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The search for a nuclear family

Family representation and choices in Stephanie Meyer’s Twilight Saga

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List of Contents

Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 1

The Varying Concepts of Family and ................................................................. 6

Family representations in the Twilight Saga ....................................................... 6

The nuclear family ....................................................................................................... 7

The broken family ....................................................................................................... 9

The chosen family ..................................................................................................... 11

Family, decisions and choices through the lens of Bowen’s Family Systems Theory .................................................. 13

Bowen’s Family Systems Theory ........................................................................... 13

Triangles .................................................................................................................... 14

Differentiation of self ............................................................................................ 14

Family projection process ....................................................................................... 15

Emotional cutoff ...................................................................................................... 16

Decisions and choices ............................................................................................. 17

Conclusion ................................................................................................................. 21

Works Cited ............................................................................................................. 23
Introduction

“How could I leave my loving, erratic, harebrained mother to fend for herself?”

(Meyer, “Twilight” 4)

Already on page four in Stephanie Meyer’s novel Twilight, the first in a series of widely successful novels, it is evident that Bella, the protagonist of the novel, has been in a care-taking position for the most part of her life. She is the only daughter to Renée, who she describes as a “child-like”, “erratic, harebrained and unable to fend for herself” (4).

The Twilight Saga consists of the four “original” books Twilight, New Moon, Eclipse and Breaking Dawn. In a fifth book, Midnight Sun, the story of Twilight is told again but from Edward’s point of view instead of Bella’s. This thesis will deal with Bella’s choices throughout the Saga. If there is a reference to a specific book in the Saga it will be named and when discussing the entire Twilight Saga, the term “Saga” will be used.

In the Saga, Isabella Swan (Bella) moves from Phoenix, where she lives with her mother, to Forks, to live with her father. In Forks, Bella meets the mysterious, handsome, and intriguing Edward. The two of them are drawn to each other although Edward keeps his distance for reasons unknown to Bella. She finds out his secret – he is a “vegetarian” (does not feed on humans) vampire. She accepts this fact and they become an item. Bella is introduced to Edward’s coven which passes itself of as a family. The story also revolves around Bella’s old childhood friend Jacob, a native American living on the nearby reservation, who turns out to be a shapeshifter who can turn into a giant wolf to protect the tribe against “the cold ones” – the vampires. They all have many obstacles to
overcome on the way. During all this Bella is drawn to both Jacob and Edward but in the end, she chooses Edward. She marries him and has a half-human half-vampire child with him before being turned into a vampire herself.

*Twilight* was released in 2005 and was an instant success. By 2012, the Saga had sold over 116 million copies worldwide and it had been translated into at least 40 different languages. It has also spawned an equally successful set of movies, which were released between 2008 and 2012.

The *Twilight* Saga has gained interest from scholars around the globe and has been mostly studied from a feminist point of view, seeing Bella as an anti-feminist character mostly due to her life choices. Christine Jarvis examines the Saga considering girls as the subject of intense and insidious forms of patriarchal control. She argues that “Bella embodies this masquerade of autonomy and independence very effectively” (105) meaning that while on the surface Bella seems to be in control of her own life, her choices are dictated by the patriarchal society in which she lives. Jarvis continues by saying that:

Bella makes her aversion to marriage clear. She is raised by a feminist mother who has embraced a semi-alternative lifestyle. She understands that in a post-feminist era marriage can be read as an abdication of achievement and ambition and she knows that her friends will gossip about her foolish early marriage. (106)

Jarvis attributes Bella with knowledge and opinions which are not stated in the novel. In contrast, Bella herself describes her mother as “childlike” (Meyer, “Twilight” 4) and says:

How could I leave my loving, erratic, harebrained mother to fend for herself? Of course she had Phil now, so the bills would probably be paid, there would be food in the refrigerator, gas in her car, and someone to call when she got lost, but still… (4)
Anna Silver makes the argument that it is evident that “Renée is unable to live independently or adequately mother Bella” (124). Even so, Renée does have autonomy over her decisions, making choices regardless of what anyone else would want or need, including Bella, putting herself and her needs first. This is eloquently stated by Bella: “Renée has always made the choices that work for her…” (Meyer, “Twilight” 414). Catherine Coker says that “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” (2). Merinne Whitton analyses the Saga from a second wave feminist\(^1\) standpoint and question whether Bella ever has a choice or if her choices are a product of the patriarchal society and their stereotypical female ideas. In contrast, Brynn Buskirk argues that when reading Twilight in the light of choice feminism\(^2\) instead of second wave feminism

Bella is not weak, helpless, stupid or willing to throw herself and all she is away for a man (...). Bella’s decisions throughout the Saga are calculating and smart, making Bella a strong female character worthy of both critical analysis and respect. (1)

Further, she refers to Bella as “the most powerful character in the Twilight Saga” (5). Bella is the narrator and controls the plotline. She is also strong in the physical sense, being the only one who can withstand Edward’s mind-reading abilities. At the end of the Saga, she is even the one who saves everyone with her shield abilities in the epic battle with the Volturi.

\(^1\) Second wave feminism broadened the scope from first wave feminist to also include things like family, sexuality, reproductive rights and focused on critiquing the patriarchal.

\(^2\) Choice feminism is a branch of modern-day feminism that lays emphasis on the agency of a woman in making decisions.
Family is a strong theme in the Saga and many scholars have explored its relation to Meyer’s faith – Mormonism. When considering the context in which the *Twilight* Saga was written, Meyer is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), and so it is not a stretch to believe that this has influenced her writing. Not only does she make Bella and Edward refrain from having sex until they are married, there is also no drinking or smoking in the Saga. The notion of marriage also has specific significance in the Mormon faith. The individual needs to be married and in a heterosexual relationship to be part of a “forever family” – a concept often used in Mormon discourse, where “being part of a forever family is critical for receiving the highest blessings of heaven after death” (Sutton and Benshoff 200). Karen Elizabeth Smyth addresses how “the literary vampire has drastically changed form between the late 1800’s to 2010, from monster to savior (6). Pramod Nayar discusses this as the “domestication of the vampire” (60) and refers to Terry Spraise’s reading of the cult TV series “Buffy the Vampire Slayer” and how Spraise proposes that there has been a radical shift in modern representation of the vampire. We see the emergence of the suave form of the vampire in the 20th century versions, where the vampire is a sex object, a monster that looks like us. This modern vampire disturbs the distinction between humans and vampires (qtd. in Nayar 68).

Further, Sutton and Benshoff argue that there are more similarities between vampires and Mormonism, with the “original” vampire Count Dracula practicing polygamy with his three brides just as Mormons traditionally practiced polygamy before outlawing it in the late eighteen hundreds (206). Georgina Ledvinka takes this one step further, arguing that Meyer’s Saga is used to confront and re-write the history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by the rehabilitation of the vampire. “By writing the Cullen vampires as
an idealized LDS family, Meyer addresses all three of the notions of predation, death and sexual deviancy that pertain to traditional vampires and late nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints” (204). This notion of using the vampire as a vehicle for social commentary is not new, as discussed by Candace R. Benefiel “The figure of the vampire, so varying and adaptable in the hands of many authors became a liminal, transgressive figure, a stage upon whom the fears and secret desires of society could be acted (262).

The parent – child relationship in the Saga has been extensively studied by Myers-Bowman and Jurich where they analyze each interaction between the parent and the child as well as each passage about parent-child relationships in the saga. The content was analyzed, finding “several examples of both appropriate and inappropriate parent and child roles” (373). Myers- Bowman and Jurich describe the reversal of the parent - child role between Bella and Renee calling the reversal of roles “parentification” and explains it as “children taking care of a parent in ways that are developmentally inappropriate” (374).

Chosen families are discussed by Burr and Jarvis with special regards to another successful vampire story - the Tv-series Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Both Bella and Buffy have a need for a chosen family due to the fact that there are parts of their lives that they cannot disclose to anyone. The manner in which they get this chosen family is different. Bella “finds” the perfect nuclear family which she wants to join whilst Buffy has to make her own where she herself ends up being the leader and matriarch upon her mother’s death.

As discussed, family in the context of Mormonism and the Twilight Saga has produced numerous scholarly papers. The parent – child relationship has been explored and chosen families in relation to the Twilight saga have been
researched. However, the subject of family in relation to choices in the Saga is not widely explored. This thesis will employ an overtly theoretical approach to family, especially family representation in the Saga, and how they affect the choices made by the protagonist. This is done, in part, by using the Bowen Family System Theory and in part by paying attention to the representation of family in the Saga through a close reading. The concepts of Nuclear families, Broken families and Chosen families will be discussed throughout the thesis as well as how Bowen’s concepts relate to the different characters in the Saga. This thesis argues that by viewing her choices with regards to family representation and the different Bowen concepts, Bella can be seen as a product of her upbringing. This thesis also argues that Bella makes informed choices to make sure that she does not continue living in a dysfunctional family.

This will be done by first summarizing the representations of family in the Saga. Secondly, The Bowen’s family systems theory will be introduced and the concepts that will be used in this thesis will be explained with examples from the Saga. This will be followed by an analysis of how family impact the decisions and choices of the protagonist.

**The Varying Concepts of Family and Family representations in the Twilight Saga**

The basis for family theory is that no one grows up in a vacuum. The people and the environment surrounding a person as they grow up impact upon the values, the beliefs, and the choices that person makes later in life. This is also true in fiction. The *Twilight* Saga has a wide variety of different family constellations represented which will be more closely analyzed below.
The nuclear family

The nuclear family is the archetypical family in Western society. This is the representation on which the Western society rests and to which all other family representations are compared to. Nuclear families have been observed as early as in the Bronze Age (Simon et al.). Throughout history monogamous marriage norms have existed side by side with polygynous practices and other family constellations with the monogamous marriage and the nuclear family as the norm in society while other practices survived even though not socially acceptable in most societies (Scheidel). It is not until recent history that different family constellations have become equally acceptable.

In the *Twilight* Saga, The Cullen’s represent the nuclear family. The Cullen family consists of the patriarch Carlisle Cullen, a 362-year-old vampire, his wife Esme and the four “children” Edward, Emmet, Rosalie and Alice. They pose as a form of an ideal family. They have extremely strong family bonds, something that is noticed in the Saga by Charlie, Bella’s father, who remarks “they stick together the way a family should” (Meyer, “Twilight” 31) showing that the dissolution of his own nuclear family, with Bella and Renée, Bella’s mother, was not his choice. To further link the representation of the nuclear family to mainstream American culture, Meyer uses the baseball game. By letting the vampires play baseball, and even remarking that “it’s the American pastime” (303) she cements the family values shared by the Cullen’s as that of the nuclear family and something to aspire to. Some scholars even relate this to the time Mormons set aside each week to spend with family members (Sutton and Benshoff 208).
Using vampires as the representation of a nuclear family is not novel, in fact Anne Rice made “the nuclear family of vampires a major theme in her novel” (Benefiel 263). A major difference between the nuclear family of vampires opposed to the normal representation of a nuclear family is that they are immortal – “… the vampire family can exist for centuries without change”. (Benefiel 263).

This is addressed in the *Twilight* Saga as we learn that although the Cullen’s are living as a nuclear family at the moment this has not always been the case. Edwards tells Bella about Rosalie and Emmet “Sometimes they live separate from us, as a married couple. But the younger we pretend to be, the longer we can stay in any given place” (Meyer, “Twilight” 253). A vampire family cannot follow the same course as a regular human family with its different iterations’ child – adolescent – adult – parent – child and so on. The family roles are frozen in place with no natural change and growth. Or as Benefiel puts it

Where the normal family is programmed by biology to form, exist as a unit from the birth of the eldest child until the youngest have left the nest to begin the next iteration, and then metamorphose into some other configuration, the vampire family can exist for centuries without change. (264).

Even so, Edward had a small “teenage period” where he lived apart from the rest of the Cullen’s. “… I went off on my own for a while” and during this time he did not live like a vegetarian “It took me only a few years to return to Carlisle and recommit to his vision” (Meyer, “Twilight” 298, 299). This questioning of the parent’s way of life is in many ways mimicking human adolescence and how the children then return to share the parent’s beliefs.
The broken family

The definition of a broken family is one that differs from the nuclear family. The most common is that of the divorced, or separated parents where the child grows up in a single-parent household. This is the kind of household Bella grows up in, with her parents separating when she was just a toddler and Renée taking her away from her father, relocating in another part of the country. Not only did she grow up in a broken home, but also with a mother who was not all grown-up herself resulting in Bella being the one who had to take care of many household responsibilities, a habit she kept even after relocating to Forks. “I did the shopping at home, and I fell into the pattern of the familiar task gladly” (Meyer, “Twilight” 28). Bella’s father, Charlie, never really recovered from Renée leaving him. “Charlie had never gotten over my mom. It made me uncomfortable”. (11). He has been alone for a long time and likes it when Bella takes care of him but also sees that it is not good for her: “You baby me too much.” (312). Even so, he does, in his own way take care of Bella too: he buys her a car (5) and when the streets are full of ice he gets up early to put snow chains on her car tyres to keep her safe (47). Still, Bella is the one who keeps the household running although Charlie points of that he has been able to fend for himself before she moved there. Most research on broken homes focuses on mental health issues in children of broken homes and how these can extend into adulthood (Amato), (VanderValk et al.)

Externalised Problem Behaviour (EPB) is often linked to a parental divorce as discussed in (Sillekens & Nottens). They claim that growing up in a family disrupted by divorce before the age of twelve influence the degree of EPB even into adulthood. In Bella’s case there is no evidence of EPB although she has
trouble socialising and prefers the company of herself to socialising with her friends in most instances. Vanessa Oliver and Rebecca Cheff looks at social belonging in homeless women and how they use bonding social capital to increase belonging. They suggest “that those working with homeless youth to create inclusive and effective programming and policy should consider the role of nonparental relationships in bolstering the social capital of young people (657). They conclude that this is a particularly good method when young people distrust adults and find it difficult to form strong bonds with providers of care and support, preferring instead to be self-reliant and autonomous.

Like the youths discussed above, Bella prefers to be self-reliant and autonomous, used as she is to being the adult taking care of others instead of being the one being taken care of. She has greater trust and forms stronger bonds with nonparental relationships, such as with Edward and his family as well as Jacob and the wolf pack.

Bella’s relationship with Renée is dysfunctional on many levels. As Anna Silver empathises, the reversal of mother – daughter roles indicates that Meyer from the beginning depicts Bella as inadequately mothered (124). She continues by saying that

Twilight is a series very much concerned with the practice of mothering, and in Renée’s abdication of her role. Meyer provides room for Edward’s adopted mother Esme to become an alternate mother figure and … offers Renée as a foil and anti-role model for Bella (124).

In many ways Bella did not only have to raise herself but also be the parent. Bella says it best herself “as far as I could remember, this was the first time since I was eight that she’d come close to trying to sound like a parental authority”,

and “someone has to be the adult” when describing to Edward why she is more mature than most seventeen-year old’s (Meyer, “Twilight” 407, 91).

The chosen family

There is also the chosen family, the family one chooses for oneself. Most research concentrates on the LBHBTQ community and how they use the concept of chosen family to create their own makeshift family. This is explored from a psychological point of view by Valory Mitchell who suggest that; “while family is essential for human psychological development generally, it has special psychological significance for lesbians (and other queer and marginalized people)” (302). This is something that is true of the people making up the representations of the chosen families in the Twilight saga. The first representation, The Cullen’s are made up of individuals with no blood relation who now act and live as a nuclear family. The other representation of the chosen family, the Wolf Pack, leave their original family and make a new family, or pack, as they develop the ability to turn into wolfs. Both are examples of people seeking belonging and kinship with people who are similar to themselves.

Bella is also searching for a place to belong and she has found this family in the Cullens. When Bella loses Edward, she mourns not only the loss of her lover but also “…losing a whole future, a whole family” (Meyer, “New Moon” 398). As Silver puts it “Bella is not only drawn to Edward, however. She falls in love with the whole Cullen family” (126). Coker describes the chosen family as an “all purpose safety catch, providing emotional and material support … (as) when the Cullen’s are willing to help Bella pay for college” (3). She continues by saying that “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” (3).

The Wolf Pack is the other example of the chosen family. Jacob Black, Bella’s friend from the Quileute reservation can turn into a wolf. He is not alone in this, more of his people share this ability. They all stick together as a pack referring to each other as “brothers”. There is a big difference between this chosen family and that of the Cullen’s. The Cullen’s all have free will and autonomy to do whatever they chose even though they call themselves a family. In the wolf pack everyone must obey the alpha wolf and trying to defy this this would imply considerable pain to the defier.

Additionally, the wolf pack share their thoughts when in wolf form. No thoughts can be hidden, and nothing can be kept private. As Smyth puts it “This is a far cry from the Cullen’s democratic and loving family system where each member is distinct individual and has chosen to be part of the family. The primary difference is the Cullen’s agency as opposed to the Quileutes lack of free will (38).

It might seem at first glance that the Wolf Pack is a far cry from Mitchell’s description of the loving chosen family in the Lesbian community but in reality, it is just a version of the same thing. The Wolf Pack live together as a pack, or family, for all the same reasons. Mitchell states “In the face of this dehumanization, we seek and invite into our families people who will offer us the ongoing experience of human likeness, of twinship” (306). This is equally true for the Wolf Pack. In the face of this change, from human to half human half wolf it is only human to seek kinship and companionship with those who are alike.
Bella also seeks this kinship. It is evident in the way she in many ways pressures Edward into making her a vampire. Edward realises the negativities of being a vampire and therefore tries to talk Bella out of it, but for Bella the reward of getting her ideal family far outweighs the negatives. She finally gets her wish, but only because of necessity, to save her life.

**Family, decisions and choices through the lens of Bowen’s Family Systems Theory.**

**Bowen’s Family Systems Theory**

What distinguishes Bowen’s theory from, for example, psychoanalysis is that instead of only looking at the individual, The Bowen Family System Theory advocates that to truly understand the behaviour of an individual their behaviour must be analysed not in isolation but in context with their family (Chavkin 142-144). The study of the family is a subjective science. Behaviour can only explain so much, our thoughts and feelings cannot only be seen externally but they do indeed matter when making choices. This is where the Bowen Family System Theory can be useful. It intends to make the study of the family an objective science with the help of eight different concepts which can be used to explain the behaviour of both families but also the individuals within (Schiff 25). This thesis will use four of these concepts in the analysis of the families and the behaviours of the individuals in the *Saga*, namely Triangles, Differentiation of self, Family projection process and Emotional cutoff.
Triangles

Triangles, or “interdependent triads” is the first concept in the Bowen family systems theory. This concept refers to the tendency to relate to each other in systems of three. This tendency occurs because a two-person relationship, a dyad, is unable to contain or manage much anxiety before a third member or thing is needed to absorb the excess anxiety. Throughout the Saga Bella is part of different triangles to relive her anxiety. When living in Phoenix, Phil, her mother’s boyfriend acts as the third party to take some of the anxiety out of the inverted mother-daughter relationship that Bella has with Renée. After Bella moves to Forks, Edward takes on this role and acts as the third – party in Bella’s relationship with her mother. A good example of this is at the end of the first book, Twilight, Bella is in the hospital after having been almost killed by another vampire. Her mother thinks it is because she fell down a flight of stairs. At the hospital when visiting Bella, her mother talks more about herself and what is going on in her life than paying attention to Bella and her injuries. Bella instead gets her emotional support from Edward, which gives her the emotional strength to handle her mother’s anxieties even though she is in her sick bed. “Bella, I was so upset!’ ‘I’m sorry, Mom. But everything’s fine now. It’s okay’, I comforted her.” (Meyer, “Twilight” 404).

Differentiation of self

The second concept, the differentiation of self, is described by Bowen as “the degree to which one self fuses or merges into another self in close emotional relationships” (qtd in Schiff 32). It is the ability to adhere to one’s own principles no matter the degree of pressure. One can say that differentiation of self is the
level of one’s emotional maturity and individuality. If someone does not have enough self to accomplish his or her goals, he or she then tries to manipulate others through such mechanics as bullying, rebellion, or guilt. His or her behavior is often reactive and volatile (qtd in Schiff 32). Not much is told about the childhood of Bella’s mother, Renée, but it is evident from the way that Bella talks about her and acts to take care of her that Renée has a low differentiation of self. Renée is a person who has trouble taking care of herself and wants life to be different for Bella. Her level of emotional maturity and individuality is not advanced. She is not able to stay clearheaded in times of turmoil such as when Bella is almost hit by the truck and ends up in hospital. “My mom was in hysterics, of course” (Meyer, “Twilight” 57). She wants Bella to make the choices she wishes she would have made. Bella on the other hand is very different. Her differentiation of self is high, and her maturity is well developed. Bella emphasizes this by saying “I was a very different person from my mother. Someone thoughtful and cautious. The responsible one, the grownup” (Meyer, “Eclipse” 450 ).

**Family projection process**

Bowen’s fourth concept, family projection process, occurs when individuals cannot accept their fears and anxieties, which they instead transmit to a willing other. “For example, by triangling within the third emotional pattern of impairment of a child, parents project their anxieties about being a failure onto their child, but under the guise of protection.” (Schiff 39). The parents’ fears and perceptions so shape the child’s development and behavior that he grows to embody their fears and perception” (Kerr 19). Throughout the Saga, it is evident
that Renée’s feelings not only about marriage but also about Forks are transferred to Bella in the guise of care and concern. In Bowens words this is called family projection process which is when individuals cannot accept their fears and anxieties and instead transmit them to a willing other. In this case Bella. “Like my mother before me, I hadn’t made a secret of my distaste for Forks” (Meyer, “Twilight” 5).

**Emotional cutoff**

The sixth concept – emotional cutoff - is defined by Kerr as “people managing their unresolved emotional issues with parents, siblings and other family members by reducing or totally cutting of emotional contact with them” (33). To deter their anxiety, many individuals choose to cut off from a significant person in their relational field. Although they may claim that such issues as money, divorce, or religion are the source of the cutoff, the underlying push comes from the low differentiation of the family (or societal) members (Gilbert, 62). As the Saga unfolds, Bella emotionally cutoff her mother. When becoming a vampire in the later part of the Saga, Charlie is, in a way, let in on the secret and allowed to be a part of Bella’s continued life with her new family. Renée on the other hand is kept in the dark about Bella’s transformation. Instead, Bella relies on her newly acquired family. Making these choices, Bella becomes “the mother that she never had, willing to do anything to protect her child” (Silver 133). This emotional cutoff is of great importance not only for Bella and her ability to make her own choices and not having to think about her mother’s feeling all the time, but also for Renée who, when being emotionally cutoff by Bella is forced to
“grow up” and by the end of the Saga has much higher differentiation of self than in the beginning.

Decisions and choices

Now, with the theory explained, Bella’s choices and decisions in the Twilight saga will be analysed to further substantiate the thesis claims that by viewing her choices with regards to family representation and the different Bowen concepts, Bella can be viewed as a product of her upbringing. Even so, the choices she makes are informed choices to make sure that she does not continue living in a dysfunctional family.

The first choice that can be analysed is in the beginning of the Saga when Bella moves from Phoenix, Arizona to Forks, Washington, a place she detests (Meyer, “Twilight” 4), not because she wants it but instead to make things easier for her mother “She did not send me here, I sent myself” (41). Bella makes this decision out of love for her mother, to make her mother’s choice to move to Florida to be with her boyfriend easier for her. “I want to go’ I lied. I’d always been a bad liar, but I’d been saying this lie so frequently lately that it sounded almost convincing now” (4). This first choice is made by Bella, not out of a search for a new stable family, but because she is used to putting her own wants and needs second to those of her mother. Due to Renee’s low differentiation of self, Bella is used to act as the adult, to take the tough decisions and care more about her mother’s well-being than her own. The fact that she detests Forks, as quoted above is not because she, herself, has had any bad experiences in the town, but instead because Renée through the concept of Family Projection
process has projected her opinions onto Bella. Her initial choices makes it clear that at this point in time, Bella’s choices can be viewed as uninformed, solely based on what she is taught by her parents, not taking her own feelings and goals into consideration.

Almost instantly after arriving to Forks, Bella meets Edward and is introduced to his family. This glimpse of the ideal nuclear family gives her a taste for more. Silver argues that “The self does not exist in isolation, but in attachment. Throughout the series, Bella has longed for family and affiliation and she finds her sense of identity not through individual achievement (going to college for instance) but through a relationship” (133). Bella is consequently drawn to the stable representation of the nuclear family, the Cullen’s. The Cullen family acts as the perfect contrast to Bella’s family. Bella is welcomed into the family, and when Bella is threatened everyone rallies to her side. This help and protection do not end with Bella but extends to her father who the Cullen’s protect and keep safe. “We’ll make sure he’s safe, and that’s all that matters” (Meyer, “Twilight” 338).

Until this point in her life, Bella has not let anyone take care of her, instead she herself has taken care of both her parents. Still, she now lets the Cullen’s take care of her, indicating her strengthened bond with them. Bella has a high differentiation of self, a high maturity, which has enabled her to take the role as care provider, but now she experiences a well-functioning family where she can be taken care of.

However, Bella is faced with a critical decision at the end of Twilight when Renée is threatened. She needs to decide whether to adhere to the instructions of her new family who tries to keep her safe or protect her mother. She decides to
disobey the Cullen’s wishes and risk her own life in order to save her mother (387). On one side, this shows that she is able to make tough decisions due to her high differentiation of self, where her maturity makes it possible for her to stand up for her values, but on the other side that the emotional cut off process from her mother has not yet started.

Shortly afterwards however, with the threat to Renée cleared, Bella takes the first steps to independent thinking and she starts to distance herself from her mother. She refuses to move from Forks to Florida to live with Renée (406) and even articulates the phrase “I can’t take care of them forever. I have my own life to live” (414) describing her emancipating from her parents.

As the Saga unfolds, her level of independent thinking increases with her decisions being more and more informed, with the objective to find a better, more stable representation of family. Bella’s affiliation with the Cullen’s grows stronger and her bond and contact with her mother grows weaker. The choices she makes are more and more for her own benefit than her mothers. It takes her longer and longer to answer her mothers’ emails, which shows an example of Bowen’s concept Emotional cutoff. Bella starts to prioritize being part of the Cullen family. Still, her parent’s relationship follows Bella and many of her choices reflects this. She is often more concerned with not making the same mistakes her parents did than to think about what she herself wants. This is a clear example of her being influenced by Renée through family projection process. Bella has trouble using her free agency to make the choices she wants instead of the choices she thinks her parents want her to make. Renée always made it clear to Bella that she believed that her own marriage as a teenager as well as having a baby so young, was a mistake and something that slowed her
down. It is not until the book *Breaking Dawn* that Renée finally addresses these issues and tells Bella on her impending marriage

> You’re not making my mistakes Bella … I know I’ve said a lot of things about marriage and stupidity – and I’m not taking them back – but you need to realize that those things specifically applied to *me* (Meyer, “Breaking Dawn” 327).

Therefore Bella, while she seeks the security from a relationship with Edward still vehemently opposes marriage. She sees marrying as a teenager a failure and a trap. This is a point-of-view that her mother has projected onto her. It takes to the end of the Saga for Bella to be truly free to make the choices she wants.

Bella’s decisions throughout the Saga have led her to become not only a vampire but also the strongest person her newfound family. She has the physical strength of the newborn vampire as well the defensive ability to act as a shield. She is the only one whose mind Edward can’t read. She is the one who makes it possible to defeat the Volturi, the ancient Italian vampires, who try to destroy the Cullen family in *Breaking Dawn*, due to her strength as a shield. She is also able to carry a half-vampire child as a human and still survive – albeit making it necessary for her to be turned into a vampire. As Bella becomes a vampire, it is evident that this was the right choice for her (Buskirk 34) with “Bella (being) literally the best Bella she can be once her conversion has taken place” (Smyth 33). Bella has in the end created a new family, a chosen family consisting of the Cullens, her child Renesmee and to some extent Jacob, her father and the rest of the werewolves.

Buskirk emphasizes that although one can be tempted to read the Saga as a story of “a weak child growing into a woman-warrior, Bella should be seen as heroic, powerful and smart not only at the end, but from the very beginning”
Buskirk’s argument is supported by the observation that Bella has a high differentiation of self throughout the Saga but should be augmented with the realization that her decisions are impacted by her childhood, primarily through Bowen’s concept Family Projection Process.

**Conclusion**

In the beginning of the thesis, two arguments were made. First, that by viewing Bella’s choices with regards to family representation and the different Bowen concepts, Bella can in the beginning be seen as a product of her upbringing. Second, that Bella throughout the Saga makes informed choices to make sure that she does not continue living in a dysfunctional family.

In the thesis these questions have been discussed in the way of an overview of the different family representations in the *Twilight* Saga as well as through an analysis of the families by using the Bowen Family System Theory and by paying attention to the representation of family in the Saga through the approach of close reading.

By discussing the different family representations in the Saga and how their actions correlate with the concepts of the Bowen Family System Theory, Bella’s choices and a gradual change throughout the Saga can be analysed in relation to the thesis statements. In the beginning of the Saga, Bella’s views of the world are greatly influenced by her mother’s views, views she has transferred to Bella through Bowen’s concept family projection process. Even so, an early example of Bella’s high differentiation of self can be observed when Bella moves to Forks not because she wants to, but to make her mother happy. She puts her mother’s happiness before her own and moves to a town she
“detest[s]” to make life easier for her mother. As the Saga enfolds, Bella starts to emotionally cut off herself from her mother. Her decisions become more and more based on what she herself wants to do instead of actions to please her family (mother). At the end of the first book, she even articulates in her mind that now it is her time, she cannot spend her life taking care of her parents.

As Bella shapes her new life in Forks, she becomes part of new triangles, Bowen’s first concept, which changes many things in her life. She meets Edward and is exposed to his family, the “perfect” nuclear family. As a product of a broken home where she has spent her childhood being the adult, this concept of a family where the adults take care of the children attracts her in every way. The longing to belong is so strong that even becoming a vampire is not a problem. She makes her own decisions based on her moral compass and what is important to her - not what is societally correct.

Reading the Saga through the lens of family representation and the Family Systems Theory provides a different perspective not only to the choices that are made in the book and the background to why they are made but also to the strength and power of not only the people but also the relationships in the Saga with Bella emerging as strong female character.
Works Cited

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