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“That Girl: Bella, Buffy, and the Feminist Ethics of Choice

in *Twilight* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

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8.4 [32]

[1] The success of Stephenie Meyer’s recent vampire romance series, the *Twilight* Saga, has naturally set itself for comparison against the other famous vampire saga of recent years, Joss Whedon’s *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Though separated by nearly a decade—*Buffy* debuted in 1997 while *Twilight* was first published in 2005—both series defy genre conventions to present the stories of heroines who become involved with the world of the supernatural. Because of their popularity and the rarity of female protagonists in blockbuster popular culture, both Bella Stephenie Meyer’s heroine—and Buffy have been examined in the media as examples of feminist and post-feminist icons.

[2] The narratives themselves are set up as questions of choice—questions that the media pose back again at both the characters and at real-life women as well. Over and over again, Bella and Buffy have to choose: family or career? Personal happiness or personal sacrifice? Silently implicit in both the texts and media criticism is the assumption that the heroines “can’t have it all,” albeit for different reasons that will be examined later. These choices will be examined here through the lens of feminist ethics: that is, the assumption at all points that women have the right to choose their own destinies for themselves.

The Feminist Ethics of Choice

[3] A primary goal of contemporary feminism is true autonomy for women: in their personal lives, in the workplace, and even their bodies. Though contemporary western society presents many comparatively enlightened options for women today, it is nonetheless true that every day, women face obstacles that men do not, whether it is something as simple as picking up prescription drugs from a pharmacy (when pharmacists resist filling orders for oral contraceptives) or being paid on an equal scale as men in the marketplace. Radical feminism posits that for true equality between the sexes, society must be completely restructured. A short review of the entire series of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* demonstrates a quest-for-freedom narrative through which Buffy systematically liberates herself from the control of others: her mother, the Watchers, the government (Principal Snyder, the Mayor, the Initiative), and religion (the goddess Glory, Caleb). Nonetheless, Buffy herself is not a completely autonomous Individual: she is defined by an outside label, as *Slayer* (“comma, the”).

[4] In her piece discussing Buffy and feminist ethics, Jessica Prata Miller situates Buffy within what is described as “the ethics of care,” that is, Buffy’s relationships to everyone around her are defined by her emotions for them, be they friendship, love, or loathing. Her emotions create her moral compass, most fully expressed as being in opposition to the cold rationalism of the men of the Watchers Council or the Initiative. However, this also situates her in the conventional view of women as both care-givers (in other words, Buffy can be read as a “helpmeet” to the human race rather than as a conventional savior) as well as someone whose needs are subservient to others through her own implicit role. In a similar fashion, Bella frequently places her own needs and autonomous existence below that of her friends and family as she navigates otherworldly threats as well as her romance with vampire Edward Cullen. As will be demonstrated below, Bella and Buffy face similar challenges and go about solving them in very similar ways.

Normal Girls

[5] Normality is something most adolescents crave. To be one of the crowd rather than awkwardly standing out is eminently preferable, unless, of course, one sticks out for a good reason. The dialogue between human normality and supernatural ability is a consistent one in both series, each of which have been taken by many as being aimed at a predominantly teenage audience.

[6] Bella Swan immediately sets herself up as someone apart from others, an outsider looking in. She introduces herself as someone who doesn’t “relate well to people [her] age:”

Maybe the truth was that I didn't relate well to people, period. Even my mother, who I was closer to than anyone else on the planet, was never in harmony with me, never exactly on the same page. Sometimes I wondered if I was seeing the same things through my eyes that the rest of the world was seeing through theirs. Maybe there was a glitch in my brain. (*Twilight* 10-11)

Bella, unlike many adolescents, feels no regret or shame attached to being an outsider. In the thousands of pages that make up the four-volume series, she in fact only once regrets being different—and that's because (in a situation that *Buffy* fans will recognize) at her high school graduation she is preoccupied with thoughts of a fight to come, rather than the "human concerns" that her friends have of homework and parties.

[7] As she becomes romantically involved with Edward Cullen, a vampire, and Jacob Black, a werewolf, her primary frustration actually comes from not being different enough. "I can't always be Lois Lane," she tells Edward. "I want to be Superman, too" (*Twilight* 474). Her goal from then on is to be with Edward and be like Edward, a vampire: never aging, super-fast and super-strong, and (preferably) super-beautiful. Her human vulnerability makes her a target for enemy vampires and a liability to her vampire friends, who could accidentally kill her with a thoughtless touch. Her desire for supernatural abilities comes from an instinct for survival as much as it does from ego or envy.

[8] Buffy Summers, on the other hand, only wants her adolescent years to be normal. Unfortunately, she is the Slayer, and she is constantly reminded that "normal" is something she can never be, and a normal life is something she can never have. This conflict is brought home (literally) in the second season episode "Becoming, Part Two" (2.22) when Buffy's mother confronts her after a vampire attack.

Buffy: Open your eyes, Mom. What do you think has been going on for the past two years? The fights, the weird occurrences. How many times have you washed blood out of my clothing, and you still haven't figured it out?

Joyce: Well, it stops now!

Buffy: No, it doesn't stop! It never stops! Do-do you think I chose to be like this? Do you have any idea how lonely it is, how dangerous? I would love to be upstairs watching TV or gossiping about boys or God, even studying! But I have to save the world—again.

Shortly after this scene, Joyce tells Buffy that if she leaves the house, not to come back. Buffy heads to her final battle against her former lover, Angel, knowing she may well die to save the world. By this point in time, Angel and his compatriots have already murdered her teacher, Ms. Calendar, and her fellow Slayer, Kendra, put her friend Willow in the hospital, and kidnapped her Watcher, Giles. Buffy lives in a world of violence and (pardon the pun) high stakes. Her worst case scenario is the destruction of the world and all those she holds dear. While Buffy ultimately does save the world, killing Angel leaves her emotionally scarred. Though she forms several romantic attachments over the course of the series, her ultimate desire is not for romance or to find her one true love, but for freedom from her burden of saving the world.

[9] Multiple times Buffy is thwarted in her attempts to have a semblance of normalcy. Her human boyfriends are put off by her strength and abilities, like Riley, or drawn to them by a desire for a "rush" when exposed to danger, like Owen. Being a Slayer does not pay the bills; after her mother's death, Buffy has to drop out of college and work to keep a roof over her head and care for her sister. With only a high school education, she has to work in the fast-food restaurant "Doublemeat Palace"; later, she has the opportunity to work briefly as a high school outreach counselor before, in typical Sunnydale fashion, the high school is destroyed by Hellmouth activity. Throughout these situations, Buffy's true calling as a Slayer is paramount.

The Chosen Family

[10] Family is a central theme for both the *Twilight* Saga and *Buffy*—specifically the concept of the invented, or chosen, family. The concept of a group of family members not related to one another by

blood, but instead by love, can trace its roots to second-wave feminism and the gay rights movements. Individuals who found themselves ostracized by more traditional members of society or otherwise unable to surround themselves with the nuclear family model instead invented a new, chosen family of friends and loved ones. The chosen family provides emotional and material support to its members in a fashion similar to that of the traditional family model, but its strength comes from shared experience and values rather than from blood relationships.

[11] Bella loves her family but is distant from them. She is their caretaker, while she takes care of herself—a reversal of the parent/child relationship. All of her other family members are dead or unmentioned. Edward's family, in contrast, can be read as a chosen family in two senses. The first is through the social lie the group maintains so that people are unaware of their true, vampiric natures: Dr. Carlisle Cullen is married to Esme, and since they are unable to have children, they have adopted five teenagers—Edward, Emmett and Alice Cullen, and Rosalie and Jasper Hale. In the other sense, Carlisle has literally chosen his family himself by turning most of them into vampires when they would have died as humans (Edward was dying of the Spanish Influenza, Emmett of a bear mauling, Rosalie of a gang rape). Alice and Jasper chose to join Carlisle because of his nonviolent, "vegetarian" lifestyle: they didn't want to feed on humans any longer or fight in the constant wars between vampire factions. When Bella falls in love with Edward, she becomes a de facto member of their family.

[12] Buffy is in a similar situation because she is the Slayer: her life revolves around saving the world, and thus around those who help her do so. When her mother Joyce dies, she becomes the guardian of her younger sister, Dawn, who happens to be a supernatural "key" created from Buffy's own blood. Buffy's high school friends Xander and Willow and her Watcher/mentor Giles round out the group, with their various love interests on the periphery. The chosen nature of the group is made clear in "Family" (5.6) in which the family of Willow's girlfriend, Tara, want to take her home against her will.

Buffy: You want her, Mr. Maclay? You can go ahead and take her. [beat] You just gotta go through me.

Mr. Maclay: What?

Buffy: You heard me. You wanna take Tara out of here against her will? You gotta come through me.

Dawn: And me!

Mr. Maclay: Is this a joke? I'm not gonna be threatened by two little girls.

Dawn: You don't wanna mess with us.

Buffy: She's a hair-puller.

Giles: And...you're not just dealing with, uh, two little girls.

Xander: You're dealing with all of us.

Spike: 'Cept me.

Xander: 'Cept Spike.

Spike: I don't care what happens.

Mr. Maclay: This is insane. You people have no right to interfere with Tara's affairs. We are her blood kin! Who the hell are you?

Buffy: We're family.

The entire group as a whole accepts Tara as a member of their family because Willow has chosen her. As such, they are willing to fight to protect her, much like the Cullen clan when Bella is in danger.

[13] In essence, the chosen family functions as an all-purpose safety catch, providing emotional and material support, such as when Giles helps Buffy pay for her house, or when the Cullens are willing to help Bella pay for college. In both texts, the chosen family is presented as preferable to the real or blood family: these family members take you in because they want to rather than because they have to. The chosen family also offers a distinctively protective state as well, as each member is willing to—and does—defend the other members of the group with their own lives. In both series, the emphasis on defense and training is shown in sequences where experienced members teach others how to fight and how to defend oneself. In *Buffy*, the Slayer's house becomes a dorm for younger, Potential Slayers who are taught by Buffy, Xander, and Willow. In the *Twilight Saga*, there are multiple scenes when Jasper and Emmett instruct the other vampires, and later the shapeshifting werewolves, in how to battle

fledgling vampires and the Volturi.

[14] That said, the chosen family is far from being viewed as the perfect solution to those who must do without the traditional family model. Jarvis and Burr have discussed at length not only the difficulties Buffy must face in caring for her younger sister as, to all intents and purposes, a very young single mother, and likewise the problems Dawn herself experiences in this arrangement.[\[1\]](#) And though the Cullens are viewed as the perfect patriarchal family, with Carlisle as its head and Esme his helpmeet, the novels discuss their fears that their differences have a negative impact on their children. Both Carlisle and Esme fear that Edward will be romantically and sexually alone for eternity, at least until he meets Bella: "All this time [Esme]'s been worried about me, afraid that there was something missing from my essential makeup, that I was too young when Carlisle changed me..." (*Twilight* 327).

[15] Kirsten Stevens has discussed Carlisle's patriarchy at length, particularly as an analogue to the vampiric "families" in Whedon's works, though "*Twilight* still rejects the evil qualities associated with such structures by avoiding the corruption of the typically monstrous aspects of the vampire—here morality replaces murder in the wisdom imparted" by Carlisle (par. 27). Nonetheless, it should be noted that Carlisle's is not an absolute rule; decisions within the family are determined by vote, and much of the respect the others owe to Carlisle is due through his rather feminized powers of absolute compassion and love for living things rather than through his role of vampiric "father."

Happy (Individual) Endings

[16] In the final book of the *Twilight* Saga, *Breaking Dawn*, Bella marries Edward. In a surprisingly controversial plot twist, she is impregnated during their honeymoon. Edward is horrified—a human-vampire hybrid is unheard of and is most likely a danger to Bella. He assumes the worst once its otherworldly nature (the baby grows at an alarming rate—Bella is "showing" after only a few days) quickly becomes apparent. Bella, in contrast and perhaps out of character, is delighted at the prospect of a child.

It was funny how abruptly and entirely necessary this vision [of Edward's child] had become. From that first little touch, the whole world had shifted. Where before there was just one thing I could not live without, now there were two. [...] I'd never imagined myself a mother, never wanted that. It had been a piece of cake to promise Edward that I didn't care about giving up children for him, because I truly didn't. Children, in the abstract, had never appealed to me. They seemed to be loud creatures, often dripping some form of goo. I'd never had much to do with them. [...] This child, Edward's child, was a whole different story. I wanted him like I wanted air to breathe. Not a choice—a necessity. (132)

It is interesting that here Bella states to herself that having the child is "not a choice" as she does have her baby over the objections of others. Edward immediately wants preventative measures taken, though again, for supernatural reasons, an abortion is impossible. During the actual birth, Edward ends up delivering the child through a messy Caesarian section—with his fangs. In the process, Bella's spine is broken from the child's powerful kicks and she loses a lot of blood from Edward's "operation." To save her life, Edward at last turns her into a vampire.

[17] When she awakens from the transformation, Bella is delighted and amazed at her new senses: her vision is sharp and highly-defined (dust motes are "like little planets" spinning in the air), her voice is like a bell, and she can hear and smell for miles (*Breaking Dawn* 387). At first she is disappointed that this is all—immortality and a perfect family with Edward and their daughter, Renesmee—when she had been expecting other powers, similar Edward's or Alice's, as well. "What? No magic visions, no formidable offensive abilities like, oh, shooting lightning bolts from my eyes or something? Nothing helpful or cool at all?" (466). This issue is resolved by the end of the novel, in which Bella discovers that she does have a "shield" ability which effectively saves the day in a final confrontational battle with the vampiric mafia Volturi. The denouement allows Bella happily living ever after with her extended vampire and werewolf families.

[18] In the seventh season of the television text[\[2\]](#) of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, a major plot

thread involves the origins of the Slayers. Buffy and her friends discover that the First Slayer was created by three men when they forced the spirit of a demon into her; since then whenever a Slayer dies, that spirit goes on to inhabit the next Potential, activating her into Slayer status. At any given time there are dozens of women with the Potential to be a Slayer, but only one (and then two, owing to an unfortunate incident involving Buffy and drowning) can be activated at a time. Buffy goes searching for the source of this power; she is revolted when she discovers the truth of how they came to be: powerful men forced demonic power into a girl through what was essentially a metaphysical rape.

Buffy: You think I came all this way to get knocked up by some demon dust? I can't fight this. I know that now. But you guys? You're just men. (rips her chains out of the ground) Just the men who did this to her. Whoever that girl was before she was the First Slayer. [...] You violated that girl, made her kill for you because you're weak, you're pathetic, and you obviously have nothing to show me. ("Get it Done," 7.15)

Buffy rejects their offer to give her more demonic power because in doing so she would lose her own humanity. By the climax of the series, she has found another way to increase her power—by sharing it.

Buffy: So here's the part where you make a choice: What if you could have that power now? In every generation, one slayer is born because a bunch of men who died thousands of years ago made up that rule. They were powerful men. This woman [Willow] is more powerful than all of them combined. So I say we change the rule. I say my power should be our power. [...] From now on, every girl in the world who might be a slayer, will be a slayer. Every girl who could have the power, will have the power. Can stand up, will stand up. Slayers, every one of us. Make your choice. Are you ready to be strong? (Chosen, 7.22)

Buffy's "happy ending" is to no longer be "the one girl in all the world who can stand against the forces of darkness."^[3] Now is she one of hundreds.

The Question of Free Will

[19] Over and over, both Bella and Buffy have to make major choices about the directions their lives will take. The choices each woman makes are different because the life challenges they face are very different. But over and over the point is: they choose. Bella chooses to be with Edward and have a family. Buffy chooses to do what she deems necessary as a Slayer, prioritizing her personal preferences below those of her profession. These choices are completely contingent upon the women directly—and choices they often make over the protests from others.

[20] Strangely, in the Twilight Saga the most outright discussion of free will is not between Bella and Edward, but between her werewolf friend Jacob and his pack. Firstly, werewolves "imprint" on their mates—an emotional state that is immediate and unmitigated. The most extreme example of this is when a teenage boy imprints on a small child and waits for her to grow up. Meyer takes care to emphasize that this emotion is nonsexual. Jacob explains to 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. And you would do anything for her, be anything for her. . . .You become whatever she needs you to be, whether that's a protector, or a lover, or a friend, or a brother. (*New Moon* 176)

When Bella asks whether the little girl would get a choice in the matter, his response is, "Of course. But why wouldn't she choose him, in the end? He'll be her perfect match. Like he was designed for her alone" (176). The subtext is that Jacob has already imprinted on Bella—an imprint that has presumably gone wrong like her imperviousness to Edward's telepathy. Ultimately we find that Jacob has not imprinted on Bella after all, but (presumably) on her egg that will one day become Renesmee; when the child is born, Jacob immediately imprints on the newborn, and the awkward Edward-Bella-Jacob triangle dissolves into two couples for a straightforward happy ending.

[21] Secondly, the werewolf pack operates as a group mind when in wolf form, with the Alpha

male (and for some reason, with only one exception, the pack *is* all male) the dominant personality. Jacob is the descendent of the other Alpha males, but has no interest in leading; Sam Uley becomes the Alpha. However, Sam and the other wolves are hostile to the vampires, and when Bella is impregnated, he wants to kill them all before her “unnatural” baby is born. Sam attempts to use the group mind to force Jacob to submit to him; Jacob rebels at the prospect of losing his will and sets out on his own, quickly gaining some followers of his own. Ultimately Jacob does become the Alpha leader so that he can protect Bella and her friends, overcoming centuries of tribal custom and genetic magic. In the process, he reminds his pack that there are always choices to be made, but the option of having a choice is the most importance choice of all.

[22] The all-male nature of the wolf pack invites a reading of an extreme patriarchy—one that excludes women altogether, quite literally. The one female werewolf, Leah, experiences the disappearance of her menses once her wolf aspect is activated, inviting many questions that go unanswered in the texts. Prior to becoming a werewolf, she was in a romantic relationship with Sam, so she is coded as heterosexual, but in sharing her mind with a dozen adolescent boys, one would think that her viewing of conventional sexuality would become skewed. Likewise, in the 2010 film lampoon *Vampires Suck* the wolf pack of a half dozen men in ripped jeans and lacking shirts is coded as exclusively homosexual in nature, right down to a campy rendition of “It’s Raining Men” before they attack an evil vampire. Their choices: mental, physical, sexual, are all limited by their group mind. Thus to achieve autonomy as a wolf, one must separate one’s mind from the others—in other words, make a choice to *make a choice*.

[23] In comparison to Buffy or even Jacob, Bella’s choices do not hinge on the supernatural, they hinge on herself. Her free will is within the usual mortal scope: she can choose to, or not to, do as she desires. That she chooses to get married and have a child before pursuing her education is not a choice many young women would prefer to make, but it is Bella’s choice to do so. Likewise, her preference for Edward over Jacob, to spend her time with vampires and werewolves rather than with humans, and the dozens of other decisions large and small that she chooses to make. The ramifications of these decisions are ones that affect her personal sphere, and they do have consequences: her various injuries throughout the books, her baby, her life as a vampire. That Bella feels rewarded by the consequences is also her preference—many readers can and do disagree.

Media Interpretations and Authorial Intentions

[24] The popularity of both series has led to inundations of criticism by the popular media both positive (primarily for *Buffy*) and negative (primarily for *Twilight*). The reasons are many, varied, and never directly discussed. The primary reason is perhaps a simple one: Whatever the emotional realism of her behavior, Buffy is transparently a fictional character. She has superpowers and saves the world (a lot). On the other hand, Bella reads and sounds a lot like a genuine teenage girl: she eats pop tarts and is relieved when her teachers show videos in class. As such, critics seem to over-invest in the interest displayed in such a character by millions of teenage girls because girls can imitate Bella in ways they can’t possibly imitate Buffy. That Bella chooses to make decisions for personal reasons rather than political ones is often (illogically) perceived as a backlash.

[25] Stephenie Meyer maintains that Bella was meant to be a normal girl, and thus a stand in for her readers, which is the true secret of the books’ popularity: “I think some of it's because Bella is an everygirl. She's not a hero. . . [...] She doesn't always have to be cool, or wear the coolest clothes ever. She's normal. And there aren't a lot of girls in literature that are normal” (qtd. in Kirschling par.4). In the collective media’s mind, this statement led to the assumption that this meant that all the girls who read the books wanted to read them because they perceived themselves to be Bella—and thus wanted to actually *be* Bella.

[26] A *Washington Post* op-ed by Leonard Sax in particular claims the *Twilight* series’ popularity and teen fandom were a revolt against feminism:

The allure of *Twilight* lies in its combination of modern sensibility and ambience with traditional ideas about gender. [...] Despite all the modern accoutrements in the *Twilight* saga, the girls are still girls, and the boys are traditional men. More specifically: The lead male characters, Edward

Cullen and Jacob Black, are muscular and unwaveringly brave, while Bella and the other girls bake cookies, make supper for the men and hold all-female slumber parties. [...] [Female readers] are hungry for books that reflect that sensibility. (B7)

Sax heavily cherry-picks the series, however, to make his points, pointing out Bella's supposed passivity by claiming that she describes herself as "helpless and delicious." Here is the full quote of the relevant passage in the third novel, *Eclipse*, in which Bella contemplates becoming a vampire:

In theory, I was anxious, even eager to trade mortality for immortality. After all, it was the key to being with Edward forever. And then there was the fact that I was being hunted by known and unknown parties. I'd rather not sit around, helpless and delicious, waiting for one of them to catch up with me. (269)

What Sax presents as feminine passivity on behalf of the character is actually passivity because of the situation—in the relevant portion of the novel, all the characters, including the males, are in a holding pattern waiting for the enemy to act first. Thus, Bella's frustrations are actually embedded in a desire for action—action that takes place with both males and females in fighting roles. Bella doesn't engage in the physical fights, but she does act a distraction for the evil vampires. Her role in the battle is not passive, certainly not helpless, and definitely not delicious

[27] Interestingly, criticism of the fourth and most controversial novel of the series, *Breaking Dawn*, focuses on Bella's "passive" actions in the first half of the book, in which she gets married and has a child. Little or nothing is said of her choices in the latter half of the novel, during which she learns to use and control her new vampiric abilities and strategizes for and participates in a major supernatural battle of wills. Bella's abilities terrify the millennia-old Volturi, and her comrades are in awe of her newfound abilities. That the good guys win in the end is primarily because of Bella; she becomes a supernatural heroine who saves *her* own world. The critical silence on these points is jarring and questionable, and perhaps a comment on media as a whole. Repeatedly, the 1990s and '00s were the battleground for the "Mommy Wars" in which pundits argued over women choosing children over careers or vice versa. That Bella chooses to be a mom who also fights supernatural enemies places her between the two factions: she is a mom and also has a career in day-saving, in as much as any of the other vampires of either gender have a career beyond perpetual students. (Carlisle is, in fact, the only vampire shown to have a job.)

[28] In contrast, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has frequently been a critical darling. Joss Whedon has stated that he always meant for Buffy to be an icon:

It was supposed to be something that, you know, little girls would play with Barbie dolls that had Kung-Fu grip. It was supposed to subvert our notions of what a hero is, very specifically. At the same time, it was supposed to do it in a fun disarming fashion. (qtd. in Said)

The show's critical success has led to its academic success as well, with not one but two academic journals—*Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* and *Watcher Junior: The Undergraduate Journal of Buffy Studies*—not to mention multiple academic courses and conferences.

[29] What negative criticism of the show that there was tended to focus on the use of violence and sexuality in the program. In the aftermath of the Columbine high school massacres multiple episodes of *Buffy* were postponed or not aired until months afterward.^[4] When Buffy's friend Willow began a lesbian relationship with Tara, there was protest that the show was no longer "family-friendly"; when Tara was later tragically killed, there was even more protest over Whedon's use of the "tragic dead lesbian" trope in his storytelling.

[30] Ultimately the true victory of the *Buffy* text lies in its continuation: after the dozens of hours of video come the hundreds of pages of comic books, novels, spin-offs, and critical works. The Buffyverse is in the realm of all-encompassing mega-texts similar in nature to those like *Star Trek* or *Doctor Who*: the stories continue. The Twilight Saga is, presumably, finite: when Meyer's work is done, it is doubtful that it will have a similar afterlife because of the author's protectiveness of her work.

A Matter of Choice

[31] What does it mean that we as an audience consistently wish to correct, to change, or to question the decisions of Bella and Buffy? The answer that many people give is that these women are role-models—dangerous ones. To some viewers, Buffy’s frequent use of violence to solve problems is just as problematic as Bella’s marriage to Edward, and vice versa. Adults are also eager to believe that children will imitate what they see or read, and all the more so when they are in the “tween” stage of early adolescence. Caitlin Flanagan articulates this anxiety:

She wants to be both places at once—in the safety of girl land, with the pandas and the jump ropes, and in the arms of a lover, whose sole desire is to take her completely. [...] The biggest problem for parents of teenage girls is that they never know who is going to come barreling out of that sacred space: the adorable little girl who wants to cuddle, or the hard-eyed young woman who has left it all behind. (par. 19)

I also get the impression that adult readers of the Twilight texts tend to feel protective of Bella in ways they do not feel towards Buffy. Perhaps this is because of Bella’s reassuring normalcy in the first few volumes, perhaps because if we trust Buffy to save the world then we also implicitly trust her to save herself as well. Trust is, after all, a key indicator in making decisions. Therefore, do we trust Bella as we do Buffy?

[32] Let’s review.

[33] Exhibit A. When loved ones are in danger, is the protagonist willing to sacrifice herself to save others? Bella: Yes. (She saves her parents from James.) Buffy: Yes. (Every episode ever.)

[34] Exhibit B. Does the protagonist’s family’s needs take precedence over the protagonist’s desires for the future? Bella: Yes. (Parents; Renesmee.) Buffy: Yes. (Dawn.)

[35] Exhibit C. Is the protagonist always going to prefer a supernatural love interest to a human love interest for multiple reasons, none of them pure? Bella: Yes. Buffy: Yes.

[36] This list is reductive by necessity, but it does illustrate a key point in the characterizations of these women: They are going to make their decisions based on what they believe to be right, and follow through on those decisions because they want to, which is of course the key to choice.

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[1] See: Jarvis and Burr. "Friends are the Family We Choose for Ourselves': Young People and Families in the TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*." *Young*, August 2005, and Burr and Jarvis. "Imagining the Family: Representations of Alternative Lifestyles in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*." *Qualitative Social Work* 6(3), 2007.

[2] I specify "television text" as the show ran for seven seasons, including five seasons of the parallel series *Angel*. However, in March of 2007 the comic book series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Season Eight* was launched. Unlike many popular media comics, the stories and events in the series are considered canon and are officially approved by Joss Whedon.

[3] Each episode in the first season of *Buffy* began with a short introduction voiceover by Giles, her Watcher. The complete text: "In every generation there is a Chosen One. She alone will stand against the vampires, the demons and the forces of darkness. She is the Slayer."

[4] This topic is discussed in an excellent essay by critical media theorist Henry Jenkins in his collection of essays, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (New York University Press, 2006). "The Monsters Next Door: A Father/Son Conversation about Columbine and *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*" is a conversation between Jenkins and his teenaged son about *Buffy*, news media's critical reactions and overreactions to the Columbine massacre and violence and popular culture, and the necessity of parental communication with their children through dialogue rather than laws/