

"But... you're just a girl." The Feminine Mystique of Season Five

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"Gradually, without seeing it clearly for quite a while, I came to realize that something is very wrong the way American women are trying to live their lives today." - Betty Friedan (9)

"I don't know how to live in this world if these are the choices. If everything just gets stripped away. I don't see the point." - Buffy, *The Gift* (5022)

[1] In Season Five, Buffy begins the journey towards understanding her heritage as a Slayer. As she proceeds, she finds that she has a new adversary in Sunnydale, the hell god they call Glory who wants to go back to her home dimension. At the same time, Willow is developing her relationship with Tara and her powers in Wicca. All three characters are pursuing separate destinies, yet share a common characteristic among them. They are all strong and powerful women, independent, and heroines in their own right (Glory, being a god, has an idyllic place to her minions). How can we explain what happens in the season finale *The Gift* (5022)? Glory, an immortal god, is defeated, Buffy sacrifices herself for Dawn's life, and Willow becomes the new figurehead in the Scooby Gang. While there are many explanations for this turn of events, one such involves analyzing the roles that each of these characters act in terms of femininity. Observing how each one defines femininity leads to insight about the character's thoughts, feelings, and eventual ending at the conclusion of the season.

[2] It is not surprising that such gender roles can be seen influencing the characters. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* reversal of gender roles in the traditional horror genre generates a strong awareness of gender in Buffy's, and the rest of the character's, lives. The

development of Buffy's character is, in part, a struggle between two traditional gender roles: the masculine role of a violent, demon Slayer and the feminine role as a young, caring woman. It is not how Buffy negates one of these sides that make gender important; it is how she is able to incorporate these sides to form a 'hybrid' identity (Jowett 21). These dichotomies also shape the other characters in *Buffy*. Seeing gender as a dichotomy is enough to begin to understand how gender influences character development within the series.

[3] Feminist inquiry has a perspective to address the question of gender in personality development. While Feminism has many goals and objectives, one of the more prominent goals is determining what gender roles are and what they entail. One of the central concerns is if 'Womanhood' and 'Femininity' are relevant to the world, and if so, redefining them to escape patriarchal definitions. One way that feminists have redefined femininity is by altering the language used to describe the feminine that shows independence from patriarchal language. One of the most common linguistic terms is the use of 'womyn' instead of 'woman.' 'Woman' is seen as subordinating womyn because it contains the word 'man' within it, implying that man is the default and 'woman' is only an alteration from the norm. 'Womyn,' on the other hand, represents a separation from a male defined woman (Kasidis). In this discussion, 'woman' and 'womyn' will both be used to represent these two states of being to describe the nature of the character, either patriarchal or independently defined, respectively.

[4] Radical Feminism has something unique to offer in an analysis of this season. Radical Feminism bases itself on some foundational principles about how gender operates in society. Some of these include that "women's oppression causes the most suffering to its victims" as well as "women's oppression is the most widespread" (Tong 46-47), meaning that the relationship between men and women is the source and model of oppression in society. Understanding how gender operates, then, leads to an understanding of how

oppression is created, maintained, and enforced. Radical Feminists also claim that patriarchal structures are deeply rooted throughout society, and in order to dispose of them and the oppression they bring, one must analyze the sex/gender system in terms of the person's identity. The patriarchal system of defining one's personal gender is historically present and, in order to escape totally from the sex/gender system that oppresses women, womyn must redefine themselves outside of the these contexts. Understanding how gender defines people's most basic personality traits and actions leads to an understanding of how to escape the male defined identities that society creates.

[5] As a feminist icon, *Buffy* has been one of the leading television series in redefining womynhood by reversing the helpless blonde horror archetype into a womyn that can fight and still have her femininity. This self-identification process is challenging, however, in that Buffy still lives in a patriarchal world in Season Five. This causes tension between the womyn and the rest of society, yet ultimately punishes the womyn who does not conform. While Buffy tries to balance life and prophecy, we see the conflict between the two become manifest as Buffy must decide between duty and Angel, or duty and Dawn.

[6] Betty Friedan saw a similar phenomena occurring throughout society. Women's role in society, how they identified themselves as housewives and mothers, became an oppressive force that caused psychological torment for many women. This problem that 'has no name' (what Betty Friedan calls these problems to emphasize the lack of public awareness of gender on happiness and self-fulfillment) was reflected in daily life as women grew more unhappy with the feminine/masculine compromises they had to navigate in society. It is with these ideas in mind that one can frame Glory's character as a feminine god, Buffy's death as an act of gendered oppression, and Willow's rise to power as femininity redefined on a personal basis. All three characters are influenced by gender identity, and each one's conclusion is a reflection of how healthy these identities are for the characters.

Glory: Patriarchal Woman

"Being human? It's like a costume for girls like you and me. Being something else, *that's* what we are." - Glory, *Weight of the World* (5021)

[7] The Big Bad of Season Five is a huge, powerful figure that predates language, uncontrolled by linguistic definitions of a name. She is referred to as Glory, yet much of her history remains a mystery throughout the season. In a sense, she is 'the problem that has no name' representing lack of knowledge but also how rooted her powers are in history. Glory's gender is center stage, as she identifies as a woman and a girl and seems to embrace traditional looks of femininity. But, her presence is not a matriarchal villain by sheer fact of being female as some have argued, but a caricature of patriarchy-defined femininity. She is the 'super-woman' in today's society, or the elite career woman in the business world. She has been able to dominate both her feminine side and her body in favor of becoming more rational and powerful, the more stereotypically male characteristics, to succeed in a patriarchal world. She does this in order to succeed in her hell dimension and conquer others, much like the super-woman conquers in the business world by embracing the hierarchical system and gaining power.

[8] Glory is one of Buffy's strongest foes throughout the series and has also one of the most detailed mythologies. She is a god from a hell dimension where she ruled with two other gods in a triumvirate. She grew more powerful as a god, seeing herself as the top of a hierarchy, and sought to conquer the other two gods. "But the beast's power grew beyond even what they could conceive. As did her lust for pain and misery. They looked upon her, what she had become ... and trembled" (*Spiral* (5020)). What is curious about Glory's description and history is that she is referred to as only a 'god' and not a 'goddess,' although she is flamboyantly feminine in her appearance. Every time she appears she is wearing a dress and heels, her hair is styled, and she has a great concern over those parts of her personality. Her first appearance in the series, she chooses not to follow Buffy because she has broken a heel (*No Place Like Home* (5005)). Part of why she is termed a god and not a goddess might be the lack of non-gendered language within English.

Godhood does not necessarily entail a gender, but within Western culture it gains a masculine connotation. But her appearance and self-identification, always asking for 'girl-time' with Dawn or Tara, support the claim that she is a woman.

[9] So, why is she not a 'goddess'? Jowett suggests that it is because the use of 'goddess' would suggest "good Wicca power" (90). In the series, Wicca power has had an ambiguous status but in Season Five is seen more as positive force. Both Tara and Willow are active participants in Wicca and their roles as 'good' characters, in how they act towards magic in the season as well as how Willow becomes Glory's weakness. Associating Glory with this positive force would disturb her place as the Big Bad within the narrative. More importantly, calling Glory a 'god' ties her to patriarchal forms of religion and makes an association with Glory's power with patriarchal ideals. Because she is "outrageously female" she can be seen as a character which "undermines patriarchy on every level" (Daugherty 161), but Glory's connection to 'god' instead of 'goddess' suggests a different interpretation. Instead, she represents the *male-defined* feminine power, a female figure framed as within the patriarchal structure as a god.

[10] Glory's appearance in Sunnydale also contains the theme of gender identity. As a punishment for her uprising, Glory is banished to Earth and forced to share the same body as a human male: Ben. Glory, as a self-identified female, is punished by being turned into a male and being trapped in his body. Ben, though, is not traditionally male. He is a male nurse, a healer, and a nurturer. These characteristics show Ben as more traditionally female than male, a difference that is opposite of Glory's identification as a female but with characteristics that represent traditional masculinity (Jowett 91).

[11] Ben and Glory's relationship is also a battle between the human body and mind. Glory has trouble being trapped in the human experience, seen in how she needs to drain others of the mental adhesive in order to remain coherent. She exclaims to the monk she has tied

up, "I get so anxious- like there's something deep inside of me and it's swelling up and it's making me crazy!" *No Place Like Home* (5005). Madness is commonly associated with a feminine quality as an antithesis to masculine rationality. Glory's claim that the madness swells from inside is reminiscent of the ancient belief that 'hysteria' was a woman's disease because the uterus was misplaced the body, shown by the common Indo-European root for both 'uterus' and 'hysteria' *udero-* (Watkins 94). Though hysteria is no longer defined as such, it is still associated very much with the body, especially the female body. Madness and the body are connected and both seen as the feminine opposition to the mental and rational masculine side.

[12] Madness and the feminine body have a connection with other parts of Glory's mythology; namely her godhood and connection to religion. Mary Daly is an established Radical Feminist that has observed a link throughout religion, mythology, and the destruction of females. Daly's examination of Dionysus, in particular, eerily describes Glory. In describing Dionysus, a god she believes is patriarchal while framed as feminine, she says:

"This femininity of Dionysus should be seen also in connection with his glorification as boundary-violator, as the one who drives women mad. ... This Dionysian temptation to 'get lost' is not unfamiliar to women... This is the seductive invitation to 'lose the self in order to find it.' Whether the loss takes place through the glorified pain of feminine christian masochism or through the 'pleasurable' torture of S and M rituals, or the through determined devotion to Higher Cause, the result is the same: female annihilation." (Daly 66)

Much of this description sounds like Glory and her relationship to insanity and pain. Along with her drive towards madness, Glory seems to be following the Dionysian model of pushing the boundaries. She is looking to destroy all boundaries between dimensions and even admits to having "boundary issues" in *No Place Like Home* (5005). As she is destroying these boundaries, the boundaries between her and Ben begin to fade and she begins to feel his thoughts. Her goal is becoming manifest, which is the complete annihilation of Ben, the feminine characteristics, and human body he represents to her.

[13] Glory's path towards female annihilation is the denial of the body and all that comes with it. She constantly refers to people as "meatsacks" and the disgusting nature of human response.

"You have no control. They're not even animals, they're just these meatbaggy slaves to, to hormones and pheromones and their, and their feelings. Hate 'em!" Glory, *Weight of the World* (5021)

The body/mind split that Glory has trouble with can be translated as a male/female split and the more pervasive presence of female biology in life. When we first meet her, during her psychotic episode, she ends her monologue with "until someone's gonna sit down on their tuffet and make this birthing stop!" *No Place Like Home* (5005). Here she alludes to giving birth, a purely feminine biological aspect. The central theme of blood within the season also links her to femininity and the body. She rejects blood and the body which contains it, but she needs to bleed Dawn in order to let the dimensions "bleed into each other" *Spiral* (5020), and it is the blood of the Slayer which ends the battle. Spike's claim in *The Gift* (5022) seems to be true for Glory as well: "'Cause it's always got to be blood. ... Makes you warm. Makes you hard. Makes you other than dead." Those things which make Glory alive in the human sense, namely blood, she wishes to destroy in order to become a full god again.

[14] Glory, as a Big Bad, represents more than a hell god. She represents something about femininity and how women are seen in society. She is the new, powerful woman that climbs up the ladder of patriarchy to achieve greatness through fitting into the masculine requirements rather than making her own individual path. In the end, it is what she views as her weakness which traps and kills her - Ben, his emotions, and his human form. Ben, although he is a feminine side to the Glory/Ben being, is still a male container and frame for Glory. It is within the male defined role which Glory must operate, and where Glory finds her power through masculine acts, but also within this male defined role is where she

meets her end and cannot be freed.

Buffy: Gendered Prophecies

"The hardest thing in this world is to live in it." - Buffy, *The Gift* (5022)

[15] Season Five begins Buffy's serious study and ultimate challenge of the myth of the Slayer. Through this process we begin to learn about the various aspects of the myth and how the Slayer came to be. She is "a woman who is objectified as function - 'the Slayer'- and controlled to serve ends which are not her own. She is a constructed woman, a kind of 'cyborg'" (Playden 121). The Slayer is a fixed, essentialist identity that confounds Buffy's wish and choice to be an independent woman, a claim she makes of wanting to be a 'normal girl'. While she is making her own path in terms of the line of Slayers, by Season Five she has done nothing revolutionary in terms of the myth of the Slayer. Though, as a Slayer, she breaks many of the rules and challenges the Council, she still is faced with her identity as the 'Chosen One' and is still in mystery about the origin of the Slayer.

[16] In this season, we also see her claim the roles of dutiful daughter to Joyce as she begins to become ill, loving sister to Dawn who has just appeared, and mother to Dawn after Joyce's death. These roles, traditionally women's roles, come with a price to other aspects of her life. She must drop out of college, her relationship with her friends becomes distanced, and her relationship with Riley becomes detached until he leaves. But these roles within her family also fulfill her needs for love and caring, so she can not give up those roles either. Buffy's concern with her spirit guide in *Intervention* (5018) is about this lack of balance in her life, that her being the Slayer makes her unable to fulfill the roles in life she chooses.

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

Buffy: I didn't say that. Yeah.

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

Buffy: Does it?

[17] The season begins with the coming of vampire folklore's most popular character: Dracula. Throughout the episode he challenges Buffy to see the darkness within her power and to embrace it. He repeats what the First Slayer said to Buffy, "You think you know ... what you are ... what's to come. You haven't even begun." *Restless* (4022), *Buffy vs. Dracula* (5001) but then ascribes a role for her, "Find it. The darkness. Find your true nature." While the First Slayer tells Buffy and leaves the statement open to interpretation, Dracula is defining Buffy by the myth of the first Slayer (Daugherty 161). While Buffy might be following the path of the Slayer, this influence from Dracula makes her reanalyze her role as the Slayer and how she is to fight. In a way, Buffy is made to see herself through Dracula's penetrating eyes and begins to define herself that way. At the end of her encounter with Dracula, she begins to call her patrolling at night 'hunting' because that is what Dracula called it, assimilating his language into her own.

[18] This process begins Buffy's decent into a role and characterization that defines her as the Slayer and 'hero.' She begins to keep herself in her strict roles in an effort to hold everything together. By trying to fit these roles Buffy begins to think that any lack on her part in being the hero, any emotional outburst or opening up, could lead to everything falling apart - an anxiety that comes through most in *The Weight of the World* (5021) and her guilt over 'letting' Glory take Dawn. She sees the emotional and dependent roles as weak, seeing emotion as something that she cannot afford in an effort to be a better Slayer.

[19] More damaging than anything else, she places herself under the category of 'good' and 'hero.' It is within these categories she finds the most success and growth, yet it is this role which causes her to die for Dawn. The 'hero' and 'woman warrior' that Buffy represents is in danger of being a phallogocentric warrior, one that will try to bind her to one single definition as the hero (Early par. 19). Giles emphasizes this as he is killing Ben, "She's a hero, you see. She's not like us" (*The Gift* (5022)). Buffy is the hero, the other, and the

contained character in comparison to the rest of the world. This is just another way in which a patriarchal entity, this time the ideal of 'hero,' presses a definition onto Buffy. Buffy is bound by the duties of the hero to fit a specific character type and is trapped by the personality characteristics and code of morals that are included.

[20] The appearance of the Buffybot in this season adds a disturbing part to Buffy's role. The Buffybot is a hollow shell of Buffy's image, being a robot without a soul. It was programmed initially to be a sexbot for Spike, made in the sexual image that he provides, and defined by his power over Warren. When Buffy's friends meet the Buffybot for the first time, they do not recognize it as a robot. In the final battle with Glory, she replaces Buffy for the beginning part of the fight and Glory does not even notice. After Buffy dies, the Buffybot replaces her on a long-term basis. All of these instances show that sometimes Buffy, as a human, is trivial as long as the Buffybot is there. Toth's spell tries to make this distinction as well by dividing Buffy into Slayer-half and Woman-half in *The Replacement* (5003). The human side is discarded in order to have the Slayer side, instead of acknowledging both aspects of the whole.

[21] The Radical Feminist analysis can be applied to Buffy's reflections as Season Five comes to a close. Buffy is performing the 'second shift' of patrolling each day after her daytime activities. This second shift is a gender enforced idea that women's work at home is not work, it is a duty. Buffy patrols because it is her calling, her destiny, yet she gains no compensation for her work and effort. This is much like the role of a working woman who, after a day at her career, must then do chores and cook dinner because it is her feminine duty to do so. The definition of femininity, as a domestic goddess, works in defining the lives of working women just as Buffy, by her definition of Slayer, must patrol as a duty. Should Buffy have to deal with this divided labor? In fact, should any womyn have to deal with 'the second shift' or added gender baggage on to what she wants her life to be? Buffy can be seen as expressing this concern in her conversation with Giles in *The Gift* (5022)

Buffy: I sacrificed Angel to save the world. I loved him so much. But I knew ... what was right. I don't have that any more. I don't understand. I don't know how to live in this world if these are the choices. If everything just gets stripped away. I don't see the point. I just wish that... I just wish my mom was here. The spirit guide told me ... that death is my gift. Guess that means a Slayer really is just a killer after all.

Giles: I think you're wrong about that.

Buffy: It doesn't matter. If Dawn dies, I'm done with it. I'm quitting.

Buffy's conflict is that, living as she is now she must constantly give up aspects of her personality and of her identity. By being the Slayer she has given up being a normal woman, being Angel's lover, and now possibly being a sister and mother to Dawn. Being a Slayer has meant she has had to give up aspects of her femininity that she finds important and necessary. In the end, she finds it necessary to end her own life in order to fulfill her roles.

[22] Buffy is the fighting ground between the forces of femininity and patriarchal definitions of femininity. She is attacked on all sides by 'woman' roles of mother, daughter, and sister as well as 'hero' roles like female warrior and the Slayer. Though she tries to navigate through the roles to redefine them as her own, the sheer amount she has to deal with begins to take a toll on her life in Season Five. All of these roles combine to make the heroic sacrifice that she makes out of sisterly love, her 'gift.' She did not have any other path, because she identified herself in respect to the rigid roles of the female warrior, hero, and loving sister which left her no choice.

Willow: A New Womyn, A New Power

[23] As the season comes to a close, it is evident a new leader and power is beginning to take shape within the Scooby Gang. Willow's sense of identity is growing and her powers reflect that change. She is not the same girl she was in Season One; meek, shy, and a victim more times than not. She has grown into her own person. Using Mary Daly's terminology,

Willow is a Spinster (4) that has 'spun' her own identity independent of the world around her. Willow matches Daly's description of a modern womyn that has grown past the patriarchy and metapatriarchy, a "radical lesbian feminist separatist" (Tong 56). This identity is composed of a fluidity of self, the ability to choose ones own definitions and terms, and the act of journeying through these identities. Willow's story arc from Season One to Season Five is a huge development from a girl to a womyn, something that shows tremendous maturity and power within her personality and a break from oppressive social roles that Buffy feels.

[24] Willow's arc begins on the margins, which allow her to develop her own unique womynhood. Willow is an outsider in many respects. From outward appearance, her red hair and choice of clothes, to her heritage, being the only Jewish character, and her initial role as computer geek, she has always been on the outside of Sunnydale's cultural norms. Willow's role as a computer genius links her to contemporary society, yet what she does online - searching for demons - marginalizes her again even within the geek culture. Marginalization, as well as association with the other members of the Scooby Gang, turns out to be a fertile environment for Willow to establish her own personality and interests.

[25] Although sometimes she feels the negative effects of being an outsider in high school, Buffy and Xander provide a support group that enables her to feel comfortable and grow. As a result, she becomes more confident in her role in the Scooby Gang by taking a more active role by becoming involved in patrolling and beginning her studies of Wicca. Willow travels her own path into Wicca under her own curiosity and constantly forms her own spells instead of using pre-made ones, again asserting her individuality and talent. She embraces being 'nerdy' and when college arrives she is in her prime as part of the 'in' academic crowd. In Season Three, Willow began dating Oz who also followed his own path as a musician and a werewolf. As Willow was gained feelings for Tara in Season Four, she dealt with and chose her path away from Oz when he returned for her (*New Moon Rising*

(4019)) showing her independence, but also the difficulty and the burden of her choices.

[26] Her most influential choice, however, is made in *Choices* (3019), when she decides she is going to stay in Sunnydale on the margins instead of embarking to the world of academia where she would be part of the center of the social circle.

"I just realized that 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."

In this quote, she gives her decision and her reasoning for staying in Sunnydale. It is not a destiny or a calling as Buffy's life is; instead it is Willow's contemplated choice and her will to be in Sunnydale. This is the greatest difference between the two in terms of identity. While Buffy is bound by destiny, Willow is able to weave her own as a true Spinster.

[27] Being an experienced Spinster by the end of Season Five, she is able to craft plans and ideas to help weaken and defeat Glory, and to help Tara with her temporary insanity brought on by Glory. In fact, Willow is the only one who is really able to affect Glory in any significant way. Buffy's strength is no match for Glory's god powers, yet Willow's magic is able to hurt her. Willow's magic spells and dedication to her friends and Tara are the things that put Glory "on the ropes" for Buffy to fight. When Willow and Tara transport Glory away during a battle using a dangerous spell, they successfully avoid further confrontation (*Blood Ties* (5013)). Her next encounter with Glory follows Tara's mind alteration that leads to one of the most passionate acts in *Buffy*. Filled with grief and despair, Willow turns to dark magicks to confront Glory in vengeance. When Willow exclaims "I owe you pain." Glory braces herself and shows her first physical signs of pain (*Tough Love* (5019)). Buffy's fight with Glory immediately following shows Willow's affect on Glory. Glory's response to Buffy's slight upperhand is "That witch barely slowed me down," which is a veiled confession that Willow actually was able to hurt her. In *The Gift* (5022), Willow is Buffy's "big gun": she even admits to Willow "You're the strongest person

here. You know that, right?" When the final battle begins, Willow supplies the initial step of weakening Glory, restoring Tara's sanity, and fixing the Buffybot to serve as a distraction.

[28] This power is directly linked to those things which she has made for herself: her love for Tara, her abilities in Wicca, and her ability to learn and use technology. These three aspects provide an inner source of power that differentiates itself from the other characters. Willow's power is individual, independent from established groups, and stems from a feeling of love. These all tie together to form a unique weave which makes up Willow's personality and identity. Willow fits Daly's archetype of a Spinster because she is able to combine these elements that she has chosen into an independent and unique life, and the outcome is a powerful womyn.

Conclusion

[29] As seen with Glory, Buffy, and Willow, Season Five of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is a battleground for definitions of femininity. A Radical Feminist approach reveals many things about the characters and helps to contextualize their actions and positions at the end of the season. Glory is compelled by madness and actively seeks to destroy her human and female self, while she embraces the life of the perfect woman through stereotypical bubble baths and clothing. Buffy is in the middle, still sorting out what it means to be a womyn as she is bound by a destiny that tries to limit her womynhood. Because she is in the mainstream culture (Caucasian, blonde, thin, physically able, heterosexual), she is caught in a fierce battle of long standing patriarchal and cultural norms, making her search difficult. Lastly, Willow grew up with marginalized past and was allowed to forge her own identity as a womyn, though not without her own personal struggles.

[30] Buffy and Willow's journeys begin at different places within the social context and

spectrum of womanhood/womynhood. Buffy's actions, and her sacrifice for Dawn, can be framed in a way to see her death as an unnecessary byproduct of her sticking to a role she did not choose for herself. This is not to say her decision was a bad, but one that, in part, stems from her role in society as a woman and a Slayer. Even though Buffy dies, Season Five begins the reinvention of what it means to be "the Slayer" and what the identity entails. Season Five begins the process by drawing out the issues of femininity in Radical Feminism into corporeal and symbolic form and allows us to see how different the femininities (woman, womyn, Spinster) operate in the Buffyverse. In the end, Glory's madness and demise show instability in womanhood as defined by patriarchy, Buffy's destiny as the Slayer and as a woman lead her to sacrifice her life to save the world, and Willow's independence becomes the central power in the fight against Glory and evil.

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