

“HOT CHICKS WITH SUPERPOWERS”: FEMINIST EMPOWERMENT IN *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*

Richard Scott Agee

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Thesis Committee:

Edward Hinck, Ph.D.

Committee Chair

Jeff Drury, Ph.D.

Faculty Member

Lesley Withers, Ph.D.

Faculty Member

May 3, 2013

Date of Defense

Roger Coles, Ed.D.

Dean
College of Graduate Studies

July 1, 2013

Approved by the
College of Graduate Studies

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This is dedicated to my friends and family who offered
unwavering support throughout this endeavor.

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ABSTRACT

“HOT CHICKS WITH SUPERPOWERS”: FEMINIST EMPOWERMENT IN *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*

by Richard Scott Agee

Television programs, available to the masses through various mediums including televisions, computers, and other devices, are readily accessible to viewers. Some programs, including those from the 1990s, focus on young viewers by presenting characters to whom they might relate and thus these programs may be influential to those who view them. Understanding this proposed influence may be viewed as important to communication scholars. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, a television series that aired from 1997-2003, is examined with a feminist critical lens to determine whether the show portrays a clear message of feminist empowerment to viewers. The researcher drew from the 144-episode series to determine whether feminist empowerment is a recurring theme in the dialogue and actions of the characters. Three research questions guide the study, focusing respectively on the redefinition of gender roles, the ability for viewers to identify with the relationships between characters, and the dialogue within the show. Regarding the first research question, the researcher found evidence indicating gender roles are redefined in the series as Buffy adopts traditionally masculine traits and qualities. Regarding the second research question, the researcher found that the situations depicted in the series, minus supernatural aspects, are relatable to the majority of the audience. Finally, the third research question was supported through the show's dialogue reflecting feminist empowerment, particularly in the final episode of the series. The evidence suggests that the program does contain a feminist message, and that television's influence should not be discounted. The researcher offers that future research is suggested and may adopt a different focus.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Rationale for Study

Since the middle of the 20th century, television has become a ubiquitous presence, mediating integral events affecting humankind since television's inception, including numerous wars; the moon landing in 1969; the destruction of the Challenger space shuttle shortly after liftoff; the collapse of the Berlin Wall; and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Television has brought these events into the homes of individuals across the world, inviting different cultures and belief systems to unite in celebration, condemnation, and brotherhood. Television has also introduced men and women around the world to cultures different from their own. Through television, gays and lesbians have had the opportunity to have their collective voices heard as homosexual relationships have been portrayed on screen. Men and women of all races can now find representatives of themselves on television at any given time courtesy of the plethora of channels available to viewers willing to pay for them. Women, who have historically been used as plot devices or administrative assistants in television programs, condemned by society to raise children and gossip with neighbors, can now find female doctors following their hearts while repairing faulty heart valves at underfunded, inner-city hospitals. Young men who are intellectually brilliant and socially awkward can be found in loving relationships with their beautiful neighbors and surrounded by their wacky friends who constitute a secondary family. Fictional television programs can be viewed as a reflection of imperfect reality—human flaws are intensified and accentuated on the screen in order to provide moral lessons and entertain the masses. Through the study of television and other means of mass communication, much can be

revealed about the trappings of human nature, which is a favorable end result in the study of human communication.

During the 1970s, women struggled against their stereotypical positioning as agents of clean diapers, full ovens, and tidy living rooms. The decade also featured the premiere of several television programs that depicted women as powerful creatures in possession of free will, career ambition, and a desire to be self-sufficient; these landmark programs included *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *One Day At a Time*, and *Maude*. The progress that began in the 1970s continues today, but the rules have still not completely changed. Gender roles established years ago often remain the same today. White, heterosexual men have always had the opportunity to tune into a television station and find examples of people like them in remarkable occupations and living desirable lifestyles. Women who desired something else did not have that opportunity until feminism took hold of the television patriarchy and were able to develop a few programs that revealed that they could have a better life, a life not under the direct control of men, and forge their own paths. Female identity is a complex concept that must be addressed on a personal level, and it is beneficial if television portrays some women as role models for young girls who desire careers and lifestyles beyond those commonly depicted in popular television shows. Gender stereotypes, though reflective of reality, do not encompass every single member of a biological sex. Television programs, even in the 21st century, have offered encouragement to young women, as there are female doctors, police officers, and lawyers headlining popular programs on popular networks. A review of literature, however, reveals that there is still a long way to go until television catches up with reality.

Gender Issues on Television

The traits inherent in both male and female gender stereotypes have been repeatedly and constantly reinforced by the portrayal of men and women in fictional television shows and commercial advertisements. Progress is recognizable, however, in various television programs starring female characters who have toppled the stereotypes that just a decade before would have defined them. In the 1980s and 1990s, several situation comedies revolved around comediennes such as Roseanne Barr (*Roseanne*), Brett Butler (*Grace Under Fire*), and Ellen DeGeneres (*These Friends of Mine*, later renamed *Ellen*), while other comedies, including *Golden Girls*, *Murphy Brown*, and *Designing Women* offered the antidote to trite programming aimed primarily at a male audience. During that time period, various dramatic series also starred strong-willed, independent women, including *Murder, She Wrote*; *Sisters*; *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*; and *Touched By An Angel*. However, for every show on a network's primetime schedule that featured a female lead character, there were likely at least two programs on the same network that included female characters in more traditional gender roles.

The traditional female role positions a woman to be completely at the whim of her emotions, devoid of logic or a resilient demeanor. A woman is also supposed to be preoccupied with her appearance and dismissive of her male counterparts' attempts to include her in traditionally male activities like sports (Nathanson, Wilson, McGee, & Sebastian, 2002). Women are also portrayed to be soft and feminine, prone to offering sympathy and empathy on a level that far surpasses what men can traditionally comprehend and exude. Men, however, are identified as being strong leaders with decisive minds, aggressive tendencies and personalities that disallow compromise as a threat to one's integrity (Fung & Ma, 2000).

Women's occupations are a major source of conflict in the gender wars. Fair and accurate representation in television programs is vitally important to gender researchers. Signorielli and Bacue (1999) found that women were consistently underrepresented in traditionally male occupations on-screen in comparison to their male counterparts. The researchers observed primetime television programs during the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. The findings revealed that most women on television were still largely confined to traditional female occupations (e.g., housewife, secretary, household worker, clerical staff). During the 1990s, men were found to likely have a neutral occupation, such as artist, journalist, or student. Traditional male jobs, such as lawyers, doctors, or public servants were reserved for males, but in lesser numbers.

The strategies used to present gender stereotypes in fictional television programs vary from program to program. Some programs that appear to be in the position to shatter stereotypes may serve to only reinforce those stereotypes. Hammers (2005) viewed the television series *Ally McBeal* to determine the influence of the show on female attitude and practices in the professional world. The main character, attorney Ally McBeal, was found to exemplify non-feminist ideals. McBeal's preoccupation with appearance and the apparent ineffectiveness of her law school training were stated to be in defiance of traditional routes of female empowerment. In addition, McBeal's behavior in the courtroom, where she contradicted professional edicts by remarking on a woman's hairstyle, was identified as infantile and derogatory to female professionals.

Signorielli and Kahlenberg (2001) surveyed jobs held by television characters during the 1990s. The findings showed that married women often had fewer employment opportunities and

that only single women were typically able to access traditionally male occupations. In comparison to actual real life job statistics, more men and women on television should have been managers or laborers and fewer should have been professionally employed. Glascock (2001) observed 1,269 fictional television characters from the 1996-1997 broadcast season in order to accumulate demographic information. The study included the four major broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC). Women were found to be underrepresented in prestigious on-screen occupations and were likely to be presented as young, attractive, and dressed in a manner befitting their youth and attractiveness. While more female characters were employed than in previously examined seasons, the actual occupations of female characters were not readily revealed.

Another component of the relationship between gender and power in a work setting is the presence of masculinity. Women in professional positions are portrayed as being more masculine than feminine, showing more stereotypically male traits than female traits. Glascock (1996) found that traditional gender roles were evident in dramatic series, but that comedy series were more likely to feature male and female characters as equals. The researcher used level of masculinity as a measure of gender roles. In dramatic series, men were found to be substantially more masculine than female characters. In comedies, women were found to be more masculine than men and men were found to be more feminine than women. The researcher attributed his findings, which were in stark contradiction to previous research (Peevers, 1979), to changing times and the introduction of more women to the workplace and women undertaking more masculine activities than their predecessors.

Men and women are depicted in certain ways, and in certain roles, on television and viewers are conditioned to accept the depictions. Changes have been made, including allowing some women to hold jobs traditionally maintained by men such as doctors and lawyers, though women are still found mostly playing particular roles, functioning as a spouse or friend to a lead male character, while the lead male character is more likely to fulfill a role that revolves primarily around being successful in a professional capacity, leaving the female characters to concentrate on friendships and family (Lauzen, Dozier, & Horan, 2008). Women in contemporary situation comedies appear to have followed the trail blazed by their comedic predecessors, such as Roseanne Barr and Brett Butler. Glascock (2001) found that female characters in situation comedies were portrayed as being more verbally aggressive than their male counterparts, often undermining the intelligence of male characters. In contrast, men in dramatic series were almost exclusively the perpetrators of violent physical acts toward women or other men.

Feminist Study of Television

The shared experience between women is an essential component of feminist criticism. All women can fall victim to male oppression in most aspects of their lives—communicating with other women who have similar experiences creates a powerful bond. Feminist criticism deals non-exclusively with identity, equality, and giving women a voice that can be heard over male-oriented rhetoric. The purpose of female criticism can differ—some critics may focus on how language creates gender while others focus on how language oppresses women in both form and function—a shared trait of criticism, though, is that it contributes to the theoretical framework of feminism within the confines of rhetorical criticism (Foss, 2004).

Membership in the band of sisters is essential to understanding the plight of women throughout history, since women are still oppressed despite the move toward equality. Men who wish to escape the stereotypical misogynist trappings associated with them can become feminist scholars and further the cause, but whether or not they can truly understand the experiences of oppressed women is debatable. While the experiences of women may not differ substantially across sex/gender lines, mediating variables such as race and class can alter the female experience on a grand scale. Griffin (1994) examined the work of Mary Wollstonecraft, a woman who questioned the established patriarchy and the power men had over women during the 18th century. According to Griffin (1994), Wollstonecraft questioned the logic of men, creatures appointed at creation to dominate the lesser beings, and how the identity of women was compromised as they were treated as objects. The idea of women establishing their own identities is still not necessarily a given. Cloud (1996) examined the role Oprah Winfrey plays in the American Dream for many black Americans as well as the appropriation of Oprah's biography by the public to use as the pinnacle of success to which all people, especially minorities, should aspire. Oprah Winfrey, a successful businesswoman and philanthropist, is also representative of tokenism due to her overcoming racial boundaries and an unfortunate childhood. While Winfrey established her own identity, that identity was not safe from the public or the patriarchy that would use her for its own ends. It is important to note that not every female is Oprah Winfrey. Not every female has Oprah Winfrey's emotional intelligence, resources, or opportunities. At times throughout history, women have not been responsible for forging their own identities. Wollstonecraft brought attention to the idea that women have value aside from the obvious, patriarchal duties they are assigned. Due to individuals like

Wollstonecraft and feminists, today's women like Oprah Winfrey and countless others have the opportunity to establish their own brands and create identities independent of the men in their lives.

Teenage girls and young women are important consumers—television programs continue airing until the ratings no longer justify keeping the show going when another show could take its place and deliver higher ratings, which leads to increased ad sales—yet young women, unlike young men, have a limited number of true role models readily accessible on television. It is essential to examine gender roles on television in order to better understand exactly what young women are learning about being a women in today's society and how being a damsel in distress is not necessarily the only valid way to express one's self.

With the popularity of fictionalized television programs still high, the depiction of women is important in the development of young girls, a demographic especially susceptible to the media and media influence on development. Arquette and Horton (2000) found that stereotyping imagery was present in television shows aimed at young female viewers. The researchers looked at shows like *Felicity*, *Dawson's Creek*, and *Seventh Heaven* that revolved around young female characters possessing beautiful physiques, high intelligence, and an almost debilitating penchant for finding an acceptable male suitor. These young women, while defying some archetypal male stereotyping, represent some negative female stereotypes. Such stereotypes include reorganizing one's life to follow a stranger to college, drinking heavily and acting promiscuously, and concealing dangerous truths from one's parents. The characters on such teen dramas are presented as role models, but are not representative of the vast majority of the target population. A different role model, a young woman who defies the greater part of

female stereotyping yet embraces some aspects of being a traditional woman, might be seen as the ideal solution.

The feminist outcry of the 1970s revealed that independent, strong female characters could headline successful television shows. The values extolled by these shows lived on through the following decades and, in 1997, a wholly new feminist character arrived. This new character, a teenage girl charged with defending the Earth against the forces of evil, portrayed women in a positive light and introduced a sisterhood of power that extended back centuries into deep-seated misogyny. This character, the eponymous heroine of the television program *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, resonated with the viewing public for seven seasons and resides as a permanent fixture in popular culture.

Buffy Summers is a more suitable role model for young girls than the other attractive young ladies on shows that aired at the same time. She faces being an outsider while contending with the forces of darkness that aim to destroy her and all of the people who may find her odd or mock her because she does not fit in with her peers. She faces personal demons and those hailing from hellish dimensions without resorting to maligning her friends in order to gain the attention of a boy or members of a popular clique. She must murder her first love or allow everyone around her to die. She makes mistakes, like all people, and must deal with the consequences, but the consequences move Buffy beyond simply a broken heart or being picked last for team sports. She embraces her responsibility and her welfare comes second to the innocents that depend on her. She must be more mature than other girls her age or people will die. Buffy is strong, independent, and seemingly right at home alongside other feminist warriors. Therefore, a rhetorical analysis of the series is warranted based on the series' approach to

feminine adolescence as opposed to the depiction of feminine adolescence in the series' contemporaries.

Buffy as a Rhetorical Artifact

On March 10, 1997, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* premiered on the fledging WB Network. The television program focused on the natural and supernatural conflicts experienced by a young woman named Buffy Summers. Buffy, portrayed by actress Sarah Michelle Gellar, was a teenage girl with a destiny that extended past graduating with honors from high school or finding a perfect date for prom—Buffy was a vampire slayer, a girl elected by fate to combat evil in its various manifestations. Buffy was the latest in a long line of young women assigned the responsibility of opposing the forces of evil, the generation's chosen one. When a generation's slayer perished, another was called to continue the fight. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* lasted seven seasons, the first five on the WB Network and the last two on UPN, a rival network that rescued *Buffy* from the brink of cancellation in order to establish a better foothold in the desired youth market.

While Buffy Summers was a girl on the cusp of womanhood, she was not like the other young female characters on the WB Network. Buffy did not spend her time pining for a man or primping in front of a mirror, engaging in stereotypically traditional female activities. She fought the forces of darkness while maintaining a social life anchored by her small circle of friends. Buffy was mature enough to realize that her abilities isolated her from her peers and that her responsibilities far outweighed the societal pressures of having the most recent blouse by a famous designer or dating the high school quarterback. Buffy transcends gender roles and, in practice, redefines what it is to be a woman in the modern age, super-powered or not super-

powered. When viewing her combat of demons and vampire metaphorically, it is clear that the monsters Buffy slays are not just present to provide antagonists for the protagonist to battle. She is battling the patriarchy that has oppressed her biological sex for centuries—she just uses different weapons, like stakes, axes, and sarcastic commentary.

According to the mythology, a vampire slayer is a teenager or young woman who is “chosen” by destiny to combat the forces of darkness using powers she inherits from the long line of slayers that preceded her. These powers include superhuman strength, prophetic dreams, enhanced healing abilities, and mastery of martial arts. Once a vampire slayer perishes in battle, another slayer is activated from a pool of “Potentials,” individuals unaware of their possible destiny and shortened life span until being approached by a Watcher. A Watcher is traditionally a man representing an agency responsible for training the slayer and assisting her in the battle against evil, acting as a guide in the slayer’s acceptance of her inherited preternatural power while remaining allegiant to the Watchers’ Council above all else. The television series focuses on a particular vampire slayer, Buffy Summers, her Watcher Rupert Giles, and her support system of family and friends as she faces down demons, the apocalypse, and possibly the scariest experience of all—becoming a mature, responsible adult.

Additionally, the memories and experiences of slayers are passed on to successive slayers, allowing each slayer to benefit from the wisdom and failings of her predecessors. This transfer of knowledge, which the show depicts as being accessible to slayers while in a dream state, conveys cautionary tales and cultural touchstones that reveal to a slayer how best to utilize her powers in the battle against evil. Slayers are treated as instruments of men, created by men to battle demons in their place. Slayers were created by the men by taking an innocent girl and

allowing the essence of a demon to violate her body. The chosen women are means to an end, as opposed to individuals with distinct personalities and life goals in contrast to learning how to use a compact bow or break a demon's spine with little more than brute strength and righteous indignation. Vampire slayers who are not raised by Watchers and are not exposed to the slayer culture early in life are liable to have other plans until the intervention of fate leaves them with wooden stake in hand, surrounded by the undead. Buffy proves to be the exception to the rule created long ago.

The vampire slayer mythology presents a process in which vampire slayers are activated following the death of the current slayer. Buffy drowns at the end of the first season but is quickly resuscitated by a friend; however, she is surprised to find another slayer in town in the middle of the second season. She did not think that her death would result in the activation of another slayer. Once that second slayer, Kendra, was murdered at the end of the second season, Buffy figured that the anomaly in the slayer line had been worked out and was surprised to meet another slayer, Faith, in the third season. The slayer line was then thought to be running through Faith and another slayer was not called when Buffy perished at the end of the fifth season. In the seventh season, the mythology of the slayer came to the forefront and viewers learned the true origins of the slayer—a young woman was violated by the spirit of a demon and thus granted superhuman abilities centuries ago in order to shoulder the burden of men (Petrie, 2003). This violation, unbeknownst to Buffy until the final season, removed the free will of The First Slayer and each successive slayer, but empowered all members of the sisterhood with unnatural abilities—the ultimate physical violation yielded the ultimate physical empowerment. In the final episode of the series, which will serve as the artifact for this project, the rule regarding

potential slayers is negated as all potential slayers, women selected by destiny to possibly inherit the abilities inherent in the spirit of the demon that created The First Slayer, are activated to face down evil incarnate.

Though the final episode of the series is the artifact for this project, aspects from previous episodes of the series will be analyzed in order to place the final episode into context within the series. The decisions that Buffy Summers makes in seasons one through seven shape who she is as both a person and as a vampire slayer and simply jumping to the conclusion of the series would not satisfactorily illustrate the feminist underpinnings in the show, nor would the Buffy's sacrifices and choices be granted their full weight. Therefore, summaries of each season, as well as summaries of particular dialogic exchanges and key scenes within said seasons, will be included in the project in order to appropriately contextualize the importance of the chosen artifact, the season finale, "Chosen."

Buffy as a Site for Contesting Cultural Identity for Adolescent Females

Buffy Summers is not wholly like other young women. She has superpowers, responsibilities that lie far outside the norm, and a destiny not of her choosing. Her responsibilities as a vampire slayer must always take precedence over everything else in her life. Buffy, a fictional character, can be used to address issues and concerns of femininity, and, particularly, call into question how young women are viewed on television and in real life. Buffy looks like an ordinary girl living a life not unlike other girls her age, unless one looks deeper. Buffy is more than just an arguably silly name adorned in fashionable ensembles and in possession of a sassy mouth—she is the Slayer, an individual who risks her life on a regular basis to ensure that the world remains safe for the innocents who dwell there. Therefore, Buffy

Summers defies the cultural aspects that typically define female adolescence, and her associated television program, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, presents a discussion of what it means to be a young woman, and more so, what it means to be a young woman who is also a vampire slayer.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer, the television series, debuted in 1997 to an audience who had already observed women in positions of equality with lead male characters in other television programs. As discussed in the previous section of this document concerning critical approaches, feminist criticism serves to examine artifacts, which are not limited to strictly textual form, and determine how each contributes to feminist criticism. Feminist criticism concerns the use of language to advance equality, define identity, and offer women a way to have their unique voice heard. Buffy Summers, the vampire slayer in question, is but one voice in a larger concert that she does not control. Her position, however, does not stop Buffy from understanding her place in society. After saving a man from a vampire, Buffy is reminded of her position when the saved man states, "but ... you're just a girl." Buffy replies, "that's what I keep saying" (Season Five, *The Gift*; Whedon, 2001). The irony of the statement is clear—Buffy is a young woman and should not be burdened with saving the world when other more mundane pursuits may strike her fancy. The dialogue in the series can sometimes be viewed as tongue-in-cheek, but some is used to systematically skewer male oppression. In the "Halloween" episode in Season Two (Ellsworth & Green, 1997), all of the people in Sunnydale who unknowingly bought their costumes from a warlock became a character based on the selected costume. Buffy dressed as a noblewoman and then commented on her status: "I was brought up a proper lady. I wasn't meant to understand things. I'm just meant to look pretty, and then someone nice will marry me. Possibly a baron." Buffy's choice of Halloween costume is a direct result of a

misunderstanding—after learning that her vampire suitor, Angel, who has lived for centuries, preferred the company of such women in the past, she hopes to appeal to him as a classy lady instead of just as the Slayer. Buffy learned after she reverted back to her normal persona that Angel did not care for those women, describing them as “simpering morons, the lot of them.” Buffy had found herself disempowered by the costume, losing not only her superpowers, but her identity as a woman of the current age. She had regressed back to a time when women were not respected for more than their social standing, a circumstance in clear opposition to Buffy’s situation.

In Season Three, Buffy is greeted by another slayer, Faith, who exists due to a flaw in the slayer line following Buffy’s short-lived death at the end of Season One. The two elect to act on impulses of superiority, a superiority which Faith describes to a reluctant Buffy: “We’re Slayers, girlfriend. The Chosen two. Why should we let him take all the fun out of it?” (Season Three, *Bad Girls*; Petrie & Lange, 1997). Buffy and Faith initially have different interpretations of what it means to be a Slayer, but by the end of the final season, they come to an agreement about their intertwined destinies: “Thank God we’re hot chicks with superpowers” (Season Seven, *End of Days*; Espenson, Petrie & Grabiak, 2003). Buffy realizes that she is more powerful than those who surround her. She can physically pummel any man who would approach her in a threatening manner, but she is also burdened with human emotion. She is a young woman attempting to find her place in the world, but destiny already holds a place for her, whether she takes the place willingly or not.

Buffy knows she is different from other people--stronger, and thus, required to be more responsible. She struggles with being both a young girl and a savior. The choices that Buffy

makes affect not only her and those closest to her, but the world-at-large. She cannot spend an hour selecting the perfect outfit to wear for a first date, because demons might be slaughtering her school's principal at the very same time. She cannot get a manicure and expect it to last very long due to her job duties. She might have a term paper due the morning following an upcoming apocalypse. Her slayer duties temper any kind of normal life she can have, though she still attempts to find some degree of normalcy between her mother washing blood out of her clothes and whittling wooden stakes. Giles, Buffy's Watcher, comments on her dual identity concerning a date she set up with a new boy at school: "Buffy, when I said you could slay vampires and have a social life, I didn't mean at the same time (Season One, "Never Kill a Boy on the First Date"; Batali, Des Hotel, & Semel, 1997)." After the young man Buffy dates in the episode reveals himself to be a daredevil interested in a lifestyle like Buffy's, she elects to pursue men who are similarly supernatural and are not both a hindrance in a battle and a likely casualty. While Buffy does have several romantic relationships over the course of the series, the most intense were with two vampires with souls, both anomalies, as most vampires are without. Her love for Angel, the first of the two vampires, is filled with tragedy and longing. Buffy cannot date around, meeting different kinds of people before finding a man she with whom she would like to settle down. Any mortal man she chooses to love will be in perpetual danger, which severely limits her dating options. At times, she is a naïve young girl surrounded by bad boys, and she must make the best decision based on the available dating pool, sometimes even compromising who she is, as she did when she entered a toxic sexual relationship with vampire Spike. Other young women might find themselves in similar romantic circumstances in their quest for identity, but usually the wounds they encounter are solely emotional, not physical.

At the conclusion of the second season, Buffy had to murder her fanged lover in order to save the world. Her secret identity is no longer secret—her mother found out about her being the Slayer and told Buffy that if she left her home without discussing the situation, she need not bother returning. Buffy took her at her word and left, eschewing anything related to her previous identity and moving to Los Angeles. Once again thrust into a battle against evil, Buffy finally reclaims her identity as the Slayer when faced with a demon responsible for making people subservient in a hell dimension. When asked who she is, Buffy states: “I’m Buffy, the Vampire Slayer. And you are?” (Season Three, “Anne”; Whedon, 1998). Buffy is a slayer and a teenage girl, and attempts to maintain the balance between the two, though her responsibilities as the Slayer must always take precedence over her responsibilities of being a teenager.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer developed a fan base far beyond the individuals who viewed it weekly. The mythology of the slayer began with a film and still continues in the form of comic books and novels, but the format being discussed is the weekly television series. As stories are distributed to the masses in various formats through various avenues, the influence of culture is evident. The message associated with the program, that women, superpowered or not, can rise above their station in life and make a measurable difference in a world dominated by patriarchic indifference while maintaining the innate sisterhood that connects all members of the fairer sex, is a positive message steeped in feminist ideals that should be examined at length to uncover how television shows can be used to support social agendas and facilitate change. Women before Buffy struggled to claim and maintain the freedoms that Buffy enjoys as a teenage girl in the 1990s, but feminism was not borne of a need to ensure that young women with superpowers have the opportunity to destroy the undead while working in an office as something other than a

secretary. The feminist movement affected all women and all men, whether directly or indirectly, and Buffy might not exist if not for the feminist leanings of the program's creator and the cultural yearnings for a woman with superpowers in a position of power.

Feminism began fundamentally altering the television landscape decades ago, and though the portrayal of women on television has changed considerably, women are still often depicted according to stereotypes that have grown stale and outdated. Pioneering characters such as Mary Richards from *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, Ann Romano from *One Day at a Time*, and latter-day disciples such as Roseanne Barr, Brett Butler, and Ellen DeGeneres kept the tradition alive, offering viewers the opportunity to become entrenched in the lives of women who not only star in their own television series but also make women of all ages cognizant of the options women have both on-screen and off-screen. Previous research was presented concerning the portrayal of women on television and the progress toward nigh-equality. While television programs disseminating feminist messages were instrumental in the development of television characters like Buffy Summers, the equality that feminism sought to construct was still hampered by the crisis of identity development. With limited alternatives, in part due to the lack of television programs aimed at a teen audience and few role models to emulate, identity issues can plague young women; *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* shows young women that they can be beautiful, suffer self-esteem issues and problems with boys, and still conquer the forces of darkness while wearing a fashionable ensemble and articulating a clever quip or pun.

Previous *Buffy* Research

The current project is not the first to focus on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*; in fact, it is one of many scholarly articles that examine different aspects of the television series, and yet another

centered on the feminist elements presented in the series and in the eponymous character. Wilcox (2006), co-editor of “Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies,” explains that scholarly research about Buffy began in 1999 and has grown exponentially since that time. Conferences and courses have been developed about Buffy, though her status as a feminist icon is still debated by scholars. The researcher claims that the amount of attention given to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as a historical artifact justifies research about other programs, and that the power of television as a medium continues to grow.

Previous research has not thoroughly addressed the dialogue of Buffy Summers as an example of feminist empowerment, or the means through which gender stereotypes are reinterpreted, or Buffy’s relationship management strategies, notions that will be addressed in this study. An abbreviated literature review will now be presented, highlighting some of the previous research about *Buffy*. The research questions that will guide this study will be presented following the literature review.

Camron (2007) examines gender roles in *Buffy*, indicating that while most of the men and women are equals in that they each have particular powers or gifts that elevate them above normal human status, normal guy Xander is constantly emasculated by those around him due to his lack of special abilities. According to the author, Xander may not embrace his masculinity at all times, but he is dependable and stalwart when the occasion requires such behavior. Therefore, the show is not simply about reversed gender roles—the characters in the program are more complex than simply existing to represent gender stereotypes.

As mentioned previously, not all scholars that have dissected *Buffy* agree that Buffy Summers is a representation of feminist ideals. Bodger (2003) identifies various negative

stereotypes about women being conveyed through the characters. The researcher comments that within the context of the series, Buffy, with her superhuman powers, needs to be reigned in by her Watcher, Giles, to prevent her from using her abilities for nefarious purposes. According to the author, Cordelia represents the vacuous, beautiful, popular cheerleader, while Willow serves as the shy girl who does not express herself assertively. Glory, the main villain from the fifth season, is emotionally unstable, another unfortunate stereotype of women, and Willow and Tara as lesbian witches reinforce the notion that witchcraft is representative of sexual experimentation. Bodger concludes that the series is more a hindrance than a help to feminism, and that the opportunity to promote feminist ideals is wasted as the most powerful characters in the series, Buffy and Willow, need to be controlled in order to function properly.

Karras (2002), in contrast to Bodger's (2003) findings, identifies Buffy Summers as a member of the third wave of feminists, women who continue the battle for equality started by their predecessors. The researcher claims that though *Buffy's* role in the realm of feminism is questioned, the fact that the show exists as a weapon against the patriarchy justifies its existence. Furthermore, Chandler (2003) expresses that Buffy Summers fights not for equality, but for the opportunity for women to use their abilities and to exercise their autonomy in all aspects of their lives.

Magoulick (2006) examines *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and two similar shows featuring strong, female lead characters, *La Femme Nikita* and *Xena: Warrior Princess*. The researcher finds that the portrayals of the characters are more akin to male fantasies than feminist icons. The author notes that the women struggle through life in harsh environments, making little effort to create a world free of bondage. Surmising that the women in the aforementioned shows suffer

in order to be powerful and independent, the author concludes that while the means to becoming powerful and independent are realistic, they are not necessarily feminist in origin. According to the researcher, true feminists would attempt to create a more peaceful world, in accordance with feminist ideals.

St. Louis and Riggs (2010) feel that the show is an adequate representation of feminist ideals, though one limitation exists—the show portrays feminism as being solely a battle to be fought by the young. The series focuses almost exclusively on young people and with the shortened lifetimes of slayers, the feminist battle is handed off to the next generation when a slayer perishes. Women mature enough to understand the need for equality are no longer participants in the war against the patriarchy that they fought to give their younger counterparts the opportunity to voice their opinions against their oppressors.

Brannon (2007) comments on the use of power in *Buffy*. The Watchers' Council, responsible for training and utilizing the slayers in the battle against evil, attempt to re-exert their control over Buffy in the fifth season after she cut ties with them in the third season. When Buffy actually needs their assistance when battling a hell goddess, they inform her that she must yield to their authority in order to gain their assistance. She informs them that she is aware that she holds the power and they need her more than she needs them. In a final act of rebellion, Buffy participates in the activation of all potential slayers, granting them the choice of using their powers for good or evil, a choice they would not have had in the past. The researcher also explains that through the empowerment of the potential slayers, Buffy metaphorically unleashes power in all women, pushing them to become agents of change in the battle against the patriarchy that oppresses them.

Pender (2004) argues that the final season of *Buffy* accentuates the feminist message more so than the preceding seasons, a claim also made in this study. Third wave feminism is addressed in the article, identifying four essential aspects of the movement: a left-over desire from the second wave of feminism—the battle against violence from men; power for both individual women and all women; a recognition that there is a beautiful mosaic of all different kinds of women; and, finally, the notion that there are inconsistencies and that no revolution is without complication. According to the researcher, when Buffy offers her power to the potential slayers, who hail from all areas of the globe, the action represents an attempt to bring a balance to the slayer army, with girls and women from different backgrounds being granted the power initially held by a white woman of privilege.

Research Questions

The present research revolves around the claim that the dialogue and events depicted in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* empower women by illustrating the power a woman can have in a world ruled by a patriarchy. Therefore, this study will examine *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to determine whether the reinterpretation of gender stereotypes, the audience's ability to relate to the character, and the dialogue in the program represent feminine empowerment:

RQ 1: How does *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* reinterpret gender stereotypes through character tests, dramatic conflict, narrative, and, most significantly, dialogue?

RQ 2: Do Buffy Summers' experiences as a young woman, particularly those involving her relationships, reflect those faced by audience members?

RQ 3: How does the dialogue in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* reflect the feminine empowerment central to the mythology?

The remaining chapters in this project will address various aspects of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the feminist messages it conveys. The researcher will address the series as a whole, selecting particular dialogic examples that lend support to the research questions, but the final episode of the series will be utilized specifically. Chapter II will offer a description of the critical approach utilized, feminist criticism, including an explanation of the key concepts and how the critical approach will be employed to examine the program. Chapter III will present a detailed discussion of the television program, including its origins, the process through which the show's audience was selected and embraced, and the feminist issues inherent in the premise of the program and how those issues were addressed. Chapter IV will present the analysis of the selected episodes, focusing on character tests, dramatic conflict, narrative, and dialogue. Again, the final episode will serve a particularly important function in the analysis. Chapter V will examine how Buffy Summers' relationships with those around her equate to the relationships maintained by the audience. Chapter VI will analyze how the dialogue in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* represents the empowerment Buffy experiences as a vampire slayer and as a woman. Specific pieces of dialogue will be examined from the final episode, dialogue that refers exclusively to the premise of feminist empowerment. Finally, Chapter VII will discuss the results of the analysis in reference to the presented research questions, draw conclusions, determine the limitations of the study, and offer future research questions based on the analysis and limitations.

Summary

The rationale for studying the television program *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is based upon the character's feminist influences and how the depiction of women in previous television series culminated in a superpowered heroine who saves the world on a regular basis while still facing

the issues associated with being a teenager. The status of women has been elevated on television, allowing them to be more than just props, background scenery, and romantic foils to male characters. Women on television need no longer be slaves to their emotions, their menstrual cycles, or to the ruling patriarchy. Buffy Summers has many television contemporaries, generally beautiful young women with desires that extend beyond getting blood out of their clothes and vampire remnants out of their freshly-washed hair. Buffy, teenager and savior, battles the undead and peer pressure while attempting to forge her identity as a young woman who is also a prophesized hero of the people, a complicated role that only a few decades ago might only be available to her male counterparts. The research questions that will guide this study identify how gender stereotypes are inverted in the series, how viewers of the series can relate to Buffy, and how the dialogue in the series reflects feminist empowerment.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

Rhetorical Criticism

Traditional rhetorical criticism, as defined by Wichelns (1925, as cited in Burghardt, 2005), requires a rhetorician to follow a specific methodology in order to determine the effect that a rhetorical artifact has on the intended audience. The methodology consists of seven steps: (1) audience analysis; (2) deriving the character of the speaker; (3) pinpointing the important thematic elements; (4) understanding how emotions are utilized by the speaker to elicit a response from the audience; (5) understanding the argument or arguments being made; (6) noting how the argument is structured and arranged; (7) and, finally, assessing the effectiveness of the speaker's delivery. Various approaches to rhetorical criticism exist, including analyzing the narrative structure of an artifact, the symbolism present in an artifact, and the mythic aspects of an artifact. None of these approaches befitted feminist criticism of rhetorical artifacts, which focuses on how women view the world around them and how an artifact reflects their experiences.

Realizing that traditional criticism was not sufficient means to analyze an artifact from a feminist perspective, Campbell (1982) created guidelines for performing a feminist critique of rhetorical artifacts. The first step for a feminist critique of an artifact is establishing the purpose that the artifact serves, specifically what idea is being conveyed and what result is expected. The second step is an analysis of those who receive the message, the audience. The persona of the speaker, in particular the believability and the ability for the audience to relate to the speaker, is examined in the third step of feminist criticism. The tone of the speaker, essentially the attitude

with which the speaker relays the message, is examined in the fourth step. The fifth step requires the rhetorician to comprehend the structure of the claims and the evidence presented, which leads into the sixth step, which relates to the strength of the evidence presented in the argument. Finally, the strategies employed by the speaker when presenting evidence and the language in which the evidence is presented is analyzed in determining the effectiveness of the argument and the success or failure of the rhetor to persuade the audience to accept the speaker's point of view.

Feminist criticism can take a number of directions, focusing on oppressive language, communication between females, or simply contributing to the scholarly methodology of feminists and further the cause of feminism (Burghardt, 2005). Whalen and Nudd (2006) identify four critical techniques inherent in female rhetorical criticism: (1) the redefinition of how gender is viewed and accepted; (2) the restoration and reclaiming of lost or forgotten avenues of communication by women; (3) a thorough cataloguing of various artifacts in order to trace the origins of gender definition found within the artifacts; and (4) the formulation of new theories steeped in feminist principles. Cragin (2010) states that "feminist media criticism is, at heart, an analysis of the relationship between women's lived experience and the cultural representation of that experience." Furthermore, the researcher states that as feminist media criticism was first taking hold in the academic arena, genres directly related to females were the first to be examined, due to the expectation that such genres would be an ideal starting place for a new wave of criticism.

Reflecting upon the various methods of rhetorical criticism, and in an effort to provide focus for the current project, it is evident that the feminist critical approach is most advantageous for critiquing *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The remainder of this chapter will outline how

Campbell's (1982) methodology for critiquing an artifact through a feminist lens can be applied to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and how the methodology will logically lead to the development of the research questions that will guide the current study. The following section will not utilize portions of dialogue—the dialogue will be directly addressed when evidence is presented in the analysis chapters.

Purpose

The instrumental purpose of the selected verbal communicative events from the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is dependent upon the audience present for said events. The primary purpose of much of the dialogue is to inform other characters on the show about the mythology of the vampire slayer; however, a speech from the series finale of the series involves Buffy asking potential slayers to accept their collective destiny and become vampire slayers in an effort to face down a malicious entity. Buffy also appears to use the spoken mythology to convince herself that the successful fulfillment of her birthright is paramount to the survival of mankind.

The purpose of the dialogue in *Buffy* is also dependent upon the audience. Buffy rarely directly speaks of the slayers that preceded her but realizes their sacrifices led her to become the current slayer. She honors the slayer line by continuing the fight, but such reverence is usually only implied. When faced with the destruction of the vampire slayer heritage and the conclusion of her legacy during the last season of the series, Buffy is forced into a position of leadership—she must lead the potential slayers, immature, ill-prepared girls who are in the position she was in less than a decade ago, into battle with evil incarnate. She speaks of the potential slayers that

fell during the final season of the show and does her best to inspire the troops while keeping in mind the number of people who had perished in order to guarantee a future for the human race.

The purpose of the dialogue in the show is to further the plot lines. The dialogue constructs the mythology and the mythology informs the plot lines. The people participating in the communicative event dictate what the purpose of the particular event is, be it to inform, to persuade, to honor, or to appreciate.

Audience

The immediate audience for the dialogue differs and often includes members of the target audience. At the beginning of the series it was required that viewers and characters were familiar with the mythology being constructed and Buffy's support system, composed of friends and her Watcher, Rupert Giles, were first to be informed about the mythology and were then used to establish particular plot points and augment the ever-expanding mythology.

Buffy's role as the slayer is revealed to many characters throughout the show through dialogic interaction. The target audience was often the same people as the immediate audience—characters on the show were informed of the mythology only when necessary. With the annihilation of the vampire slayer line imminent during the final season of the show, the target audience expanded a great deal when many potential vampire slayers entered the slayer's circle of intimates. Buffy was unexpectedly thrust into a position of leadership and had to act as both role model and guardian of dozens of young girls unprepared to face their collective fate. During the series finale, Buffy, in defiance of the established inheritance cycle and arguably a product of patriarchal hierarchy, attempts to convince the potential slayers to accept their slayer powers to combat the most powerful evil force on Earth. The acceptance of their powers

allowed the once potential slayers to assist in the slaying of the forces of darkness and to spare the denizens of the world from certain death and probable eternal torment.

Persona

Buffy is often responsible for bringing new people into the fold and informing them of the slayer mythology. While she is more powerful than mortal beings, she rarely deviates from a strong ethical code that prevents her from murdering human beings, regardless of their crimes. She may have a role to play in the governance of demons and demon-related activities but she steers clear of punishing humans for their perceived misdeeds. Buffy takes on the role of teacher to the potential slayers in the final season and educates them about their duties and responsibilities.

A defining characteristic of Buffy Summers is that she is constantly faced with difficult decisions (in regard to the safety of her loved ones on more than one occasion) and faces her role as sole decider with aplomb and minimal histrionics.

Tone

Buffy's tone when discussing her role as the slayer progressed from detached and indifferent to emotional and grateful through the duration of the series. Buffy was displeased when given the mantle of slayer as a teenage girl—she was more interested in shoes and school dances than stakes and hand-to-hand combat. She initially rebelled against her destiny but soon realized the importance of her role in the battle against evil. She matured throughout the series, learning that she mattered in the grand scheme of things and even going so far as to sacrifice her life in order to prevent the world from ending.

Other characters in the show had varied tones when discussing the mythology of the slayer. Giles, Buffy's Watcher, was deeply involved in the mythology before Buffy was chosen and has a deep reverence for fighting the good fight. Buffy's other companions respect the slayer mythology and have, on more than one occasion, helped alter the mythology for the betterment of the slayer line. When characters outside of the Slayer's sphere of immediate influence speak of the slayer, they (even evil beings) are generally respectful of the mythology and the Slayer, viewing the mythology as stable and the slayer as a worthy adversary.

The characters' attitudes toward the audience vary. For example, Buffy is initially impersonal with the potential slayers in order to build a rapport based on trust and respect. Only when Buffy became attached to the Potentials did she have problems dealing with them. She was authoritative with the Potentials in order to keep them safe—as soon as one of them was injured, they turned on her, questioning her ability to lead. She attempted to toughen them up by being cold and, at times, adversarial. When dealing with individuals other than the potential slayers, Buffy and the other characters act in accordance with their personalities and demeanors.

Supporting Materials

When explaining the slayer mythology to any audience, Buffy can rely on her role as a slaying authority. Being a slayer and having the associated abilities of a slayer make her a valid resource concerning the mythology. She can relate tales of slaying and share her adventures with those requesting proof. Being the only slayer for her respective generation, no one else (save the two slayers activated following Buffy's deaths and the mass activation in the series finale) can speak about slaying with Buffy's credibility.

Buffy's intimates can also relate many tales involving the slayer often due to their presence. Buffy often faced down apocalyptic threats with the assistance of her friends; therefore, they can also offer testimony about slaying. Rupert Giles, Buffy's Watcher, can also be viewed as an authority due to his involvement with the Watcher's Council, an organization designed to train and control vampire slayers. The vast amount of knowledge about past slayers allows Giles (and many other Watchers) to offer a relatively accurate description of the accumulated mythology. The potential slayers activated in the series finale could also be recognized as authorities on vampire slaying following the final battle.

Structure

The structure of the dialogic interactions concerning the mythology of the vampire slayer depends upon the content of the dialogue, the speaker, and the audience. When Buffy first shares her status as a vampire slayer with her intimates she often speaks of what a slayer is and what purposes a slayer serves. Each episode of the first season of the series began with a voice over from Watcher Rupert Giles: "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." The narrative format of the sequence indicates that the role of the slayer has been in existence for some time and that it is important. The statements also harkens back to a time long ago, indicating a chronological structure is nigh-inherent in the story of the vampire slayer.

The speech Buffy delivers in the final episode of the series in which she asks the Potentials to choose whether or not they wish to become full-fledged slayers is almost structured in a problem-solution format. The problem is the impending battle with evil and the solution is the acceptance of one's destiny and the accompanying super powers to combat said evil. Buffy

also tells the Potentials that she can understand their apprehension and expresses the sentiment that she wishes that she weren't there and that she wishes that the existence of evil didn't require the presence of a slayer in order to maintain the delicate balance. The ability to view the situation from the perspective of the Potentials assists Buffy in gaining and maintaining their attention.

Strategies

According to the slayer mythology, Buffy the Vampire Slayer fights evil. The mythology of the slayer dictates that Buffy is part of a sisterhood of power extending all the way back to the dawn of humanity. Buffy uses her inherited superhuman powers to stop the spread of evil and keep as many human beings alive as possible. The mere idea that Buffy fights against evil and that the mythology of the slayer has existed for millennia can lead the audience to deduce that Buffy is a tool for good and that the slayer mythology is important and possibly essential to the survival of humankind. Buffy kills only those things that prey on mortal creatures and does not knowingly murder people; therefore, one can assume that Buffy is good.

In regard to specific strategies of proof, Buffy can rely on enactment—she is the slayer and is proof that slayers and the mythology surrounding them exists. In addition, when Buffy proposes to the Potentials in the series finale that they should allow themselves to be part of the mythology and accept their slayer powers, she attempts to be persuasive and manages to use enumeration, offering many reasons as to why the Potentials should accept her offer, including the empowerment they both seek and fear.

The potential slayers were likely to be activated regardless of their decision whether or not to be strong as Buffy requested. Another interpretation is that the Potentials could flee the

fight and, if the newly-activated slayers did not destroy the evil entity threatening civilization, would perish anyway. This corresponds to the theme of fate and the acceptance of one's destiny prevalent throughout the tale of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

McCabe and Akass (2006) maintain that technology plays an important role in feminist television criticism. When soap operas were first broadcast on television, demographic information was gathered in order to determine how viewers, mostly women, engaged with the television programs. A transition occurred that led researchers to be more interested in how television was perceived as opposed to the texts which had been of fundamental importance until the age of televised entertainment. More recently, use of the internet allows fans to gather, including female fans, to discuss their favorite television programs with like-minded individuals. In addition, the researchers comment on different waves of feminism, concluding that feminist ideals generally remained static, but messages were in need of recoding in order for feminism to adapt to messages in different formats. Television allows for women to connect with other women with whom they would likely never meet otherwise and allows female voices from all different sources to connect with a larger audience.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer is a television program that has benefitted from the advent of the internet. Researchers McCabe and Akass (2006) mention *Buffy* in their project, stating that *Buffy* is one of the many programs with a fervent fan base that connects online. *Buffy* Summers' role as a feminist icon--strong, beautiful, and courageous—is a worthy example of being critiqued through a feminist lens. The feminist approach to rhetorical criticism, the foci of which include the audience (teenagers, both male and female), the purpose (to entertain and question the status quo), and the character of the rhetor (*Buffy* is willing to sacrifice her own

happiness for that of others), is appropriate for analyzing a television program about a young woman with superpowers fulfilling a role traditionally held by a man. Young women can look to Buffy as a role model, young men can appreciate the reversal of gender roles, and feminists can argue whether or not Buffy is a feminist character or just one more young lady looking for a man to rescue her from her life of turmoil.

Buffy's story has been made available to the mass viewing audience and has been seen by millions of viewers. Technology has allowed many television shows to be broadcast in different countries filled with people with different ideas of what it means to be a woman and how femininity and masculinity can be defined. The mass exposure of the rhetorical artifact in question allows interpretation from scholars everywhere, scholars with different experiences that can determine whether their personal narratives align with that of Buffy Summers, which as Cragin (2010) states, is an important goal of feminist media criticism.

Evidence will be presented in the next three chapters that serve to answer the research questions presented in the Chapter One through the use of feminist criticism. The character of Buffy Summers, as well as her speech and the speech of those around her, will be analyzed to determine whether or not aspects of the television program, the artifact in this case, provide evidentiary support to provide an answer to the presented research questions. Following the fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters, each of which will feature a different research question, a final chapter will close the study. The final chapter will allow the present researcher to provide analysis of the evidence presented in the three previous chapters and will also identify strengths, weaknesses, and issues that should be addressed in future research.

Summary

The traditional rhetorical criticism techniques were insufficient in conducting research with a feminist lens. The feminist approach requires the establishment of a purpose for an artifact, as well as an examination of the intended audience. The persona of the speaker, whether he or she is believable and relatable, as well as the tone of the speaker, are critiqued. The structure of the argument is examined, as is the strength of the evidence presented. The purpose of the dialogue in the show was to convey information, to promote the deconstruction and reconstruction of gender roles, and to create and advance plot lines. The audience for the dialogue was found both onscreen and off-screen, both characters in the series and the viewers. The mythology of the show was disseminated to both characters and audience members when necessary. Buffy Summers is an expert on being a teenage vampire slayer and is believable and relatable to characters on the show and the intended audience. Buffy's tone fluctuated throughout the series, beginning as displeased with her destiny and then progressing to acceptance and eventually leading to her being grateful for her role. Other characters, including her archenemies, respected her role as the Slayer, even as they tried to murder her. Supporting materials for the argument of Buffy's appropriateness for research include Buffy's credibility as a slayer, as well as her and her friends' ability to relate tales of slaying and the many dangers they faced. The structure of the dialogue serves chronological purposes, narrative purposes, and can be found in the problem-solution format. The strategies of proof reside within Buffy and her status as the Slayer, as well as the outside influence of the television medium, which disseminates the messages of the series to viewers throughout the world. The internet has led to even further distribution of the

messages inherent in the program, allowing scholars and viewers throughout the world the opportunity to view, discuss, and analyze the program within different contexts.

CHAPTER III

“BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER”

“Buffy the Vampire Slayer” Defined

Many individuals may falsely believe that Buffy the Vampire Slayer was a concept originally developed by Joss Whedon for the 1992 box office failure, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Whedon instead states in an interview included in the series' sixth season DVD set that Buffy was originally "Rhonda the Immortal Waitress ... the idea of some woman who seems to be completely insignificant who turns out to be extraordinary" (Townsend & Walworth, 2003). Furthermore, Whedon identified an essential theme within the tale of the Slayer: "The very first mission statement of the show was the joy of female power: having it, using it, sharing it" (Gottlieb, 2002). Buffy Summers was burdened with a traditionally masculine job, hero, and was isolated from her peers due to her calling. Buffy's vocation was first established in the film and further explained in the series.

The television series is a sequel to the theatrical film that appeared in theaters in 1992. Whedon was disappointed by the approach the auteur, Fran Rubel Kuzui, took in crafting the film. Kuzui misinterpreted the intent of Whedon and used the script to create a "pop culture comedy about what people think about vampires," an idea completely contradictory to Whedon's tale of female empowerment (Havens, 2003). Several years later, Whedon was given an opportunity to correct previous missteps and sold a television series based on the film. The series, steeped with metaphors (high school as hell and magic as an addiction, for example), quickly developed into a cult series with a strong and devout, albeit small, fan base, averaging over four million viewers per episode ("Buffy the Vampire Slayer," n.d.).

Buffy the Vampire Slayer ran for seven seasons and 144 episodes. Many television programs benefit from the work of pioneering female television characters and, accordingly, many shows may have benefited from the popularity of *Buffy*. Following the success of *Buffy*, several shows with young, strong female characters who redefined gender roles also had multiple-season runs on network television, among them *Charmed*, *Veronica Mars*, and *Gilmore Girls* (Lotz, 2006). The aforementioned programs featured female lead characters who were determined, intelligent, and powerful, and each program was aimed at a young demographic group like those who tuned into *Buffy*.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer found a home on the WB and UPN networks due to the storylines involving high school and the associated growing pains. The two networks were created in order to reach younger and more diverse viewers than the larger networks (Clark, 2004). The show was possibly successful due to the fact that viewers could identify with and were often the same age as the characters on-screen. Individuals could feel more connected to the characters because they were also going through the same trials and tribulations of the characters, save the metaphorical context present in the series. The fact that the series could be found on free, broadcast television (except for the markets where WB and UPN affiliates were unavailable) made the adventures of *Buffy* and her colleagues easily accessible to many viewers, as did the fact that while the show was a continuation of the events of the film, knowledge of the film was not necessary to view and understand the series. The availability of DVD season sets of the series, which began being released in 2002, allowed viewers access to the series at their own pace for a fee.

The show was accessible on various levels to different kinds of viewers. Whether individuals viewed the series for entertainment purposes, the ability to relate to the characters or situations, the deep-seated metaphors, or for other reasons, the broad message inherent in the show--women are powerful and part of an expansive sisterhood older than recorded time—was reinforced in each episode.

The character Buffy Summers was no ordinary woman. She had superhuman powers, access to fighting skills reserved for black belts in various martial arts styles, strong friendships based on mutual trust and honesty, and an impeccable fashion sense. Because of all of this, viewers chose to visit the Slayer each week to see where her adventures would lead her and her devoted group of friends and enemies. Buffy's identity as the slayer and, more particularly as a woman, come into strong focus in the final season. For six years, Buffy had been basically the one of her kind in existence, the only slayer (save Faith, who was incarcerated in an effort to rectify her mistakes) functioning in the big bad world. She wondered who she was and, in the final season, Buffy finally learned the true nature of the Slayer and the true nature of Buffy Summers.

Buffy's role as a vampire slayer, a woman who battles evil in a traditionally male role, allows her to defend ideals important to feminism, such as equality and the power of women, particularly in a world dominated by white, heterosexual men. Each episode depicts Buffy fighting against the patriarchy simply by using her abilities, abilities both natural and supernatural in nature. Feminist issues are most directly addressed in the seventh and final season of the series, though the influence of feminism is observable in each episode and plot arc. The very institution of the Slayer is in jeopardy—The First Evil, which predates time and

humans, attempts to end the slayer line and wreak havoc upon the world. The last remaining girls and women capable of becoming the next slayer after Buffy and Faith die descend upon Sunnydale, seeking protection. The final episode of the series, "Chosen," not only serves to close the series, but only the vampire slayer mythology that has existed for decades. Buffy engages in a final battle with an ancient evil that wants to destroy her heritage and eliminate her future, ending her quest to become who she is destined to become by ending her life and her legacy. In this episode, Buffy asks the potential slayers if they would like to embrace the power of the Slayer sisterhood and become slayers prior to the battle with The First Evil. The Potentials accept the gift and at the end of the battle, from which Buffy and the slayers emerge triumphant, Buffy is asked what she will do since she is no longer the only slayer. The last image viewers have of Buffy is of her with a knowing smile, as she looks back at what used to be her town.

The importance of this episode in the series lies in the notion that Buffy is no longer alone as a vampire slayer, and that all of the girls in the world with the potential to take her place were granted the ability to rise above their individual stations in life and become empowered. While the potential slayers literally became empowered with mystical strength and other related abilities, they were also empowered by being part of a sisterhood of warrior women who can impact the world around them more than they could before their collective inner strength was unleashed.

Slayer Synopsis

In order to properly comprehend and categorize the feminist issues addressed in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, it is essential to become acquainted with the plot lines and character arcs

throughout the series. A short synopsis follows that outlines all seven seasons of *Buffy* and reveals the feminist issues present in the story, the mythology, character actions, and the dialogue. A brief section explaining the purposes the various men/male creatures in the series serve and why an empowered woman does depend on men in some respects follows the synopsis.

Season One

Buffy the Vampire Slayer premiered five years after the movie bowed from movie theaters. The movie concludes with Buffy Summers burning down her Los Angeles high school's gymnasium in order to protect the masses from the many vampires contained therein. The series opens with Buffy's mother, newly divorced from Buffy's father, accepting a job in Sunnydale, California and enrolling Buffy in Sunnydale High School. Still haunted from her experiences in Los Angeles, including the death of her Watcher, Merrick, Buffy hopes to start anew, shunning her destiny as the Chosen One. Upon meeting the school librarian, Rupert Giles, who will serve as her new Watcher, she realizes that her destiny is inescapable, especially after a corpse is found in the girls' locker room of Sunnydale High. She soon meets Xander Harris, an everyman (to whom the audience can relate), who fancies her; Willow Rosenberg, a shy computer whiz who fancies Xander; and Cordelia Chase, a popular, attractive girl who warns Buffy to not socialize with either Xander or Willow if she wants to be unconditionally accepted by the school's ruling party, a warning Buffy does not heed. Giles explains that Sunnydale High School sits atop a Hellmouth, a center of mystical convergence that renders the small town prone to supernatural activity, the least of which is vampires. Buffy also meets Angel, a mysterious man desperate to assist her in her quest to vanquish the undead population in Sunnydale. Angel is revealed to be a

vampire and, as revealed in the second season, the victim of a gypsy curse--he now has a soul and must continuously attempt to atone for all of his past misdeeds as a soulless vampire. As the season unfolds, Buffy and her entourage wage battle against various supernatural creatures that leads to a final showdown between Buffy and The Master, a long-in-the-tooth vampire trapped beneath the town who cannot escape until he tastes the blood of a slayer. Adhering to an ancient prophecy, Buffy enters The Master's underworld and is quickly subdued. The Master sinks his fangs into Buffy and leaves her for dead in a puddle of water, relishing the opportunity to complete a vampire apocalypse aided by the awakening of the tentacled creature of the Hellmouth. Buffy, having drowned in the puddle, is revived by Xander and tracks down The Master, effectively ending his reign of terror by dropping him through a window onto a broken piece of wood. Buffy and her friends end the season by attending a school dance, a traditional rite of passage following a nontraditional battle to the death.

Season Two

The second season opens with Buffy having spent the summer in Los Angeles with her father and returning to Sunnydale just in time to save Willow and Xander from a vampire. Psychologically scarred from her premature death and subsequent resurrection, Buffy has difficulty readjusting to her life in Sunnydale and shuns her friends and allies. She perished at the hand of a great enemy and then rose again, ready to fight vampires with a new attitude and establish that the Slayer will not succumb as easily as her enemies might believe. She finally reaches closure when she saves her friends from the clutches of vampires attempting to resurrect The Master and destroying the remains of her great enemy. Kendra, Buffy's replacement slayer, activated following Buffy's short-lived death, arrives in Sunnydale and assists Buffy in a battle

with assassins sent after Buffy by Spike and Drusilla, two vampires with pasts linked to Angel. Spike and Drusilla soon find an accomplice in Angel once he reverts to his former evil, soulless persona, Angelus, a direct result of finding true happiness through copulation with the Slayer. Angel and his cohorts attempt to awaken Acatlha, a demon capable of sucking the world into a hell dimension. Spike betrays Angel, admitting that he appreciates the world he lives in and the availability of human-shaped meals, leading Buffy to their base and forcing a confrontation between the former lovers. Kendra dies by Drusilla's hand defending Buffy's friends and with the world hanging in the balance, Buffy murders Angel just as Willow casts a spell to restore his soul. Angel's last memory of Buffy is her thrusting a sword into his chest. He is swallowed into a hell dimension and Buffy, no longer welcome in her home after her mother learns of her destiny, retreats to Los Angeles with her loved ones none the wiser.

Season Three

The third season opens with Buffy's friends taking over her slaying duties (often with humorous results), Giles desperately searching for his charge, and Buffy's mother blaming Giles for her daughter's exodus. Buffy, now known by her middle name, Anne, works as a waitress in a Los Angeles diner. Buffy, distraught over what she lost and what she left behind in Sunnydale, ignores her destiny and compromises her identity. Buffy then runs into a young woman she once rescued in Sunnydale, a teenage runaway who recognizes Buffy, who is also lost and searching for her own identity. The two soon run across a man promising to help them find their way, neglecting to mention that their way will lead them into a hell dimension. Buffy emerges from the hell dimension, rescuing many other lost individuals at the same time, and decides to take hold of her destiny once again. She returns to Sunnydale and is soon faced with Faith, the slayer

sent to replace Kendra, a vengeance demon named Anya, and a newly-resurrected, ensouled Angel. Anya loses her demon powers after failing to properly fulfill a wish made by Cordelia that rewrote history so that Buffy had never come to Sunnydale and is punished for her failure by being stripped of her immortality and forced to enroll in high school. Faith, despondent after her Watcher was murdered by an ancient vampire who she eventually dispatches, chooses a darker path than Buffy and accidentally murders a human. Incapable of dealing with her actions, Faith joins forces with the mayor of Sunnydale, a man who has been in office for 100 years and plans to ascend to demonhood during the high school commencement exercise. Faith, knowing of Buffy's love for and dependence on Angel, attempts to murder Angel with a poison that can only be counteracted if the afflicted feeds on the blood of a slayer. Buffy decides that Faith should be willing to shed blood after her various misdeeds and the two brawl, ending in Faith being stabbed and falling into a coma. Buffy allows Angel to drink her own blood and the two plan how to stop the mayor before he can decimate the senior class and the rest of the town. In order to destroy the demon that was once the mayor, Buffy and her allies blow up the school with the demon inside. Angel then disappears, fulfilling his promise to leave Sunnydale after graduation to allow Buffy to follow her own path.

Season Four

The fourth season begins with Buffy and Willow starting college at the University of Sunnydale. Xander soon returns from a road trip that did not unfold as planned and attempts to find himself by accepting any job offered. Giles, now unemployed, enjoys a life of leisure and begins to feel worthless now that Buffy has started college. Willow befriends another witch, Tara, and begins a sexual relationship with her. Tara soon becomes an indispensable member of

the group. Buffy meets Riley Finn, an older college student who serves as a teaching assistant for Buffy and Willow's psychology teacher, Maggie Walsh. Walsh and Finn are actually part of an underground military faction known as "The Initiative," a group designed to research the various demons and other supernatural creatures in Sunnydale and to find military applications derived from experimenting on them. The Initiative captures demons, called "hostiles," and tags them in order to track their movements. Vampires are fitted with a special microchip that prevents them from causing harm to human beings. Spike returns to Sunnydale and is captured and fitted with such a chip. More sinister applications for the demon research are revealed when viewers learn that Dr. Walsh is heading an experiment in which a creature composed of demon parts, human parts, and robotics is being assembled. The creature, Adam, breaks free and attempts to start a war between humans and demons in order to bring about a new race comprised of creatures like himself. He ultimately fails when Buffy uses magic to join her essence with those of Giles, Willow, and Xander to defeat Adam. In the season finale, Buffy and her cohorts plan a movie night to unwind after the battle with Adam but they all fall asleep. Each has a dream featuring a primitive woman (as well as a strange man in possession of cheese), revealed to be The First Slayer, who they unknowingly invoked when casting the spell to allow Buffy to defeat Adam. They all awaken and share the contents of their dreams and learn that the Initiative has been disbanded.

Season Five

The fifth season opens with Buffy meeting Dracula. He informs her that she is nothing more than a killer, words she takes to heart that haunt her throughout the season. Viewers are then introduced to Dawn, Buffy's little sister, who did not exist until the fifth season premiere.

Dawn is actually energy disguised in the form of a young girl, created by monks attempting to protect said energy from a demigoddess known as Glory. Glory needs Dawn, “the Key,” to open up a door to her own dimension so she can escape Earth and leave behind the human being she is forced to share a body with, a medical student named Ben. When Glory uses Dawn to open the doorway back to her dimension, all of the boundaries separating dimensions will open and allow entities from all dimensions access to other dimensions, including the one in which Buffy and her friends reside. Glory spends the season attempting to determine where and what the Key is and is certain that Buffy knows the identity of the Key. Buffy soon realizes that Dawn is not a part of her past and learns that the monks gave the Key to her in the form of a sister, knowing that Buffy would protect it with her life. Buffy’s mother is stricken with a brain tumor and, near the end of the season, passes away from an aneurysm.

Buffy and her friends are hit hard by the death, but realize that they must fight on and protect Dawn to halt the destruction of the world. Tara is attacked by Glory, rendered insane, and accidentally reveals Dawn’s true nature to Glory. A large battle ensues between Buffy and her friends, a group of knights dead set on not letting Glory gain access to the Key, and Glory herself. When the battle ends, Glory abducts Dawn and Buffy is left catatonic over her failure to protect her sister. Buffy soon emerges from this state, with Willow’s help, and puts a plan into action to save Dawn. Buffy defeats Glory in the ensuing battle but Dawn has already been used to open the portal to return Glory to her home dimension and tear down dimensional walls. Atop a large tower, Buffy realizes that the words spoken to her by The First Slayer in a spirit walk, “death is your gift,” is not condemning her to be nothing but a killer, but empowering her to save the world and her sister by sacrificing herself. Dawn’s status as the Key depends upon her blood

being spilled and since Dawn was created from Buffy, they share blood. Buffy leaps to her death, sealing the dimensional breach and saving the world again.

Season Six

The penultimate season begins with Buffy's friends and sister attempting to adjust to life without her. They exploit a robot version of Buffy, built for Spike for his pleasure, in an effort to keep up appearances and keep the demons in town under the impression that the slayer is still active. No new slayer was called after Buffy's death because the slayer line now runs through Faith, who is serving time in a prison in Los Angeles to make amends for her various crimes. Buffy's friends, distraught over her death, decide to use magic to return Buffy to the land of the living, a possibility because she died a mystical death instead of a physical one. During the ceremony, demons, newly-aware of the lack of slayer in Sunnydale, attack the town and halt the ceremony prior to its conclusion. Buffy is revived, but wakes up in her coffin and must claw her way through her coffin and the earth above her in order to be free. She spends the rest of the season attempting to deal with her return to the living, allowing everyone to continue to believe that she was in a hell dimension, her friends' justification for bringing her back. She also enters a sexual relationship with Spike, her former nemesis and more recent ally. Spike is the only one who initially knows the details of Buffy's afterlife, and she hates herself for giving him so much power over her. When the relationship ends, Spike attempts to rape Buffy and then leaves town, determined to make her love him. Upon Buffy's revelation of her pleasant afterlife, her friends feel a great deal of guilt and regret but must also contend with "The Trio," a triumvirate of minor, human villains bent on controlling the world. Buffy foils one of their schemes and, humiliated, their leader, Warren, shoots Buffy in her backyard and while fleeing the scene,

inadvertently murders Willow's girlfriend, Tara. Willow, fueled by grief and overcome by a once-thought subsided addiction to magic, embraces the darker side of her nature and attempts to exact revenge on those responsible. Willow skins Warren alive and sets out to destroy his counterparts. Buffy and her friends attempt to reason with Dark Willow but are unsuccessful. Xander finally gets through to Willow and ends her plan to destroy the world while Buffy embraces life, both the beautiful and the less beautiful aspects.

Season Seven

The final season focuses almost entirely on the slayer mythology. Sunnydale High School is rebuilt and reopens just in time to count Dawn Summers as one of its students. Spike lives in the school basement, tormented by past acts after having his soul restored in an effort to get Buffy to love him. Buffy and her loved ones are visited by dead individuals once thought lost, and Buffy realizes that they are dealing with "The First," a creature older than time. The First is capable of adopting the appearance of anyone deceased, including Buffy, but is incorporeal. Also aware of the threat, Giles, rarely seen since the beginning of the sixth season, returns to Sunnydale with several potential slayers in tow. The First attempts to destroy the slayer lineage and take down the last line of defense between humans and demons. Buffy begins training the potential slayers to fight, but her leadership skills are repeatedly tested by the First's minions and her own misinformed decisions. Faith returns near the end of the season and the two slayers prepare to lead the potential slayers into battle. Buffy takes possession of a magic scythe that she presents to Willow as part of an outrageous plan. Willow, a powerful witch with difficulty controlling her abilities, is to use the power of the scythe to activate all of the potential slayers to full slayer status and reboot the slayer mythology. Buffy and her army of Slayers enter the

Hellmouth under the high school and fight the minions of the First. Spike uses a medallion brought to Buffy by Angel to defeat the remaining army of demons and then disintegrates. Buffy and her followers escape the city limits just before the entire town, deserted episodes before, disappears, leaving nothing but a crater behind. Buffy, always burdened with being the one-and-only-slayer (with the exception of Faith, who spent most of her time in Sunnydale committing acts of evil), is no longer alone in her fight to save the world. The series ends with Buffy smiling, staring into a future wide with possibilities.

Female Identity and Feminist Empowerment

The story of *Buffy* is a feminist tale featuring empowered women battling a society that belittles them while attempting to become the best people they can be; nonfictional women write their own tale, one decision at a time, on their own developmental path. Buffy Summers' quest for identity is chronicled throughout the entire series. Buffy had attempted to leave her slayer duties behind after being expelled from her previous high school for incinerating a gymnasium full of vampires, but upon arriving in Sunnydale, Buffy is once again thrust back into the demon-destroying game. Buffy is faced with both her sacred duty, which is of the utmost importance, and being a normal girl, which can seem to be of the utmost importance. Buffy faces apocalypse after apocalypse, her friends and lovers by her side, as she fulfills her role as the "chosen one," a role that designates her as the only one of her kind. She spends the series defining and redefining who she is and who she wants to be, and in the final season of the program, Buffy is forced to become the leader she was meant to be, the hero she always was, and a slayer among slayers, no longer alone (save Faith) and looking forward to a future over which she has more direct control. Buffy's quest to find herself is revealed through her actions, her decisions, and

the dialogue that establishes the mythology and the invites viewers to a place where women are not always victimized by men or beasts.

The role of vampire slayer brings with it connotations of power and responsibility, yet its very nature is the only connection to femininity. Men are supposed to be heroes and women are supposed to be in need of heroes, not the other way around. Buffy Summers does not require the assistance of a man when dispatching vampires and their ilk—all she needs is confidence, a sense of purpose, and a weapon. According to the mythology, vampire slayers have existed for centuries, ever since men decided that a young woman combined with the spirit of a demon and imbued with supernatural abilities could do their job for them. The male oppressors' decision to create the slayer bloodline was ultimately what allowed the chosen women to become empowered. When Buffy realizes how important she is to the Watchers' Council in the fifth season and informs them that they need her in order to exist, she takes back the power they had taken from her when they saddled her with a Watcher and a mission. The final season focused on Buffy learning to share her experience, her expertise, and, ultimately, her power. The potential slayers, terrified girls and women who were up until recently unaware of the great destiny ahead of them, are trained by Buffy to battle a force more evil than Buffy had ever faced. Buffy's decision to invite the potential slayers into the fold and allow them to access the power all of them are not necessarily supposed to receive fundamentally alters how the women in that fictional world will be viewed by the men. Girls and women all over the world with the potential to become vampire slayers were simultaneously empowered, granting them superhuman abilities, confidence, and the opportunity to embrace their destinies and forge their identities without the restraint of the patriarchy or the burden of being normal.

Buffy Summers' identity remains in a constant state of flux throughout the series. As the Slayer, she must make crucial decisions that can have dire consequences. She must depend on her instincts, her experiences, and the wisdom of previous slayers to ensure that her decisions reflect the best possible outcome. As a young woman, her decisions are important, sometimes made with the world in the balance. Every day, women are forced to make decisions, armed with the same metaphysical weapons the Slayer yields. People change over time, their established identities fluctuate with each crisis they face, each joy they experience, and even small decisions can have immeasurable effects on themselves and those around them. Women are placed in little boxes with impersonal labels that stereotypically define who they are—it is the responsibility of women to understand such definition and decide whether they represent what the label claims. Buffy's quest for identity parallels that of her intended viewing audience; she starts out as a teenage girl with little more on her mind than what might transpire in the immediate future. Her identity as a shallow teenager is compromised when she learns that she is all that stands between existence and nonexistence. She dies at the hands of a monster, only to be resurrected with severe emotional scars. She has to slay her soulmate to save the world. She faces the wrath of her mother when her slayer identity is revealed and needs to visit Hell before once again embracing her identity. She becomes a college student and has to decide how to function as both a coed and a superhero. She loses her mother and has to care for a little sister who previously did not exist. She has to come to terms with the fact that her death could save the lives of her loved ones and the whole of humanity. She has to pretend to function normally after her extraction from a peaceful afterlife leaves her dead inside. She has to combat her best friend's flirtation with the dark side. She has to face down an ancient evil and become a leader.

Buffy Summers has to endure all of these trials to achieve her identity as a powerful feminist agent, yet this identity develop incrementally. Every decision a woman makes defines who she is and who she is going to be; this is true of both fictional vampire slayers and mothers and daughters throughout history.

The seventh and final season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* best represents the feminist messages of the series. The season contains 22 hour-long episodes and while each episode is an essential piece in the *Buffy* saga, the final episode, "Chosen," brings the story to a conclusion. It is in the series finale that Buffy Summers is shown to be most comfortable with her identity as a slayer and a young woman, and when the slayer mythology is irrevocably altered and girls and women throughout the world face an overpowering awakening that will leave them forever changed.

"Chosen" begins with Buffy Summers, aided by her former lover, Angel, taking possession of a weapon, a scythe, that becomes part of a grand plan to vanquish The First Evil. Angel, deeply in love with Buffy, wishes to stay in Sunnydale and assist Buffy in her battle but Buffy tells him to leave and prepare a second front in case she fails to defeat The First. Spike, Buffy's current vampiric paramour, witnesses her reunion with Angel and jealously confronts Buffy later. She offers him the opportunity to wield an amulet Angel left with Buffy that would help take down The First Evil. Spike agrees and while the two are sleeping, Buffy is visited by her powerful adversary, having taken the physical form of Buffy, as it can with anyone who has died, who advises her to give up the battle because she cannot possibly win. It is at that point that Buffy has an epiphany and realizes how to thwart The First and share her power with the potential slayers. Buffy's friend, Willow, a powerful witch, will cast a spell with the scythe

Buffy acquired earlier in the episode that will grant all of the potential slayers the power associated with the mantle of vampire slayer. Buffy explains her plan to the Potentials and they descend on the newly-rebuilt Sunnydale High School, under which the Hellmouth, filled with powerful vampires, resides. A battle plan is enacted—Buffy and the potential slayers enter the Hellmouth while Willow goes to the principal’s office to begin the ceremony to utilize the power of the scythe. The battle begins and Willow activates the scythe, empowering the potential slayers and evening the odds between the countless vampires and the limited number of new slayers. Some of Buffy’s allies fall, as do numerous vampires, and then Spike activates the amulet which destroys the remaining vampires and triggers a powerful earthquake. Buffy is forced to leave Spike behind as she and the Potentials escape the high school and the crumbling town. Just beyond the city limits, the school bus used to transport the survivors away from the Hellmouth stops. The occupants, and Buffy, forced to ride atop the vehicle, look back at Sunnydale, now an enormous crater. After taking stock of the situation and what lies ahead, Buffy smiles and the series ends (Whedon, 2003).

Buffy the Vampire Slayer is the story of women warriors. Men traditionally wield the axes, carry the firearms, and physically pummel the enemy to save defenseless women from evildoers. Buffy Summers and her slayer army spent most of the final season training for the big showdown with The First Evil, knowing full well that they might not survive to see how the story ends. The potential slayers are drawn from the collective populace to abandon their mundane lives and become essential cogs in a machine designed to vanquish evil. While stories and myths often revolve around boys and young men embracing the warrior’s path through weapons training, hunting wild animals, and spending time alone in hostile environments, the idea of young women

picking up axes and wooden stakes to defend the world may sound far-fetched and fantastical. Women's roles in *Buffy* deviate from those found in other television programs. The women of *Buffy* represent a new kind of woman—an empowered feminist that represents what is typically right with men, such as defending those considered weak, and what is typically right with women, such as great emotional depth and understanding, and fusing the two together to create an amalgam necessary to developing a generation of women unafraid to stand up for what is right while understanding why injustice arises and how their empathic knowledge can be applied to solving problems without violence, though still willing to dole out violence when necessary. Embodying both feminist ideals and traditionally masculine attributes allows such women to transcend the trappings of gender and define themselves as something entirely new, something both primal and powerful, something both feminine and masculine.

Prior to the activation of the potential slayers in “Chosen,” the young warriors-in-training would not have been granted slayer abilities until Buffy perished. They would never be empowered as slayers, never join the slayer sisterhood, and would probably live their lives without ever grasping their true collective purpose in the battle between good and evil. When Willow casts the spell that imbues the Potentials with the powers they had originally only had a slight chance of ever attaining, the mythology changed, the Potentials changed, and the world changed. With more than one young woman in possession of superpowers battling evil, the entire balance of the eternal battle waged between good and evil was altered. The empowerment granted to the potential slayers was not just physical power, but emotional and psychological power, power that could topple any tower of patriarchy and any instrument of evil.

Buffy: Misogyny Interrupted

Though an empowered female, Buffy Summers is surrounded by men that exercise some degree of control over her personal life, her slayer life, and the points at which those two lives converge. As a vampire slayer, she depends on her Watcher and surrogate father, Rupert Giles, to provide guidance in her role as the Slayer and as a young woman in a male-dominated world. Her friend Xander and her various paramours throughout the series influence Buffy's decisions, actions, victories and defeats. The majority of villains in the series are men who challenge her to rise above her station as both a woman and a vampire slayer, and the organization designed to dictate her actions and train her to perform her job duties also consists mostly of men. Though it may seem peculiar that a woman warrior with supernatural powers turns to men for assistance when she does not necessarily fall prey to many of the traditionally stereotypical traits assigned to her biological sex, Buffy does not live in a vacuum and though she may be able to dispatch evil physically, the men in Buffy's life, including her enemies, serve different roles in her life that prove essential to her success. These men can be viewed as representatives of the oppressive patriarchal force that holds Buffy down while simultaneously forcing her to rise above them and function as an empowered female. This section will evaluate the roles that the men in Buffy's life play and how each contributes to her development as both a slayer and as a woman.

Buffy and Rupert Giles

When Buffy arrives in Sunnydale, she does not have a Watcher and had hoped to toss her destiny aside and resume a normal life without the ever-looming threat of physical violence and removing the remnants of dusted vampires from her favorite blouse. When she is once again

thrust into her former life, she turns to Rupert Giles to provide guidance. As a Watcher, Giles is well-equipped to assist Buffy through his vast knowledge of the supernatural and essentially unfettered access to texts that contain crucial information about Buffy's destiny and the destinies of her predecessors, as well as the evils she will face as a slayer. When Buffy's desire to be normal surfaces throughout the series, Giles reminds her of who she is and what she must do, that she is special and with her many gifts comes responsibilities that must come before her own desires. Giles also helps Buffy by providing focus when her emotions promote indecision that leads to mortal peril for the whole of humanity, such as when Dawn's death can halt the destruction of the world and Buffy wants nothing more than to save her beloved sister at the cost of everyone else. Buffy ultimately makes a decision in that instance that Giles respects, though he understands that Buffy allowing Dawn to perish would be a decision reflective of those that need to be made by the Slayer. When Buffy loses her mother, Giles is instrumental in her ability to cope with the loss. When Buffy must train the Potentials in the final season, Giles is there to facilitate her transition into the competent leader she is destined to be and to admonish her when she strays from the mission and develops doubt about her abilities. Giles serves as a friend, a confidant, a teacher and a surrogate father who contributes to the recipe for the cookie dough that is Buffy Summers.

Buffy and Xander

When Xander Harris first lays eyes on Buffy, he is immediately smitten. When he learns of her slayer status and of the purpose she fulfills in the battle against evil, he joins her and contributes what he can to the mission. Unlike Giles, who is in possession of knowledge and resources from the Watchers' Council, Xander offers the perception granted to an everyman

surrounded by greatness. Despite the military training he retained from the third season's Halloween episode in which all of the characters were granted abilities and attributes associated with their chosen costumes, Xander is a normal man who is average in most aspects other than bravery and loyalty. He has no superpowers or supernatural powers yet he battles alongside his friends to thwart evil at great harm to himself. Xander is a true friend to Buffy who offers comic relief when tension strikes and picks up a battleaxe when evil strikes. His romantic interest in Buffy quickly subsides and he becomes an almost brotherly figure in her life. When The Watchers' Council appears in the fifth season to assess Buffy's training and her assembled support team, Buffy defends Xander to the Council, pointing out that the time he has spent fighting with her is more than adequate when compared to any formal training he may have received. Xander is one of Buffy's best friends and has the scars to prove his allegiance, including having lost loved ones and an eye in a battle in the final season. Xander's bravery and loyalty to the Slayer is proven time and time again throughout the series and though Buffy may not need to rely on Xander in the same way as women traditionally need to depend on men, his presence in her life has benefitted her in ways other than just being an additional hand in battle or a friend with whom to spend a lonely Saturday night watching movies.

Buffy and the Men She Loves

Buffy Summers has three serious relationships with men during the series. Arguably the most important, or at least the most intense, is Buffy's entanglement with Angel. When they first meet, Angel is a mysterious figure that appears when Buffy needs assistance. Once he is revealed to be a vampire, he becomes an ally and a lover who, when his soul is lost, becomes Buffy's greatest enemy for a short time. Spike first entered Buffy's life as an adversary—he

then developed romantic feelings toward her and the resulting relationship, while not necessarily healthy for either party, is beneficial to both in the long run, culminating in Spike sacrificing himself to save the world and his beloved. Riley, a human granted superpowers through scientific means, proves to be an unremarkable relationship partner despite the constraints of Riley's own fragility once his enhanced abilities dissipate. Buffy's romantic partners demonstrate many traditionally-female attributes—while they are all physically strong and generally resistant to physical harm, they are prone to jealousy, emotional dependence upon Buffy, and insecurity about their roles in her life when they are exposed to one another. In the show's mythology, even taking into account Angel's spinoff series, only one of Buffy's men had a seemingly authentic relationship after Buffy—Riley found a wife after leaving Sunnydale. Angel had a brief relationship with Cordelia prior to her passing, and Spike's television life ended with him, and Angel, still battling over who deserves to be with Buffy, not taking into account the fact that she wished to merge her slayer half with her normal half upon leaving the battle against evil to the once-Potential slayers. With Angel, as well as with Riley and Spike, the other two important romantic relationships in her life during the series, Buffy finds a protector, a savior, a peer and a partner. While she is no traditional damsel in distress, the men in her life sometimes treat her like one, not realizing that she is not stereotypically weak-willed and overemotional, and that she can cope with threats of any nature. Unlike the nature of her relationship with Xander, Buffy relies on her lovers for carnal and emotional needs, but like Xander, they assist her with her slayer duties and make a contribution to the nigh-complete person Buffy becomes as she stares out at the vast Sunnydale-shaped hole in the earth that held her captive for seven years before finally relenting and setting her free.

Buffy and the Men She Loathes

Buffy is a girl with superpowers, a sharp wit and, at most times, a sharp weapon. As a woman, she is meant to flaunt her neck cleavage for vampires and then scream while her blood is drained from her like a good little girl with no options other than to be a tasty snack for demons. This is how the evil male creatures who oppose her view her prior to finding themselves on the ground with no notion of how a young woman put them there with a roundhouse kick or a well-timed headbutt. The Big Bad villains in the series consist mostly of men, save Glory in Season Five and Willow at the end of Season Six. Buffy encounters The Master in the first season who discounts her abilities to stop him from rising from the depths and becoming inebriated on the life's blood of the humans that would defy his authority as an ancient vampire with an unpleasant demeanor. The Master discounts Buffy as being weak and ineffectual against his power but soon finds himself on the wrong end of a pointed object. Her battle against The Master leaves her psychologically wounded following her temporary death at her hands, but emerging victorious from the battle empowers her against those who would challenge her abilities in future skirmishes. Buffy faces Spike (and Drusilla) and the evil alter ego of Angel in Season Two, once again proving her power over the demonic patriarchy that desires nothing more than world domination and her untimely death. The third season villain, a misogynistic mayor with delusions of demonhood, afforded Buffy the opportunity to destroy her high school while dispatching the man who referred to her as a "whore" and challenged her to rally her classmates to halt yet another apocalypse. The fourth season villain, a hybrid demon-robot-human, forced Buffy to tap into the empowerment synonymous with her slayer heritage that would prove paramount in her war against The First Evil in the final season. The First Evil recruited a

woman-hating priest to ensure Buffy and the Potentials would die before they could stop The First Evil from ending the slayer dynasty, only to be cut in half by a “bitch” named Buffy. Buffy’s encounters with evil male men/creatures who thought of her as a harmless girl whom they could eliminate with minimal effort were thoroughly educated about the potential of an empowered female with access to weaponry and a solid support system consisting of both men and women.

Not Just an Instrument of Men

All of the men in Buffy’s life serve a purpose—they are not simply placed within the context of the story to provide window dressing or dramatic conflict. Giles is Buffy’s Watcher and while it may seem at times that she must fight him to maintain control over her destiny, he allows her to make mistakes from which she learns valuable lessons that make her a better slayer and a better person. They may disagree on battle tactics and her romantic life, but Giles is her “stalwart standing fast” and a father figure in a life lacking such. Xander risks his life on a weekly basis alongside those who have a much better chance of leaving a battle unscathed than he, yet he does so because of his platonic love for the Slayer. He uses humor to defuse tense situations and while he may not be the man of Buffy’s dreams, he is always there to lend a helping hand, an open ear and open heart, and the use of his one good eye. Angel, Spike, and Riley are romantic rivals with more than one thing in common—they love Buffy and let that emotion consume them at different points throughout the series, putting them at odds with one another. They are men with traits more befitting a stereotypically overemotional young girl who see her heartthrob spending time with another person deemed less-than-worthy. They are members of an elite team to eradicate evil, but that status does not prevent them from acting like

jealous boyfriends that must be reined in by an empowered woman. Buffy's male adversaries represent a patriarchal dominance unaccustomed to dealing with a woman that can and will fight back, a woman with superhuman powers, the will to use might and for right, and men in her life that at times may seem to hold her down, but in the end serve to raise her up and support her in her demon-dusting endeavors.

Not all men are the same—not all men are reflective of the patriarchal hierarchy whose sole purpose is to dominate and oppress women. The men in Buffy's life, at least those who are not major villains, share a common goal with Buffy. Their value systems are in sync with hers, and they appreciate what she contributes to the team as a woman, not in spite of her being one. Without Buffy, the men in the story might still battle evil individually, but Buffy is the common denominator within the team and promotes the notion that a woman need not be rescued in order to be a part of an adventure--sometimes, a woman can do the rescuing. As an empowered woman, it may not seem logical that Buffy is dependent on men to accomplish her goals, but without the delicate balance and contributions provided by the men in her life, Buffy would simply be an angry young woman with superpowers and no access to ancient texts, male friendship, or someone to share her bed after a long battle and a warm shower. She can face the darkness alone, but her fate provides male beacons to illuminate her path.

Summary

Buffy the Vampire Slayer was conceived by creator Joss Whedon as the tale of a seemingly ordinary woman gifted with extraordinary abilities. Although the story of Buffy Summers was originally introduced to audiences on the big screen with mixed reactions, several years later the television program premiered. Aired on a network aimed at young people, the show follows

Buffy and her friends as they battle demons while still attempting to have some semblance of a normal adolescence and young adulthood. A synopsis of the series was generated and from that synopsis, two main issues of importance to feminism were identified—establishment of female identity and feminist empowerment. The final episode of the series, “Chosen,” was selected as the artifact of the current study because the episode culminates in Buffy’s acceptance of her identity and the empowerment of girls and women who could someday find themselves in Buffy’s role as the Slayer. The close examination of the how the actions of Buffy and the dialogic exchanges in the series empower women is vital to understanding the impact of the series, as is the notion that empowered women must sometimes work with men--who do not prescribe to traditional norms within male/female discourse and interactions--toward a common goal.

CHAPTER IV
RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

Gender Stereotypes

RQ 1: Does *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* reinterpret gender stereotypes through character tests, dramatic conflict, narrative, and, most significantly, dialogue?

The first research question designed to guide this study involves whether or not *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* reinterprets popular gender stereotypes through character tests, dramatic conflict, narrative, and dialogue. The main character of the series, Buffy Summers, violates gender norms through her actions, dialogue, and simply by virtue of being a supernaturally strong woman defending the world against the evil forces usually battled by men. Buffy is responsible for the lives of many people and must make difficult decisions repeatedly throughout the series, and act as a man traditionally would do when faced with such conflicts. A main theme in the series is sacrifice, specifically Buffy giving up her own happiness in order to protect the innocent and fulfill her slayer duties. The following analysis will be separated into two parts. Due to the creator and writers' decision to artfully intertwine various aspects being analyzed, the first section will focus on character tests, which arise from and/or create the dramatic conflicts that compose the overall narrative. The second section will provide dialogic examples that are indicative of how the messages created, disseminated, and received by Buffy Summers are essential to the story and to the reinterpretation of gender stereotypes. Though dialogue from each season will be addressed, the series finale, "Chosen," features the culmination of everything Buffy Summers has said, done, and faced since the beginning of the series. Her experiences brought her to the final battle with The First Evil, and though dialogue from "Chosen" will not

be addressed in each section and every instance, the trials she endured during the series until that point deserve to be chronicled in order to provide the necessary context to comprehend the impact the finale had upon the series and the mythology therein.

Sacrifice: Character Tests, Dramatic Conflict, and the Narrative of Buffy Summers

This research question cannot be properly addressed without examining events that occurred during the series prior to the finale. Focusing solely on the events of the finale without taking into account what events preceded Buffy's decisions and sacrifices, often portrayed through both dialogue and her actions, cannot be justified. The Slayer's experiences in 143 episodes of the series led to the events in the final episode, and Buffy Summers' growth as both a slayer and a young woman define who she was and what she became. For the sake of brevity and to avoid repetition from the "Slayer Synopsis" portion of Chapter Three, which summarized all seven seasons of the series, one example from each season will be presented in this section to illustrate how the tests of character and dramatic conflicts within the narrative of Buffy Summers' life revolve around sacrifice, specifically Buffy's sacrifice of her own safety, the ones she loves, and twice in the series, her own life.

Throughout the seven seasons of the series, Buffy is faced with many tests of her character and dramatic conflict with other people, demons, and various forms of monsters from the beginning of the narrative until the end. These tests of character and dramatic conflicts are what made her capable of performing her duties as the Slayer throughout the series and, perhaps most importantly, grant her the strength to share her power and destroy an ancient evil at the close of the series. During the series, Buffy contends with reconciling her desire to be a normal teenage girl and a superpowered savior, willing to sacrifice her well-being for the well-being of

others. She must also attempt to maintain relationships with friends and lovers, some of who betray her or question her decisions when she is most vulnerable. Buffy dies twice during the series, though resurrected by natural and supernatural means, respectively, and following her second death, which lasted for months and resulted in her regaining consciousness in her grave six feet underground. Buffy faces demons that test her strength, her will, and her love for her sister and friends. She must face down a rogue slayer who gives her pause and leads her to evaluate her own performance as the Chosen One. At the end of her hero's journey, Buffy must defeat an ancient evil that aims to eradicate the slayer bloodline and compromise her destiny and the destinies of those who would follow her. Examining some of these aspects as presented during the series will best illuminate the tale of Buffy the Vampire Slayer and how she slays gender stereotypes through her actions, decisions, and speech.

Season One

Buffy's relationships with other people, including the men in her life, are complicated. One particular relationship with a man, The Master, is arguably the most complicated. He kills her, and then she returns the favor. The Master is the main villain in the first season and is responsible for the deaths of several of Buffy's peers. Knowing that she will die, she meets with The Master in an attempt to rewrite her destiny. This example proves that Buffy is willing to die to save other people, and that even at age sixteen, she understands the importance of sacrifice and the sanctity of life.

In the first season finale, "Prophecy Girl," Buffy learns of her role in the release of her archenemy, The Master, from his underground prison (Whedon & Whedon, 1997). According to a book of prophecies in the possession of Giles, Buffy is fated to face The Master and perish at

his hand. Being only sixteen years old and having her entire future in front of her, Buffy makes clear to Giles that she will not face The Master and that another slayer or someone else can take her place. Her reluctance to face The Master and perish represents her futile attempt to be an ordinary girl without the weight of the world resting upon her shoulders. Once she learns that vampires had once again invaded campus and murdered her peers on her turf, she understands the part she must play in the evil machinations of The Master and descends to the sunken church and fulfills her fate, dying and facilitating The Master's release. Though she is later brought back to life via cardiopulmonary resuscitation, she chose to give her life to protect those she loves and the world-at-large, just one of the difficult decisions she must make on a regular basis. Buffy's choice to face The Master and fulfill her destiny represents a turning point in her character development in which it is made abundantly clear that she is willing to sacrifice herself to protect the innocent, whether she does so when patrolling on a nightly basis or facing down a foe much more powerful than herself.

Season Two

The theme of sacrifice recurs in the second season, when the vampire Buffy loves turns evil and she must destroy him, as well as a part of herself, to save the world. Unfamiliar with sacrifice, Buffy kills Angel and leaves town, carrying the pain away with her to parts unknown to her friends. This example shows that Buffy understands her role as the Slayer and the responsibilities associated with role, and that her needs do not outweigh the needs of those who depend on the world to keep spinning and for life to go on, whether they know about her sacrifices or not. Buffy is willing to sacrifice the love of her life to protect the innocent.

After Angel loses his soul and reverts back to his alter ego, Angelus, he and Buffy engage in a final battle that culminates in Angelus successfully awakening the demon Acatla and the world beginning to be sucked into hell (Whedon, 1998b). Right before Buffy can kill him and halt Acatla's progress, Angelus' soul is restored and Buffy is faced with sparing her soulmate or saving the world. She asks him to close his eyes and impales him with the sword, forced to watch her lover, a look of confusion upon his face, be absorbed by the demon statue and sucked into a hell dimension. Distraught and homeless, courtesy of her mother's commandment that Buffy stay home instead of saving the world at risk of losing the safety and security provided by her home, Buffy flees Sunnydale and travels to Los Angeles. She loses everything to save the world—her family, her friends, and her boyfriend—just more sacrifices she is forced to make as the slayer and protector of the innocent. Buffy is truly alone, just as the prophecy detailing her role as the Slayer describes. She cannot face her friends after endangering their lives once again, and she cannot face her mother, who Buffy rightfully assumes abandoned her after being told not to return home if she defied her mother's wishes and ventured into the dark night to defend the world. Buffy feels isolated and that her time in Sunnydale has ended—she cannot process the idea that she had to murder her beloved Angel in the line of duty, nor that she is unwelcome in her own home, the one place in the world where she could retreat when her life had become too tumultuous to endure.

Season Three

After seemingly losing everything good in her life, Buffy flees to Los Angeles and must regain her identity and self-worth in order to return to her duties as the Slayer. When she returns, she is confronted by those she left behind in the aftermath of Angelus' attempt to end the world.

Buffy faces more difficult decisions when she must lie to her friends about Angel's return, and must face the worst parts of herself when dealing with her fellow Slayer, Faith. Buffy faces the loss of her boyfriend, attempts to murder her fellow slayer, and questions an unsure future. She musters her slayer strength and makes difficult decisions in order to save the world and those she holds dear. The following example from the third season finale illustrates Buffy having to decide whether Angel or Faith dies, and must do so while preparing to face an enormous demon that will attack during her high school graduation. The decisions Buffy makes show that once again, her happiness is not paramount and that the greater good is of the utmost importance.

In the two-part third season finale, "Graduation Day," the Mayor of Sunnydale's plan to ascend into demonhood is jeopardized by Buffy and her team's intervention (Whedon, 1999a). The mayor sends his secret apprentice, Faith, to poison Angel in order to occupy Buffy and distract her from what is to transpire on the day of her high school graduation. The poison, a particularly potent concoction that can only be remedied by the afflicted vampire feasting on the blood of a slayer, quickly weakens Angel. Buffy, watching her lover die, decides that Faith's actions, including the accidental murder of an innocent, indicate that she has officially become evil and that her blood should be used to cure Angel. A fight between the slayers follows and before Buffy can apprehend Faith after mortally wounding her, Faith falls off of a balcony onto a passing truck and escapes becoming Angel's unwilling savior. Having failed in her mission to bring Angel the blood of a slayer to save his life, Buffy allows him to drink from her, knowing full well that he may not be able to stop draining her blood in time to ensure her safety. She is left near death by Angel, almost losing her life in order to save her lover and be certain that the good deeds he commits to atone for his past sins can proceed as planned. Buffy's action of

risking her own life to save that of her soulmate is indicative of her love for Angel, despite his decision to leave her at the end of the season, allowing her to have a semi-normal life and experience all that life has to offer a college student. They never reunite for an extended period of time in the series, though it is clear that Buffy and Angel are committed to each other and that if circumstances were more favorable, they would spend the rest of her life together.

Season Four

During her first year in college, Buffy must adjust to all of the changes in her life, just like her real-life audience, but must do so while still saving the world on a regular basis. Her decision to call upon The First Slayer to augment her power to destroy the fourth season's Big Bad, Adam, affects the rest of the series as she begins to grasp who she is, from where she comes, and where she is going. At one point in the season, Buffy temporarily loses her friends and mentor and must face the world alone. While not unprepared to do so, Buffy's friends are her family, and she will sacrifice anything to be certain they are safe and happy. The following example shows how Buffy depends on her friends and that they depend on her, essentially serving as a functioning family unit, and that they are strongest when united.

In the season four finale, "Restless," Buffy and her friends deal with the ramifications of their summoning of the spirit of The First Slayer to destroy the season's big bad, Adam, a human-demon-robot hybrid that intends to forge more creatures like himself with the leftovers from a human-demon war he wishes to initiate (Whedon, 2000a). Buffy is imbued with the essence of The First Slayer due to a ritual performed by Giles, whose offering to the spell was his mind, Xander, who offered his metaphorical heart to the spell, and Willow, who offered her magical ability to the spell, in the previous episode, "Primeval" (Contner & Fury, 2000). After

defeating Adam, Buffy's ancestor's intervention ends and Buffy and her friends return to her house for a night of movie viewing. They all quickly fall asleep and are tormented in their dreams by The First Slayer. Each of Buffy's friends die in a fashion that fits their contribution to the spell that conjured The First Slayer. Willow's life essence is extracted from her by The First Slayer, while Xander has his heart ripped out of his chest and Giles is scalped. Buffy finally faces The First Slayer and, after realizing that her predecessor's notion of working alone and not being able to maintain friendships while serving as the slayer does not apply to her, ends the dream and awakens at the same time as her friends, each of them alive and aware of what occurred in their respective dreams. Buffy's decision to allow the essence of The First Slayer to inhabit her body brought her closer to the slayer bloodline than she'd ever been before, though she didn't necessarily realize the effect her decision would have on her friends. The First Slayer appears in later episodes and guides Buffy during difficult times, reinforcing Buffy's decision to embrace her heritage in order to defeat an evil being she cannot destroy on her own.

The realization that Buffy is stronger with her friends beside her, that each of them offer something that she does not necessarily possess, helps shape her relationships with her friends throughout the rest of the series. Though she does still physically fight alone in some instances, the idea that she has a support system beyond her Watcher allows her to break the slayer mold and surround herself with those who love her and who are willing to sacrifice their own well-being for the greater good, whether they possess superpowers or not. Later in the series, Buffy does still sometimes question whether or not she is meant to fight alone, but her friends, who are now part of her family, do not allow her to dwell on that notion for long.

Season Five

Buffy faces a challenge unlike no other in the fifth season—her mother dies, leaving her to care for a sister that she never had before, and forcing her to mature at a pace for which she was unprepared. Buffy must protect her sister from a goddess who wants to use said sister to eliminate the barriers between dimensions so that she can return home. In the following example, Buffy makes the ultimate sacrifice for the second time, leaping to her death to save her sister, her friends, and the world, from unspeakable torment. Buffy's decision to sacrifice herself in order to ensure that the world keeps turning is a hallmark of the character.

In the final episode of the season, "The Gift," Buffy understands the haunting phrase The First Slayer offered her in an earlier episode, "Intervention": "Death is your gift" (Whedon, 2001b; Espenson & Gershman, 2001). Buffy does not fully comprehend the weight of those words until she is faced with compromised dimensional boundaries endangering the world she is destined to protect and seeing her bleeding sister as the key to restoring normalcy. Buffy reasons deductively that since her sister was fashioned from her using supernatural means, they share the same blood and that though Dawn's blood is officially the cause of and remedy for the destruction befalling the world and countless other worlds, Buffy's blood can serve the same purpose and that her death can stop all of the pain, all of the death, and all of the destruction. Buffy asks only that her sister live her life as best she can, encouraging Dawn to take advantage of what life has to offer, and to take care of her friends before leaping to her death, thus restoring everything to normal and creating a hole in the hearts of her loved ones. In this instance, the second and last time in the series, Buffy sacrifices her very life to save the world. Buffy dies saving the world, a familiar fate to her slayer predecessors, and her sacrifice will allow her

friends and family and all those who inhabit the planet to live on due to her selfless act, an act that represents the positive effect that one person, one woman, can have on the world around her.

Season Six

In the sixth season, Buffy sacrifices her pleasant afterlife to live amongst her friends. She has trouble emotionally connecting to them and is almost forced to sacrifice her best friend in order to save the world. Buffy will always make the difficult decisions when necessary, which is part of her burden as the Slayer. In the following example, Buffy sacrifices a chance at a normal life when a demon's venom leads her to believe that her time in Sunnydale is simply a psychotic delusion. She decides to leave the chance at normalcy behind and returns to protect her friends, destroying her only opportunity to be relieved of the extraordinary stresses that plague her existence. Buffy's sacrifice of a normal life, even if it was a demon-induced delusion, proves how much she cares about those who love her and how much being the Slayer has informed her personality and the choices she makes.

Buffy's season of readjustment is further complicated when a demon infects her with a toxin that leads her to believe that her life in Sunnydale is a fictional creation of a broken mind. In "Normal Again," Buffy begins to view her friends and sister as obstacles that need to be eliminated in order for her to become fully-realized again, and has hallucinations in which her mother and father are still married and are desperate to see their daughter healthy (Gutierrez & Rosenthal, 2002). Buffy attempts to murder her friends to become whole again until she finally comes to terms with the fact that she belongs in Sunnydale and that the reality she hallucinated is simply a figment of her imagination. Had Buffy made the wrong decision, she would have sacrificed the life she always wanted and by choosing reality, she did make that sacrifice. She

has one final hallucination set in a mental health facility, when she finally lets go of what kept her sane in that reality and retreats into the supposed illusion that is her life as the Slayer.

Season Seven

The final season finds Buffy finally becoming an official leader. She faces The First Evil, a creature that wants to destroy the slayer line and be certain that no new slayers will be available to thwart his evildoing. After all the sacrifices Buffy has made throughout the series and all the trials she has endured, her growth as a person and as a superhero are evident when she shares her power with young women who could prove to be her successors. She becomes a fully-realized person and changes the world for the better, unleashing an army of vampire slayers to combat evil in all its forms. The following example reveals that, just like in the second season, Buffy is prepared to sacrifice her loved ones in order to do what is morally right.

When Anya, Buffy's former vengeance demon friend and Xander's ex-fiancée, returns to the demon fold and murders a group of college students accused of breaking a young girl's heart in "Selfless," Buffy is once again faced with the decision of whether or not to kill a friend whose actions are supernaturally-borne and emotionally-motivated (Goddard & Solomon, 2002). Buffy must explain to Xander, who objects to Buffy handling Anya's return to evil with violence, that she once had to kill Angel, who she loved more than anything else, because she is faced with such decisions due to her role as the Slayer. No one else can make the decisions Buffy does; she carries an emotional burden that she cannot properly express to her friends whose opinions on matters may differ, which is another way in which the target audience can relate to Buffy Summers. Anya and Buffy fight until Anya is impaled with a sword, which only wounds her. Willow summons D'Hoffryn, Anya's superior, who proceeds to cause Anya pain by murdering

her fellow vengeance demon friend, Halfrek, instead of Anya, whose recent death wish was not granted. Buffy's willingness to do what is right is reinforced in the episode through discussion of the fact that she killed Angel, her soulmate, to save the world, thereby showing that none of her friends who become evil are safe from retribution. Buffy operates as an agent of good, and therefore must attempt to maintain the balance between what is good and what is evil, and she is willing to sacrifice her loved ones to that end.

Buffy's growth as a character throughout the series is unquestioningly important when examining the events in the final episode. Buffy has consistently sacrificed herself, her happiness, and her desires in order to protect both her loved ones and the world. She left behind her ability to be a normal girl and have a normal social life in the first season. She also died at the hands of The Master. In the second season, she lost the love of her life to evil and had to murder him to save the innocent. In the third season, after regaining her identity lost at the end of the previous season, she lost her love all over again, as well as the opportunity to share the slayer burden with her crazed counterpart. In the fourth season, she temporarily lost her friends and her grasp on what her destiny holds until she is visited in a dream by The First Slayer. In the fifth season, she had to sacrifice young adulthood to raise her sister and, in a selfless final act, lost her life to save the world. In the sixth season, she sacrificed her own happiness and remained in a thankless world that did little but to hold her down and endanger her regularly. In the final season, Buffy sacrifices her exclusive hold on her birthright and offers up her power to share with others in a final battle with evil incarnate. She rises above her station and becomes a leader to a group of scared young girls and offers them power beyond their wildest dreams and a place in a sisterhood of power that reaches back to the dawn of humanity. Each sacrifice, each

decision, helped mold Buffy Summers into a heroine, and the various tests of her character she faced further define her.

Dialogue: The Slayer Speaks

To television viewers unfamiliar with the roles women hold in American culture, it may appear that women are required to be empathic, sympathetic, and supportive of the men in their lives. Traditional gender roles on television limit women to being vain and uninterested in men's efforts to include them in male-oriented, competitive activities like sports (Nathanson, Wilson, McGee, & Sebastian, 2002). Women are soft, feminine, and unassertive, in stark contrast to men, who are portrayed as being strong, unyielding, powerful leaders capable of changing the world around them (Fung & Ma, 2000). Women are supposed to hold traditional occupations such as housewives or executive assistants, or perform miscellaneous duties in offices (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999). Buffy Summers does not work in an office and while at times she can be soft and delicate, she can also be a fierce fighter, make increasingly difficult decisions that affect people beyond her immediate intimates, and save the world on a regular basis. As a vampire slayer, Buffy has more to consider in her life than what she should prepare for dinner or how best to collate warm documents fresh out of the copy machine. Buffy's role in the world is that of a hero, a position traditionally deemed appropriate only for men. The words Buffy Summers uses to communicate are paramount to understanding how she views herself in the context of society that views her as weak and ineffectual like her peers. The dialogue presented below will illuminate how the vampire slayer functions in society, the role she fulfills, and the ways in which she defies her socially-assigned gender and the associated limitations.

A vampire slayer generally works behind the scenes, stalking evil and neutralizing the threat it presents to those without the abilities to defeat it. Buffy does not receive accolades for her slaying, nor does she receive monetary compensation or any rewards other than the knowledge that she has protected the innocent. She operates as an agent of good, but is not recognized by the public. She simply performs her duties using the abilities she has been granted and does so because she realizes how essential her role is to the greater good. She attempts to maintain her role as a normal teenage girl for those unaware of her deadly vocation, yet many people just consider her strange, an unwelcome stigma, particularly in high school. She is expected to simply be like any other teenage girl, a character she sometimes has difficulty playing convincingly.

The dialogue contained in this section illustrates how Buffy functions as a teenage girl/young woman, as a vampire slayer, as well as how she reconciles both roles. Examples from each season will be utilized in order to develop a context through which the events of the final episode, the artifact, can be viewed. This section will also be divided by season.

Season One

Between slaying vampires and eviscerating demons, Buffy Summers yearns to be normal. She wants to date teenage boys, she wants to have fun with her friends, and, above all else, she wishes to make it to age seventeen. The following dialogic examples prove that Buffy wants to be normal, but that her slaying duties are extremely important to her and that she is willing to die to save the world, despite her desire to live a normal, happy life. She is mature enough to understand her role in the universe and yet desires what other people, those without her responsibilities, take for granted. She is a powerful woman warrior, but she sometimes just

wants to share a plate of French fries with a guy or eat ice cream on her couch while wearing sushi pajamas. She is a strong woman who sometimes wants to make the choice to be feminine, to put down her stakes and battle axes and just embrace what comes naturally.

In “Never Kill a Boy on the First Date,” Buffy’s first date with a young man in Sunnydale should come secondary to her duties as the Slayer. Giles, her Watcher, is displeased at the nonchalance he feels she associates with her destiny, informing her that despite her teenage yearning to have a normal social life, she needs to be available to thwart evil. She reaches a compromise with Giles:

Buffy: If the apocalypse comes, beep me. (Batali, Des Hotel, & Semel, 1997)

Buffy wants to go on a simple date without worrying about the end of the world, just as other young people do. She uses humor to inform her Watcher, Giles, that she will be available to eliminate evil if the need arises, but that she wants to have a normal date with a normal guy. This is an attempt for her to find some balance between her natural desires and the supernatural dangers that surround her. She is not shunning her responsibilities, nor is she postponing them; she just wishes to live a semi-normal existence that does not require her to be battle ready at the drop of a hat.

When Buffy first learns of her predestined communion with The Master, she reacts as any young person faced with certain death would, though in the end, she comes through, sacrificing her life to keep others safe in “Prophecy Girl.” Buffy initially wants to shun her slayer responsibilities, well aware of the fact that she is destined to die at the hands of The Master. She is only sixteen years old and wants to grow older and experience what life has to offer, a reaction

that any typical teenager would surely have when faced with such a decision. Fortunately, Buffy Summers is no ordinary teenager:

Buffy: *(about the prophecy in which she will die)* So that's it, huh? I remember the drill. One slayer dies, the next one's called. I wonder who she is. Will you train her? Or will they send someone else?

Giles: Buffy... I...

Buffy: *[wimpering]* Does it say how he's gonna kill me? Do you think it'll hurt? *[as Angel steps close to her]* Don't touch me! Were you even gonna tell me?

Giles: I was hoping I wouldn't have to, that there was some way around it. I...

Buffy: I've got a way around it. I quit.

Angel: It's not that simple.

Buffy: I'm making it that simple. I quit. I resign, I-I'm fired, you can find someone else to stop The Master from taking over.

Giles: I'm not sure that anyone else can. All the... the signs indicate...

Buffy: *[enraged, throwing books at Giles]* The signs?! Read me the signs! Tell me my fortune! You're so useful sitting here with all of your books! You're really a lot of help!

Giles: I don't suppose I am

Angel: I know this is hard.

Buffy: What do you know about this? You're never gonna die.

Angel: You think I want anything to happen to you? You think I could stand it? We just gotta figure out a way...

Buffy: I already did. I quit, remember. Pay attention!

Giles: Buffy, if The Master rises...

Buffy: I don't care! I don't care. Giles, I'm sixteen years old. I don't wanna die. (Whedon, 1997)

Buffy understands her destiny—she knows that she has a shortened life span. However, to be told by an ancient book that she will die soon and that there is nothing that she can do about it initiates a flight response instead of a fight response. She does not want to die, but she realizes that she must. She has a job to do, a job she was literally born to do, and she does not abandon her responsibilities. She faces The Master and she dies, just as the prophecy foretold, but the prophecy did not illuminate what would happen to her after she died.

When Buffy encounters The Master in “Prophecy Girl” for what proves to be their final showdown, she does not allow the fact that he killed her prevent her use of humor to express her feelings about the situation. In this instance, Buffy embraces her feminine nature and her status as a teenage girl, commenting on her appearance before ending the reign of terror of an ancient vampire. He may have killed Buffy for a short time, exercising the power that men hold over women in society, but she rises and makes light of his power, essentially defeating the hold he has over her before she ends his existence. Buffy is attractive, deadly, and intelligent, a combination that The Master, and misogynists, are not necessarily prepared for or equipped to face:

The Master: You're dead.

Buffy: I may be dead, but I'm still pretty. Which is more than I can say for you.

The Master: You were destined to die! It was written!

Buffy: What can I say? I flunked the written. (Whedon, 1997)

Buffy is quick with a quip, even after recently rising from the dead. She disarms The Master with humor, calling upon her femininity in expressing that though she perished, she is still attractive, and that he is not fortunate enough to be so. She then uses her status as a female high school student to explain why she did not stay dead, claiming that her destiny was not entirely accurate, a fact The Master learns as she tosses him to his death.

The preceding excerpts from the first season illustrate how Buffy Summers yearns to be normal, to have a boyfriend and attend a school dance without having to worry about sullyng her dress or hair. She wishes that being the Slayer did not dictate how she must behave and make decisions that could have deadly consequences. Buffy's role as the Slayer doesn't allow her to lead a frivolous life; instead, she must constantly act as a mature adult whose choices affect the lives of other people and often, the lives of everyone else on Earth. She learns that she cannot endanger innocent people just because she wishes to have a romantic life. She learns that her role as the Slayer requires that she not be normal. She must play by supernatural rules that do not always align with what she desires. She learns that her future is not entirely bright and that sometimes, facing one's destiny does not always entail an end to one's life.

Season Two

Buffy, the woman warrior, returns full force in the second season. She embraces her role as a slayer, dispatching the undead while temporarily alienating her friends. Still distraught from her short-lived death, Buffy returns to the fold a changed person and faces the feelings that arose from her battle with The Master. In spite of all of her superpowers, Buffy is still a teenage girl, and though she faces death on a regular basis, actually dying is a different experience. The following dialogic exchanges focus on Buffy's declaration of being a girl who happens to be a

vampire slayer. Being a vampire slayer informs her actions and dialogue, as does being a teenage girl, and the dangerous men she faces and the new allies she meets are privy to her assertions of identity.

Following the restoration of her memory due to a spell convincing her that she was a noblewoman centuries ago, Buffy reintroduces herself to Spike before he can kill her in “Halloween.” Buffy played the role of a noblewoman while under the spell, though as soon as the spell lifts and she regains her memory, she exercises her feminine power by pummeling Spike, who was poised to take advantage of her compromised personality, something he knew he would only be capable of doing if she were not in her right mind:

Buffy: [*as her memory returns*] Hi, honey, I'm home.

[*beats up Spike*]

Buffy: You know what? It's good to be me. (Ellsworth & Green, 1997)

Spike thought that he would be able to kill Buffy since she was not herself and, due to the spell that possessed her, subservient to him as a woman of that time period would be to a man. Just before he is able to sink his teeth into her, she is no longer rendered defenseless by the spell and proceeds to show him that she will not be a play thing for his amusement. She uses her slayer powers to defend herself and expresses her appreciation for her slayer gifts that once again protect her from the advances of men with sinister agendas who would view her as an easy target due to her biological sex.

Buffy and Angel's relationship, complicated due to his age and her mortality, makes her yearn for a simpler life of normalcy in “What's My Line, Part One.” Knowing that her role as the Slayer and her feelings for Angel prevent her from having a traditional life, even one that

may put her in a position similar to traditional women in relationships, Buffy laments her inability to be normal and have normal problems, such as a boyfriend who smokes or makes her parents uncomfortable, not a boyfriend whom has lived for two centuries and spent part of that time slaughtering the very innocents Buffy is empowered to protect:

Buffy: I wish we could be regular kids.

Angel: Yeah. I'll never be a kid.

Buffy: Okay, then a regular kid and her cradle-robbing, creature-of-the-night boyfriend.

(Gordon, Noxon, & Solomon, 1997)

Buffy's relationship with Angel is complicated, yet they both wish for the same thing—to have a normal relationship. She is a vampire slayer with a shortened life span and he is a vampire with an elongated life span. She understands mortality, having just died within the past year, and her desire to have a normal relationship with a normal person is not possible due to her slayer duties. Angel cannot die as easily as the mortals she could date, but he, like she, is not invincible. There is common ground between the two—the relationship is not normal and can never be normal. They can never have a traditional relationship, an issue that arises again and again throughout the series.

In “What’s My Line, Part Two,” Buffy explains to Kendra, her chosen replacement, about how her emotions empower her and should not be discounted. Kendra has a Slayer handbook, outlining her abilities and responsibilities, which Buffy never received. Kendra follows the handbook precisely, while Buffy takes a different path and trusts herself and her

emotions to be her guide, believing that the power within her should work in tandem with her supernatural abilities:

Buffy: Kendra, my emotions give me power. They're total assets. (Noxon & Semel, 1997)

Buffy attempts to explain to Kendra that her emotions are not a weakness but instead grant her strength. Kendra cannot understand the concept, having been trained to be a slayer for a lengthy period of time. Buffy has grown up in a world filled with normal people with normal problems and only within the past couple years learned of her destiny. She did not learn to suppress her emotions—she learned to wield her emotions. Buffy's superpowers come from the supernatural, yet she has other powers that are natural. She is tenacious in a battle, loves her friends and family, and does not stand down when faced with a deadly destiny. She may not always be logical and sometimes may put her feelings before her duties, but she always prevails, sometimes even having to rise from the grave to do so. She is both masculine and feminine, though the balance may shift at times due to situational concerns, such as when revealing to her mother she is the Slayer or when inserting a stake into a vampire that just fed on a coed.

In "I Only Have Eyes For You," Buffy informs Willow of the danger of impulsive behavior and the ensuing ramifications, referring to Angel's transformation following the consummation of their relationship earlier in the season. Buffy had no way of knowing that when she made love to Angel that his soul would disappear and that he would attempt to bring about the end of the world. Had she known, her behavior before and after that fateful event

implies that she would have not been so impulsive and pondered the effect her decisions had on those around her and herself:

Buffy: Impulsive? Do you remember my ex-boyfriend, the vampire? I slept with him, he lost his soul, now my boyfriend's gone forever, and the demon that wears his face is killing my friends. The next impulsive decision I make will involve my choice of dentures.

Willow: Okay, the Angel thing went badly, I'm on board with that, but that's not your fault. And anyways, love isn't always like that. Love can be... nice! (Noxon & Whitmore, Jr., 1998a)

Buffy made a mistake sleeping with Angel and unleashing the beast within him, but she was unaware of what would occur post-coitus. She did not know that he would begin terrorizing her, her friends, and strangers. She made love to a man and he became evil, perhaps an experience shared with many young women whose male companions have changed after an advance in their physical relationships, though most males likely do not resort to murder following fornication. Buffy is accustomed to her decisions being integral to the safety of those around her and did not expect that giving into carnal desires would bring about the end of the world. In hindsight, she regrets her decision and feels obligated to repair the damage caused by said decision. Willow attempts to explain to Buffy that love is not always so complicated and that there are positive things associated with the emotion, but Buffy must concern herself with the fallout from her night of passion as both the Slayer and as a woman.

Buffy sometimes uses threats to motivate the demon population to cooperate. Demons may not initially recognize Buffy's authority or recognize her power, but once they are exposed

to her physical prowess, they may opt to be more open to what she has to say. The use of threats may be considered more of a masculine trait, but the fine line Buffy must walk between traditional masculine traits and her role as a young female is often blurred by her need to get information quickly without having to go through the motions of being polite and dainty. This example is found in “Becoming, Part Two”:

Buffy: If you have information worth hearing, then I am grateful for it. If you're gonna crack jokes, then I'm gonna pull out your rib cage and wear it as a hat.

Whistler: Hello to the imagery. Very nice. (Whedon, 1998b)

Buffy encounters demons on a regular basis and has learned that dealing with them is not always easy. Demons expect that she will behave like a scared young girl, incapable of defending herself or her viewpoint. The majority of the demons on the show are men, which allows Buffy the opportunity to educate them on the power inherent in a woman, as well as the power inherent in a vampire slayer. She needs information from this particular demon and does not wish to waste any time. She must defer to the knowledge of this demon who resides in a human form, but she need not defer to all men.

Buffy's double life is finally revealed to her mother in “Becoming, Part Two.” Buffy had kept her role as the Slayer a secret from her mother to protect her and allow her to have the tentative peace of mind that the parent of a teenager can muster. Buffy's mother was aware of her daughter's odd behavior—they had to move to Sunnydale because Buffy burned down the gymnasium of her former high school to eliminate the vampiric threat contained within. Her mother knew that Buffy could be difficult and that she was irresponsible, but did not know the responsibilities with which Buffy was saddled. When the truth is revealed, it is evident that

Buffy's mother had created some form of mental block, denying that Buffy's behavior was anything more than the usual antics of a teenage girl testing her boundaries. Buffy, distraught by her mother's reaction to the revelation, attempts to bring levity to the situation:

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.

(Whedon, 1998b)

Buffy, perhaps like other girls her age, feels alone in the world, that no one can truly understand her. As the Slayer, Buffy is alone. Others cannot understand what she must deal with on a regular basis. She cannot approach a peer in the cafeteria and ask about what would be the best detergent to remove demon blood from her favorite blouse. She has little in common with people her age, and her mother has elected to avoid asking direct questions about what transpires in her daughter's life. Buffy was forced to mature faster than her peers and her mother chose denial as a coping mechanism to deal with her daughter's strange and dangerous behavior. While Buffy is essentially an adult with responsibilities that few adults can understand, she still feels that she needs her mother. Her identity has been forged by destiny, but that does not mean that her desire for a mother has been sated. When her mother finally learns of her slaying duties,

she does not react well and tells Buffy that she must stop at once. Buffy knows that the world is in peril and that despite her mother's attempts to understand what Buffy must do, she never will.

When Angelus finally gains the upper hand in the battle with Buffy during his attempt to awaken Acatlha in "Becoming, Part Two," he is surprised by her reaction to his statement about her predicament:

Angelus: No weapons, no friends, no hope. Take all that away, and what's left?

Buffy: Me. (Whedon, 1998b)

Buffy's empowered answer to Angelus' question was shocking—he figured he finally had her in a position of weakness and that he would triumph over her quickly. Angelus had tormented Buffy since the middle of the season, terrorizing her friends, even contributing to the murder of two of them, utilizing his familiarity with Buffy during the psychological war he launched against her. Buffy wanted Angel back, but was unwilling to sacrifice the world to get what she desired. Buffy's assertion of identity and feminine power reveals that she is not weak and will not be defeated. Shortly thereafter, Buffy must send Angel to a hell dimension in order to fulfill her slayer duties and prevent the end of the world. Her role as a teenager in love was secondary to her role as a defender of the innocent, indicating that the roles Buffy must play can and must be manipulated in order for her to be herself.

Season Three

The following dialogic exchanges from the third season of *Buffy* highlight Buffy Summers' attempts to reclaim her dual identity and reaffirm her status as the Slayer. Buffy initially tries to deny her destiny, to leave behind all the trappings of her former life and begin anew. In finding her identity once again, Buffy is empowered as a slayer, as a teenage girl, and

as a feminist warrior when she slays a demon that lured lost souls into a hell dimension. She is no ordinary girl who must defer to the misogynistic patriarchy that aims to govern her actions and her world. She escapes a hell dimension, faces an evil slayer, competes for the position of Homecoming Queen, and destroys an evil mayor-turned-demon while trying to maintain her relationships and graduate from high school.

In “Anne,” the third season premiere, Buffy is transported to a hell dimension and, while other residents are stripped of their identities through torture, Buffy reasserts hers when the question of her identity is posed by a demon:

Buffy: I'm Buffy. The Vampire Slayer. And you are? (Whedon, 1998c)

Buffy had spent the first episode of the third season running from her destiny, suppressing her slayer identity in an attempt to start over and leave the trauma associated with her time in Sunnydale in the past. When forced to once again embrace the other, less desirable part of her personality, Buffy maturely decides that she needs to be herself again in order to release the other human captives in the hell dimension. Once again claiming her destiny, Buffy is immediately thrown back into her dangerous life as a warrior woman with a mission.

In “Faith, Hope & Trick,” Buffy laments her lack of social life as a slayer to her friends. Buffy’s yearning to be normal is a necessary and static part of her character throughout the series. She wants to experience what it is to be normal, though as revealed in this dialogic exchange, Buffy’s idea of normal has changed and differs from what others may refer to as normal:

Buffy: I just wanna get my life back, you know? Do normal stuff.

Willow: Like date?

Buffy: Well...

Xander: Aw, you wanna date. I saw that half-smile, you little slut.

[Xander starts chuckling and Buffy punches him on the arm]

Xander: *[still kind of chuckling]* Ow.

Buffy: Alright... yes, date, and shop and hang out and go to school and save the world from unspeakable demons. You know, I wanna do girlie stuff. (Greenwalt & Contner, 1998)

Buffy redefines “girlie stuff” in the above dialogic exchange, as she does throughout the series when she wants to cuddle with her stuffed pig while planning to destroy demonic threats, carries around lovingly-named stakes, and dresses appropriately for different monster mashing missions. With this particular quote, Buffy includes saving the world in a short list of the things she considers to be normal activities for her. Normal teenage girls may participate in most of the activities listed, but only Buffy and her friends can relate to saving the world on a regular basis. As Buffy negotiates her identity and tries to balance her role as a slayer with being a teenage girl, she manages to redefine what is girlie for a girl who battles a patriarchy that attempts to keep her trapped within a particular role that was designed for those of her biological sex.

In “Homecoming,” Buffy and Cordelia compete for the crown, prompting Cordelia to question Buffy’s intentions and Buffy to reveal that although she is a powerful woman with an important destiny, she also desires a normal high school experience and recognition of her contributions to her school. Buffy receives no widespread recognition from anyone who is not a member of her inner circle and must walk around seeing everyone else enjoying their lives, unaware that she almost perished in order for them to have the opportunity to live their mundane

lives. Buffy wants a taste of the spotlight, to be recognized for something other than her ability to insert stakes into the living dead; unfortunately, she does not become homecoming queen. At the prom, however, she is recognized as being the “class protector” by her classmates. They are unaware of the extent of what she does to protect them from the evil in their town, but they do realize that she is always around, keeping them safe:

Cordelia: I don't even get why you care about Homecoming when you're doing stuff like this.

Buffy: Because this is all I do. This is what my life is. You couldn't understand. I just thought ... Homecoming Queen. I could pick up a yearbook someday and say, I was there. I went to high school, I had friends, and, for one moment, I got to live in the world. And there'd be proof, proof that I was chosen for something other than this. Besides, *[pumps a rifle]* I look cute in a tiara. (Greenwalt, 1998)

Buffy Summers does not have a normal high school experience. She does not date around, or really date at all. She does not have the time to participate in many clubs or activities. She spends her sparse free time with her friends, who are in reality allies in her battle against evil. When the opportunity arises for her to do something normal, to be elected by her fellow students to wear a crown and be recognized for something other than being a weird girl who gets into a lot of fights, she does her best to win. She wants to remember high school as more than just a building in which she spent her downtime from slaying. She wants to take the opportunity to be feminine, to do something that other girls do, and to embrace the fact that while she is a woman warrior, she is in fact a young woman who happens to be a warrior. She comments on how she

would look wearing a tiara, an indication that despite her destiny, she too can have a normal high school memory.

The third season of the series found Buffy at a crossroads. She began the season denying her destiny and attempting to start over after the disastrous conclusion of the second season. She reconciles her dual identities, accepts that her version of normal will never coincide with the version to which others prescribe, and finds the recognition she has always deserved for her efforts as the Slayer. She also maturely lets Angel follow his own path, understanding that they cannot be together in the way they wish to be and that their differences are great. Buffy begins the season as a lost soul, attempting to avoid and repress the trauma that she suffered at the end of the previous season. When she reclaims her identity and once again embraces who she is, she becomes empowered. She becomes the warrior she was, better comprehends the person she can be, and comes to understand that she is both masculine and feminine, both slayer and normal girl. This rudimentary understanding of who she is comes into questions at the beginning of the fourth season, when Buffy's transition from high school to college does not progress as smoothly as she hoped.

Season Four

The following dialogic exchanges from the fourth season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* outline her character struggles as she leaves behind the relative safety of high school and strikes out on her own into an unforgiving world. Even with her superpowers and support system, Buffy is still a teenage girl who suffers from self-doubt and anxiety when venturing into unknown territory. The dialogue below reveals that Buffy is not physically or emotionally invulnerable. She is still a warrior in the fight against the unforgiving patriarchy and does rise

above her proposed station, but there are some bumps along the road that send her reeling, such as becoming a little slayer in a big pond of vampires, and having a trusted mentor attempt to eliminate her in order to maintain the status quo.

In “The Freshman,” Buffy utilizes humor before slaying a fanged menace who stole Buffy’s possessions from her dorm room. Buffy has always used puns and clever word play when slaying, likely to defuse tension and allow her to enjoy her duties. The vampire she stakes prior to making the assertion below had humiliated Buffy soon after Buffy started college, defeating her in a battle and injuring her arm. Thinking that Buffy would likely leave school following the incident, the vampire and her minions remove Buffy’s possessions from her room, enraging the Slayer, who was already having trouble adjusting to the many changes that recently occurred in her life. Buffy’s defeat of this vampire reenergizes her, leading her to realize that college is similar to high school and she survived that four-year battle and is prepared to wage a similar battle in different surroundings:

Buffy: When you look back at this in the three seconds it'll take you to turn to dust, I think you'll find the mistake was touching my stuff. (Whedon, 1999b)

Buffy had spent the episode in a mental state unfamiliar to her. Her friends had adjusted better to their post-high school lives than she had, and a group of vampires had proven their superiority in battle, leaving her defeated both physically and mentally. The usually confident and secure Buffy had been compromised and she began to doubt herself and her abilities to stop the swelling of the vampire population on campus. However, when Sunday, the vampire who defeated her in battle and had taken her possessions, destroyed a precious artifact that Buffy treasured, Buffy staked the vampire and regained her self-confidence. She was once again the

Slayer, and she realized that college was a great deal like high school, which she survived, much to the chagrin of the forces of evil.

Buffy learns that an ally has betrayed her and attempted to arrange her death in “The I in Team.” Buffy’s psychology teacher, who she had begun to view as a mentor, is actually a scientist working for The Initiative, a government agency concerned with exploiting the powers of demons and creating superpowered soldiers after harvesting abilities from captive demons. Buffy initially welcomes the assistance in the war against evil, which would take some of the pressure off of her in regards to keeping innocents safe. Buffy becomes problematic to the cause, questioning the intentions of the government agency and distracting an important soldier, Buffy’s boyfriend, Riley, from his duties. Upon learning of the treachery, and defeating the demon that was meant to eliminate her, Buffy asserts her displeasure and makes her intentions clear:

Buffy: Professor Walsh. That simple little recon you sent me on... wasn't a raccoon.

Turns out it was me trapped in the sewers with a faulty weapon and two of your pet demons. If you think that's enough to kill me, you really don't know what a Slayer is.

Trust me when I say you're gonna find out. (Fury & Contner, 2000)

Buffy was elated to find more allies in her fight against evil. Her boyfriend, Riley, was a soldier in an army designed to protect civilians from supernatural threats. The military project had other interests, however, as demons were captured and their inherent abilities were to be used to manufacture super soldiers. Buffy, unaware of the hidden agenda, joined The Initiative and used her skills to assist them in eliminating the threat, until her mentor decided that she was a threat to the project and had to be eliminated. Buffy had faced disappointing authority figures

before, but this betrayal was more powerful because she thought that she no longer worked with just her friends, but with an entire army of individuals fighting for the greater good. She had branched out and attempted to find new allies, as college students do when they are forced to intermingle with new people, and she found herself worse for the wear. In the quote, she reminds herself that she is the Slayer, she operates independently of such organizations, and that Dr. Walsh better be prepared to face the consequences of her actions.

Buffy Summers faces many changes during her first year of college. Her soulmate is no longer around, her friends are initially separated and enjoying their own post-high school lives, and Buffy, having never experienced the freedom provided in a college environment, attempts to grow as a person and explore her options. As a vampire slayer, however, she keeps in mind her responsibilities and realizes that the challenges and opportunities provided by college will test her as both a young woman and as a slayer. When she is defeated by a vampire in the first episode of the season, Buffy feels lost and confused—such a battle would not have fazed her before, but her state of mind was altered by her transition to college and the upheaval associated with said transition. She encounters a military group with common interests, but is soon after betrayed by a new mentor. She regains her footing by understanding and embracing her slayer heritage despite setbacks and asserts herself with authority figures and brings down a military operation designed to breed super soldiers. Buffy makes it perfectly clear by the end of the season that she is an adult and does not require the guidance of adults or need to obey their commands. She ends the season with additional knowledge about her role as the slayer and its beginnings, her role as a young female college student with her future ahead of her, and a positive outlook on what may come. She has survived the transition that plagues so many first-

year students every year and did so without losing track of whom she is or where she is going. The fifth season will prove to challenge the growth she sustained in the fourth season.

Season Five

The dialogue highlighted in this section focuses on Buffy becoming completely independent of The Watchers' Council, the organization that observes, trains, and controls vampire slayers, and her acceptance of how others view her. The aforementioned dialogue proves that Buffy has learned of her worth to the world and to the misogynistic Council that aims to control her through intimidation and threats against Buffy and her friends. The Council needs Buffy more than she needs them—the Council would not exist without a slayer. When the Council travels to Sunnydale to subject Buffy and her team to a battery of tests designed to determine whether or not they are fit to be associated with the Council in “Checkpoint,” Buffy finally realizes that she possesses all of the power and has a great deal of control over the proceedings (Petrie, Espenson, & Marck, 2001). Buffy had generally steered clear of the Council until she needed them, when her mysterious sister arrived and she met Glory, a hell goddess that served as the Big Bad during the fifth season. For the first few seasons of the series, Buffy and Giles were under the watchful eyes of the Council. Buffy makes it abundantly clear in the following dialogic exchange that she holds the power. She is the Slayer and without a slayer, the Council is useless. She had been under the control of the misogynistic agency for too long and realized the role that she fills is essential and that she will no longer be taken for granted. Buffy also comments on her treatment by Glory. Though Buffy is only human, she possesses something that Glory needs to achieve her goals, placing Buffy in a position of power.

Buffy: I've had a lot of people talking at me the last few days. Everyone just lining up to tell me how unimportant I am. And I've finally figured out why. Power. I have it. They don't. This bothers them. Glory ... came to my home today.

Giles: *[alarmed]* Buffy, are you-

Buffy: Just to talk. She told me I'm a bug, I'm a flea, she could squash me in a second. Only she didn't. She came into my home, and we talked. We had what in her warped brain probably passes for a civilized conversation. Why? Because she needs something from me. Because I have power over her. You guys didn't come all the way from England to determine whether or not I was good enough to be let back in. You came to beg me to let you back in. To give your jobs, your lives some semblance of meaning. (Petrie, Espenson, & Marck, 2001)

In the same episode, Buffy continues the dressing down of her alleged superiors, turning the tables on them and making her own list of demands:

Buffy: You're Watchers. Without a Slayer, you're pretty much just watchin' Masterpiece Theater. You can't stop Glory. You can't do anything with the information you have except maybe publish it in the Everyone Thinks We're Insane-O's Home Journal. So here's how it's gonna work. You're gonna tell me everything you know. Then you're gonna go away. You'll contact me if and when you have any further information about Glory. The magic shop will remain open. Mr. Giles will stay here as my official Watcher, reinstated at full salary...

Giles: *[coughing]* Retroactive. (Petrie, Espenson, & Marck, 2001)

The previous dialogic exchanges indicate a turning point in Buffy's relationship with the Council. She will no longer be taking orders from them—they exist because of her. The Council had always been a looming threat that could derail Buffy's success as the Slayer. They interfered on countless occasions in her battle against evil. After her assertion that she is actually the one in charge, the one on the frontline in the war against the supernatural, they back down and defer to her demands. She is the Slayer and they are simply back-up, a contingency plan of sorts that will not act until Buffy demands action or until she falls in battle.

In this exchange from "The Gift," Buffy toys with a vampire before slaying him and rescuing an innocent young man in the alley behind Giles' store, The Magic Box. This scene, which occurs before Buffy goes into battle to rescue Dawn and prevent Glory from plunging the world into chaos and unleashing hell, reflects Buffy's journey from a normal girl to a powerful slayer. This particular vampire, the last she slays before her selfless suicide, serves as a representation of all the vampires she had slain up until that point. Said vampire, unfamiliar with vampire slayers, thinks he has come across a fresh victim, a stupid, beautiful girl with a big mouth:

Buffy: You ever heard the expression, 'biting off more than you can chew?'

[he shakes his head]

Buffy: Okay. Um, how 'bout the expression, 'Vampire Slayer?'

Vampire: What the hell you talkin' about?

Buffy: Wow, never heard that one. Okay, how about, 'Oh, God, my leg, my leg?'

[he attacks her and she breaks his leg]

Vampire: Oh, God, my leg! (Whedon, 2001b)

To an uninformed vampire, Buffy appears to be a beautiful, defenseless young girl. Then she takes out her stake and asserts her authority. Buffy has to face misogyny on various levels throughout her life, men attempting to control her and oppress her and keep her in a place of subservience. The above dialogic exchange shows that Buffy is well-aware of how she is viewed and that her deceiving appearance actually assists her in her war on evil. She accepts who she is, the purpose she serves, and how she can best use all of her attributes to complete her duties.

The fifth season of the series features Buffy realizing her significance in the grand scheme of the battle between good and evil. She is a warrior imbued with supernatural powers who risks her life on a regular basis to protect friends and strangers, but she is also a young woman. Society treats women as delicate, powerless creatures to be admired for their beauty and subservience. When confronted by both Glory and The Watchers' Council, Buffy is uncertain about her role and her mission. She is dismissed by both entities and treated as a powerless girl who has nothing of value to contribute. The Watchers' Council handled her in such a way, and a fellow female, Glory, treated her as though her lack of power rendered her ineffective and weak. Buffy realizes the power she possesses and how that power changes her status, giving her direct control over situations that would not typically be under her control. She realizes how important she is, not only to her friends and loved ones, nor to only those who need her, but to the very fabric of the universe—she is essential to maintaining the balance between good and evil and, until her death, she deserves to be treated as such. The fifth season bridges the first four seasons and the last two seasons. Buffy dies at the conclusion of the fifth season, her legacy intact, and then through her resurrection in the sixth season, The First Evil is able to exploit weaknesses in the slayer line and launch an attack on The Watchers' Council and the vampire slayer line itself

in the final season. Buffy finally realizes her extent of her power, embraces it, and perishes. She returns to a world that is unforgiving, unwelcoming, and alien to her recent time in a heaven-like dimension.

Season Six

The dialogic exchanges from the sixth season prove that though Buffy is initially confused and uncomfortable when being dragged back into a life she had left behind for greener pastures, she is still the Slayer at heart and that her return to her former greatness is an absolute certainty. She was temporarily derailed from her path when she died, but when she returns, she is still essentially the same person who spent five years coming to grips with her identity and her destiny. Buffy is resurrected at the conclusion of the first episode of Season Six. She spends the following episode wandering through town in a state of shock, having been reintroduced to the harsh realm she had departed mere months ago. She was in a peaceful dimension until her friends cast a spell to rescue her, believing that she had been suffering a torturous existence in a different dimension. When she regains her composure, her friends inform her of the reasoning behind their actions, and she decides that she would spare her friends the guilt associated with their error in judgment. She would rather contend with the feelings of loss and despair by herself, and with Spike, than give her friends a moment of regret for what they assumed was a valiant act of mercy. Once again, Buffy shoulders another burden not of her design to prevent others from suffering. Following her botched resurrection, Buffy has conflicting feelings about her return to the living and, concerned for how her friends would be affected by their selfish actions bringing Buffy back from a serene dimension, shares these feelings only with Spike in “After Life.”

Spike: Well, I haven't been to a hell dimension just of late, but I do know a thing or two about torment.

Buffy: *[looking down]* I was happy. *[Spike stares at her, confused and shocked]*

Buffy: Wherever I ... was ... I was happy. At peace. I knew that everyone I cared about was all right. I knew it. Time ... didn't mean anything ... nothing had form ... but I was still me, you know? And I was warm ... and I was loved ... and I was finished. Complete. I don't understand about theology or dimensions, or ... any of it, really ... but I think I was in heaven. And now I'm not. *[near tears]* I was torn out of there. Pulled out ... by my friends. Everything here is ... hard, and bright, and violent. Everything I feel, everything I touch ... this is hell. Just getting through the next moment, and the one after that ... knowing what I've lost... *[pause]* They can never know. Never. (Espenson & Solomon, 2001)

The burden of keeping her secret afterlife from her friends weighs heavily on Buffy. She knows that they intended to save her from a hellish existence and that they did not know where she wound up after her death. Buffy has carried many burdens throughout the series, some of which, like her destiny, stay with her, and some of which, like this secret, eventually come to the surface.

Buffy's role as the slayer does not necessarily disconnect her from her role as a woman, as evidenced in this quote from "Once More, With Feeling." Stereotypically, young women can be associated with a knowledge of fashion and a desire to comment on it while dressing in a fashionable way to avoid the judgment of their similarly-minded peers. Just because Buffy is a superhero with grand responsibilities does not mean that she must go into battle in last year's

frock or last season's hair. Individuals with high-stress jobs may pursue hobbies during their free time in order to distract them from their work-related responsibilities. Why can't a vampire slayer do the same? Buffy is a woman, and Buffy is a warrior. Focusing on her female attributes is important to maintaining the balance between her identities. Buffy's trademark humor is also present in this quotation. She will soon face a demon with the power to coerce people into dancing and singing to the tune of their respective inner turmoil, though when she makes light of the situation, she is unaware of the danger awaiting her:

Buffy: Well, I'm not exactly quaking in my stylish yet affordable boots, but there's definitely something unnatural going on here. And that doesn't usually lead to hugs and puppies. (Whedon, 2001c)

The sixth season is another season of transition for Buffy. She rises from the grave and finds herself despondent and confused. She left her life behind voluntarily so that others could live. She had earned her place in her once-thought final destination, a place of peace and tranquility. Her friends believed she was suffering and removed her from her own personal heaven, unaware of the consequences of their misdeed. Buffy spends the season taking on the role of guardian for her sister, working odd jobs in an effort to be a breadwinner and role model. Her identity is inexorably changed when she is forced to take on more adult responsibilities and her desire to return to college has to be neutralized because her new role in her sister's life took precedence. Such selfless pursuits are necessary for many young women who must mature faster than planned when life intervenes.

Season Seven

The following dialogic exchanges from the final season of the series prove Buffy's acceptance of her power, from deciding to kill Anya to uphold her high moral standards, to making clear her power and her role as a leader, and a final expression of her woman warrior status. When Buffy is forced to make the difficult decision to slay Anya following her return to her demonic ways in "Selfless," her friends discuss other options and past precedents that Buffy should consider before killing Anya and halting her wicked acts. Her friends reference her tendency to shut them out, embrace her slayer identity, and make the difficult decisions that others are incapable of making. Buffy's role as the slayer makes her uniquely qualified to make decisions about how demons should be handled, regardless of whether or not the demons were once allies. Once again, Buffy is faced with a decision that separates her from her friends, a decision that can be viewed by outsiders as callous and misguided, but is actually selfless and essential. Young women faced with decisions that will not render popular results can look to Buffy and appreciate the importance of taking into account all sides of an issue before doing what needs to be done, regardless of how the consequences will affect one personally. Buffy explains her reasoning for having to kill Anya, and must contend with her friends questioning her decision:

Xander: You think we haven't seen all this before? The part where you just cut us all out. Just step away from everything human and act like you're the law. If you knew what I felt...

Buffy: *I killed Angel!!* Do you even *remember* that?! I would have given up everything I had to be with... I loved him more than I will ever love anything in this life! And I put a sword through his heart because I had to.

Willow: And that all worked out OK.

Buffy: Do you remember cheering me on? Both of you! Do you remember giving me Willow's message? "Kick his ass."

Willow: I never said that!

Xander: This is different.

Buffy: It is *always* different! It's always complicated. And at some point, someone has to draw the line and that is always going to be me! You get down on me for cutting myself off but in the end, the Slayer is always cut off. There's no mystical guidebook, no all-knowing council. Human rules don't apply. There's only me. I *am* the law.

Xander: There has to be another way.

Buffy: Then please find it. (Goddard & Solomon, 2002)

Buffy exclaims that she is the sole decision maker when it comes to what supernatural dangers must be eliminated. She has had to kill Angel in order to save the world, and now she must slay Anya because of Anya's return to killing innocent people as a vengeance demon. Buffy's friends object to her reasoning, not realizing that she must always consider the greater good, and that she must dole out punishment because she is the only one qualified to do so.

In "Get It Done," an episode from the final season, Buffy must take control of the potential slayers and keep them motivated against The First Evil. Buffy has become a role model for potential vampire slayers and must learn to be more than just a leader of a small group

of friends with similar goals. She must mentor and shelter a group of young women, separated from their friends and families due to a calling of which they were blissfully ignorant until they were thrust into a life-or-death battle. In order to show them the consequences of their decisions and what happens if they do not band together and fight as a group, she initially resorts to dictatorial methods to protect the young women and her friends:

Buffy: I'm the Slayer. The one with the power. And the First has me using that power to dig our graves. I've been carrying you - all of you - too far, too long. Ride's over.

Kennedy: You're out of line!

Willow: No, she's not.

Kennedy: You're gonna let her talk to you like that? Willow, she's not even the most powerful one in this room. With you here, she's not close.

Buffy: You're new here, and you're wrong. Because I use the power that I have. The rest of you are just waiting for me.

Xander: Well, yeah, but only because you kinda told us to. You're our leader, Buffy, as in "follow the."

Buffy: Well, from now on, I'm your leader as in "do what I say."

Xander: Ja wohl! But let's not try to forget, we're also your friends. (Petrie, 2003)

Buffy had struggled with leading the Potentials from near the beginning of the season. While her friends and allies that have been with her since she moved to Sunnydale recognize her authority and defer to her judgment in supernatural situations, the Potentials, like the viewers, are scared young girls who wish to stay alive and crave someone to protect them. Just as the Potentials look for someone to emulate and try to determine the right life path to follow, viewers

face similar decisions about whether or not to create their own paths or follow one that was already designated for them by someone else. The Potentials and viewers are like Buffy was before she learned of her sacred duty—lost, confused, and hopefully innocent and ignorant to some degree about what happens in the big bad world. The Potentials choose to follow Buffy, though some of them rise up against Buffy when missions go awry and she must assert her authority in order to keep them safe. Buffy realizes that these girls look to her for guidance and that she must lead them, but that particular responsibility is new to her and she has difficulty adjusting to leading an army of teenagers against The First Evil.

In the series finale, “Chosen,” Buffy encapsulates her character with a simple statement in response to Angel’s assertion that he hadn’t returned to Sunnydale to assist a damsel in distress. Buffy is not a woman who requires assistance in dealing with the men who will deem her weak or foolish. Angel, in possession of first-hand knowledge of Buffy’s character, is certain to state that he is offering his services because he chooses to do so, not because Buffy requires his assistance. Buffy must face the final battle without Angel, who must be prepared to continue the fight if the Slayer and the Potentials fail to stop The First Evil from accomplishing its goal:

Buffy: You know me. Not big with the damseling. (Whedon, 2003)

The final season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* represents a culmination of the vampire slayer mythology and finds Buffy Summers leading a group of people who are just like she was at one time, frightened and confused about a destiny of the utmost importance. Buffy’s growth throughout the series from reluctant hero to empowered role model is showcased in the dialogue in the series. Buffy faces down misogynistic entities throughout her time as The Chosen One,

paving a path for those who will follow in her footsteps. She embraces her femininity and uses it to augment her supernatural powers, and in the final episode of the series, fundamentally alters how other young women with the potential to be great are introduced to the world of vampire slaying. With their eyes opened to the possibilities and the dangers of being The Chosen One, the activated slayers never have to face being alone in the world—Buffy Summers, their role model, defied the expectations and commandments of the men who thought they ruled her and took her rightful place among her newly-minted sisters, an army of vampire slayers poised to eradicate evil, often while fashionably-dressed.

Summary

As illustrated in this chapter, Buffy Summers, the eponymous heroine of the television program *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, grows from a teenage girl to a young woman over the seven seasons of the show and faces tests that determine her character and assess her integrity, encounters dramatic conflict with her loved ones and creatures who would be delighted by her bloody demise, all revealed through a tight narrative that is accessible to the general audience not only through onscreen action, but through character dialogue. Buffy did not only contend with the challenges associated with being a teenage girl in the 1990s, but had to do so with the weight of the world balanced on her shoulders. Buffy found friends, lost friends, found love, and lost love. She had to become a protective big sister to not only a little sister-shaped bundle of supernatural energy, but to a number of young girls facing an uncertain future and a fate similar to her own. She was required to make devastating decisions in order to put the needs of the collective ahead of her own needs and display a level of maturity not traditionally synonymous with young members of her biological sex. She died twice and rose from the dead just as many

times. Buffy endangered her life on a weekly basis, yet was not necessarily an accurate representation of her female fans due to a destiny she did not choose but was ultimately able to change using all of the resources at her disposal. Women in the real world have similar resources to Buffy's, including the traits that define their individuality and the people with whom they associate, but are not gifted or cursed with superpowers, which would possibly make their struggle for equality less difficult, but they do what they can on an everyday basis to find their own happiness, whether they choose to be heroic or to observe from the back of the crowd, silently shrinking into the background. Men are meant to be heroes, to make sacrifices and difficult decisions; women are supposed to stand in awe of the masculinity and power men display in their actions. Buffy Summers, through her speech and her actions, redefines the capabilities of women and exhibits many traits particularly associated with masculinity, though she maintains a delicate balance of masculinity and femininity, allowing herself to feel her emotions and let them guide her, while still accomplishing her goals and protecting the innocent.

CHAPTER V

RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

Shared Experiences with the Audience

RQ 2: Do Buffy Summers' experiences as a young woman, particularly those involving her relationships, reflect those faced by audience members?

Buffy Summers had to suffer through the transition to a new high school and the reappearance of the living dead in her life, and while she wasn't physically bullied by her peers, their verbal assaults paired with the physical assaults committed against her by supernatural creatures could have led Buffy to live her life as a victim, a victim of circumstance incapable of changing her situation. To her peers, Buffy was the new girl who associated with those dangerously low on the social totem pole, making her too weird to be popular and too pretty to be damned. Through Buffy's trials and tribulations, viewers could relate to her high school battle, regardless of the demons she slew on school nights. She was an outsider whose experiences, when stripped of supernatural nuance, could be relatable to young people, particularly young women unsure of themselves and their fate. Buffy's fate may have been sealed, but she managed to rise above her destiny and enjoy the social experience of high school, both the highs and the lows, and come out on the other side ready to face her future, whatever may come.

The evidence presented in this chapter represents how the events in the life of fictional character Buffy Summers parallel those in the lives of viewers. Buffy, encumbered by fate at the age of fifteen, yearns to be normal. She has to balance her schoolwork and her extracurricular activity, slaying. She wants to be accepted by her peers, a difficult task when she has to abruptly

leave a room or conversation in order to slay a vampire or terminate a demon. She lies to her mother in order to protect her from the true nature of her daughter's activities. She has close friends who support her and protect her. Her first relationship ends badly and then, upon starting once again, ends to the mutual benefit of both parties. She has difficulty adjusting to living away from home and attending college, has a one-night stand with a promiscuous young man, and then finds a mature man willing to accept her baggage. She must grow up quickly and take responsibility for her younger sister when her mother suddenly dies and must perform menial labor in order to afford the necessities of life. She dates a bad boy, she forgives the transgressions of an old enemy, and finally, she learns that she is no longer trapped on a life path she did not choose for herself.

All or some of these events are likely experienced by the majority of the program's viewers. Buffy is not depicted as a perfect young woman incapable of fault—aside from her destiny and supernatural abilities, she is essentially an everywoman who must face adversity, overcome that adversity, and learn from her mistakes and poor judgment, just like the individuals who follow her narrative. Buffy's behavior at the beginning of the series reflects how a young girl might feel if informed that she has no control over her life and that she will likely die before the age of 21, just like those who preceded her in the slayer line. Her growth from the first season to the final season, however, is exponential. She goes from begrudgingly accepting her power to embracing her heritage and then sharing her power, power designed only to be possessed by one person at a time, with every girl in the world who could someday be chosen as her replacement following her death. Buffy lived and learned, accepted herself for who she is and what she could offer, and did the best with what she was given; young girls face the same

challenges without superpowers, making their victories and safe emergence into adulthood that much more impressive.

The second research question designed to guide this analysis refers to Buffy Summers' experiences as a teenager and a young woman and how said experiences can relate to the experiences of the viewing audience. Viewers were able to watch Buffy slay the undead and save the world, but more importantly, they were able to see her find and lose her first love, attend school dances, start college and join her in many other rites of passage, tracing her maturation throughout the series. Viewers were able to watch Buffy's greatest relationship unfold—her relationship with herself.

This chapter will examine many of these relatable aspects from the narrative of Buffy Summers, particularly focusing on how she manages her relationships with others, and will be divided into three parts; (1) Buffy's relationship with her friends and peers; (2) Buffy's relationships with her lovers; (3) and Buffy's relationship with her sister slayers.

Managing Interpersonal Relationships

Buffy Summers, vampire slayer, has a support system not unlike those who do not slay demons in an extracurricular sense. Buffy has a small group of friends and allies who are part of both her social circle and her apocalypse-halting posse, but she also maintains other relationships outside of her close friends and fellow heroes. Viewers of the series might be able to draw parallels to their own relationships, such as having a few close friends and a larger number of acquaintances that exist outside of that sphere. Buffy's acquaintances may be unaware of what Buffy does with her stakes, fists, and crossbow, but they might see how she defends her weaker peers against aggressors in the lunchroom and hallways. Buffy leans on her close friends,

sharing secrets and acts of derring-do, while she might only wave at her acquaintances on her way to class. Buffy's desire to be somewhat normal during school hours requires her to maintain relationships with her peers that do not infringe upon her secret life in order to keep those around her safe from the dangers associated with her slayer duties, and allows her to perceive the importance of her duties when her classmates are able to come to school during daylight hours without fearing combustion.

The following two subsections showcase dialogue that illustrates Buffy's relationships with both her friends and her peers. Viewers of the program might be able to recognize similarities in the relationships discussed and in their own personal relationships. Buffy's relationships with her friends differ greatly from those with her peers, but each relationship in her life informs her personality, her choices, and her actions, just like the relationships in the real world maintained by viewers.

Managing Relationships with Friends

Family is not simply defined by a blood relationship or a document that legally binds two people together. A family can be created by people who share a strong, common bond that links them into a tight grouping that is not easily severed. Buffy and her friends are a family, perhaps not by the traditional definition, but they are willing to sacrifice themselves for one another as well as for the billions of strangers that populate the planet. This section focuses on the bond between Buffy and her friends, the family they have created, and how their relationships are subject to outside influences and internal struggles.

When Buffy arrives in Sunnydale, she wishes to leave the vampires in the past and be a normal girl, a difficult task when one is saddled with such responsibility. Buffy embraces her

destiny and surrounds herself with new friends, friends who are willing to risk their own lives to assist Buffy in her world-saving duties and accompany her on the journey to becoming who she is fated to be:

Xander: Well, the Hellmouth, the center of mystical convergence, supernatural monsters: been there.

Buffy: Little blasé there, aren't you?

Xander: I'm not worried. If there's something bad out there we'll find, you'll slay, we'll party!

Buffy: Thanks for having confidence in me.

Xander: You da man, Buff! (Greenwalt & Green, 1997)

Buffy is fortunate to forge meaningful relationships with Xander and Willow soon after she determines that a slayer is indeed needed in Sunnydale. Xander, Willow, and even her Watcher, Giles, immediately become a support system for Buffy, learning all about the things that go bump in the night in their town. Initially, Xander has reservations about his newfound knowledge about his hometown, expressing to Willow his concerns:

Xander: This is just too much. I mean, yesterday my life's like, 'Uh-oh, pop quiz.' Today it's 'Rain of Toads'.

Willow: I know. And everyone else thinks it's just a normal day.

Xander: Nobody knows. It's like we've got this big secret. (Whedon & Kretchmer, 1997)

Willow: We do. That's what a secret is, when you know something other guys don't.

When the possibility of their futures diverging after high school arises, Buffy has a conversation with Willow, representing her reliance on her friend and the desire to share additional adventures and work together beyond the hallowed halls of Sunnydale High School.

Buffy: I can't let you stay because of me.

Willow: Actually, this isn't about you. Although I'm fond, don't get me wrong, of you. The other night, you know, being captured and all, facing off with Faith, things just kinda got clear. I mean, you've been fighting evil here for three years, and I've helped some, and now we're supposed to decide what we want to do with our lives. And I just realized that's what I want to do. Fight evil, help people. I mean, I-I think it's worth doing. And I don't think you do it because you have to. It's a good fight, Buffy, and I want in.

Buffy: I kind of love you.

Willow: And, besides, I have a shot at being a bad-ass Wicca, and what better place to learn?

Buffy: I feel the need for more sugar than the human body can handle.

Willow: Mochas?

Buffy: Yes please! [*the two get up and walk away*] It's weird. You look at something and you think you know exactly what you're seeing, and then you find out it's something else entirely.

Willow: Neat, huh?

Buffy: Sometimes it is. (Fury, & Contner, 1999)

The preceding dialogue centers on Buffy and Willow making choices about their respective futures, an occurrence that can arise with viewers and their own friends. Buffy

worries that Willow might sacrifice her own bright future in order to remain in Sunnydale with and risk her life on a regular basis. Willow explains that the choice is hers alone, and that she has contemplated the consequences and is willing to accept them in order to remain a contender in the good fight and to promote her own personal growth in respect to her Wicca studies. The choices that one makes after high school can determine the path for the rest of his or her life; Willow choosing to remain in Sunnydale and fight alongside her best friends indicates that when the apocalypse comes, she will be standing beside them, prepared to die for the greater good, hopefully as a powerful Wicca wired on sugar.

After Willow and her girlfriend, Tara, begin a romantic relationship in the fourth season, her friends are unsure how to deal with the new situation. When Tara's livelihood is threatened and she believes she should depart after botching a spell and endangering Willow's friends, Buffy stands up for Tara, who is painfully shy and socially awkward, telling Tara's family that they cannot take Tara with them with they depart because Tara is a part of the group, a member of the family:

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. (Whedon, 2000)

Sometimes friends become more like extended family members than just people with whom common interests and experiences are shared. Buffy and her friends have formed a family outside of their own blood kin. When Tara becomes intimate with Willow, she is accepted into the family and, even though she endangered the lives of Buffy and her friends, she is still accepted by them without reservation. Viewers with similar friendships with others might also

integrate their close friends and significant others into their own families, choosing to elevate their status above simple friendship or relationship partner. With Buffy's explanation to Tara's father as to why Tara will stay with them and not return to the life of misogynistic servitude reserved for her by her father and other women in her family, she states what has been obvious from the beginning of the show: you cannot choose your family, but you can form a new family that is just as important.

During the fourth season, Buffy's relationships with her friends are strained by the unfortunate consequences of maturation. Buffy becomes involved with a secret government group that hunts demons, while Willow indulges in magic and meets a young woman, Tara, who she grows to love, a relationship that preoccupied Buffy does not recognize exists until Willow directly informs her. Xander, not matriculating at the University of California in Sunnydale, is adrift, searching for himself and falling in love with former demon, Anya. Giles, unemployed after the high school burned to the ground, is a gentleman of leisure who feels as though his former charges no longer need him in their lives. Spike takes advantage of the weakened bonds between members of the group and attempts to rip the group apart:

Buffy: You guys, stop this! What happened to you today?!

Willow: It's not today! Buffy, things have been wrong for a while, don't you see that?

Buffy: [*perturbed*] What do you mean 'wrong?'

Willow: Well, things certainly haven't been right since Tara. We have to face it, you can't handle Tara being my girlfriend...

Xander: No, it was back before that, since you two went off to college and forgot about me. Just left me in the basement to--Tara's your *girlfriend*?!

Giles: *[from upstairs, still drunk]* Bloody hell! (Petrie & Grossman, 2000)

Spike's attempt to separate the Slayer from her friends ultimately fails and the relationships between members of the group are not permanently damaged, but it is made clear that time, manipulation, and circumstance can sever the tightest of bonds. External forces can complicate relationships, a fact to which most, if not all, viewers can attest. While most people may not have a manipulative vampire attempting to curry favor with a demon-human-machine hybrid in their lives, there might just be a boy or girl in homeroom who is bored enough to start a rumor to destroy relationship bonds. Relationships are dynamic systems—they ebb and flow and are in constant flux, and some relationships end abruptly, such as when Buffy sacrifices herself to save her friends, sister, and a planet full of strangers. Buffy tells her recently-created sister that she grasps the finality of her act, and that her death need not be in vain if Dawn complies with the simple requests of her selfless sister:

Buffy: Dawn, listen to me, listen. I love you. I will *always* love you. But this is the work that I have to do. Tell Giles... tell Giles I figured it out. And, and I'm okay. And give my love to my friends. You have to take care of them now. You have to take care of each other. Dawn, the hardest thing in this world... is to live in it. Be brave. Live... for me. (Whedon, 2001b)

When Buffy is brought back to life the following season, her relationship with her friends is initially strained due to her unfortunate removal from a place of peace and tranquility and insertion into the world she left behind. Her friends learn of their part in her unhappiness and while they try to reconnect, a difficult task with Giles being abroad, their bond is threatened again when Tara is murdered and Willow transitions from a sweet-natured Wicca to a powerful

dark witch fueled by grief and despair. Giles returns to assist and Buffy must inform him of all that has occurred in his absence:

Giles: Buffy, what's happened here?

Buffy: God. I don't even know where to start.

Giles: Well, Willow's clearly been abusing the magicks.

Buffy: She has. She was ... and I barely even noticed. Giles, everything's just been so...

[sighs.] Xander left Anya at the altar, and Anya's a vengeance demon again... *[Giles looks shocked.]* Dawn's a total klepto ... money's been so tight that I've been slinging burgers at the Doublemeat Palace ... *[looks down at the floor.]* And I've been sleeping with Spike.

[Giles stares at her... then starts laughing. He covers his mouth with his hand but can't stop. Buffy stares at him.]

Giles: *[trying to calm down.]* Sorry.

[He bursts out laughing again. Buffy rolls her eyes, now just looks amused. Giles keeps laughing and slowly Buffy starts to laugh too.]

Giles: Sometimes the most adult thing you can do is... ask for help when you need it.

Buffy: Now you tell me. (Fury & Contner, 2002)

Buffy's relationships with her friends, who refer to themselves as 'The Scooby Gang,' help keep her grounded and her friends assist her whenever they can, contributing to her development into a mature adult and a competent slayer. Any young person would be fortunate to find themselves with such selfless friends who remain by his or her side despite the dangers of opening one's self up to another individual at the risk of presenting vulnerability. Buffy

reciprocates their friendship and these relationships remain at the core of the series until the finale.

Managing Relationships with Peers

Buffy's relationships with other students, however, are strained. Buffy believed that the other students at her school that never encountered her in a situation requiring her slayer skills thought she was strange and possibly even dangerous. Buffy fought tirelessly to keep her fellow students safe from the darkness that existed in their town, but she never felt as though they appreciated her contribution to the peacefulness in their lives. Buffy, like many teenage viewers might feel at one time or another, felt like simply another face in the crowd. She could not tell her peers about her kind deeds, instead relying on her close friends to give her the proper amount of esteem and respect one would offer to a savior. By the end of the third season, however, Buffy learns that her sacrifice of a normal life was recognized and appreciated by her peers, despite them not actually knowing what she had done for them.

In the third season, Jonathan, a recurring character throughout the series, was found by Buffy perched in the clock tower with a rifle, seemingly about to open fire on his abusive peers. Buffy confronted Jonathan and was privy to the pain he felt as an outsider, a role with which Buffy is intimately familiar:

[Buffy finds Jonathan in the clock tower with a rifle.]

Jonathan: Go away!

Buffy: Never gonna happen.

Jonathan: You think I won't use this?

Buffy: I don't know, Jonathan. I just –

Jonathan: Stop doing that!

Buffy: Doing what?

Jonathan: Stop saying my name like we're friends! We're not friends! You all think I'm an idiot! A short idiot!

Buffy: I don't. I don't think about you much at all. Nobody here really does. Bugs you, doesn't it? You have all this pain and all these feelings, and nobody's really paying attention?

Jonathan: You think I just want attention?

Buffy: No. I think you're up in the clock tower with a high-powered rifle because you wanna blend in. Believe it or not, Jonathan, I understand about the pain.

Jonathan *[bitterly]*: Oh, right! Because the burden of being beautiful and athletic, that's a crippler!

Buffy: You know what? I was wrong. You *are* an idiot. My life happens to, on occasion, *suck* beyond the telling of it. Sometimes more than I can handle. And it's not just mine. Every single person down there is ignoring your pain because they're too busy with their own. The beautiful ones. The popular ones. The guys that pick on you. Everyone. If you could hear what they were feeling. The loneliness. The confusion. It looks quiet down there. It's not. It's deafening... You know, I could've taken that by now.

Jonathan: I know.

Buffy: *[holds out hand]* I'd rather do it this way. *[gently takes the rifle from Jonathan as he hands it to her]* (Espenson & Kimble, 1999)

Jonathan, constantly bullied by his peers, felt that the easiest way to deal with his pain, a

result of feeling isolated him from everyone else, planned to end his life. After learning that Buffy, an individual who seemed to have a perfect life but instead had troubles of her own, he realized that he was not the only teenager dealing with issues that seem overwhelming. Viewers can likely relate to Jonathan's plight, being unable to recognize that other people, even the people they would least suspect, have their own burdens and responsibilities that might not be obvious. Buffy dealt with her own problems with the assistance of her support system, a system Jonathan was sorely lacking, and that hopefully viewers have in place. The relationship between Buffy and Jonathan continues later in the season, when Jonathan represents his classmates when bestowing an honor upon Buffy that she did not expect.

Near the end of season three, Buffy's desire to be accepted by her peers is finally met by the graciousness of the student body who collectively recognize her with a special award for service to the school. The people that Buffy passed in the hallways everyday had a different opinion of her than she was led to believe by their actions and speech. Though she may not have spent a great deal of time getting to know them, they were aware she was present, protecting them from the strange things that populated the town:

Jonathan: This is actually a new category. First time ever. I guess there were a lot of write-in ballots, and, um, well, the prom committee asked me to read this... We're not good friends. Most of us never found the time to get to know you, but that doesn't mean we haven't noticed you. We don't talk about it much, but it's no secret that Sunnydale High isn't really like other high schools. A lot of weird stuff happens here.

Crowd outbursts: Zombies! . . . Hyena people! . . . Snyder! [laughter]

Jonathan: But whenever there was a problem or something creepy happened, you seemed to show up and stop it. Most of the people here have been saved by you, or helped by you at one time or another. We're proud to say that the Class of '99 has the lowest mortality rate of any graduating class in Sunnydale history... *[applause from the crowd]*... And we know at least part of that is because of you. So the senior class offers its thanks, and gives you, uh, this. *[produces a glittering, miniature umbrella with a small plaque attached to the shaft]* It's from all of us, and it has written here, "Buffy Summers, Class Protector."

[The crowd breaks into sustained applause and cheering.] (Noxon & Solomon, 1999)

The award, shaped like a parasol, represented Buffy's role as a protector, shielding the innocents around her from danger. The award also represents how relationships, despite the amount of time or effort that each party contributes can be more influential than one might think. The fact that Jonathan was alive to present the award, and that his peers selected him to present the award, reveals that Buffy's handling of a suicidal Jonathan had been influential in his life, and that her compassion and ability to empathize (much to his surprise) with his situation and to solve the problem without violence reflects feminist ideals.

The special relationship that exists between the members of the Scooby Gang lies at the heart of the series. As the slayer, Buffy believes that she is meant to fight evil alone, just like her predecessors. When she meets people who willingly endanger themselves to assist her, she becomes part of a stable complex of interlocking personalities that thrives on the commonalities and differences found among the members of her inner circle. She navigates her teen years and early twenties with these special people as co-stars in her destiny, not unlike how viewers and

their friends maintain their own relationships. While not all relationships are meant to be a constant presence in one's life, such as with Buffy and her high school peers who thought her to be strange and made no effort to get to know her personally, even simple, detached relationships can impact one's life, such as when Buffy receives the 'Class Protector' award from the very people she thought disliked her or perhaps did not recognize her existence.

Billions of people populate this planet, and many of them are in high school. When a number of different personalities are forced together in one location, there will likely be conflict, a fact to which viewers can probably relate. Buffy's friendships allow her to be herself and express her feelings and needs, while her relationships with peers are forced to be secretive and detached. Buffy refuses to invite innocent individuals into her world of chaos, and so her peers must remain strangers. Though Buffy does recruit the senior class to fight off vampires during the graduation ceremony during which she must slay Sunnydale's demonic mayor, she does not generally endanger them. She fights for their lives just as hard as she would for the lives of her friends. It is her duty, and it is her choice. Viewers may not relate as well to their peers as they would like, but peers will always be there, and finding a way to deal with those with whom they disagree, those of whom they resent, and those of whom dislike them for whatever reasons they choose is an essential part of maturation—tolerance.

How Buffy Relates to her Lovers

Buffy viewers may or may not be engaged in romantic relationships when viewing the program, but the program illustrates Buffy's romantic relationships in case viewers want to live vicariously through the Slayer. As hormones rage and romantic feelings develop, it is not uncommon for teenagers to court their peers in an effort to find a date for a dance or a mate for a

lifetime. Buffy Summers even finds time to date between vampire slaying and homework. Her pool of potential mates differs from any that viewers might find, but they represent different kinds of people and different aspects of Buffy. Buffy has three major romantic relationships during the series. First, she falls in love with Angel, a vampire with a soul. After their relationship ends, she becomes involved with Riley Finn, a normal guy who lives a secret life as a commando. Finally, Buffy begins a doomed affair with Spike, a reformed killer who initially wanted to murder Buffy and then became smitten with her. Each relationship comes to an end either because Buffy realizes that there is no future or because the destiny of her suitor does not converge with her predetermined fate. Romantic relationships in the fictional world of *Buffy* and the real world are similar, though the details of said relationships differ. Television programs provide viewers with overdramatized romances that can run the gamut from idealistic to toxic. When viewers watch the program and become emotionally involved with the relationships, they are capable of seeing themselves in the characters and recognizing aspects of their own relationships portrayed by skilled actors for entertainment value. How Buffy maintains her relationships with her lovers might not involve the incorporation of the same tactics used by viewers, since relationships are context sensitive, but the lessons Buffy learns about love are universal.

When Buffy officially begins a relationship with Angel in the second season, after he stood beside her in her quest to destroy the evil presence in Sunnydale throughout the first season, she wishes for a normal relationship, an impossibility when dating a centuries-old vampire. When she and Angel finally consummate their relationship, he turns on her, damaging her self-esteem and leaving her with lingering doubts about their future, her sexual performance,

and whether she is flawed and difficult to love. Here is an exchange from “Innocence”:

Angelus: What? I took off.

Buffy: But you didn't say anything. You just left.

Angelus: Yeah. Like I really wanted to stick around after that.

Buffy: What?

Angelus: You got a lot to learn about men, kiddo. Although I guess you proved that last night.

Buffy: What are you saying?

Angelus: Let's not make an issue out of it, okay? In fact, let's not talk about it at all. It happened.

Buffy: I, I don't understand. Was it m-me? Was I not good?

Angelus: You were great. Really. I thought you were a pro. (Whedon, 1998a)

Buffy and Angel's relationship, which had become adversarial, was endangering Buffy and those she loved. Angel murders Giles' girlfriend and temporary member of the Scooby Gang, Jenny Calendar, a descendant of the gypsy tribe that cursed him before she can restore his soul. This exchange between Buffy and Willow, found in “Passion,” summarizes the danger Buffy faces from her former lover and current tormentor:

Buffy: It's so weird. Every time something like this happens, my first instinct is still to run to Angel. I can't believe it's the same person. He's completely different from the guy that I knew.

Willow: Well, sort of, except ...

Buffy: Except what?

Willow: You're still the only thing he thinks about. (King & Gershman, 1998)

Buffy's situation allows her to violently assault Angelus, Angel's former persona, and relieve her frustration regarding the failed relationship. Young women who are faced with the same circumstances do not have the luxury of physically beating their ex-intimates without the intervention of law enforcement officials, though many may be tempted to find closure in a similar way. At the conclusion of the season finale, Angel returns to Buffy, but the reemergence of her boyfriend comes too late and Buffy must kill him in order to stop the world from being enveloped by a hell dimension. Typical teenage girls are not responsible for saving the world on a weekly basis, though many of their own trials and tribulations probably seem similar and perhaps maintaining order in their own personal worlds is akin to Buffy's challenge. Once a young woman gives herself sexually to a young man, the relationship changes. While Buffy and Angel were in an entirely different situation, a young woman might find herself on the receiving end of a toned-down dismissal from her paramour after he accomplishes the intimacy he sought, and she is left with hurt feelings and a reluctance to engage in such interpersonal relationships. Buffy and Angel become closer when he returns to Sunnydale the following season, but not all relationships have the same outcome or expiration date.

When Buffy and Angel's relationship ends prior to her starting college, she decides to adjust her expectations and find a suitable mate, particularly one with a pulse. Riley Finn meets that requirement, though his impression of Buffy is not as clear as she would likely appreciate.

The following exchange between Riley and his friends and fellow commandoes, Forrest and Graham, occurs in the episode entitled "The Initiative":

Forrest: Buffy? I like that. That girl's so hot, she's buffy.

Riley: It's her name, Forrest.

Forrest: You've established first contact? Excellent. What do you think of her?

Riley: You know, I never really thought about what I think about her.

Forrest: A girl that cute in the face, and you form no opinion?

Riley: No, I mean, she's all right, I guess. She's just kinda... I don't know. Peculiar.

Forrest: Peculiar?

Riley: Yeah.

Forrest: Hey, Graham.

Graham: Huh?

Forrest: What do you think of the blonde chick? Mattressable, n'est-ce pas? Riley's not down. Doesn't like her.

Riley: I don't dislike her. She just... she never feels like she's really there when you talk to her. I like girls I can get a grip on.

Forrest: I bet you do.

Riley: Not that way. Just a little less ready for takeoff all the time. There's definitely something off about her.

Graham: Maybe she's Canadian. (Petrie & Contner, 1999)

In romantic relationships, it is sometimes difficult to know what the other party is thinking. Riley finds Buffy peculiar, and Buffy, while interested in Riley, knows very little about him, specifically his secret life as a commando in a demon-hunting branch of the government. The relationship progresses and regresses, due to the actions of both parties, such as Buffy not needing to lean on Riley as much as he desires and Riley allowing a female vampire

to feed off of him, until Riley returns to the military in the fifth season, leaving Buffy single once again. Riley returns in the sixth season episode “As You Were,” his new wife in tow, and delivers a poignant message to Buffy after learning about her affair with Spike and the state of her life, including her job in a fast food restaurant:

Riley: You want me to say I like seeing you in bed with that idiot? Or that blinding orange is your very best color? Or that that burger smell is appealing?

Buffy: You smelled the smell?

Riley: Buffy, none of that means anything, it doesn't touch you. You're still the first woman I ever loved and the strongest woman I've ever known. And, I'm not advertising this to the missus, but you're still quite the hottie.

Buffy: You know, it goes away after many bathings. (Petrie, 2002)

Although their relationship has ended and both have moved on to other relationships, Riley still recognizes Buffy as the woman she was when he met her. Their previous intimacy allows him to see through her current circumstances to what lies within and beyond. When the bitterness and resent subsides following an unpleasant severing of romantic ties, individuals can see what attracted them to their prior relationship partners in the first place. Viewers might have similar experiences with their former boyfriends or girlfriends, or even friends with whom they have fallen out.

Buffy's relationship with Spike is the most complicated of her romances. Spike came to Sunnydale in the second season to kill the Slayer and failed on multiple occasions. He then found himself falling in love with her, going so far as fornicating with a robot duplicate of Buffy when she rebuffs his advances. Here he attempts to connect with Buffy in “After Life,”

reminding Buffy of the fact that he had been keeping his promise to protect Dawn following Buffy's death:

Spike: *[to Buffy]* Uh ... I do remember what I said. The promise. To protect her. If I had done that ... even if I didn't make it ... you wouldn't have had to jump. But I want you to know I did save you. Not when it counted, of course, but ... after that. Every night after that. I'd see it all again ... do something different. Faster or more clever, you know? Dozens of times, lots of different ways ... Every night I'd save you. (Espenson, & Solomon, 2001)

Not every relationship is healthy. Sometimes the toxicity is not obvious until one has reached rock bottom, but the signs are there. Buffy knows what Spike is, what he has done, and that of what he is capable, yet because he protected her friends and sister in her absence, she allows herself to develop feelings for him. Viewers may find themselves in similar situations, realizing that having a relationship with a person of questionable morals is wrong or dangerous, but choose to do so because it feels good at the time, consequences be damned. Though ashamed by her behavior to the point of keeping her relationship with Spike a secret, she continues her affair. She is aware that her behavior is dangerous and that the only reason she remains in the relationship is because she loathes herself as well as Spike. Here Buffy expresses her feelings of disgust about her actions from the previous night, the first time she had intimate relations with Spike:

Buffy: Will you quit that? The only thing that's different is that I'm disgusted with myself. That's the power of your charms. Last night... was the most perverse... degrading experience of my life.

Spike: Yeah. Me too.

Buffy: That might get you off, but it's not my style.

Spike: No. It's your calling. (Noxon & Solomon, 2001)

Near the end of the fifth season, Buffy ends her relationship with Spike, leading him to take out his aggression physically, attempting to rape Buffy. She is able to fight him off, but he leaves town, knowing that she can never truly love a soulless creature that defiled her on several occasions. She has no contact with Spike until the following season, when she finds him in the new high school's basement. He is in a poor mental state when she finds him, having had his soul restored and being wracked with the guilt for all the atrocious acts he committed during his time as a vampire. Here is a discussion Buffy has with Spike after he has regained some degree of his composure, and when she learns of the restoration of his soul:

Spike: I dreamed of killing you. I think they were dreams. So weak... did you make me weak? Thinking of you. Holding myself and spilling useless buckets of salt over your... ending. Angel, he should've warned me. Makes a good show of forgetting, but it's here. In me. All the time. The spark. I wanted to give you... what you deserve. And I got it. They put the spark in me and now all it does is burn.

Buffy: Your soul?

Spike: Bit worse for lack of use.

Buffy: You got your soul back. How?

Spike: It's what you wanted, right? It's... it's what *you* wanted, right? And-and now everybody's in here... *talking*. Everything I did... everyone I... and HIM. And it. The

other. The thing... beneath... beneath you. It's here, too. Everybody. They all just tell me go. Go... to Hell.

Buffy: Why? Why would you do that?

Spike: Buffy, shame on you. Why does a man do what he musn't? For her. To be hers. To be the kind of man who would nev... To be a kind of man. And she shall look on him with forgiveness... and everybody will forgive and love. And he will be loved. So everything's okay, right? C-can we rest now? Buffy? Can we rest? (Petrie & Marck, 2002)

Spike was willing to experience unrelenting guilt to keep Buffy in his life. His soul forces him to remember his many misdeeds, the murder victims in his wake, the screams of those he butchered. His love for Buffy may not be as pure as Angel's love for her, but he loves her the best way that he can and, for a while, the safest way he can—from a distance. When a relationship ends, people are eventually capable of reflecting on their contribution to the dissolution of the relationship bond. Viewers might relate if they have ever injured, either physically, emotionally, or psychologically, the ones they love. The wronged party is responsible for determining whether or not reconciliation is possible or worthwhile. In the case of Buffy and Spike, Buffy chooses to allow Spike to join her fight against The First Evil. She recognizes that he will be an asset to the battle while still internalizing the torment he once offered her as an enemy and as a lover.

When Buffy is faced with leading the potential slayers into battle against The First Evil, she is happy that she can lean on her friends. She considers Spike an ally during that physically- and emotionally-exhausting period. She treats him as a friend, though the idea of a relationship

with Spike does not appear to be too far out of her mind. In “Never Leave Me,” Buffy informs Spike that she respects him, encouraging him when he needs encouragement most:

Buffy: *[to Spike]* You faced the monster inside of you and you fought back. You risked everything to be a better man. And you can be. You are. You may not see it, but I do. I believe in you, Spike. (Goddard & Solomon, 2002)

Buffy still cares for Spike, which is perhaps a facet of human nature that may not seem logical. Though he hurt her in the past, she can recognize that he has changed and has a great deal to offer in spite of his sins. It is similar to Buffy’s meeting with Riley in the previous season, though Buffy is now the person responsible for seeing what lies beneath. Viewers may also find themselves in similar situations in which they need to determine whether or not the sins of one’s past should designate how one is viewed in the present and in the future.

In the seventh season episode, “Touched,” Buffy, newly stripped of her leadership of the potential slayers when they feel that she is irresponsibly sending them to their doom, is found in an empty home by Spike and they discuss their relationship as Spike attempts to make Buffy realize that she needs to see the bigger picture and not allow the fractured relationship she has with the group to prevent her from protecting them:

Buffy: We were never close. You just wanted me because I was... unattainable.

Spike: You think that's all that was?

Buffy: Please, let's not go over the past.

Spike: Oh, no, no! Oh, let's hold on here! I've hummed along to your pity ditty. I think I should have the mic for a bit.

Buffy: Fine. The stage is yours. Cheer me up.

Spike: You're insufferable.

Buffy: Thank you. That really helped.

Spike: I'm not tryin' to cheer you up.

Buffy: Then what are you trying to say?

Spike: I don't know! I'll know when I'm done sayin' it. Something pissed me off, and I just-- "unattainable," that's it.

Buffy: Fine. I'm attainable. I'm a-- I'm an "attain-a-thon." May I please just go to sleep?

Spike: You listen to me. I've been alive a bit longer than you, and dead a lot longer than that. I've seen things you couldn't imagine, and done things I prefer you didn't. Don't exactly have a reputation for being a thinker. I follow my blood... which doesn't exactly rush in the direction of my brain. So I make a lot of mistakes. A lot of wrong bloody calls. A hundred-plus years, and there's only one thing I've ever been sure of. You... Hey, look at me. I'm not asking you for anything. When I say I love you, it's not because I want you, or because I can't have you. It has nothing to do with me. I love what you *are*. What you do. How you try. I've seen your kindness, and your strength. I've seen the best and the worst of you, and I understand, with perfect clarity, exactly what you are. You're a *hell* of a woman. You're the One, Buffy.

Buffy: I don't want to be the One.

Spike: I don't want to be this good-looking and athletic. We all have crosses to bear.

(Sinclair & Solomon, 2003)

Viewers may relate to the above situation in which Spike, Buffy's former lover and enemy, finds himself confronted with a vulnerable Buffy, a rare occurrence for him. When

people are vulnerable, those around them can either take advantage of the situation or try to help the person who is in need. By this point in the series, Spike had shed his evil persona and although he maintained his combative personality, his feelings for Buffy were still intact. He realized that she needed a friend, an individual to lend moral support and lead her back to her chosen path and help her heal.

The relationship between Spike and Buffy ends in the series finale, “Chosen,” when Spike gives his life to save Buffy, and the world, from The First Evil. Prior to his death, he and Buffy reach an understanding and exchange their last words as the world crumbles down around them:

Buffy: I love you.

Spike: No you don't, but thanks for saying it. (Whedon, 2003)

Buffy’s attempt to express love to Spike before he martyrs himself for the greater good cements their relationship before it ends. She may love him, but only platonically, which he realizes and appears to understand. All of Buffy’s romantic relationships end in a dramatic fashion, which mirrors how she lives her life. During the turbulent teenage years, viewers are faced with many situations and decisions that seem dire and all-encompassing to them, though they are not charged with protecting their fellow humans from creatures that are generally concealed from humanity. When emotions become involved, people do not necessarily think logically or consider the consequences that may arise when things go awry. Buffy’s relationships with the men in her life are complicated by her role as the Slayer and as a young woman encumbered by the weight of the world. Viewers may also feel as though they are weighed down by undesirable responsibilities and their relationships may suffer, or be strengthened, in spite of those responsibilities. Each romantic relationship is different, and

though viewers may see themselves reflected in the fictional characters on the screen, they do not have the luxury of talented writers to craft their dialogue or elaborate set pieces to increase dramatic tension.

How Buffy Relates to Her Sister Slayers

Viewers of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* may at times need to share responsibility with others in extracurricular activities such as clubs and athletics, or perhaps in an afterschool work environment. Sometimes they and their peers may clash over how to address certain situations for which they share responsibility. Perhaps they disagree and argue until a compromise is reached and each feels as though they have been heard and respected. It is unlikely, however, that viewers are forced to share their sacred destiny with another individual from a completely different background with completely different training. Buffy is supposed to be “The Chosen One,” her generation’s lone vampire slayer. When she temporarily dies at the end of the first season, another slayer is activated, an automatic process that she had not considered until Kendra, her successor, arrives in Sunnydale. Since Buffy was revived, she must co-exist with her replacements, sharing the mantle of the Slayer and the associated power. Buffy’s relationships with her fellow slayers are at times strained, like with any relationship, but fellow slayers are the only other people in existence who know the difficulties associated with her position. This section will focus on how Buffy’s complex relationships with her sister slayers are maintained and the importance of her exposure to other individuals who can truly empathize with her situation.

Upon learning of Kendra’s vampire slayer status, Buffy is standoffish and acts largely cold to her accidental successor. She does not understand why Kendra acts so differently and

has no other focus in life other than being a slayer. Buffy has difficulty relating to her sister slayer. Kendra is a foreigner in Buffy's social support group and Buffy does not take kindly to Kendra's methods and criticisms of Buffy's handling of her status:

Kendra: And those two, they also know you are the Slayer?

Buffy: Yep.

Kendra: Did anyone explain to you what "secret identity" means?

Buffy: Nope. Must be in the handbook. Right after the chapter on personality removal.

(Noxon & Semel, 1997)

Not everyone is meant to get along. Viewers have likely been trapped in situations in which they must work with someone with whom they do not get along and view as an adversary. Viewers' squabbles, however, likely do not have the devastating effect that a squabble between slayers can to the world-at-large. Being able to put differences aside and work toward a common goal is something instilled in young people early in life, though some are more willing to compromise than others. When Buffy and Kendra must join together to battle Spike and his fellow vampires, it is obvious that they have overcome their initial opposition and dedicated themselves to the common goal of reducing their dangerous enemies to harmless piles of dust.

Kendra assists Buffy in battling Spike and the forces of the undead, which causes Buffy to feel closer to her and understand why Kendra is so different—she was raised by her Watcher and was trained to be a slayer from a young age, knowing nothing else but the way of the warrior. Buffy realizes that her life could have been similar had she or her parents known about her fate. The following exchange from the episode "What's My Line, Part 2" indicates how

Buffy has welcomed Kendra as a friend and as a fellow slayer, and that Kendra has also been affected by Buffy's presence in her life:

Kendra: You talk about slaying like it's a job. It's not. It's who you are.

Buffy: Did you get that from your handbook?

Kendra: From you. (Noxon & Semel, 1997)

Buffy and Kendra, in spite of their different experiences as vampire slayers, share a common destiny and worked together, finding common ground and a common enemy. Buffy did not learn of her slayer destiny until she had spent most of her life being vacuous and irresponsible. When she was informed of her destiny, she had to mature quickly and cast aside the vestiges of her previous life. Kendra did not have a normal childhood—she was raised to be a warrior and understood early on that she may have to bravely perish for the cause that defined her developmental years. Viewers may encounter peers that were cognizant of their future goals early in their lives and adjusted their behaviors and goals accordingly, such as a young man who knows that his lack of academic prowess may prevent him from earning an academic scholarship to college, but realizes that his ability to toss a round object into a metal hoop may give him the opportunity to rise above his lot in life.

After Kendra is murdered by Spike's girlfriend, Drusilla, at the end of the second season, another slayer appears in Sunnydale. Faith, a troubled young woman who believes her role as a slayer elevates her above other people, also influences Buffy. In fact, Faith, who eventually becomes a rogue slayer and winds up incarcerated for her criminal acts, likely influences Buffy more than Kendra due to the volatile nature of their relationship and the amount of time they spend together. When they first meet, Buffy is jealous of the attention her friends offer Faith,

and begins to question whether she should be happier about being a slayer, enjoying herself and her duties. Buffy's feelings about her destiny and the acts of violence she must commit are not parroted by Faith, who truly enjoys vampire slaying, evident in this exchange from "Faith, Hope & Trick":

Faith: Well, when I'm fighting, it's like the whole world goes away, and I only know one thing: that I'm gonna' win, and they're gonna' lose. I like that feelin'.

Buffy: Well, sure. Beats that dead feeling you get when they win and you lose.

(Greenwalt & Contner, 1998)

Just as with Kendra, Buffy initially finds little in common with Faith. They are both quick healers, excellent fighters, and physically attractive, but they do not share the same temperament or personality. Viewers may also find themselves attracted to the personalities of people from whom they would generally avoid, individuals who seem a bit more dangerous or risqué than the individuals viewers might normally befriend. Faith represents what can happen when a vampire slayer is saddled with an unfortunate upbringing and a number of bad choices.

When Faith arrives in Sunnydale, Buffy's friends are fascinated by the stories she tells and the life she has led. A boy Buffy is interested in is also charmed by Faith, which makes Buffy more resentful. Buffy's insecurities are brought to the surface due to the attention Faith receives from her friends, friends who she is accustomed to impressing with her tales of slaying and her death-defiance. Faith feels welcomed by Buffy's friends, remarking on how her lack of a social support system might have affected her decisions:

Faith: You guys are a hoot and a half. I mean, if I had friends like you in high school, I... probably still would've dropped out, but I might've been sad about it, you know?

(Greenwalt & Contner, 1998)

Faith's dedication to her slaying allows her to relax and release tension. As a slayer, Faith pummels demons and stakes vampires, enjoying every moment of the fight. Buffy, much more reserved and having much more to lose, allows her jealousy to get the best of her and rudely belittles Faith, which leaves an opening for Faith to comment on how uptight Buffy is and her desperate need to view her slayer role for what it is, not what it prevents her from doing:

Faith: I'm five-by-five here, B, living entirely large, actually wondering about your problem.

Buffy: Well, I may not sleep in the nude and rassle alligators...

Faith: Maybe it's time you started 'cause obviously something in your bottle needs uncorking. (Greenwalt & Contner, 1998)

Before Faith embraces the darkness within after accidentally murdering a human and eschewing Buffy and her friends, Giles and Buffy have a dialogic exchange that clearly represents Buffy's jealousy of Faith and outlines why Faith would be well-served by having a group of friends that support her and ensure that she doesn't stray from her predestined path of righteousness:

Giles: She doesn't have a whole other life here, as you do.

Buffy: She doesn't need a life. She has mine.

Giles: I think you're being a little...

Buffy: No, I'm being a lot. I know that. (Greenwalt & Contner, 1998)

The jealousy between the slayers is reciprocated by Faith. In the fourth season, Faith awakens from the coma she fell into after being beaten and stabbed by Buffy in an effort to save the life of Angel. Faith learns that her former friend is living her life with little regret, and is angered to the point of using a demonic device to switch bodies with Buffy and experience Buffy's life. Before the body exchange, Buffy and Willow are confronted by a bitter Faith on the college campus in "This Year's Girl":

Faith: I kept having this dream; I'm not sure what it means. But in the dream, this self-righteous blonde chick stabs me, and you want to know why?

Buffy: You had it coming.

Faith: That's one interpretation, but in my dream she does it for a guy. [*Willow starts to sneak up behind Faith and is about to hit her with her backpack*] Try it, Red, and you lose an arm. [*Willow backs off*] I wake up to find that this blonde chick isn't even dating the guy she was so nuts about. I mean, she's moved on to the first college beef stick she meets. And not only has she forgotten about the love of her life, she's forgot about the chick she nearly killed for him. So that's my dream... that and some stuff about cigars and tunnels. But, uh, tell me college girl, what does it mean?

Buffy: To me? Mostly that you still mouth off about things you don't understand. [*Police sirens are heard*] Uh oh, I guess somebody knows you're here [*Faith hits Buffy*] (Petrie & Gershman, 2000)

The two slayers regain their rightful bodies but each realizes something essential about the other—living the life of another person is difficult, and although one person's life might seem uncomplicated and consequence-free, life is difficult for everyone, especially vampire slayers.

Soon after the body switch, Faith surrenders herself to authorities and does not return to Sunnydale until near the end of the series, when she is needed to fight The First Evil. She is instantly a hit with the potential slayers, much to Buffy's chagrin, but she and Buffy reach an understanding and put aside their petty issues in order to train the potential slayers and live to fight another day, with a newly-activated team of slayers to mentor with their respective, distinctive styles.

Viewers likely have relationships in their lives that are marked by jealousy and pettiness, just like the relationship between Buffy and Faith. Perhaps someone has more friends on a social networking site, or gets more attention from members of the popular crowd. While these situations may not lead to lengthy comas and body-switching, such behaviors exist and complicate otherwise healthy relationships. Buffy did not always behave maturely in her dealings with Faith, but in the end, they were both able to let go of their negative feelings and work together. Learning to rise above the negative behaviors may prove difficult, but in the case of Buffy and Faith, the two of them were able to save the world from the greatest evil that ever existed.

Buffy meets the original member of the slayer line in the fourth season finale, "Restless." She is a simple woman from simpler times, filled with rage and anger, her appearance reminiscent of a cavewoman. Buffy, questioning the origin of her power, communes with The First Slayer once again in the fifth season episode "Intervention." Buffy wants to know if she simply exists to kill demons and whether her slayer status is affecting her in other ways, particularly whether or not her humanity is being compromised by being a monster-killing pawn of The Watchers' Council. The First Slayer explains to Buffy that she is still human and that

death is her gift, words that allow her to let go of her life and selflessly take her sister's place as the one responsible for resealing the dimensional walls that threaten Armageddon at the conclusion of the fifth season. This exchange cements the relationship between the two and Buffy, who has little contact with her slayer matriarch throughout the series, learns what she needs to know about her calling and its influence on her human life:

First Slayer: You think you're losing your ability to love.

Buffy: I-I didn't say that... Yeah.

First Slayer: You're afraid that being the Slayer means losing your humanity.

Buffy: Does it?

First Slayer: You are full of love. You love with all of your soul. It's brighter than the fire... blinding. That's why you pull away from it.

Buffy: I'm full of love? I'm not losing it?

First Slayer: Only if you reject it. Love is pain, and the Slayer forges strength from pain. Love... give... forgive. Risk the pain. It is your nature. Love will bring you to your gift.

Buffy: I-I'm sorry, I, I'm just a little confused. I'm full of love, which is nice, and... love will lead me to my gift?

First Slayer: Yes.

Buffy: I'm getting a gift? Or, or do you mean that, that I have a gift to give to someone else?

First Slayer: Death is your gift.

Buffy: Death...

First Slayer: Is your gift.

Buffy: Okay, no. Death is not a gift. My mother just died. I know this. If I have to kill demons because it makes the world a better place, then I kill demons, but it's not a gift to anybody.

First Slayer: Your question has been answered. (Espenson & Gershman, 2001)

Viewers may find themselves wondering where they fit in, what they have to offer, and why their peers seem to possess things that they do not. Some lucky people may slip through the cracks, not noticing that they are different from everyone else and that conformity is perhaps easier; others may deal with their perceived inadequacies every day, braving the gauntlet of the school hallway and questioning why they are so different from those around them. Sometimes they are confronted with messages that they do not understand and must uncover what the message means to them. By the time that Buffy confers with The First Slayer, she had been questioning her origins for months. The First Slayer informs her that death is Buffy's gift to offer, but Buffy doesn't understand that The First Slayer was not referring to Buffy doling out death to demons, but what she could offer to her loved ones and the world. Buffy had to decide what the message from The First Slayer meant to her and, in the moment just before her death, realized the true meaning of the message. Buffy's death allowed countless others to live and prevented hellish creatures from destroying the world. She once again recognized the importance of sacrifice, a lesson that viewers may also wish to utilize, though they should not jump off of a large platform through a cloud of mystical energy in order to prove their worth.

When Buffy becomes a reluctant leader to a group of potential slayers, girls who may be chosen when Faith dies (it is implied that the slayer line is dependent on Faith after Buffy's two deaths during the course of the series), she must become a big sister to all of them, teaching them

about their calling and what is expected of them if chosen. She trains them, taking a hard line, making it abundantly clear to them that they will likely die young like their predecessors. When she determines that she can help the girls become powerful without their predecessor's demise, she attempts to rouse the troops, offering them the power to which they may eventually have access if they choose to be strong enough to accept it. The following quote from "Chosen" represents the self-actualization of Buffy, when she completely understands her power, her importance, and how wonderful it is to have the opportunity to share the power with other worthy girls. Men created the slayers and controlled them, crafting oppressive rules while isolating the slayer from others in an effort to control the perfect, yet expendable, weapon in the fight against evil. Buffy's empowerment, and the empowerment of the potential slayers, is defined in this particular passage:

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 (points to Willow) is more powerful than all of them combined. (Willow whimpers) So I say we change the rule. I say my power...

Buffy (voice over): ...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? (Whedon, 2003)

Buffy had never intended to lead a group of potential slayers into battle. Had The First

Evil not attempted to destroy the slayer legacy, Buffy's leadership skills would have been limited to attempting to keep her close friends and loved ones alive as they combatted evil. Buffy destroyed the mold that the men who created the slayer line had constructed. She recognized that girls younger than her were being forced to pick up weapons and battle forces beyond their comprehension; that recognition led her to a selfless act—activating the potential slayers and sharing her power. Viewers may follow Buffy's lead when they stand up to bullies, when they react to injustice around them, and when they fully embrace their femininity and comprehend what their foremothers had to sacrifice in order for them to have the freedom and ability to seek justice for those who cannot seek it themselves.

Summary

Buffy's relationship with herself is ultimately the most important relationship in her life. She has friends who support her, lovers that contribute to her life both negatively and positively, and peers that respect her, whether their actions and speech reflect that respect or not. As a slayer, Buffy has few perfect peers—she lives in a human world, surrounded predominantly with humans incapable of understanding how and what she feels. She meets other slayers, one who dies young, like the majority of slayers, and one that challenges her on a physical and mental level. Her mentor, The First Slayer, teaches her about what she has to offer the world, and the potential slayers she mentors show her that there is another generation ready to take her place. The relationships in which Buffy engages shape her world, influence her personality, and allow her to remain a member of the human race, though she questions her humanity at times. Her relationship partners change, as does she. The way she maintains those relationships are all-too human: communicating with other people; taking chances on other people; allowing herself to be

vulnerable with other people; questioning her actions and compromising when necessary; and crying and screaming when such methods are most suitable when her relationships are complicated or too much to handle. Viewers can relate to Buffy's relationship maintenance strategies because they have their own relationships that make them feel loved, hated, comfortable, uncomfortable, and sometimes confused. Buffy Summers may be a fictional character who battles demons and prevents the world from ending, which, when understood metaphorically, is what viewers do on a regular basis in a different context.

CHAPTER VI
RESEARCH QUESTION THREE

Empowering Dialogue

RQ 3: How does the dialogue in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* reflect the feminist empowerment central to the mythology?

Buffy Summers is a vampire slayer. She possesses preternatural abilities that border on superhuman and is responsible for utilizing said abilities to combat the forces of evil and protect the innocent from vicious creatures beyond their imagination. Buffy's unique situation, as the one girl chosen from her generation to carry on a centuries-old legacy of superpowered females appointed to battle the forces of darkness without their expressed consent, is empowered not only by the supernatural origins of her predecessors, but by her femininity and emotions, which are responsible for the confidence that allows her to stay alive when others before her have perished at an early age. As the series progresses, Buffy finds herself accepting her fate, sacrificing her happiness and on two occasions her life, and her acceptance culminates in her decision to disseminate the power associated with her vocation to every young girl in the world with the potential to replace her upon her death in order to defeat The First Evil and, once again, save the world.

Researchers agree that Buffy Summers is empowered and represents the concept of feminist empowerment, though the extent of the empowerment and its manifestation differ. Spicer (n. d.) predictably identifies Buffy's role as a hero as being generally fulfilled by men, and argues that while the feminist empowerment inherent in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is appropriate, Buffy Summers' past battles against authority figures throughout the series are

seemingly called into question when she decides to become the unquestionable expert on how best to address the final battle with The First Evil and not allow discourse on how to finish the campaign. The end result of Buffy's seizing of authority is the activation of all potential slayers, sharing the power once relegated to only one girl in each generation, and essentially dismantling the structure of the slayer line created by men too fearful and selfish to embrace the heroism synonymous with their biological sex.

Symonds (n. d.) observes the empowerment present in Buffy Summers, questioning what aspects in her life are also benefitted from the empowerment radiated by her role as the Slayer. The researcher determines that Buffy's empowerment as a sexual being is tempered by the fact that the overwhelming majority of her relationships end badly following sexual intercourse. Buffy's relationship with Spike is directly addressed, including the idea of Buffy using Spike to feel something to counter the numbness that permeates her soul following her resurrection in the sixth season, which can be considered a form of empowerment in defiance of gender stereotypes. Spike's attempted rape of Buffy is also examined, as well as the role Buffy's empowerment plays in her ability to escape the situation before it escalates. Buffy Summers' superpowers do grant her physical power beyond imagination, yet she is still a human being, a woman even, whose emotions, vulnerabilities, and strength dictate how her power is used.

The dialogue in the series reveals Buffy's empowerment, whether she is dealing with vampires, friends, or society. Her empowerment extends beyond her slaying, granting her a level of confidence that allows her to express her opinion without fear of reprisal. She speaks her mind, recognizes her strengths and weaknesses, and serves as a feminist icon due not only to her superpowers, but due to her acceptance of her fate and her efforts to always act in accordance

with her ethical orientation and consideration of the needs of the many over her own personal needs.

Evidence will be presented in this chapter highlighting Buffy's female empowerment. The fact that Buffy Summers fulfills a traditionally male role and must make difficult decisions at such a young age reflects her role as a warrior woman. Her words, however, are much more revealing. Quotations and dialogic exchanges involving Buffy and the characters that surround her play an integral part in conceiving how a young woman can represent feminist ideology and easily take the place of a man in battle. Several of the passages included in this chapter have been used in previous chapters, sometimes in the same context and sometimes not. The repeated quotations and passages only reoccur in this chapter when excluding such passages would nullify a proper and thorough explanation of the empowerment of Buffy Summers. This chapter is not separated by season, which would interrupt the flow of information, though it proceeds through the seasons in sequential order.

Empowerment Expressed

Buffy Summers maintains the appearance of a beautiful young woman. Only when confronted with the darkness that shrouds her vampire slayer heritage does she reveal the part of herself that is not obvious. Passing as a weak, young woman offers Buffy certain advantages, such as the element of surprise. The misogyny that dictates how women should defer to men, leaving matters in the hands of those best equipped to handle intense situations that would do nothing but soil the dainty hands of a woman, operates most efficiently when women know their place and do not act out of turn. Since Buffy protects those less powerful than her from creatures sometimes more powerful than her, she defies the role that the men in power would prefer she

play. She is a leader, a martyr, a fighter, and the only person qualified to make decisions that affect all humankind. She is passionate with her lovers, compassionate with her friends and peers, and vengeful of those who would harm her or those she is sworn to shelter from evil. She has power that separates her from other females, other males, and those who would order her into a life-or-death battle against deadly foes. Wielding her power, embracing it and utilizing it to maintain the delicate balance between good and evil leads to her empowerment as both a woman and as a warrior. Each time she strikes a monster, stakes a vampire or contributes to the charbroiling of a demonic snake serves as an enactment of her feminine power, as does every time she comforts a friend, confronts a bullying peer, or leaves a generous tip for the individual that gave her a manicure.

In the first season finale, “Prophecy Girl,” Buffy learns that her fate is sealed and that she will perish at the hand of The Master, her adversary throughout the season. She remarks upon her young age and her desire to live and decides to defy fate and quit being a slayer. She returns in the end to face her destiny, though this conversation with Giles and Angel speaks volumes about Buffy’s understanding of her responsibilities and her yearning for normalcy. Buffy knows she will die when she battles The Master, yet realizes that her death will not be in vain—she will breathe her last breath defending her friends, and the rest of the world, from the dangers she encounters on a nightly basis. She alone has the power to battle The Master, and she alone must meet the fate that awaits the Slayer:

Buffy: *(about the prophecy in which she will die)* So that's it, huh? I remember the drill. One slayer dies, the next one's called. I wonder who she is. Will you train her? Or will they send someone else?

Giles: Buffy... I...

Buffy: *[wimpering]* Does it say how he's gonna kill me? Do you think it'll hurt? *[as*

Angel steps close to her] Don't touch me! Were you even gonna tell me?

Giles: I was hoping I wouldn't have to, that there was some way around it. I...

Buffy: I've got a way around it. I quit.

Angel: It's not that simple.

Buffy: I'm making it that simple. I quit. I resign, I-I'm fired, you can find someone else to stop The Master from taking over.

Giles: I'm not sure that anyone else can. All the... the signs indicate...

Buffy: *[enraged, throwing books at Giles]* The signs?! Read me the signs! Tell me my fortune! You're so useful sitting here with all of your books! You're really a lot of help!

Giles: I don't suppose I am

Angel: I know this is hard.

Buffy: What do you know about this? You're never gonna die

Angel: You think I want anything to happen to you? You think I could stand it? We just gotta figure out a way...

Buffy: I already did. I quit, remember. Pay attention!

Giles: Buffy, if The Master rises...

Buffy: I don't care! I don't care. Giles, I'm sixteen years old. I don't wanna die. (Whedon, 1997)

Buffy is informed that she is meant to die, that her death was foretold by prophets of a bygone age. Whether or not the soothsayers intended for her to just roll over and accept her fate

is debatable, but Buffy initially refuses to meet her doom just because she is told to do so. She rebels, explaining to Giles that she will not die before she really has the opportunity to live. She eschews the patriarchy that attempts to use her as a witless pawn, but soon after learning that the vampires she was meant to battle had violated the sanctuary of her school and brutally murdered her peers, she chooses to fight. She chooses to fight because she has the power to do so, not because men tell her to fight. She acts as an agent of empowerment, not the witless pawn they wish her to be.

During the second season, Buffy stands up for herself, the choices she makes, and the fate she was assigned when speaking to her mother. She speaks to her mother as an equal, not as an attitudinal teenage girl, and declares that while she would rather be living a tamer, more ordinary life, she must accomplish her goal or no one will have the opportunity to live. Buffy faces adversity in many forms and must sacrifice her home, her friends, and her lover due to her status as the “Chosen One.” In this exchange, found in the season finale, “Becoming, Part Two,” Buffy finally confesses her secret identity to her mother, understanding what could happen to their relationship, but more so understanding the results of her inaction against the threat facing humanity. She had withheld knowledge of her role as the Slayer from her mother, attempting to prevent her mother from worrying or being susceptible to harm by the very forces Buffy combats:

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.

(Whedon, 1998b)

During the third season, Buffy must unknowingly complete a trial associated with her role as the Slayer. In "Helpless," Buffy begins losing her powers prior to her eighteenth birthday, a result of Giles drugging her in accordance with his role as her Watcher, and is set to battle a crazed vampire without her slayer abilities, a challenge she overcomes by using her intelligence, not physical violence, revealing that her empowerment is not merely physical. In this first exchange, Buffy receives a book for her birthday from Angel and questions her fate:

Buffy: It's sweet and thoughtful, and full of neat words to learn and say like "wilt" and "henceforth."

Angel: Then why'd you seem more excited last year when you got a severed arm in a box?

Buffy: I'm sorry ... it's just, suddenly there's a chance that my calling's a wrong number ... it's just freaking me out a little. (Fury & Contner, 1999)

Buffy's very identity is called into question, making her doubt her calling and what the rest of her life will hold. She has possessed her slayer skills for a couple of years and has grown accustomed to her slayer lifestyle, including her powers and her responsibilities. Without knowing why her abilities are vanishing, she is left in a dangerous position, a rite of passage for vampire slayers. Her physical empowerment is waning, forcing Buffy to rely on her empowerment as a resourceful woman.

In this exchange, also from “Helpless,” Buffy explains to Angel how carrying the weight of the world on her shoulders has changed her, specifically how the empowerment of being a slayer allowed her to become a better, stronger person:

Buffy: Before I was the Slayer I was ... Well, I- I don't wanna say shallow, but let's say a certain person, who will remain nameless, we'll just call her "Spordelia," looked like a classical philosopher next to me. Angel, if I'm not the slayer, what do I do? What do I have to offer? Why would you like me?

Angel: I saw you before you became the slayer.

Buffy: What?

Angel: I watched you, I saw you called, it was a bright afternoon out in front of your school. You walked down the steps and ... I loved you.

Buffy: Why?

Angel: Because I could see your heart. You held it before you for everyone to see, and I was worried that it would get bruised or torn. And more than anything in my life, I wanted to keep it safe. To warm it with my own.

Buffy: That's beautiful ... Or, taken literally, incredibly gross.

Angel: I was just thinking that too. (Fury & Contner, 1999)

In the fourth season episode “The Initiative,” Buffy defends Willow to their psychology professor, who does not care to hear Willow’s excuses about her boyfriends’ many absences, showing that her slayer empowerment permeates her life and has become a part of her personality. While most students are respectful enough, or perhaps too timid, to question the authority of their professors, Buffy encounters a situation with which she disagrees and decides

to react directly. She does not demure, nor ask a man to voice her concerns—she speaks to a professor with disrespect, addressing the professor as an equal, an equal whose behavior is questionable:

Buffy: You know, for someone who teaches human behavior, you might try showing some.

Professor Walsh: It's not my job to coddle my students.

Buffy: You're right. A human being in pain has nothing to do with your job. *[exits]*

Professor Walsh: I like her. (Petrie & Contner, 1999)

In the fifth season premiere “Buffy vs. Dracula,” Buffy encounters the Prince of Darkness and is surprised to learn that the vampire and his kin view her as a murderer and believe that her power is rooted in darkness. This exchange finds Buffy mocking Dracula, until he pinpoints her weakness, her ignorance of her origin:

Buffy: So let me get this straight. You're... *Dracula*. The guy. The Count.

Dracula: I am.

Buffy: And you're sure this isn't just some fanboy thing? Because... I've fought more than a couple of pimply overweight vamps that called themselves Lestat.

Dracula: You know who I am. As I would know without question that you are Buffy Summers.

Buffy: You've heard of me?

Dracula: Naturally. You're known throughout the world.

Buffy: Naw. Really?

Dracula: Why else would I come here? For the sun? I came to meet the renowned... killer.

Buffy: Yeah, I prefer the term *Slayer*. You know, killer just sounds so...

Dracula: Naked?

Buffy: Like I... paint clowns or something. I'm the good guy, remember?

Dracula: Perhaps, but your power is rooted in darkness. You must feel it.

Buffy: No. You know what I feel? Bored. (Noxon & Solomon, 2000)

This encounter is a turning point, making Buffy question the source of her power and whether she is just an instrument of destruction. She possesses power that gives even mythological vampires pause. She is known throughout the world as one who uses her power to end the lives of immortal creatures. Until she meets Dracula, she did not consider herself a killer and never questioned the source of her power and whether or not her power came from a dark place (she does not learn until the final season that her powers come from a demon).

She later speaks to the spirit of The First Slayer and learns that death is her gift. Her meeting with The First Slayer, borne of her questioning her role as a killer of supernatural evil, initially confounds her until she finally realizes her true power when she sacrifices herself to save the world. Buffy's greatest gift to the world, other than all she has done as the Slayer, was to save her sister, her friends, and the world by allowing herself to die and end the torment that would plague the human race indefinitely.

In "Fool for Love," an episode from the fifth season, Buffy and Giles engage in a candid conversation about the life expectancy of a slayer. Buffy wants to explore the conditions under which previous slayers met their demise, but Giles finds the topic uncomfortable, despite how

empowering such knowledge might be to Buffy. Part of Buffy's empowerment lies in the notion that she understands the risk of being a slayer. She knows that she would not be a slayer had her predecessor not met her end. She wishes to learn about those who were slayers before her, understand their motivations, and be familiar with the details of their final stand against evil.

Rather than a display of morbid curiosity, Buffy realizes that the information she seeks will make her even more powerful:

Buffy: Look, I realize that every Slayer comes with an expiration mark on the package.

But I want mine to be a long time from now. Like a Cheeto. If there were just a few good descriptions of what took out the other Slayers, maybe it would help me to understand my mistake, to keep it from happening again.

Giles [*uncomfortable with the topic*]: Yes, well, the problem is after a final battle, it's difficult to get any... well, the Slayer's not... she's rather...

Buffy: It's OK to use the D-word, Giles.

Giles: Dead. And hence, not very forthcoming.

Buffy: Why didn't the Watchers keep fuller accounts of it? The journals just stop.

Giles: Well, I suppose if they're anything like me they just find the whole subject too—

Buffy: Unseemly? Damn, love ya, but you Watchers are such prigs sometimes.

Giles: Painful, I was going to say. [*Giles and Buffy are very quiet for a moment*] But you're right; accounts of the final battles would be very helpful. But there's no one left to tell the tales. (Petrie & Marck, 2000)

The power that Buffy possesses has already been possessed by those who came before her in the slayer line. She understands that she would not be in possession of the powers had

they not met their demise and their powers passed on. Buffy wishes to learn from the deadly mistakes made by her predecessors in order to increase her life span and become a more effective agent of good. Part of her power, not only her physical attributes, come from those who held her position previously. She has prophetic dreams that link her to those who once slayed. She is the most recent addition to a sisterhood that has spanned centuries and the more knowledge she possesses about the extent of her powers and abilities will only serve to help her in her battles.

Buffy's understanding of her power, particularly over the patriarchy, is no more apparent than in the fifth season episode "Checkpoint." Buffy, desperate to learn the information the Watchers' Council has concerning Glory, must contend with their efforts to control her as they have done with past slayers. The following speech expresses Buffy's feelings about their desire to operate her as a pawn in their game of good versus evil. In this speech, Buffy makes her position abundantly clear to the men who would oppress her, commenting on how her existence gives their lives meaning. She lets them know that she understands that they need her much more than she needs them, and she will not be treated as a pawn in their battle against evil:

Buffy: I've had a lot of people talking at me the last few days. Everyone just lining up to tell me how unimportant I am. And I've finally figured out why. Power. I have it. They don't. This bothers them. Glory ... came to my home today.

Giles: *[alarmed]* Buffy, are you-

Buffy: Just to talk. She told me I'm a bug, I'm a flea, she could squash me in a second. Only she didn't. She came into my home, and we talked. We had what in her warped brain probably passes for a civilized conversation. Why? Because she needs something from me. Because I have power over her. You guys didn't come all the way from England

to determine whether or not I was good enough to be let back in. You came to beg me to let you back in. To give your jobs, your lives, some semblance of meaning.

Buffy: You're Watchers. Without a Slayer, you're pretty much just watchin' Masterpiece Theater. You can't stop Glory. You can't do anything with the information you have except maybe publish it in the Everyone Thinks We're Insane-O's Home Journal. So here's how it's gonna work. You're gonna tell me everything you know. Then you're gonna go away. You'll contact me if and when you have any further information about Glory. The magic shop will remain open. Mr. Giles will stay here as my official Watcher, reinstated at full salary...

Giles: [*coughing*] Retroactive. (Petrie, Espenson, & Marck, 2001)

Buffy's final statement, in which she demands the respect of the Council and gets Giles reinstated as her official Watcher is a culmination of her fight for autonomy and freedom from the patriarchy that had controlled her for so long. She informs them that without her as an instrument, they cannot contribute much to the battle against darkness. She explains that she will use the information they provide in tandem with her powers to stop Glory. She finally makes it clear to the Council that she will perform her duties as she desires and not allow them to bully her or dictate her actions. She is no longer a company woman, but a free agent dedicated to change.

In "Conversations With Dead People," an episode from the final season of the series, Buffy is reunited with a high school classmate in a cemetery. Now a vampire, Buffy must slay him after deflecting his comments about how he will defeat her, countering with her own assessment of what will transpire. Buffy's confidence is directly related to her empowerment, as

is her position as protector of the innocent. Her authority and responsibility are what separate her from the creatures she battles—she must protect the weak because she is the only one who can. She must enter each battle as though it will be her last and, despite the outcome, she will have fought valiantly and with a purpose. She has the power to intercede when evil attempts to conquer good and she does so each time she picks up a stake or dropkicks a demon. Buffy does indeed win the battle, and her sense of empowerment is obvious in her comments to her opponent:

Holden: Hey, I don't mean to be Count Buttinsky here, but you just don't seem as thrilled.

Is it because we're gonna fight?

Buffy: It's because I'm gonna win.

Holden: Hello! Two years of Tae Kwon Do and vampire strength. I think somebody's counting their chickens.

Buffy: You're not leaving this graveyard. Can't let you. (Espenson, Goddard, & Marck, 2002)

In the seventh season episode “Get It Done,” Buffy learns about the origins of The First Slayer, finding that men infused a young woman with the essence of a demon, which is the source of the slayer powers. Buffy is outraged by this revelation and refuses their offer for more power, letting the men know that her empowerment should not have come at the price of violating a young woman. She addresses the men as the weaklings they are, for sending a young woman into battle for them, and cowardly hiding behind the magic that created a line of young women to be slaughtered for their conception of the greater good:

Buffy: No, you don't understand! You violated that girl, made her kill for you because you're weak, you're pathetic, and you obviously have nothing to show me! (Petrie, 2003)

Buffy's empowerment can also rub her friends the wrong way, complicating their relationships and creating strife, as illustrated in this conversation between Buffy and Anya in the seventh season episode "Empty Places." Anya points out that Buffy's empowerment is a result of luck and that she is no better than anyone else fighting by her side. Buffy understands the point Anya is making and is incapable of refuting it. Her power was handed to her, but had she not embraced it and taken on the responsibilities of the Slayer, someone else would have taken her place, and upon examining the young girls she will soon lead into battle, she understands that her empowerment is an integral part of keeping everyone alive and vanquishing the ancient evil that wants to destroy them all:

Anya: And it's automatically you. You really do think you're better than we are.

Buffy: No, I...

Anya: But we don't know. We don't know if you're actually better. I mean, you came into the world with certain advantages, sure. I mean, that's the legacy.

Buffy: I...

Anya: But you didn't earn it. You didn't work for it. You've never had anybody come up to you and say you deserve these things more than anyone else. They were just handed to you. So that doesn't make you better than us. It makes you luckier than us. (Greenberg & Contner, 2003)

In "End of Days," Faith and Buffy, the two vampire slayers, discuss their past and come to a conclusion about their relationship and the circumstances that make them who they are. Their

relationship has been complicated from the beginning, and they have rarely been anything but adversarial in their interactions, but when the final battle approaches and they must join together, they look past their differences, find common ground, and reflect on what binds them together, empowering them to be more than just attractive young women:

Faith: I'm looking at you, everything you have, and, I don't know, jealous. Then there I am. Everybody's looking to me, trusting me to lead them, and I've never felt so alone in my entire life.

Buffy: Yeah.

Faith: And that's you every day, isn't it?

Buffy: I love my friends. I'm very grateful for them. But that's the price. Being a slayer.

Faith: There's only supposed to be one. Maybe that's why you and I can never get along. We're not supposed to exist together.

Buffy: Also, you went evil and were killing people.

Faith: Good point. Also a factor.

Buffy: But you're right. I mean, I... I guess everyone's alone. But being a slayer? There's a burden we can't share.

Faith: And no one else can feel it. Thank God we're hot chicks with superpowers.

(Espenson, Petrie, & Grabiak, 2003)

The final episode of the series, "Chosen," is arguably the most important episode of the series. Buffy's fate is rewritten, she shares her power and empowers numerous young women who now share her unwritten fate, she makes a decision to be alone and not depend on a man for her happiness, and she defeats The First Evil. Buffy understands that she is still young and once

her battle against The First Evil is complete, she can attempt to forge some kind of life not dictated solely by her former destiny. Society, and perhaps viewers of the program, might wish for Buffy to settle down with one of her vampire beaux and begin a life that will conclude with a happy ending. Buffy Summers, however, is not the type of character to do what society, or men, would want her to do. Her empowerment, even though it is shared with many girls all over the world, is still hers. She has earned her empowerment through many trials and wields it with the authority that only she could. This first selection is a short conversation that occurs between Buffy and Angel, allowing Buffy to express that though she appreciates Angel's attempt to intervene in a fight, she can take care of herself:

Buffy: (looks into Angel's eyes, smiling) Angel, what are you doing— (shakes her head) Don't even. I just want to bask. (looks into Angel's eyes, smiling, for a few seconds, then snaps out of it) OK, I'm basked. What are you doing here?

Angel: Not saving the damsel in distress, that's for sure.

Buffy: Oh, you know me. (picks up scythe) Not much with the damseling. (Whedon, 2003)

Buffy refers to herself as “cookie dough” while explaining to Angel that she is not yet the person she wishes to be and that her life is just beginning and she isn't prepared to settle down with any man, not even her soulmate. This quote, examined in a previous chapter, addresses Buffy as a young woman free of her slayer status. She has had many failed, even doomed, relationships. She reaches the conclusion that perhaps she is not ready to simply settle down with a man. She has other plans, whether she can articulate them or not, that involve her becoming her true, best self, and while being a slayer complicates that process, it also empowers

her to want to try to live a life where she can figure out her future, be it as a slayer or just a woman in love:

Buffy: What was the highlight of our relationship? When you broke up with me or when I killed you? I'm well aware of my stellar history with guys... (sighs, leans beside Angel) And, no, I don't see fat grandchildren in the offing with Spike, but I don't think that really matters right now. (chuckles) You know, in the midst of all this insanity, a couple things are actually starting to make sense. And the guy thing— (sighs) I always feared there was something wrong with me, you know, because I couldn't make it work. But maybe I'm not supposed to.

Angel: Because you're the slayer?

Buffy: (looks at Angel) Because—OK, I'm cookie dough. I'm not done baking. I'm not finished becoming whoever the hell it is I'm gonna turn out to be. I make it through this, and the next thing, and the next thing, and maybe one day I turn around and realize I'm ready. I'm cookies. And then, you know, if I want someone to eat— (eyes go wide as she catches herself) or enjoy warm, delicious cookie me, then...that's fine. That'll be then. When I'm done.

Angel: Any thoughts on who might enjoy— (sighs, irritated) Do I have to go with the cookie analogy?

Buffy: I'm not really thinking that far ahead. That's kind of the point. (Whedon, 2003)

Buffy shares her battle plan with her friends and the potential slayers prior to their assault on The First Evil. She informs them that she will be descending into the Hellmouth and battling the monsters that threaten to destroy humankind. She is aware that some of the potential slayers

do not respect her past decisions and believe that she will likely get them killed, yet she does not yield. She holds the power, power that she will use until she can use it no longer. Her empowerment is evident in her words to the scared young girls:

Buffy: I hate this. I hate being here. I hate that you have to be here. I hate that there's evil, and that I was chosen to fight it. I wish, a whole lot of the time, that I hadn't been. I know a lot of you wish I hadn't been either. (*Kennedy and Rona look away*) But this isn't about wishes. This is about choices. I believe we can beat this evil. Not when it comes, not when its army is ready, now. Tomorrow morning I'm opening the seal. I'm going down into the hellmouth, and I'm finishing this once and for all. Right now you're asking yourself, "what makes this different? What makes us anything more than a bunch of girls being picked off one by one?" It's true none of you have the power that Faith and I do. So here's the part where you make a choice. (Whedon, 2003)

Buffy does not use her power to force the Potentials into accepting an uncertain destiny-- she gives them a choice, a choice she did not get to make for herself. The girls, once oppressed and devoid of authority and autonomy, are granted the opportunity to make a choice that will change their lives, and the lives of those who surround them, forever. By accepting Buffy's offer, the potential slayers become slayers and are given the ability to stand up to evil and to subvert the oppression that once shackled them.

Buffy is empowered not only through mystical means but as a young woman who grew up with the influence of mystical powers. She could have kept all of the power for herself, allowing the young girls to die at the incorporeal hands of The First Evil, but instead she elected to give them the opportunity to empower themselves, to grant them the skills and confidence of

superpowers to hopefully keep them alive through the encounter with The First Evil and perhaps even in future encounters. The greatest gift Buffy had to give besides her own death was the power of the Slayer, which she willingly gave to scared young girls about to face ancient evil.

The following is arguably the most important verbal expression made by Buffy throughout the entire series. Though it has been noted in previous chapters, it is the most powerful rhetoric in the series, and not making mention of this declaration in the chapter about female empowerment would be detrimental to the argument this chapter presents. With this short speech, Buffy rewrites the slayer mythology and shares her empowerment with her slayer sisterhood, granting many young woman the gifts she has possessed for years and allowing them to stand up against the patriarchy that oppresses them and use their newfound powers to keep themselves and the world safe against the forces of evil, forces that will soon need to regroup due to Buffy and the new slayers' vanquishing of The First Evil:

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 (points to Willow) is more powerful than all of them combined. (Willow whimpers) So I say we change the rule. I say my power...

Buffy (voice over): ...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? (Whedon, 2003)

Summary

The quotations and dialogic exchanges highlighted in this chapter provide evidence of Buffy's empowerment. She is a woman performing the traditional role of a man, protecting the world from evils that are evident, like demons and vampires, and evils that can seem less evident, such as sexism and the oppression of females. She faces death on a regular basis, dies twice in less than five years, and defies a master plan put into practice by pusillanimous men who meddled with magic in order to avoid defending themselves. At times she faces utter defeat and is physically beaten almost to the point of death, but like a feminist beacon, she stays aglow and lights the path for other women, and potential slayers, so that they too can be powerful in the face of darkness.

When Buffy defies her preordained death at the end of the first season only to change her mind and die in order to vanquish her adversary, she makes a choice to not allow others to dictate her destiny and to act as an agent of good with autonomy. When she finally confesses her secret life to her mother and confidently defends her choice to follow her slayer destiny, she acts independently of maternal authority. When she loses her Slayer powers and must battle a crazed vampire using only her wits, she chooses to survive, to not go silently into death due to a temporary lack of power. When she stands up to an unpleasant professor and when she questions her origins, she does so because she can and because she wants to—she is empowered as a woman, as an individual, and as a vampire slayer. When she attempts to learn more about her predecessors and whether or not she is indeed simply a killing machine employed to vanquish the undead, she claims her power. When she finally declares her independence from the patriarchal Watchers' Council and asserts that they would not serve any purpose if she were

not around, she is an agent of change. When she embraces her responsibilities to protect the innocent, when she learns that her powers come from a demon, and when she and her former adversary find solace in the facts that as powerful, beautiful women, the duties of slaying are easier to accept, she is empowered. Finally, when she realizes that she still has the opportunity for growth outside of slaughtering demons and that her power can be shared with those who need it as much as she does, and then gives those people the opportunity to make a choice that she could not make for herself, her empowerment is at an apex. She can control her own destiny, assist in forging the destinies of others like her, and she is finally free to live her life as she sees fit, having the opportunity to choose whether or not a man has any influence on what she does and how she lives.

Buffy Summers, vampire slayer, woman, sister, friend, lover, and leader, is empowered by her slayer-granted abilities and her understanding of her role as a woman in a society where her kind are undervalued. Buffy expresses her feelings and thoughts verbally, like most communicators, and her confident demeanor, borne of her experiences of making difficult decisions and committing self-sacrifice, provides additional impact to these verbal expressions. Buffy spent eight years battling the undead, demons from dimensions vastly dissimilar to her own, and the trials and tribulations inherent in becoming an adult. Her position as a powerful woman makes her a role model for viewers, for she is selfless, wise, physically and emotionally strong. Though she fights against the tide of fate that may someday overwhelm her, she accepts responsibility for herself and others, and proudly carries on the legacy of the vampire slayer until she is presented with the opportunity to modify that legacy, when she uses her power to

empower others and create a superpowered sisterhood who join Buffy in fighting the good fight, and allow her to escape the fate of many past slayers—facing the darkness alone.

CHAPTER VII

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Research Question Review

Buffy the Vampire Slayer has been a topic of scholarly research since the late 1990s. The seven-season run of the program presented researchers with various avenues to examine, as evident when an individual visits <http://slayageonline.com>, the website of *Slayage: The International Online Journal of Buffy Studies*, and peruses the archives. Topics include philosophy, gender roles, feminism, ontology, parenting, language, and aesthetics. The broad appeal of the program is clearly indicated by the academic interest in the show's many facets and the annual conferences that bring together members of various academic disciplines to discuss the many adventures of Buffy Summers and her friends (Wilcox & Lavery, n. d.).

The feminist message of the show, though questionable depending on the researcher and his or her intentions, is a popular angle for researchers to adopt. This study analyzed the arguably feminist messages inherent in the program using a feminist critical lens. The current project also featured an examination of the show's eponymous heroine, Buffy Summers, and her relationship management strategies with those closest to her, as well as the dialogic content that defines the character and her role in her relationships and in the world-at-large.

The goal of this project was to find evidence to provide answers to the presented research questions. The questions revolved around the handling of gender roles in the program, the relationships Buffy maintains throughout the program and similarities between those relationships and those of viewers, and how the dialogue reveals feminist empowerment within the character. The remainder of this chapter will offer discussion about the findings of the

present study and how they compare to the findings in previous research. Next, a discussion of the limitations in the study will be offered, followed by suggestions for future research projects and additional questions that warrant study. This chapter will be divided into four sections: (1) a discussion of the findings for Research Question One; (2) a discussion of the findings for Research Question Two; (3) a discussion of the findings for Research Question Three; (4) and, finally, a reexamination of previous research, a discussion of the project's limitations, suggestions for future research, and a general conclusion to the study.

Research Question One

RQ 1: How does *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* reinterpret gender stereotypes through character tests, dramatic conflict, narrative, and, most significantly, dialogue?

The evidence presented in Chapter IV of the current project supports the notion that gender stereotypes are reinterpreted in the program through character tests, conflict, the narrative, and the dialogue. Buffy Summers is faced with life-or-death decisions on a regular basis, often endangering her own life in the process. She sacrifices being a "normal" girl in order to protect innocents as a vampire slayer, and embraces traditionally masculine aspects that separate her from those of her gender and biological sex and place her in a precarious situation regarding balancing her private life and her vocation. She is tested by fate, circumstance, and the decisions she makes while shouldering the immense burden of being both a savior and a sassy woman warrior.

Buffy's character is tested often throughout the series as she is challenged by adversaries, lovers, her slaying responsibilities, and the avenues in which all of the aforementioned challenges converge. Romantic entanglements are frequently used for plot devices in television

programs, as is dramatic tension that arises between characters. Buffy's participation in relationship dyads with men is often colored not only by complications related to her birthright, but also by typical issues present in relationships. She cannot date regular boys, worrying that they will be injured or killed. Each of her relationships with superpowered or supernatural men end when one party realizes that the relationship is unhealthy or detrimental to the happiness of the other.

Buffy's arguably true love, Angel, has a complicated past that leads him to lose his soul and attempt to kill her and her loved ones. She must murder him, shortly after his soul is restored, in order to protect the world. He returns from a hell dimension and she loses him again when he understands that staying with her beyond high school will prevent her from living her life and possibly finding a future with a more suitable mate. In killing Angel and then, after his return, letting him go and living her life without him, Buffy reveals her strength and her ability to understand that sacrifice is an integral part of her identity; she can save the world and protect her charges, but she herself cannot always be happy as a result. Tales of men sacrificing for the greater good are part of the public consciousness, but such tales about young women, who should stereotypically be accustomed to histrionics and dramatic conflicts facing the same choices as her male counterparts, are certainly less common.

Buffy believes she finds a more suitable mate in Riley Finn, a commando for a secret government agency, who, when later stripped of his own superhuman abilities, realizes that he is a burden and that Buffy is better off without him. Concerning Riley, Buffy again realizes that sacrificing her romantic relationships is part of her duty and that although Riley himself made the decision to leave her and sacrifice his own happiness rather than serve as a distraction from

Buffy's duties, Buffy is left to carry on without him, bravely facing her duties without an equally-powerful romantic partner in whom she could confide, a situation of which she had grown accustomed.

Buffy then begins a doomed relationship with Spike, which ends when he attempts to rape her, but continues in one form or another until he dies saving the world. Buffy's innocence was lost years before, but when Spike attempts to physically violate her she realizes the true gravity of her decision to lust after a soulless killer. Buffy realizes in the final episode that she is still growing and has not yet determined who she truly is, though it is clear that her role as the slayer complicates her romantic relationships. All of the trials and character tests Buffy faces in reference to her romantic relationships force her to grow as a person and always choose to put her duties ahead of her happiness, a trait that is a hallmark of heroes, whether they are male or female. Buffy subverts most notions of the stereotypical feminine fragility that arises when relationships end and uses her pain to augment her slaying.

As the Slayer, Buffy is faced with many difficult decisions that fall in line with the vampire slayer job description. In a world full of demons, Buffy is essentially the law, deciding which demons are truly evil and which can be redeemed. She decides which demons live and which demons die. She kills Angel to ensure the safety of the world and almost has to kill her friend, Anya, a vengeance demon who murders a number of young men after they play a mean prank on a young lady who wishes for vengeance. Her friends cannot possibly understand the pressure Buffy is under when making such decisions, and they offer their opinions about how she should do her job, regardless of their inability to appreciate the difficulty of her decisions.

The vampire slayer mantle is more akin to a man's role. Being a vampire slayer requires sacrifice, isolation, and probable death. Buffy Summers is a teenage girl who must combat evil while still attending high school and navigating her teen and young adult years. According to tradition, men should wage wars and women should be grateful and anxiously await the return of their men from said wars.

All of the character tests and trials revealed in the dialogue in the show facilitate Buffy's becoming a woman warrior capable of sacrifice and making difficult decisions. She must contend with the loss of loved ones and innocents while performing her duties. She sacrifices love while seeing her friends revel in the emotion. She rises above everything in order to fulfill her role as the Slayer and, courtesy of the emotions she possesses, realizes all that she loses, all that she has lost, and all she is capable of having but cannot because of the responsibilities she was assigned without her being able to make a conscious decision about her fate.

Research Question Two

RQ 2: Do Buffy Summers' experiences as a young woman, particularly those involving her relationships, reflect those faced by audience members?

The television landscape has changed dramatically over the past four decades. Women are now able to be doctors, construction workers, research scientists, and perform duties that are not secretarial in nature. Had the feminist movement not influenced television, Buffy Summer may have never had the opportunity to use pointed wooden stakes to reduce fanged aggressors to dust. While Buffy may not have been the first woman warrior on television, her tale was featured on a television channel dedicated to young viewers, viewers who could follow the adventures of the Slayer and her cohorts and perhaps be influenced by the relationships portrayed

on screen. The show, which has prompted academics and viewers to look beyond the name of the program and the notion of a teenage girl eradicating evil and recognize the depth associated with the plots, characters, and dialogue indicates that a television program aimed at young viewers can be critically acclaimed and appeal to a larger audience than simply the demographics for which it was intended.

Buffy's experiences, when viewed as metaphorical, are similar to the experiences of non-fictional individuals. She has close friends who are willing to die for her, who stand by her whenever she needs them. Her friendships can become strained at times, due to circumstance and selfishness and jealousy. People may choose different paths, independent of the paths their friends choose, and must then deal with the consequences of those choices. Her relationships with her peers likely reflect the relationships most teenagers have with their peers. High school is a time when people are deciding who they are, and sometimes others will find those identities offensive for one reason or another. Her relationships with her suitors, when stripped of supernatural nuance, can reflect the relationships in which viewers participate. Romantic relationships can leave participants elated or devastated at different times, and relationships in fictional worlds seemingly operate in the same fashion. Buffy's role as leader of the potential slayers shows the growth she endures throughout the series; she begins the series feeling generally isolated from society as the only slayer and ends the series surrounded by young women who share the empowerment she at one time solely possessed.

The relationships between Buffy and her friends and the relationships between Buffy and her lovers have been discussed thoroughly in this manuscript. Another relationship important to the series was Buffy's relationship with her peers during high school. Her affiliation with losers

Xander and Willow made her an outcast, and Buffy believed many of the students disliked her and thought she was a troublemaker they should avoid. Meanwhile, Buffy risked her life to protect all of them on a weekly basis and was never shown any appreciation by them unless they happened to be present when she battled the undead. At the prom, Buffy is finally made aware of their appreciation when she is presented with an award from her peers, recognizing the fact that she has been around to protect them and that they appreciate her and her service to the school.

Another relationship of relevance in Buffy Summers' life is her relationship with the potential slayers. She begins her relationship with the Potentials as a reluctant leader. She looks to Giles to advise her, but when it becomes obvious that she must lead them, she becomes a dictator, telling them what must be done and not yielding to their criticism. When the potential slayers decide they no longer wish to follow her, she must earn back their respect before they face The First Evil.

Buffy's experiences as a teenager and young woman in the program are relatable to those of audience members, as is her place as a teenager and young woman in society. Buffy is female and represents traditionally male traits as a warrior and a savior. She is not meant to be battling demons; she should leave fighting evil to men and instead pursue safer interests that do not endanger her well-being. She faces down demons, the essence of evil, and the show's representative patriarchy, and the messages conveyed in the program can have real-world implications. When a woman is faced with the opportunity to stop someone from hurting another person, or to verbally correct a man whose lewd conduct is making others uncomfortable, or when a woman makes a selfless decision that will ultimately impact the lives

of others in a positive way, the idea of being feminine in a masculine world is torn asunder. While men may arguably rule the world, the existence of women has an immeasurable impact on said world, and when a young woman battles evil so that men can sleep soundly at night and need not worry about what lurks in the darkened recesses of their quaint subdivisions, the influence of women, and the trappings of feminism, are concretely evident.

Buffy Summers is not a typical teenage girl, but that does not negate the influence she could have on an audience. She stood up for the weak and she sacrificed her own health and happiness to ensure that others who could not join her in the battle against evil could sleep soundly at night. She was a woman warrior when no men would step up and fight the war for her. She was a woman who benefitted from the off-screen battle that allowed women to be viewed onscreen as more than props and comedic foils. Though it is unlikely that many viewers were influenced to take up arms against demons, many other aspects of the program could have created agents of good in the viewing population. Buffy's choices, her victories and her failures, were often steeped in metaphor. High school was not an always pleasant experience for Buffy and her friends, and viewers may have felt the same way. Perhaps viewers were bullied or witnessed bullying and stood up for themselves or others. Perhaps a girl with few friends found herself at a lunch table with others deemed insignificant by their peers and forged lifelong friendships. Perhaps a young girl stepped in to help her friend when she was being physically abused by her peers or parents, or maybe somewhere a young girl is currently in the fight of her life against a vampire whose sole agenda is to feed on her and leave her for dead. The influence of the television medium has been analyzed in many studies; if having Buffy as a role model assists one girl in choosing a destiny that leads to her helping other people, or even simply gives

her the strength to go to school each day with her head held high, than Joss Whedon's characters have served a purpose other than entertainment.

Research Question Three

RQ 3: How does the dialogue in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* reflect the feminist empowerment central to the mythology?

The dialogue in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* serves multiple purposes: moving along the plot, developing the characters and their relationships, and identifying Buffy Summers as a representative of feminist empowerment. Throughout the series, Buffy faces the forces of evil, some human and others not human. As a woman, Buffy is viewed as weak and ineffective, but as a slayer, she defends the innocent and uses her power to negate the weakness assigned to her because she is female. At the conclusion of the series, Buffy is left facing an uncertain future after having empowered a new generation of women to fight what was once her fight. The empowerment she grants the potential slayers is symbolic of a changing of the guard, of passing the torch to future protectors whose lives are irrevocably altered by power and responsibility. Buffy chooses to share her power, and her burden, with others, allowing them to feel what it is like to be powerful and to cast aside the chains that the patriarchy would use to subdue and control them.

Whenever Buffy uses her words to condemn an evil act, or to express her feelings about a situation, she speaks as both a young girl/woman and as a vampire slayer. As a slayer, she speaks from a place of knowledge and power. As a human being, her words sometimes betray her role as a heroine, revealing the vulnerability that is an essential component of the human condition. Buffy Summers' voice can be heard above the cacophonous droning of the male

patriarchy that would silence her if at all possible. A woman warrior is not necessarily a traditional role to which young women may aspire, but courtesy of Joss Whedon and the characters he created, young girls can see that women can use their femininity as a weapon to create positive changes that can reach far beyond their limited social circle.

Buffy's words, recorded on a medium that can last practically forever, can be revisited time and time again and the message from the series lives on not only in the quips Buffy uses to mentally disarm her opponents or to stifle the dissenting tones of the male majority, but in how those words influenced those who watched the program and were influenced by the messages and dialogue that defined not only the birth of a new form of genre television, but also how a teenage girl who was decidedly different from those around her carved a path through a television landscape overpopulated by young women that were more concerned with their own problems than anything happening around them.

When Buffy tells a teenaged girl that she should flee her abusive boyfriend, Buffy makes a difference. When Buffy verbally reclaims her identity when facing a demon that wishes to remove her from society and rescues those who had lost hope, she makes a difference. When Buffy tells the potential slayers that they can make a difference if they choose to accept their birthright and embrace the power that men created in an act of self-preservation, she not only alters their lives, but the lives of those around them who may someday need a savior. When Buffy dies to save a world full of strangers and uses her last moment of life to inspire her younger sister to live her life fully, she reveals a passion for life and an understanding that others can live if she fully embraces her role as a woman warrior with an expiration date.

Buffy has abilities beyond the grasp of normal people, but the abilities come packaged with advanced responsibilities. She is charged with maintaining her identity as a young woman and her identity as the Slayer, being careful not to compromise either. She merges the responsibilities as best she can, never forgetting that her slayer gifts make her more powerful than normal people her age, and that she must always keep in mind that with empowerment comes the responsibility to use that power to the advantage of those who surround her. She is the one girl in her generation with slayer powers (except for Faith) until she offers other young women the gift of empowerment. This action, which changes the vampire slayer mythology irreparably and allows young girls and women to find the power within, is an unparalleled, literal example of female empowerment.

Limitations and Future Research

The findings in this study are similar to the findings of select previous research, and in stark contrast to the findings of others. The present researcher has found evidence to support that gender roles in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are reinterpreted within the show, with Buffy Summers acting as a warrior, a job traditionally delegated to men. Magoulick (2006) found that powerful, female, television characters are merely fantasy figures created by men, for men, and that the feminist message is skewed as a result. Any opportunity for a female character to be the main protagonist in a television program that is not solely about interpersonal relationships and the desperate search for validation through a romantic relationship is a victory for fans who just a few decades ago would be unable to find such a television program. While Buffy's interpersonal relationships with men were featured on the show, Buffy's relationship with herself and acceptance of who she is and what she can be is more prominent in the storylines. Buffy

influencing and empowering an entire generation of girls and young women to embrace their feminine power overshadows any criticisms about how her existence is the result of men fantasizing about powerful women.

Bodger's (2003) results are in agreement with Magoulick's (2006), identifying various negative female stereotypes present in the show's characters, such as emotional instability and vapid beauty. Buffy and her friends spend the first several seasons of the show as teenagers, a time of emotional instability and questioning who one is and is meant to be. While a few of the show's characters were vacuous, the main characters on the program were portrayed as less concerned with their appearance than they were with staying alive while battling monsters and inner demons. Camron (2007) addresses gender roles, referencing Xander, the show's only main character not in possession of a superpower or natural gift, and his tendency to defer to Buffy most violent matters, though noting that Xander plays a supportive role when necessary. Xander's function on the program may be interpreted as being a conduit through which viewers can experience the world of the Slayer. While viewers do not possess such powers or responsibilities as the characters on the show, they were given a character to whom they could relate.

The present researcher has also found evidence in the series to indicate that Buffy's relationship maintenance strategies are likely similar to those of viewers, allowing viewers to relate to the character and her experiences. Most of this evidence, however, is open to interpretation by viewers. Relationships transpire in different ways for different people, meaning that some people may have relationships similar to those depicted on screen in *Buffy*, but not all viewers will have similar experiences. The show's popularity, which can be due to a number of

factors, can possibly be attributed to viewers being capable of relating to the characters and thus enjoying the show for that reason.

Finally, the present researcher has found evidentiary support in the show's dialogue to lend credence to the notion that Buffy's feminist empowerment is revealed, at least partially, through dialogue. While an insubstantial amount of research focuses on feminist empowerment within the show's dialogue, researchers have agreed that Buffy Summers is a representative of feminist empowerment. Brannon (2007) discusses the power Buffy possesses, and that when she activates the potential slayers at the end of the series, welcoming them to the slayer sisterhood, Buffy is essentially giving them a choice to possess their powers without serving as possessions of The Watchers' Council. Pender (2004) focuses on the final season of Buffy, stating that the feminist message in the show is no more powerful than it is in the final season. While Buffy's struggle to understand who she is and her importance in some grand, cosmic plan does help drive the series to a conclusion, Buffy's power and the way she chooses to use it is reflective of the character's feminist underpinnings. Chandler (2003) claims that Buffy's battle is not solely for the purpose of establishing equality, but for empowering women to be independent and use their abilities to become agents of change, to both feel and use the power within them.

A positive aspect of the current study is that it is not simply a reproduction of previous studies, though other studies have addressed similar material. As a rhetorical criticism, this project focuses on dialogue, an integral component of a television series. This approach, however, is reflective of limitations within the study. The television series lasted for 144 episodes, and the present study was focused on themes that existed throughout the series. The abundance of dialogue in the series, much of which does pertain to the topics of this project,

complicates the proceedings. This project could have easily quadrupled in length if each piece of dialogue thematically linked to the research questions was identified and analyzed. A focused appraisal of a particular season or episode would allow for deeper analysis and a drawing of more specific conclusions.

Perhaps the greatest limitation of the present study is the breadth of the research questions. Selecting only one of the research questions that guided this study would likely have provided enough information to examine a particular aspect of the series. Having three research questions complicated the study and led to repetition and difficulty in discerning relevant information to provide evidence to support the notions that comprise the research questions. Repetition also arises from the inclusion of a lengthy series summary. While the summary provides a context for readers unfamiliar with the series, particular topics, plots, and dialogic interactions are addressed repeatedly in the manuscript to support conclusions, illustrate plot points, and develop connections between topics.

Future research should focus on only one topic in order to be streamlined and effective. The current project was too broad in nature and could have been improved by focusing on one specific aspect of the series. Further research could revolve more around the non-romantic relationships in the series—these relationships lasted for seven years and allowed the main character to function in both the human world and the world of the demonic. The dialogue in the series should also be closely examined in future research. The dialogue, conceived by those responsible for the series, tell the story as much as the environment, the actors, and the situations that compose the plot. The amount of research on a television series that ended almost a decade

ago is revealing, indicating that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* contains more depth than the deceiving title might communicate.

Another possible topic to be addressed in future research is the theme of choice. The theme of sacrifice is present in the current study and is reflected in the various decisions Buffy Summers must make for the good of those around her and the world-at-large. Buffy frequently makes the choice to sacrifice her own happiness in accordance with her role as the Slayer. She makes a conscious decision to perform acts detrimental to her own self with a complete understanding of the consequences of said decision. When Buffy first arrives in Sunnydale, she hopes to leave her past behind and live a normal life free of the forces of darkness, but she soon embraces her slayer persona once the threat of vampires is detected in the town. She is aware that her duties as a slayer are crucial to protecting those who cannot protect themselves. She chooses to fulfill her obligations as the Slayer at great personal cost to herself and her relationships with others. As the one designated slayer for her respective generation, Buffy understands that her powers are to be utilized to face down evil in all its forms and though she does choose to temporarily disregard her birthright several times in the series, she always chooses to return to her duties.

Choices are also made by the other slayers portrayed in the series. Though their lives will be in constant danger, the girls/young women chosen by destiny choose to embrace their collective destiny. Kendra, groomed to be a slayer since birth and expected to suppress the emotions that make Buffy effective as a slayer, chooses to follow the guidelines set by the patriarchal Watchers' Council and fulfill the duties of the slayer as a pawn of the Council. Faith chooses to pursue the freedoms associated with being a slayer, leading to an accidental murder

and incarceration prior to her arguable redemption at the conclusion of the series. While Faith seemingly finds redemption at the end of the series following a number of morally questionable decisions, the potential slayers are also given a choice that alters the course of their respective lives, though a question remains about how much weight their input had in their activation as slayers.

In the series finale, Buffy makes a grand speech that is essentially the crux of the current project. Buffy informs the potential slayers that she has a plan that will lead to their activation and the awakening of the powers and responsibilities of being a slayer within them. She gives them the choice to share in her power, and the viewers can interpret that the potentials choose to become slayers based on the final battle between the First Evil and its minions and an army of newly-activated slayers. Viewers also see a montage of several girls who are not present at the battle being activated, though they are not given the choice. Buffy, and perhaps the slayer army she leads into the Hellmouth, make the decision for them. While one can argue that the girls in the montage not being consulted about becoming slayers are simply introduced into a sisterhood they know nothing about and become part of a large group of superpowered girls and young women, the question of whether or not it is just for the decision to be made without their consent remains. Buffy, Kendra and Faith are able to make their choices with full knowledge of the consequences of whether or not they choose to embrace their destinies, while the potentials not present at Buffy's speech are robbed of that decision. Is empowerment truly empowerment if the choice to be empowered is made by someone else?

The research questions that guided this project concentrated on the series redefining gender roles, the main protagonist reaching the pinnacle of her potential through her

relationships with others and herself, and the role dialogue plays in the feminist empowerment inherent in the slayer mythology. The current project examined *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as a television program reflective of the ideals of the surrounding social context. *Buffy* hit the airwaves in the late 1990s, drawing in audiences with a combination of humor and heart, inviting viewers to join Buffy Summers and her companions as they attempted to save the world from supernatural evil while attempting to navigate themselves through adolescence and young adulthood. The characters were defined by their choices, their interactions with other characters, and their spoken words. The dialogue found in *Buffy* created a mythology that transcended the eradication of immortal leeches and viewers who became involved with the characters, developing emotional bonds along the way, were invited into the minds and lives of fictional characters living lives almost parallel to their own.

Buffy faced many crises and had to make many difficult decisions since she became the slayer and all of these decisions helped mold her into who she is when she stands on the precipice over Sunnydale at the conclusion of the finale. It is then that she realizes that she is no longer the only pawn of fate. She sacrificed romantic relationships, battled her own friends both physically and mentally, and died twice in the series performing the duties of the slayer before arriving at the end of her televised story. She lost her mother, gained a sister, and created a family of friends that would die for her as quickly as she would die for them. Throughout the series, her dialogue conveys her feelings about being a slayer, both positive and negative in different situations, but the result is the same—Buffy Summers is the slayer and she is also female and must contend with where the two come together and where the two come apart. Buffy initially resents her destiny and then realizes how vital she is in maintaining the balance of

good and evil despite the consequences she faces for her role. She declared her freedom from the patriarchal Watchers' Council that aimed to control her through speech, and also declared herself to be raw cookie dough that was not yet finished baking. She balanced her roles as young woman and slayer as well as she could and grew substantially from her first vampire slaying to her life-or-death struggle with The First Evil. Her experiences as a young woman, and some as the Slayer, mirror the experiences that young women face under similar circumstances. Not many young women are responsible for thwarting the apocalypse on a regular basis, but even minor crises can be instrumental in what kind of person one becomes. Buffy sharing her power, the empowerment of feminism bestowed upon her by men too cowardly to combat evil themselves, is symbolic of the spread of feminist ideals and the associated power that comes with it. Buffy is a woman, Buffy is the Slayer, but Buffy is more than that—Buffy is a symbol of how women can take the power for themselves, elect to be a hero, and disavow the patriarchal society that keeps them from achieving their potential.

Below is a quotation from Joss Whedon, creator of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, from a speech he recited when accepting an award from Equality Now, an international organization that aims to improve the lives of women across the globe. Whedon's answer to the question of why he creates strong female characters speaks volumes about the purpose of the series and what Buffy Summers truly represents:

...equality is not a concept. It's not something we should be striving for. It's a necessity. Equality is like gravity. We need it to stand on this earth as men and women. And the misogyny that is in every culture is not a true part of the human condition. It is life out of balance, and that imbalance is sucking something out of the soul of every man and woman who is confronted with it. We need equality. Kinda now.

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