

The Case For Faith: The Rogue Vampire Slayer's Search for Identity

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Let me tell you something. Nobody knows what you are. Not even you, little Miss Seen-it-all. The Ascension isn't just my day, it's yours too. Your day to blossom, to show the world what a powerful girl you are. I think of what you've done, what I know you will do, no father could be prouder. -Mayor Richard Wilkins (3022)

[1] In the seven year run of *Buffy*, creator Joss Whedon introduces us to a very interesting and deep cast of characters. However, none of those characters bring forth more questions than the character of Faith. As the above quote above implies, the audience does not necessarily know exactly who Faith is in terms of her true identity. Instead, we see a performance put on by Faith to show the strength and independence that she feels she needs to fulfill her role as the slayer. As we see her character develop, we see that in the process of establishing a true identity for herself, Faith falls into evil and then redeems herself. This process involves a change in how she portrays herself to those around her, shifting from what Karl Schudt argues is a Nietzschean ideal to that of a Platonic ideal described by Greg Forster. However, what seems to be ignored in both Schudt's and Forster's analysis of Faith is a concrete explanation of the social mechanisms that lead to this massive paradigm shift. This paper fills that gap, examining the events surrounding Faith's stint on *Buffy* with a sociological imagination with the goal of explaining how Faith's behavioral changes were influenced by those around her, and how that influence leads to both her fall into evil and later her redemption.

"I've Got a Theory!" { 1 } - Applicable Sociological Theories

[2] This paper will utilize three micro-sociological theories in order to create a bridge between Faith's time portraying the Nietzschean ideal to her ending up the Platonic ideal. The first of these theories is Dramaturgy. Developed by Erving Goffman in his landmark work "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life," Dramaturgy is the study of social interaction that utilizes metaphors drawn from drama, such as the concept of front stage verses back stage performances. The front stage performance is "the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance" (Goffman 22). The behaviors, but intentional and unintentional, that we perform in front others in order to fit into a specific role in society are done on the front stage. On the flip side, the back stage is the place where individuals no longer are concerned with portraying a specific role. Here, they get a chance to be their "true self" and have time to recover from having to put on a strong front stage performance. While in the back stage, individuals can knowingly violate norms without having to worry about any implications because no one in their audience can see that.

[3] This paper will use this idea of front stage and back stage performances to make that argument that Faith at no time actually a true Nietzschean ideal. Instead, she appears so because she feels that acting in these ways are what is normal for a slayer. In the time that we see her in the back stage, we see that she is a confused girl in search for answers, looking for someone that she can feel she can trust and open her true self up to.

[4] Faith's need for guidance, a mentor, a person to trust, leads us to the next theory we will use to help explain her development. The concept of the Johari Window is a model that consists of four quadrants, "each of which represents a somewhat different self" (Devito 65). The following diagram outlines the four quadrants of the Johari Window{2}:

THE JOHARI WINDOW

	KNOWN TO SELF	NOT KNOWN TO SELF
KNOWN TO OTHERS	<p>OPEN SELF</p> <p>Information about yourself that you and others know</p>	<p>BLIND SELF</p> <p>Information about yourself that you don't know but that others do know.</p>
NOT KNOWN TO OTHERS	<p>HIDDEN SELF</p> <p>Information about yourself that you know but others don't know</p>	<p>UNKNOWN SELF</p> <p>Information about yourself that neither you nor others know</p>

Each of these quadrants represents different aspects of one's self concept, all of which interact and change as an individual develops relationships.

[5] As Faith progresses through her fall into evil and her redemption, she becomes more and more aware that what is being portrayed in her front stage performance does not necessarily mimic who she truly is. Her interactions with others through the course of her stint on the show allows her to understand more and more of who she is by both making her aware of her "blind self" and creating strong bonds with other characters that allows her to keep what is in her "hidden self" from coming out into the "open self." It is how these strong bonds are created that the final theory this paper will utilize addresses.

[6] According to linguist George Lakoff in his book *Don't Think of an Elephant*, there are two forms of communication that mirror two major forms of parenting, the strict father model and the nurturing parent model. The strict father model works off a series of definitive assumptions: The world is a dangerous place, and it always will be, because there is evil out there in the world. The world is also difficult because it is competitive. There will always be winners and losers. There is an absolute right and an absolute wrong. Children are born bad, in the sense that they

just want to do what feels good, not what is right. Therefore, they have to be made good. (Lakoff 7).

This type of communication, which Lakoff associates to a conservative political ideology, attempts to force people to believe that they have to act in a certain way simply because it is the right thing to do. It lacks considerations of alternatives and consequences and tends to be fairly disciplinarian in nature.

[7] On the other side of the coin, the nurturant parent model of communication has two main characteristics, empathy and responsibility. In terms of parenting, "if you empathize with your child, you will provide protection...if you empathize with your child, you want your child to be fulfilled in like, to be a happy person" (Lakoff 12). Those who follow this model tend to feel that a person should be encouraged to do what makes them happy and that the parent or communicator themselves should be happy if they expect the person they are communicating with to be happy too. There is also a tendency to show compassion about the wellbeing of those around you.

[8] Throughout the show, Faith tends to gravitate towards people who use the nurturant parent model of communication with her. People who look to empathize and understand her problems and plight are well received by her while those who attempt to use their authority with her are rejected. It is the use of this use of the nurturant parent model that motivates Faith to open up and trust people, which in turn leads to her giving people her allegiance, no matter if they are good or evil.

[9] By using these three theories, this paper will attempt to weave through the events in Faith's life to explain how and why she shifted philosophical paradigms, from Nietzsche to Plato. First, the notion that Faith starts out as the Nietzschean ideal will be proven false by asserting that these characteristics are simply a front stage performance that is in line with what Faith thinks a slayer ought to be. In reality, as can be seen when shown Faith in the back stage, she is a vulnerable young woman who is seeking someone to fill the role of parent.

Putting on the Nietzschean Act - Front Stage Action Verses Back Stage Reality

[10] In his article "Also Sprach Faith: The Problem of the Happy Rogue Vampire Slayer", Karl Schudt posits five characteristics that make up a person who is the Nietzschean ideal, and argues that Faith fits all five of these characteristics. These characteristics include: strength, the search for satisfaction of one's desires, a ruthlessness or cruelty in the pursuit of these desires, a distrust of rational argument, and a rejection of traditional morality (Schudt 26). However, one can notice that the times when Faith shows most of these characteristics, she is around others in her role as the slayer. When in the back stage, which in this case would be her hotel room, we see a different girl, alone and vulnerable. For Faith, fitting into the Nietzschean ideal is simply an act that she has discerned to be necessary for her to play her role as the slayer, and not part of her actual identity.

[11] We see her play this role of the Nietzschean idea from the very first episode that she is introduced. When the audience is introduced to Faith in the Bronze, they are introduced to someone who is more of a "vamp" (Schudt 26) than a vampire slayer. She is dancing seductively in

the Bronze with a young man who is dressed in outdated attire (a clear mark of a vampire). As the sequence goes on, we learn that she is using this seductive act to lure this young man, who is actually a vampire, outside in order to slay him (4003). Schudt argues that this event is an example of how Faith is preoccupied for the satisfaction of one's desires, saying that "the flirtation on the dance floor and the choosing of the mate are both there, with the sexual act replaced by slaying" (Schudt 26). Faith uses slaying as a substitute for sexual conquest, treating the act of slaying as just another human need.

[12] However, if we view this event dramaturgically, we can see that all of these actions are performed in order to Faith to fulfill her expected role of vampire slayer. It is her job to do whatever it takes for her to slay vampires. So, the use of her seductive talents is simply a method with which she can fulfill her role. To Faith, part of being the slayer is using all the talents that she has in order to fulfill her duty. Thus, it is not unreasonable to believe that she would use her seductive talents to her advantage in order to fulfill her role.

[13] It when she uses these seductive talents on Xander that we see another way Schudt argues she fits into the Nietzschean ideal: ruthlessness or cruelty in the pursuit of desires. According to Schudt:

In "The Zeppo," Faith beds Xander in order to work off some stress of hunting vampires. Xander is very excited: it is his first sexual experience, and as a result he thinks the two have made some kind of connection. But he is mistaking her intentions: she is merely scratching an itch with whatever is convenient, and to expect Faith to establish a relationship with him is like expecting the person with an itchy hack to establish a relationship with the backscratcher. (Schudt 27)

Faith's treatment of Xander parallels her ideas about men in general; they are a tool that help her fulfill her sexual desire. She even goes so far to tell Buffy that they should "find a couple of studs, use them, and discard them. That's always fun" (3005).

[14] Though cruel an attitude this may be about men, it serves a keen purpose in Faith's belief in what the role of the slayer is and how it should be performed. To Faith, the slayer is a person who is simply above others because their duty is so important to the survival of the rest of us: "We are better! That's right, better. People need us to survive. In the balance, no one is going to cry over some random bystander that got caught in the crossfire" (3015). Since slayers are better than others, Faith feels that she should be able to use other people in ways that she needs them and discard them without worry. In her specific case, this means using men for sexual pleasure and then discarding them without a care for their feelings because she no longer needs them.

[15] It is in the moments when Faith's backstage becomes public where we can really see that this adherence to the Nietzschean ideal is simply for show and that underneath she is truly a lost vulnerably young woman. The most clear cut instance of her vulnerability is in the episode that we are first introduced to Faith, "Hope, Faith, and Trick." Here, we learn the details as to why Faith has come to Sunnydale. Her watcher was murdered by a powerful vampire and she comes to Sunnydale in hopes of escaping him. It is when Faith is told that the vampire has followed her to Sunnydale and eventually when she confronts him that we see the barrier between the front stage performance and the back stage performance break down. Faith's face becomes a mask of

fear and she begs to be saved from the evil vampire. The strong Nietzschean ideal Faith is gone, replaced by a frightened and vulnerable young woman who is in over her head.

[16] However, even though Faith's front stage act is covering up a back stage reality that is starkly different, it does not affect her ability to slay. After the incident with the vampire who killed her watcher, Faith never again falters from her front stage performance in front of anyone, and she is able to join with the scoobies as a useful member of the team. However, the scoobies are unable to motivate Faith to open up to them. Throughout her time on their side, Faith does not learn anymore about herself, and the "open self" quadrant of her Johari's window does not change. It is not until Faith's accidental murder of the Vice Mayor of Sunnydale that a rift forms between Faith and the scoobies - a rift that results in a change in how they communicate with Faith, and leads her to close up and reject them and eventually open up to and join the Mayor in his evil quest.

Slamming the Window Shut - Strict Father Communication and the Rejection of Good

[17] The audience begins to see Faith's dislike for those who use the strict father communication model very early on. In the episode entitled "Revelations," we are introduced to Faith's faux watcher, Gwendolyn Post. Mrs. Post is a strict disciplinarian, who demands Faith's obedience and respect. Faith responds to these demands with disrespectful comebacks, such as "Excuse me, Mary Poppins, you don't seem to be listening" (4007), in response to Mrs. Post's attempt to change the way she practices her slaying. This disrespect shows us that Faith has an obvious dislike of this form of communication, and thus Faith cannot relate and feels no obligation to be obedient to Mrs. Post, a fact we see played out when the realization is made the Mrs. Post has evil intentions.

[18] It is not until Faith's murder of the Vice Mayor that we truly see what can happen when Faith is confronted with strict father communication. Faith refuses to accept responsibility for the death of the Vice Mayor, because doing so does not fit into her perception of the role of the slayer. As stated earlier, when performing on the front stage as the slayer, Faith feels that she is better than normal people. For her, this also extends to being above the law. We see this played out when Buffy confronts Faith, demanding that she fess up to her actions and turn herself into the police. Faith responds with a smirk, "No, you don't get it. I don't care" (4014).

[19] Buffy is asserting her belief that there is an absolute right and wrong in the world, and that one of those wrongs is murder. She demands that Faith accept the consequences for her actions because it is the right thing to do. Buffy has a very absolutist perspective in terms of her morality about the event. However, Faith does not respond well to being given orders, something she has already made clear through the Mrs. Post incident.

[20] As Buffy and the other scoobies continue to demand that Faith turn herself in for the murder, Faith begins to distance herself from them. She is no longer part of the group and thus the group can no longer have an impact on her creation of her identity. They can no longer have any affect on what Faith considers herself to be in the "open self" quadrant of Johari's window - in effect, slamming the window shut. This lack of companionship also leaves her vulnerable to those who understand how to reach her. As Mayor Wilkins begins to enter her life, Faith begins

to fall into evil, not because she is evil, but because the Mayor provides her with her need for parental companionship.

Faith Finds a Father - Nuturant Parent Communication and the Acceptance of Evil

[21] As the Mayor enters Faith's life, we finally begin to see what exactly is required to get Faith to open up to someone a trust them. When they meet, Faith is in a vulnerable position. She is alone and isolated from the scoobies because she can no longer find solace in their company because of their communication style. She deeply craves satisfying companionship, and seeing that need, Mayor Wilkins takes advantage by confronting Faith and slowly earning her trust.

[22] Their relationship begins when the Mayor hires Faith to help him acquire the Books of Ascension, a item necessary for the Mayor's evil plot. As we can see from the following dialogue from the episode "enemies (3017), the Mayer communicates with Faith in the manner of a nuturant parent, and thus receives her trust, and eventually her love:

Mayor: And what exactly did this demon look like?

Faith: Demonic?

Mayor: Ah. And you say he has the Books of Ascension, or will soon, and he was, what, willing to sell them?

Faith: That's what I said.

Mayor: Hmm. You know what I wish? I wish you'd pull your hair back. I know, I know, fashion's not exactly my thing, but, gosh darn it, you know, you've got such a nice face. I can't understand why you hide it.

Faith: Yeah, sure. Whatever. It's just a matter of time before this demon guy is gonna spill. Then Buffy and the superfriends are gonna-

Mayor: (interrupts) You know, you worry too much for a girl for your age. That's unnecessary stress. Luckily, I've got just the thing.

(The Mayor pours a glass of Milk and hands it to Faith)

Mayor: There you go. Now, first you load up on calcium. Then find this demon, kill the heck out of him, and bring the books to me.

(Faith looks at the milk and sets the glass down, untouched)

Faith: And if Buffy gets to him first?

Mayor: Oh, well. Frankly I don't like to think about that. I like good, positive, up thoughts. If you fail me in that way. Well, you know, replacing Mr. Trick was chore enough. (chuckles) Oh, come on, don't work. Drink up. There's nothing uncool about healthy teeth and bones. (4017)

Though his words have an evil intention, the Mayor talks to Faith as if she is his daughter. He does this through his tone of voice, he shows that he has honest concern for things such as the health of her teeth and the look of her hair. Faith see the way that the Mayor communicates with her as an expression of his father love for her, and develops a loyalty to him, because he fulfills her need for a parental figure.

[23] As they work together, the Mayor and Faith form a genuine Father-Daughter bond that goes beyond his attempts to goad her to help him with his evil plans. He actually feels as if Faith is he

daughter, often referring to her as "my Faith" (4022). The most telling demonstration of this relationship can be seen in the following dialogue from "Graduation Day Part I:"

(In Faith's Apartment. The Mayor is tidying up. Faith is not in the room)

Mayor: And everything went smoothly with Mr. Wirth?

Faith: Not if you're Mr. Wirth.

Mayor: (giggles) Well, that's swell. You know how I feel about loose ends. And the big day is so close; you can smell the excitement in the air. Say, are you ever coming out of there?

Faith: I don't know

Mayor: Aw, come on.

(Faith enters, in a pink and white dress, barefoot)

Mayor: Wow, aren't you a vision?

Faith: I feel I look stupid in this.

Mayor: You look lovely. Perfect for the Ascension. Any boys that manage to survive will be lining up to ask you out.

Faith: It just isn't me, though.

Mayor: Not you? Let me tell you something. Nobody knows what you are. Not even you, little Miss Seen-it-all. The Ascension isn't just my day. It's yours too. Your day to blossom, to show the world what a powerful girl you are. I think of what you've done, what I know you will do. No father could be prouder.

Faith: I hope I don't let you down.

Mayor: Impossible. Now come on, change back into your street clothes. I'll buy you an Icee. (4022)

From this bit of dialogue we get an idea of who the real Faith is. No longer is she this independent girl, concerned only with herself and her image as the slayer. Through her communication and relationship with the Mayor, she has discovered that her true self is a person who is loyal to those who truly care about her; a self that is far from evil. The Mayor sees this potential of loyalty in her, and though their relationship brought it out of Faith's "unknown self" and into the "open self."

[24] But alas, as is the norm with the Buffyverse, evil never prevails. Faith ends up in a coma after a long grueling fight with Buffy. Then, the Mayor is defeated, with Buffy actually using his love for Faith as a tool against him. When Faith awakens from her coma in season four, she wakes in a world where her Father is gone. Once again left with no one to turn to, Faith's identity shifts back to the Nietzschean ideal, her once defining loyalty now part of her "hidden self." But as events unfold after her awakening, Faith is both redeemed from evil and accepts more of her identity into the "open self," including that of the Platonic ideal.

Life in Someone Else's Shoes - The Body Switch, Redemption, and a True Identity

[25] It is in Faith's redemption from evil that we see her finally accept that the Nietzschean ideal is not her true identity and shift to a more honorable Platonic ideal, as laid out in *The Republic*. According to Greg Forster, in his article "Faith and Plato: 'You're Nothing! Disgusting

Murderous Bitch!," "Plato argues in *The Republic* that we should strive to be just rather than unjust because the just person is happier than the unjust person" (Forster 12). To Plato, the just person is happy because each part of his soul is under control and in harmony with one another (Plato 443c-445b{3}). On the other hand, the unjust person seeks only to fulfill their desires without control. If the unjust person gains power, much like Faith's power through being a slayer, they feel as if they are in control, but they are in fact a slave to their passions. Plato puts it like this: "The real tyrant is, even if he doesn't seem to be so...in truth a real slave" (Plato 579d). As we have already seen, Faith with her Nietzschean ideal front stage performance fits right into Plato's description of the unjust person.

[26] In the episode where Faith's redemption begins, Faith is put into a very unique situation. A magical device is put into her possession by the Mayor that allows her to switch bodies with Buffy. When she does this, she begins experiencing life as Buffy. For the first time in her life, Faith feels genuine parental{4} and romantic love. These open her eyes to what she has missed out on by living on the front stage of life as she has, and forces her into an identity crisis.

[27] Right after the body switch takes place, Faith and Joyce, Buffy's mother, have a conversation about why Faith turned evil. Faith comments that "Maybe she likes being that way." To which Joyce responds "I'll never believe that. I think she's horribly unhappy" (4016). The audience notices at this point that Faith "changes the subject rather than directly respond to Joyce's comment. She does still cling to her belief that she is happier being evil" (Forster 16) because it is all that she has left to be.

[28] It is when Joyce then hugs Faith that the audience notices a specific discomfort in Faith. She has never been able to experience the type of unconditional, parental love that Joyce has provided Buffy all her life. This event is the start of a process that leads to Faith's identity crisis. She begins to question her return to the Nietzschean ideal because she now sees that following a different paradigm would lead to a happier life.

[29] The most telling moment of the episode comes when Faith offers Riley the opportunity to abuse Buffy's body for his own sexual pleasure. Riley rejects Faith's offer, instead opting to "make love" with her. Forster points out how explosive this event is to Faith's identity: If Faith's account of her love life in an earlier episode is to be believed, she has never been with a man who cared about her, or even... with any man who met the most basic standards of decency. We are left to imagine what it must have been like for such a woman to spend her first night with a man who not only cared about her, but completely loved her. (Forster 17)

[30] This experience of romantic love does not register with Faith because her past has taught her that men are not capable of this sort of love without some underhanded motive (i.e. the Mayor and his evil plan). When Riley later whispers "I love you" to her, Faith breaks down. She demands to know "What do you want from her?" (4016). It is at this moment that the audience sees that Faith is entered fully into an identity crisis. She sees that living her front stage life as the Nietzschean ideal cannot give her what she wants, which is to continue to experience this love. But without the connection she had with the Mayor combined with the large unlikelihood of being able to establish a relationship with the scoobies, her chances of being able to open up are bleak.

[31] According to Forster, "This realization forces Faith to acknowledge that her decision to turn evil was wrong even on its own terms. That is, even if duty and abstract morality are set aside, it simply isn't true that the evil life is more pleasant than the good life" (Forster 17). Faith now knows that it was her unwillingness to open up to the scoobies early on that prevented her from being able to have the attachments that she eventually got from the Mayor. This causes her to become disgusted with herself. We see this in a fight that she has with Buffy as their bodies are still switched. She has Buffy, who is in her body, pinned down, screaming "You're nothing! Disgusting, murderous bitch! You're nothing! You're Disgusting!" (4016) as she pummels her own face. She is both literally and figuratively beating up her old identity to make way for a new one, grounded in a new philosophical paradigm, the Platonic ideal.

Seeking an End - Faith's Attempted Suicide and the Resolution of Her Identity Crisis

[32] After she is returned to her body, Faith's disgust in herself leads her to Los Angeles. There, she attempts to force Angel into killing her, thinking that ending her own life will end the misery she is feeling because of her identity crisis. Angel doesn't kill her, and at one point even asks "I thought you were happy the way you are?" (A1018) But, as Forster points out, "...they both know it isn't true. Finally knowing that evil will never make her happy, and believing that redemption is impossible for her after she is done, Faith simply wants to end her pain" (Forster 18). She sees no way to return to what she was when she had the Mayor as a figure in her life, no way to experience that part of herself that is loyal to someone who loves her because she feels there is no one else out there to love her. When Angel refuses to kill her, Faith loses all the strength that had once been the staple of her front stage performance, and literally begs him:

I'm evil! I'm bad! I'm evil! Do you hear me? I'm bad! Angel I'm bad! I'm bad. Do you hear me? I'm bad! I'm bad! I'm bad. Please. Angel, just do it. Angel please, just do it. Just do it. Just kill me. Just kill me. (A1018)

Any semblance of her old identity is now gone. Knowing the terrible deeds that she committed to be able to feel the love she needed combined with knowing she may never be able to feel that way again, Faith has fully rejected the Nietzschean ideal as part of her front stage performance, and has shifted to the Platonic ethic of the just are happier than the unjust. Since death is not an option anymore, Faith instead chooses to turn herself in for the Vice Mayor's murder, in hopes that doing so may redeem herself in the eyes of the scoobies and eventually lead to her once again experiencing the love and loyalty that truly characterizes her identity.

Bringing it All Together

[33] In the end, what led Faith through this drastic change in her identity was her desire to have a parental figure to open herself up. Faith was only truly happy when she was experiencing pure love, but her front stage performance of her role forced her into only being able to experience said love through a turn to evil, because the Nietzschean ideal she portrayed did not mesh well with the scoobies. Motivated completely by her need to feel love, Faith turns to the Mayor and to evil and learns that she is happier when she has someone to be loyal to. That realization seeps into her "open self," and once realized she demands it in order to feel happy. When denied it, she

is forced into an identity crisis that leads her to desire death; and when that is denied her, redemption.{5}

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Footnotes

{1} (6007)

{2} This diagram was derived from DeVito's *The Interpersonal Communication Book*

{3} Passages from *The Republic* will be noted by their Stephanos number.

{4} Though the Mayor did love her like a daughter, because of his original motives, one can not say that Faith experienced genuine unconditional parental love from him.

{5} I would like to extend a special thanks to five people, whose help was invaluable to me throughout this process. First, my peer reviewer Megan Handshoe and Holly Gilbert, who had to read this paper about a show they'd rarely watched. Second, Dr. Scott Whiddon, who supported me 110% throughout the revision process. Third, Martha Gehringer, who helped me muster the courage to submit this paper in the first place. And last but not least, I'd like to thank Gary Deaton, who let a lowly little first year write a term paper on his favorite TV show. I could not have done this without you!

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