptibility to hypercommercialism, just as scholars decry the hypercommercialism of the series itself. The devaluation also results from what is presumed about fans’ sexual desires, which are positioned as immature, fantasized, and hence unreal or unrequited: “Twilight fans will do anything to feel like they have Edward’s mouth in the general area of their crotch.” The *Buffy* fans who critique “Twilight” fandom in this way can be assumed, as long-term devotees of their series, to be twentysomethings or older. Otherings of the “Twilight” phenomenon thus may result from age differences, rather than emerging as a gendered rebuke to “Twilight” fans. Of course, the Twilight Moms phenomenon might complicate this condescension of older female fan to younger female fan, since the Twilight Moms might be presumed to be still more sexually experienced/more mature than the *Buffy* fans. However, it is notable that these *Buffy* fans specifically connote Twilighters as “immature”—Twilight Moms are not their symbolic target. While othering “Twilight” fandom, *Buffy* fans also misrepresent “Edward underwear” as an official, mass-produced product, when in fact this was DIY merchandise, playfully created for the “Twit-tarded” blog and represented ironically. In order to combat misreadings, the blog was actually updated as follows: “These [Pattinson panties] were made for us as a gag by a very talented—and funny—reader. They are not for sale and are not being mass-produced” (Snarkier n. pag.).

A different example of inter-fandom pathologization (emerging through both textual proximity and intertextual connection) concerns fans of the band Muse. Muse’s music is used in the “Twilight” films, and Meyer is an avowed Muse fan herself, meaning that their music, the “Twilight” films, and Meyer’s books all have an extratextual and intertextual proximity. Rebecca Williams has analyzed how some “Twilight” fans follow this intertextual pathway in their fandom, but are pathologized and negatively stereotyped by sections of Muse fandom posting at the official Muse board, in the “Muse in the media” subforum. She observes that there is a sense that for those fans who have discovered Muse via Twilight there should be a feeling of gratitude. This view clearly positions Muse as the superior fan object, as one which should be appreciated and valued over Twilight—the inferior text. ... [The] “hard-core Muse” ... is extremely interested in music and ... is opposed to the imagined mainstream of ... high school peers or the audience of a teen movie (... making distinctions based around ideas of infantilization and childishness). (n. pag.)

Fans who combine “Twilight” fandom with Muse fandom defend their “gateway” or route into Muse appreciation, suggesting that “[i]f it takes a mainstream movie to expose people to Muse, I don’t see what’s so bad about that. It made me a dedicated fan” (qtd. Williams, n. pag.). However, other fans negotiate their position in the two fandoms by disavowing “Twilight” fandom and positioning themselves solely with the “superior” fan object of Muse, as when, for example, a Muse fan
affirmed that “I love Muse. I really do. I hate Twilight. I really do. But ... I found Muse through Twilight back in my er ... idiotic stupid days when I thought shit was the new cool” (qtd. Williams, n. pag.).

Despite such negotiations of fan identity, either defending a combined “Twilight” and Muse fandom, or placing one fandom firmly in the past as an “idiotic” phase, Muse fans also draw on pathologizations to devalue “Twilight” fandom, repurposing negative stereotypes from mainstream media coverage (as do the Buffy fans above). In this case, however, they do so to defend the boundaries around “authentic” Muse fandom. As one Muse fan observed, “If the movie weren’t shit, actually had a story line, and wasn’t doted on by creepy little fangirls who get turned on by sparkles, I would rejoice [sic] at the fact that Muse was getting proper recognition. But this is not the case” (qtd Williams n. pag.).

Inter-fandom uses devaluing discourses of “creepy” fandom (Muse versus “Twilight”), or sexualized “crazies” (Buffy versus “Twilight”) to elevate one pop-cultural fandom by devaluing an othered text and its audiences. Such inter-fandom pathologizations can occur when spatial proximity brings fandoms into contact (as at Comic-Con), or via generic and intertextual proximities (as with Buffy and Muse). Pathologizing inter-fandom maneuvers resemble those discursively enacted by Carroll in Twilight in Forks: one media fandom can be legitimated, or distanced from stereotyping, by relocating negative fan stereotypes elsewhere—leaving the symbolic equation of “fan = deviant” in place while arguing for fan exception(als)ims. However, these gambits rarely involve traditional fan oppositions, unlike the “anti-fan within the fan” studied by Theodoropoulou. Rather, such inter-fandoms occur more contingently and in diverse ways across fan communities: horror fans critiquing the “Twilight” phenomenon as “inauthentic” for its vampire representations, for example, or Buffy fans decrying the alleged “immature” sexuality of “Twilight” fans.

What such inter-fandoms share is a repurposing of negative fan stereotypes, as well as a concern with the “Twilight” phenomenon as a “gateway” to other media and fandoms. Established media fandom may have historically viewed such fan cultures as “feral” or untutored, as Smith’s comedic defense of the “Twilight” phenomenon at Comic-Con evidences by arguing that it might act as a positive “gateway” into goth subculture in due course. This concern over “Twilight” as a “gateway” is also shared in Muse fandom, where its acceptability as a route into becoming a Muse fan is hotly contested (Williams). And the concept of “Twilight” fandom as a “gateway” is played out in aspects of mainstream media coverage, with cultural commentators suggesting positively that reading the “Twilight” series can bring teens into reading as an activity, or that the franchise can negatively lead to a low-cultural cul-de-sac of romance reading rather than engagement with “literature” (see Bode, “Tastes”). What is striking in each instance is that mainstream and inter-fandom pathologizations of “Twilight” fandom do not hinge only on gendering, though they do hinge on this, but also on generation. “Twilight” fans are “just going through a phase” based on their age, all this “gateway” imagery rather condescendingly implies.
I have argued here that we should supplement a focus on mainstream, mass media representation of “Twilight” fans with an approach that also considers how fans are being represented, positively and negatively, in commercial, marketing paratexts and within other media fandoms. We need to address these issues because (contra Sandvoss) fans continue to negatively stereotype other fandoms, even while marketing paratexts resist such pathologizations. As Melanie Nash and Martti Lahti have observed, “being targeted as a lucrative market is not quite the same thing as ‘driving cultural tastes.’ . . . Despite the alleged proliferation of objects being created for these ‘amazing consumers,’ any such marketing trend remains at odds with the continuing critical mockery of girls’ genres or desires” (82). This point would seem to remain true for the “Twilight” phenomenon, with girls’ fandom being taken most seriously (or least critically) by the Summit franchise that targets it, while other assorted fandoms (both culturally masculinized and feminized, such as Muse and Buffy) elevate their own cultural status at the expense of pathologizing “Twilight,” hence recirculating negative stereotypes from mass media coverage (Click n. pag.; Bode, “Tastes”). Generation is also important in its articulation with gender, with “Twilight” fans being devalued in other media fandoms for their lack of genre knowledge, newbie status, and teen sexuality—all discursive functions of age. In line with these arguments, fan studies should maintain a critical approach not only to mass media coverage, but also to the inequities, prejudices, and power relations indicated by what I’ve termed interfandom. It is an unhappy irony indeed that established media fandoms, long since used to negative stereotyping, have gone on to apply this same stereotyping to new generations of fans.

Works Cited


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