
**FEMINISM IN STEPHENIE MEYER'S THE TWILIGHT SAGA:
BELLA SWAN'S ABILITY TO MAKE HER OWN CHOICES**

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Abstract: *Stephenie Meyer argues that Bella Swan is a feminist character because “the foundation of feminism is this: being able to choose. The core of anti-feminism is, conversely, telling a woman she can’t do something solely because she’s a woman”. However, using this definition of feminism, Bella Swan still is not a feminist character because she might not be making these choices of her own free will due to her controlling, abusive, vampire boyfriend with psychic abilities. She does not actually become a feminist character under this definition until she herself becomes a vampire and gets on a level footing with Edward in terms of supernatural abilities.*

Key words: *Bella Swan, Stephanie Meyer, Twilight, feminist character, feminism , anti-feminism*

As feminism enters the mainstream, more and more people try to argue that the works that they have created are in some way “feminist works.” Stephenie Meyer, the author of The Twilight Saga, is no exception; she argues that her book series and the main character, Bella Swan, are feminist. In her own words “the foundation of feminism is this: being able to choose. The core of antifeminism is, conversely, telling a woman she can’t do something solely because she’s a woman” (Wilson 207). Her claim that Bella is a feminist character is based entirely on a faulty and oversimplified version of feminism, but even ignoring this, her argument still does not hold water. If, as Meyer says, feminism is the ability of a woman to

make her own choices and to not be told that she cannot do something because she is a woman, Bella Swan still is not a feminist character because not only is she constantly being told what to do, she is also potentially enthralled by a vampire with explicit psychic abilities and a habit of control and manipulation.

The Twilight Saga tells the story of Bella Swan, a teenager who moves in with her father in an unfamiliar town full of strange creatures that all seem to be interested in her. This move highlights the self-sacrificial behavior that plagues Bella throughout the series, as she does so to make her mother's life easier even though she does not want to live in Forks, Washington. It is not long before Bella is surrounded by vampires and werewolves; she starts a romantic relationship with Edward Cullen, the only single vampire in Forks, and later befriends Jacob Black, a werewolf with a massive crush on her. Her relationship with Edward leads to run-ins with several groups of dangerous vampires, putting her life in his hands multiple times over the course of the series. After about two year's worth of plot over the course of the four novels where Bella is repeatedly endangered by her proximity to these vampires and werewolves, Bella reluctantly agrees to marry Edward and becomes life-threateningly pregnant with his half-vampire baby. At the end of the series, Bella Swan has become Bella Cullen, a vampire who is no longer in danger from either her relationship with Edward Cullen or the variety of other vampires who had wanted her dead.

Bella's choices.

Between Edward's controlling behavior and his manipulative abilities, the idea that Bella makes any choices entirely of her own free will is unlikely. Bella's decision to move to Forks is one of her only life-changing decisions that is not manipulated by Edward in some way. Even then, this is a decision that is influenced by her parents rather than a choice she makes entirely of her own volition; her mother's new relationship makes her feel unwelcome in their home and she wants her mother to not feel held back by her presence (Twilight 4) After she moves to Forks, Edward is a pervasive force in her life. Meyer's insistence that Edward be so insistent in Bella's life shows that although she claims Bella makes her own

choices, it is clear that Meyer believes Bella needs Edward's male voice to tell her how she should be living her life.

Even when Edward is absent, as he is in the vast majority of *New Moon*, Bella continuously imagines his voice in *New Moon* telling her what she should and should not do. When Jacob Black takes her out to ride motorcycles, she imagines she can hear Edward's voice, which is just as controlling as Edward is in person: "As I began to loosen my grip, I was shocked to be interrupted by a voice that did not belong to the boy standing next to me. 'This is reckless and childish and idiotic, Bella,' the velvet voice fumed" (*New Moon* 185). Bella is aware that this was likely merely a hallucination brought on by a rush of adrenaline, but she doesn't care and is willing to continue to risk her life to hear it again and again because Edward is physically absent and unreachable. His actual presence is not even necessary for him to continue to influence her decisions at this point in her life. However, in these cases, she is explicitly doing what she believes he would not want her to do which is a rare choice for her to make. It is generally not one Edward would even allow her to make, but since Edward is not actually there to stop her, she chooses to be reckless in order to continue to have him in her life.

Bella's desire to become a vampire is another strange example of her own reckless and free will overpowering Edward's conscious control over her actions. Edward expresses multiple times throughout the books that he would rather Bella remain human for a variety of reasons. However, Bella is adamant about this point; she wants to be a vampire so that she can remain with Edward forever. Although she makes this decision without his direct, explicit influence (and actually against his advice and wishes), she would not have wanted to become a vampire if Edward's influence in her life had not been so enthralling. She desires to remain under his spell for the rest of her life, living blissfully with him and giving up a lot of other things that bring her joy. She chooses to never see her parents again, to never see her human friends again, and to not have the opportunities that her humanity gave her to interact with new people:

"So ready for this to be the end," he murmured, almost to himself, "for this

to be the twilight of your life, though your life has barely started. You're ready to give up everything.

" "It's not the end, it's the beginning," I disagreed under my breath. (Twilight 497)

Although Bella is certain she wants to become a vampire, her relative ambivalence about the consequences of becoming a vampire is shown over and over again in the Twilight Saga. Bella is depicted in the beginning as a person driven by rationality: she leaves her mother, whom she loves dearly, because it makes more sense for her to live with her father, who she hardly knows at this point (Twilight 2). Although one of Bella's defining character traits had been an emotionless rationality, she does not seem capable of applying that rationality to the negative side effects of becoming a vampire. She interprets the downsides of vampirism (the blood-drinking, the violence, the inability to control oneself at points) to be more of mild inconveniences in the lives of the Cullens rather than the demanding, restrictive, and, and they view them, demeaning realities of their lives that they have to deal with on a daily basis (Clements 111). In *The Vampire Defanged*, Susannah Clements believes that Bella's choice to become a vampire against Edward's wishes is a prime example of Bella's free will, but it is not even remotely in character for her, as that early rational and non-emotional young woman, to give up so much for such selfish reasons without properly considering the consequences of her choices on the lives of those around her. Her self-sacrificing behavior does not correspond to this decision.

Rather than an example of free will, as Clements suggest, Bella's desire to become a vampire is just another example of Edward's control over her, taken to a level even Edward has no control over. His psychic abilities and supernatural attractiveness have gotten such a hold on her, driven her to have such strong feelings about Edward and remaining around him, that even he cannot stop her from wanting to become a vampire. At an almost unconscious level, Bella has ceded control of her own life to the idea of becoming a vampire purely to remain with Edward. Because it would be impossible to permanently remain with Edward

while she is human Bella reasons that she must become a vampire before she becomes significantly older than Edward. She even has nightmares about getting older at the beginning of New Moon:

- Only then, as I looked at the bigger picture, did I notice the huge gilt frame that enclosed my grandmother's form. Uncomprehending, I raised the hand that wasn't wrapped around Edward's waist and reached out to touch her. She mimicked the movement exactly, mirrored it. But where our fingers should have met, there was nothing but cold glass...

- With a dizzying jolt, my dream abruptly became a nightmare. There was no Gran.

- That was me. Me in a mirror. Me—ancient, creased, and withered. Edward stood beside me, casting no reflection, excruciatingly lovely and forever seventeen. (New Moon 5)

Being with Edward is really her only goal and she sees becoming a vampire as the only real way to achieve it permanently. She's absolutely terrified that she's going to continue to grow older and die while Edward remains seventeen for the rest of their lives.

The second strongest example of Bella making a choice outside of Edward's desires for the situation happens in *Breaking Dawn*, when she goes against Edward's wishes to continue her pregnancy, but even this decision was manipulated by the child. The pregnancy is a debatable instance of Bella making her own choice because a half-vampire fetus that was living inside her influenced her decision. This particular child, Renesmee, is described after birth as being incredibly charming and manipulative: one other vampire character describes Renesmee's ability as "whatever magic this extraordinary child has bewitched us with" (*Breaking Dawn* 595). It is not a long leap to assume that the child had a similar affect on Bella during her pregnancy in order to prevent it's own death.

Bella had previously stated that she had no interest in having children; she claimed that being with Edward was more than enough and did not relate to Rosalie's dream of having a child (*Eclipse* 167). As it had been established in the

series that vampires cannot have children (Breaking Dawn 126), she was willing to give up the ability to have a child if it meant that she could be with Edward forever; it was not even a difficult decision for her to make. However, once she is actually pregnant, she changes her tune considerably.

- I'd never really understood Rosalie's pain and resentment before. 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....

- This child, Edward's child, was a whole different story.

- I wanted him like I wanted air to breathe. Not a choice- a necessity.

(Breaking Dawn 132)

The difference here seems to be that this is not a human child; it is specifically Edward's half-vampire child that she does not want to give up. It is hard to imagine that Bella makes the choice to keep this child entirely on her own, when even during fetal development, this child is admittedly supernaturally influential on Bella's emotions. Even assuming that Bella did make this decision on her own, though, it means that the only major decision in the entire series that Bella Swan makes is one that directly leads to her death.

To conclude Stephenie Meyer's argument that Bella Swan is a feminist character because she makes her own choices does not become applicable to Bella until she gets on equal footing with Edward in terms of supernatural abilities in the fourth and final book of the series. Up until that point, Bella's choices are manipulated from the day she meets Edward, whether directly by him forcing his own decisions onto her or by his supernatural abilities persuading her to change her mind. She only becomes free from his control once she becomes a vampire herself, but she is no longer the same person she was before. Her character and values have changed along with her outward appearance. With this transition, Bella's lack of control in her own life previous to this becomes incredibly clear. Using Meyer's definition of feminism, Bella Cullen, the vampire, could be considered a feminist character. She is allowed to do as she pleases, with minimal intervention from her

husband, which she had not been allowed to do as Bella Swan, the human.

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