

Negotiations after Hegemony: Buffy and Gender¹

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[1] In the final season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), Buffy Summers, her friends, and the potential Slayers—young women who might become the next Chosen One upon Buffy’s death—are huddled in the Summers house, attempting to fight the First Evil, a nameless, primordial “Big Bad,” and its servant Caleb. Caleb has been taken as fundamentally representative of hegemonic masculinity: the Slayer and her team are fighting a representative of traditional gender oppression. However, in their own little world, traditional hegemonic gender norms have almost completely broken down. In fact, since the rest of Sunnydale has more or less fled, this last isolated stronghold is a situation ripe—and a model environment—for the construction of nontraditional, nonhegemonic gender presentations. Utilizing Connell’s conceptualization of masculinities and Schippers’ extension of this work to femininities, I will interpret the Summers gang’s situation as a post-hegemonic gender space. The arguments of these two sociologists provide a handy theoretical apparatus for conceptualizing the gender space of the Summers house on the eve of the final battle with the First Evil. Drawing from Schippers’ notion of alternative masculinities and femininities, I will examine how the internal group conflicts of Buffy’s team suggest potential problems for developing alternative gender presentations that seek to undermine hegemonic gender structures. Gender and power must be negotiated, even in the absence of tradition, and these negotiations may prove problematic. I attempt to read the show as a warning about constructing alternative masculinities and femininities. Specifically, Buffy’s leadership is questioned because of her authoritarianism—a stereotypically masculine trait. This power-

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stratifying characteristic is what drives her from the group; however, Buffy's iron rule is never questioned after her readmission as general-in-command. The need for caution arises, because the group's anxieties regarding Buffy's dictatorial authority are never resolved and her plan for battling the First Evil is successful only as a matter of luck. In light of this, if strong leadership is in fact necessary—or is being endorsed by the series—such leadership must be tempered by being responsive to criticism and answerable to evidence, and Buffy is neither of these on the eve of the final battle. This analysis echoes concerns others have had about the feminist message of the seventh season.

[2] R. W. Connell has developed a framework for thinking about gender and power relations within masculinity. According to Connell,

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (77)

Hegemonic masculinity is a strategy that maintains social authority through a set of changing practices and relations that are aimed at keeping men in the position of power. Hegemonic masculinity takes the form of the stereotype of the man's man; it also sets a normative ideal. Other masculinities stand in power relations to hegemonic masculinity. Subordinate masculinities are best exemplified by gay men, though many heterosexual men will also be pushed into this group. Subordinate masculinities embody certain aspects of femininity and practices typically associated with women—be it a flair for fashion, cowardice, or the willingness to be penetrated during the sex act. Complicit masculinities, like subordinate masculinities, also engage in practices not associated with hegemonic masculinity. They do, however, enjoy the rewards that patriarchal power bestows upon them, even though they fail to live up to the normative ideal of hegemonic masculinity. Mimi Schippers has built upon Connell's framework and extended it to femininities. Specifically, she wants to develop a relational account, because “gender hegemony is produced through the relationship between femininity and masculinity” (94). She revises Connell's conception of hegemonic masculinity into “the qualities defined as manly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical

and complementary relationship to femininity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women,” whereas “hegemonic femininity consists of the characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Schippers 94). Thus, hierarchies within the gender order must be based on the idealized relationship between men and women within the culture in question (94). With this relational understanding of gender hierarchy in place, Schippers identifies femininities and masculinities that undermine or corrupt the ideal of male/female relationships as those lower in social status. She argues for the existence of pariah femininities that embody traditionally masculine characteristics and thus “corrupt” the ideal (95). Pariah femininities contain the same content, at least in part, as hegemonic masculinity, but they cannot be seen as masculine because that would violate the domain traditionally viewed as masculine (95-6). They are thus pariah femininities and not female masculinities.

[3] Schippers goes on to consider the implications of her view on Connell’s conception of subordinate masculinities, and she concludes that Connell’s view is mistaken on this count. There are no subordinate masculinities, because the traits they embody are feminine and not masculine (Schippers 96). Thus, we should consider them to be male femininities, as they are constituted by traits that threaten to undermine the traditional male/female relationship. Schippers believes that her view is superior because it opens up room to identify those gender characteristics that do not support the hegemonic view of the male/female relationship and also generates space for creating “alternative femininities” that do not revolve around a hierarchical gender arrangement (97-8).

[4] I want to now develop an interpretation that situates the final season of *Buffy* within the theoretical framework from Connell and Schippers. The central contention of this interpretation is that the Summers household, where the forces of good have huddled in preparation for their final stand against the First Evil, is a world of its own removed from the traditional hegemonic gender structure. In fact, this outpost of non-traditional gender relations is fighting an enemy that

enforces traditional understandings of the relationship between men and women (Pender 167-8). The First Evil has enlisted a preacher-servant Caleb, whom Patricia Pender sees as “a monstrous but familiar representation of patriarchal oppression, propounding a dangerous form of sexism under the cover of pastoral care” (168). Caleb’s insults are constantly sexist: he views women as dirty and shameful; he utilizes diminutive insults like “little lady.” Pender even goes so far as to say that “within the context of the narrative, Caleb’s sexist convictions . . . and, more importantly, their unconscious internalisation by the Slayer and her circle pose the principle threat to their sustained, organized, collective resistance” (168). Kevin Durand puts it perfectly: “Even the most novice literary critic cannot miss the phallic and deeply Freudian use of . . . Caleb’s knife into the potential’s belly. In short, Caleb is obvious” (para. 7).

[5] The enemy is traditional, hegemonic gender norms. The Scoobies, however, are very far removed from such relations within their own group. The female characters that play the largest role in the final season are all two-sided figures. Each woman manifests a duality, with one side of her character typically being antithetical to the other.² Consider Willow. By one account, she is a meek, quiet bookworm; yet she is also a power-hungry, lesbian super-witch. Anya is extremely neurotic and insecure and constantly overanalyzes her feelings for Xander. She is also a demon-turned human who has lived for untold ages and previously possessed immense power. Faith is a Slayer—by definition, the protector of good—but she is also a hard-drinking criminal who has killed innocents. Finally, take Buffy herself. She is a cheerleader, a cute blonde that likes to shop. She is also an indomitable, tough fighter who has taken on enemies ranging from super-vamps and demons to an underground military cell.

[6] Buffy’s duality is, however, unlike the others. If we take each side of these characters’ personalities independently, an interesting trend emerges. Each character manifests a pariah femininity—to be sure. However, when each side of the characters is taken uniquely, we see that, with the exception of Buffy, each character has at least one pariah side considered on its own. Willow is a lesbian; her sexuality threatens the tradition. Anya’s knowledge makes her powerful. Faith is the antithesis

of what we might call the “good woman.” However, the pariah side of all these characters has a failing that goes further than just acting like a man: Willow, Anya, and Faith do not just break social norms; they violate the moral and natural order of things. Willow uses magic, Anya is a former demon, and Faith is a murderer. Thus, if their pariah traits were enacted by men, those men would not participate in hegemonic masculinity. Only with Buffy does the pattern change. Buffy’s hardcore tough side is a performance of hegemonic masculinity—she uses physical violence, she takes orders only from herself, she is the leader. Were a man to enact these traits, he would live up to the hegemonic norm—like Rambo or Dirty Harry. However, Buffy’s softer side is a performance of hegemonic femininity. She looks for love in all the wrong places; she is concerned with her appearance; she loves shopping. This difference is key if we are to understand the lessons to be learned from the final season of the show.

[7] The masculine influences in the Summers household are not hegemonic. First and foremost, the Watchers’ Council, which had attempted to impose their traditional power structure on Buffy and Giles’s relationship, has been destroyed. The agents of the First Evil have bombed the Council’s headquarters and killed most of the Watchers (“Never Leave Me” 7.9). Thus, one of the major hegemonic structures working on the side of the Slayer has been toppled. Furthermore, Buffy has turned her back on the ancient Shadow Men and the power they offer (“Get It Done” 7.15). The men cloistered in her house also do not participate in hegemonic masculinity. Xander is weak and has been traditionally willing to stand by and let Buffy tell him what to do. Giles has willingly renounced his traditional role as Watcher and adopted a subordinate position whereby he follows Buffy’s instincts and plans for action. Spike is a vampire with a soul—a fighter who lost his ability to fight humans during the years when a chip was surgically implanted in his brain. He is also the last member of the gang still willing to take orders from Buffy.

[8] If we add the fact that all of the potential Slayers in the house are female warriors with great potential power, then it becomes clear that we should understand this last stronghold of good as a stronghold of non-traditional gender relations. Given that the Summers camp is

removed from hegemonic gender relations, I believe that we can read the ending of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as a type of cautionary tale about how we approach and attempt to refine gender relations in an attempt to limit or remove their hierarchical aspects.

[9] The problem in the Summers house is Buffy herself. Eventually, Buffy's leadership is questioned. She is unwilling to relinquish power and adopt a more democratic process. She explains it best herself:

Look, I wish this could be a democracy. I really do. Democracies don't win battles. It's a hard truth, but there has to be a single voice. You need someone to issue orders and be reckless sometimes and not take your feelings into account. You need someone to lead you. ("Empty Places" 7.19)

Because of her unwavering determination on this matter, the entire group kicks her out of her own home. Buffy is forcibly exiled because of her traits that are associated with hegemonic masculinity. Buffy's particular brand of pariah femininity makes her a pariah in her own group: she will not surrender power—a typically masculine trait.³ As Pender describes it:

In one of the more dramatic and disturbing character developments in the series as a whole, season seven presents Buffy's leadership becoming arrogant and autocratic, and her attitude isolationist and increasingly alienated. Following in the individualist footsteps of prominent "power feminists," Buffy forgoes her collaborative community and instead adopts what fans . . . perceived as a sort of "You're-Either-With-Me-Or-Against-Me" moral absolutism . . . an incipient despotism exemplified by what Anya calls Buffy's "Everyone-Sucks-But-Me" speech. (169)

Unlike Pender, I do not think that Buffy's absolutist rule is all that new to the series—the other characters have just had fewer problems with it previously. In any case, now Buffy's domination has made her an outcast. Buffy is eventually brought back into the fold; however, her readmission into the group is not based on a compromise on her part. While out on a lone mission, she saves Faith and the Potentials and is permitted to return after this rescue ("End of Days" 7.21). Buffy is

readmitted regardless of her leadership style. It is clear that without following Buffy's plan, good cannot triumph. Sure enough, after her plan is executed, the Scooby Gang defeats the First Evil.

[10] As I argued above, all the in-group hegemonic gendered relations have broken down—with the exception of Buffy's. Furthermore, the small band of potential slayers cannot succeed without obeying Buffy's traditional, authoritarian leadership. Buffy, whose pariah femininity most closely mirrors hegemonic masculinity, is necessary to achieve victory—thus, certain hegemonic traits cannot be omitted from the group if they are to succeed. Buffy is not brought back in by compromise, but by an emergency and her ability to *save* her peers. The traditionally masculinist side of Buffy is what saves the day. Furthermore, when the gang is deciding what they will do after the world is safe, Buffy asserts her hegemonic femininity by suggesting that they go shopping: her hegemonic femininity dictates the terms of the happy ending (“Chosen” 7.22).

[11] Buffy's traditionally masculine traits place her in a traditional power role. These controlling characteristics stay controlling, even in a female's hands. Durand is right to point out that she is the end of the long line of patriarchal force beginning with the Shadow Men and passing through the Watchers' Council into the Slayer, and the beginning of a new line, in which women are not systematically dominated (para. 17-18). This new line is not ordered in traditional, hierarchic ways; however, the leadership style Buffy has inherited *is*. Her pariah femininity is still pariah even when it is removed from traditional practice and placed in the non-traditional gender space of the gang's stronghold. In this post-hegemonic-gender microcosm, Buffy's pariah characteristics are themselves shunned as hegemonic and unnecessarily hierarchal—what made her into a hero now makes her a villain.⁴ James South has argued that Buffy herself is the “big bad” of the seventh season, and in certain respects I agree—though for completely different reasons. Drawing on Elizabeth Rambo's analysis of evil in Season Seven as a lack or deficiency, South maintains that Buffy only succeeds in overcoming the First Evil when she overcomes thinking of herself in terms of what she lacks—specifically, the power available to the First and its minions (para 19-20). Buffy is the Big Bad of Season Seven;

however, it is not because she thinks of herself as lacking power. Instead, it is because she *actually* lacks the ability to compromise with her team.

[12] A central conflict of this season is the group coming to terms with Buffy's leadership—which they never actually manage to do. The gang seems to acquiesce to Buffy's authoritarian leadership only when they are saved *precisely because* she has acted as a lone wolf. No compromise is ever actually reached; Buffy is never democratically elected general. Out of necessity, the gang tacitly consents to her rule. Buffy acts as dictator, albeit a benevolent one, but a dictator nonetheless. Durand is right to point out that the new order initiated by Buffy is one that shares power—literally and metaphorically rendered by unlocking the potential in all the Potentials and sharing the power of the Slayer. However, as I have argued, this sharing of power is done at Buffy's command: she is the one piloting this ship, assigning each talent to the role it must fulfill in order to achieve victory. Though I agree that Buffy's plan does make good use of the special abilities of each of her troops, the troops are still *hers*—she is commanding what part they will play. Even the *deus ex machina* device of the amulet—which is really what saves the day—is given to Spike *by* Buffy.⁵ It is her decision that dictates the terms of sharing power and her decisions that win the day.

[13] There is another interesting sense in which Buffy herself is the Big Bad of Season Seven. As South points out, Caleb seeks the “one and only, the original, accept-no-substitute Slayer”: Buffy (para. 21). It becomes very clear that Caleb could not care less about finding and killing Faith—the other, unoriginal, substitute Slayer that was called when Kendra (another unoriginal Slayer) was killed. The timing of the emergence of the First and its plan to attack is attributed by Beljoxa's Eye to “something the Slayer did” (“Showtime” 7.11).⁶ Buffy will ultimately win by creating multiple Slayers—something she has unwittingly done before. Arguably, the reason behind the First's timing is Buffy's unwitting discovery of the possibility of creating multiple slayers. Though neither Buffy nor the First ever explicitly acknowledges this possibility, it would explain Caleb's determination to recover the scythe as well as helping to disarm the criticism that its introduction is seemingly *ad hoc*. Thus, Buffy is the reason for the First's attack—she has opened the door for the creation of multiple simultaneous Slayers.

(Granted, it is technically Xander who creates this possibility by performing CPR on Buffy ["Prophecy Girl" 1.12], but something as powerful as the First Evil cannot be bothered by such details.) The possibility of disseminating power to other potential Slayers—the very plan that Buffy will rely on—is what awakens the First. Buffy is the Big Bad in intersecting ways. The First typically manifests itself as Buffy, even when appearing to Caleb. The image of Buffy is both the in-group and the out-group enemy of the Scooby Gang.

[14] I take my arguments here to bolster Arwen Spicer's worries about the conflicting messages of Season Seven. Like Spicer, I recognize that the Scoobies' ousting of Buffy and the awakening of all the Potentials through the power of the scythe clearly communicate a message about success coming through the non-hierarchical sharing of power and the mutual benefit of putting everyone's talents to use. Spicer argues that Buffy's recklessly ill-conceived strategy for the final battle with the First and the other characters' readiness to go along with it undermine the overtly feminist and collective-strength themes of the season: "In order to achieve the metaphor of 'sharing power,' the participatory power of every voice but Buffy's is gutted. The problem is that being denied the free expression of one's individual identity is not empowering. Being silenced is not empowering" (para. 28). Buffy's totalitarian impulses in this final season are extremely problematic—most notably because they are never exorcised from her character. If the bullet point to take away from Season Seven is about success through the sharing of power, then Buffy's continued status as the lone pilot of the Scooby Ship makes little sense. As Spicer aptly puts it: "A narrative that endorses a feminist dissemination of power via a plot that undermines this message begins to move in the direction of a dogmatic feminism that requires the ideological support of female power regardless of how that power is used" (para. 30).

[15] Apart from adding an oddly anti-feminist bent to the final episodes of an otherwise pro-feminist series, I propose that we read the last season of Buffy as a cautionary tale. Schippers recommends that we develop alternative masculinities and femininities that do not participate in hierarchical gender relations. Developing these new forms of gender will allow us to challenge the power of hegemony. The question I think

we should take the final season of *Buffy* as asking is: How do we challenge hegemonic gender when pariah gender manifestations sometimes embody power-stratifying traits? The lesson seems clear. The fact that a gender performance is not a performance of hegemonic masculinity or femininity does not mean that it does not reproduce undesirable hierarchal relations. The adoption of the opposite gender's traditional traits will not establish a space free of hierarchal relations. It is precisely the leadership style that Buffy has inherited from the Shadow Men and the Watchers—Season Seven's patriarchal forces of good—that opposes the sharing of power and command. We must take Schippers' advice quite carefully and extensively examine the terrain of gender relations to determine those characteristics that do not result in power stratification. Only once we've determined what those interactions are will we be in a place to develop alternative masculinities and femininities. *Buffy* teaches us that so doing may require experiments and trial and error. Stern, authoritarian leadership seems a more obvious example than others, but we must tread cautiously into this domain.

[16] Two objections to this interpretation of Season Seven seem particularly salient. First, we might alternatively consider that the show is condoning Buffy's authoritarian style of leadership. Specifically, Buffy is a general commanding an army, and in situations like these such leadership may very well be necessary for victory. It may be that her hegemonic traits are not worthy of condemnation: she is not trying to dictate every facet of her troops' lives, and she is making use of the unique resources each soldier brings to the table. Buffy's concern is not with gender presentation or with how others will judge her in light of it; Buffy is desperately trying to win a war—one that until the eve of the final battle she did not seem to believe they could win (“Chosen”). She is doing whatever it takes, but she is not overextending her reach as general in a way that meddles with the affairs of others. Instead of positioning Buffy in a negative light, the seventh season endorses her willingness to do whatever it takes to accomplish a herculean task, even though achieving this goal places her in a traditionally hegemonic, masculine role.⁷ Second, and relatedly, my analysis seems to forget a crucial fact: Buffy and the Scoobies actually *succeed* and defeat the First Evil in the end. How is it that we should read this triumph as a tale of caution? If

the gang does succeed while under Buffy's authoritarian leadership—and they do—why not take that as an endorsement of Buffy's command? Furthermore, as Spicer has pointed out, a central thread in Buffy's plan is power-sharing: the potential in all the Potentials must be unlocked, and countless young women will come to share in Buffy's power as part of her autocratically imposed plan. If the plan is a success and the plan involves the sharing of power, why should we view Buffy's demeanor as suspect?⁸

[17] Two considerations—already in part discussed above—are relevant for disarming these objections. The first focuses on how it is that Buffy comes to share power, and the second reiterates that Buffy's success is largely a matter of blind luck. As noted above, it is never democratically decided or even discussed further whether or not Buffy will lead after her readmission into the group. The in-group conflict that plagues the bulk of the season is never resolved, but simply brushed aside: Buffy may be leading, but none of the underlying issues of her leadership or her troops' hesitations regarding it are resolved. It may simply be the case that the fear of death in her absence has silenced any reservations about her leadership style. If the members of Buffy's team have somehow realized the necessity of authoritarian leadership, they never mention it. Buffy may be willing to do whatever it takes to win, and this attitude may on occasion be necessary; however, the other characters give us no indication that they believe this to be the case, and they have spent the bulk of the seventh season in conflict with the very person espousing this view.

[18] One of the ways in which Buffy has typically shared power and demonstrated how highly she values each of her cohorts is by making use of their individual talents and skills. While her final plan does continue in this tradition, there is at least one character whose abilities she completely disregards: Giles. After Giles and Principal Wood plot to kill Spike, Buffy tells him she no longer needs him as a teacher ("Lies My Parents Told Me" 7.17). For the remainder of the season, Giles is presented as largely being in the dark and having little helpful information besides a few relatively unimportant insights about the scythe. Though it is only one example, it is a particularly poignant one; Giles's role as mentor and lead bookworm is defunct. When Buffy

presents her final plan to him, with no real evidence that it will be efficacious, he jokingly chastises it for being absurd and then immediately acquiesces into unequivocal endorsement (“Chosen”).

[19] Furthermore, the metanarrative of sharing power is undermined by what is arguably a deep inconsistency in Buffy’s leadership: by her own admission, she does not take the feelings of her troops into account, but the plan she imposes on them is based almost entirely on her own intuition without—as more than one character points out—any substantive evidence to back it up. The feelings of others are irrelevant, but Buffy’s a-rational divinations are the basis of her strategy. As Spicer astutely demonstrates, the show has often endorsed intuitive insight as being key to the successful plan; however, Spicer is also careful to note that this tendency is always tempered with logic and rationality—with the exception of the climax of Season Seven (para. 14-16). The number of Uber-vamps in the cavern is overwhelming⁹: there is every reason to believe that had hand-to-hand combat continued—even after the potentiality of the Potentials awakened into actuality—eventually each member of Buffy’s army and Buffy herself would have been destroyed (Spicer para. 16). Victory only comes when the amulet kicks in and Spike destroys the Hellmouth, despite his protestations that he is merely “clean[ing] up” (“Chosen,” Spicer para. 9). While Buffy’s plan works, it is based on hunch and intuition, not evidence and caution. Coupled with Buffy’s authoritarianism, the central question we should ask ourselves after the climactic final battle may very well be why the Scoobies went along with the plan at all. Hence, I believe that the second objection—the one focusing on Buffy’s victory—is disarmed. The Slayer gang wins, but this victory is not really due to Buffy: yes, she came up with the plan, but she had absolutely no evidence that this plan would work. It is worth celebrating that they won; but we can still chastise their hastiness in endorsing a half-baked scheme. Buffy is successful, but it is a matter of luck. Buffy is readmitted to the group, but no anxieties or issues concerning her leadership are effectively addressed and assuaged. If we are meant to endorse her leadership style, then it will require both patience and a leap of faith to get onboard.

[20] The discussion of luck helps motivate an answer to the obvious further questions: if the final season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is a cautionary tale, what is the warning, and what prescriptive advice does it offer us? The show seems to suggest that we must accept the presence of some undesirable, gendered traits; victory is impossible without authoritarian leadership. The message, however, might be subtler: generals may be necessary, granted, but they need not be authoritarian. Ultimately, Buffy's plan works, but only in virtue of two things: first, the blind luck that her intuitions are correct; and second, the potential in each of her troops that Buffy has accurately intuited. Reasons for each step of the plan were no doubt available and could have been readily discovered. Angel had already given some indication of who should wear the medallion and the intensity of its power ("Chosen"). Willow could have unlocked the Potentials' power *before* the final assault began—thus ensuring that the scythe would perform as Buffy expected. This action would have even freed up Willow to use her magic as a weapon against the Uber-vamps. What the show warns us of is the perilousness of blindly following leadership. The Scoobies survive by serendipitous happenstance.

[21] The juxtaposition with Faith's tenure as general is particularly telling here. The anti-Buffy coup is effectively initiated by Faith asking Buffy to produce more evidence for her view and not simply "play the odds"—Giles pointedly describes Buffy's plan in this earlier episode as chasing "windmills" ("Empty Places"). After being democratically elected to lead, Faith assumes a Buffy-style authoritarian role, and under her direction, the gang is unlucky and Potentials die ("Touched" 7.20 and "End of Days"). That her plan did not work is a matter of luck—the First and Caleb tricked them. The point to highlight is that Faith has evidence to support her plan: the interrogation of the Bringer leads them to the arsenal they attack ("Touched"). That Buffy's plan for the final battle worked was also a matter of luck. That one general is luckier than another is no great reason to take up her banner. The difference is that Faith's plan was backed by evidence that was made available to the rest of the group. The group does not substantially question Faith's decision—despite the fact that Buffy had a largely similar plan about tracking down a source of power—because Faith has good, public

reasons for making that decision. Leadership can be strong and direct, but it must be justified. The general must be open to criticism and she must present reasons for decisions and defend those reasons in light of contradictory evidence—or the absence of evidence.

[22] The voices of dissent so prominent amongst the Scoobies—and that Spicer finds absent from consideration of Buffy's master plan—must be allowed to speak. But simply having an outlet is not enough. If leadership is not to devolve into authoritarian, hierarchical, traditionally masculine command, it must be responsive; the leader must defend her decisions in light of dissenting concern. The Scoobies must be heard, and the general must be publicly justified. Buffy's power-stratifying traits need not become authoritarian so long as she is accountable and responsive to the myriad voices of reason and wisdom that surround her.

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Notes

¹ A previous version of this paper was presented at the Popular Culture Association in the South and the American Culture Association in the South Conference as part of a panel on Sexuality and Gender in the Whedonverse. I wish to thank James Rocha for putting the panel together and to thank both the participants and audience members for insightful discussion and suggestions. Thanks also to two anonymous reviewers for *Slayage* who provided helpful suggestions and challenging criticisms.

² I confess that my descriptions of the characters that follow (perhaps especially with Willow) are cartoons and grossly simplify them. That said, examining the various

complications and nuances of their characters would, I think, only enhance the case for the point I am making here.

³ Compare and contrast my reading of Buffy's exile and subsequent return with Erma Petrova's. Petrova sees Buffy's anti-democracy speech and the Scoobies' subsequent exile as portraying her as a failed leader; her return to the fold is interpreted as a shift in her rhetoric and willingness to listen to others (para. 12). I agree that Buffy's exile is the result of her unwillingness to listen to others and share power; I do not, however, think that this changes after her readmission to the group.

⁴ Compare my discussion of Buffy here with Dustin Dunaway's discussion of Faith in season three. Dunaway sees Faith as embodying hypermasculinity in a way that causes the Scoobies to pull away from her (para. 18). In a way Season Seven thus repeats a major theme of season three; however, instead of turning to darkness (as Faith does with the Mayor), Buffy is accepted again out of necessity. Nonetheless, Buffy's identification with the Big Bad—both in appearance and narrative structure—might make the parallel with Faith even more interesting (see discussion below).

⁵ There is a great parallel between Spike's fate and the previous fate of all Slayers—in order to save the day, the hero(ine) must die—just as Buffy did twice before.

⁶ Arwen Spicer picks up on this, but reads this plotline as being dropped since Giles and Anya do not report it to Buffy or the rest of the gang (para. 13). I would argue, conversely, that this pronouncement by Beljoxa's Eye could constitute evidence for the potential efficacy of Buffy's plan for the final battle with the First. This observation is important given my argument below.

⁷ I am indebted to an anonymous *Slayage* referee for astutely pointing out this possible reading of the seventh season.

⁸ I am thankful to a second anonymous *Slayage* referee for pressing this objection to my argument.

⁹ The number is overwhelming especially when we consider Buffy's vision of them coupled with the visuals from the final battle ("Get It Done").