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# Buffy, the Scooby Gang, and Monstrous Authority: *BtVS* and the Subversion of Authority

(1) *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, like much of the fare on the WB network (the show's home for the first five seasons), is marketed to and most popular among younger viewers. Like *Dawson's Creek*, *Charmed*, *Roswell*, and *Popular*, it depicts a young attractive cast struggling with the issues that typically face young adult characters on television, if not young adults in real life. A recent promotional spot on the WB for these shows features the stars laughing, dancing, and partying. The spot ends with the phrase “The night is young” on the screen. Current promotional spots feature the same imagery with a hip-hop version of The Who's "My Generation" on the soundtrack. They are young and hip and appeal to a young audience that uses television as one of the cultural texts that informs their interpretive communities. There are a number of elements of *BtVS* that have potential significance for an audience, but the ones on which we choose to focus are the issues of authority and power in the show. Issues of power and authority provide the show with most of its plot lines as well as thematic context.

(2) Authority is viewed primarily through the eyes of the show's teen protagonists and so takes on the guise of traditional figures from the spheres in which the characters travel: school authority embodied by administrators, teachers, professors, and coaches; social authority embodied by parents; and civic authority embodied by local and federal officials and police. The number of supernatural threats that have a basis in these mundane areas emphasizes the show's focus on these spheres of the characters' lives. The relevance that these figures have to Buffy and the Scooby Gang has shifted throughout the course of the show's five seasons, and no doubt that will continue. But these authority figures comprise the landscape or the set against which the show's action occurs. Just as a show like *ER* is set against the backdrop of the economics of rationed medical care in a dangerous and violent world, or *The Practice* is shaped by the struggle between a rigid ethical legal code and an unethical, amoral world, *BtVS* is about young heroes with little or no socially constructed authority struggling against all of the various authorities to which they are subject. In many ways, this description could be used for shows like *Beverly Hills 90210*, *Party of Five*, *Dawson's Creek*, or *Freaks and Geeks*. But in *BtVS*, power held by authority figures is often made literal through some supernatural twist. The power held by Mayor Wilkins comes from more than the consent of the majority of the citizens of Sunnydale; it is demonic.

(3) So while the heroes of *BtVS* must contend with the petty power abuses of Principal Snyder, they must also contend with Mayor Wilkins' plan to devour the graduating seniors of Sunnydale High as he achieves full demonhood. At the same time Buffy must face her first love turning against her, she must also deal with his attempts to kill her and open a vortex to Hell.

(4) What distinguishes the traditional authority figures from the villains in *BtVS* is their relationship to power. As mentioned above, Mayor Wilkins holds socially constructed power since he has the consent of voters to preside, but we find out later that he possesses supernatural powers and plans to achieve more at the expense of the town. It is because of his thirst for more power that he becomes a threat and comes to the attention of Buffy and the Scooby Gang.

(5) In contrast to the mayor, however, is Joyce Summers, Buffy's mother, who is the representative of parental authority on the show. Joyce has no supernatural powers and has no desire for them. She remains, in terms of the dynamics of the show, a mere “authority figure” with all of the flatness and sketchiness that that phrase implies. While Joyce became an important character in the show's third season and in the fifth season, she is not nearly as integral as the other characters. One sign of her lack of relevance is the fact that, prior to her illness and surprising death in Season Five, she has never made opening credit status; that is, the actress (Kristine Sutherland) who plays her (and plays her well) has never been featured or named in the show's opening credit sequence. Oz, who never really became too much more than Willow's boyfriend, went from “recurring character” to achieving opening credit status before the actor left the show. Cordelia maintained opening credit status even after she became more and more sidelined by the series' story arc. Even Spike, now a quasi-member of the Scooby Gang, has made it to the opening credits. The show seems to regard parents as obstacles to overcome, get around, or ignore. They control the freedom of the heroes to some extent, but rule mostly by consent of the children.

(6) In the first seasons of the show, Joyce does not know that Buffy is The Slayer. She merely imagines that Buffy is disobedient or has gotten in with the "wrong crowd." Thinking Buffy is a normal child, Joyce imposes (or tries to impose) normal restrictions—curfews, groundings, etc. Buffy must lie and deceive in order that she may fulfill her duties as The Slayer. At the end of Season Two, when Joyce finds out about her daughter's supernatural abilities, she attempts to prevent Buffy from battling Angel, "forbidding" her and telling her that, should she leave, Buffy should never return. Finally, the only power Joyce has over Buffy is to withhold her love, but even this cannot stop Buffy. And in the end, Joyce is unable to make good on her threat. In the fourth season, Joyce pops up rarely. In one episode she appears mainly just so Faith can menace her. In the final episode, she appears in Buffy's dream sequence trapped inside a wall, talking congenially to her daughter about her predicament through a small hole. Neither mother nor daughter seems terribly worried about it. In the fifth season, Joyce appears more often, especially after the magical creation of Buffy's younger sister, Dawn. But her presence serves mainly to illustrate her own diminished capacity due to her illness and her inability to protect Dawn from Glory and her minions. In this season, Joyce has no authority at all over Buffy and in fact transfers her mother role to Buffy. Buffy first has to take care of the ailing Joyce and after Joyce's death, she must take authority over Dawn. Of course, Buffy is angry that Dawn shows the same lack of respect for parental authority that she always has.

(7) Joyce is the only parent of the members of the Scooby Gang the viewers see regularly. In the one episode in which we see Willow's mother Sheila, the mothers exercise their authority very firmly, nearly killing their children for their disobedience, but in the end we see that they were under demonic influence. [Ironically, it was a demon taking the form of children that manipulated the parents ("Gingerbread," 3011).] In the episode "Ted" (2011), Joyce begins dating a man who tries to impose further restrictions on Buffy by obligating her to "family time." Buffy's refusal to accede to his authority results in a violent confrontation in which it appears Buffy kills Ted. Of course, she does not kill him; he is a robot – a Stepford step-father—who is seeking to create (and imprison) a perfect (and eventually dead) family. In the episode "Witch" (1003), Amy's mother seeks to relive her youth and uses witchcraft to switch places with her daughter. She uses her powers to eliminate her competition in joining the cheerleading squad — the ultimate cheerleading Mom. Of course, the Scooby Gang defeats her, but she is a notable exception to the rule that parents are generally irrelevant in BtVS.

(8) If it isn't clear enough that parents hold very little power on the *BtVS*, the episode "Bad Eggs" (2012) explicitly questions the concept of parental control. In this episode, Buffy and her fellow students in health class are given the assignment of caring for eggs for two weeks so that they can begin to learn about the chores of parenting—not an uncommon assignment in a sex-ed curriculum. In the Buffyverse, however, the eggs hatch little mind-controlling creatures that turn the "parents" into the slaves of a demon who is trapped beneath the school. Buffy escapes the control of the little creatures because of her quick Slayer reflexes. Xander, whose parents we never see (and we learn from anecdotes that they are at least negligent and perhaps abusive), boils his egg. But Willow's protective maternal instincts leave her totally vulnerable to being controlled by the little egg-creature. "Bad Eggs" suggests that parents are little more than drones or interchangeable "parental units" (to use the phrase coined in the *Saturday Night Live* "Coneheads" sketches) and that the children are far from innocent little cherubs.

(9) Like parents, most teachers and school administrators hold minor supporting roles on the series. Rather like the parents and teachers of Peanuts cartoons, they are garbled background noise. Like parents, school authorities are there to be subverted, overcome, or ignored. Principal Flutie, for example, is shown to be ineffectual in "The Pack" (1006); faced with a pack of students possessed by hyena spirits, he attempts to discipline them and is devoured. But the school authorities are often shown to use and abuse power that parents in the Buffyverse do not have. Flutie's replacement, Principal Snyder, embodies every negative stereotype of school principals. He is a bully who favors the jocks and the school elite at the expense of the already marginalized students. He resorts to extortion to force Willow to tutor the jock Percy. (Ironically, as we find out in "Band Candy" (3006), he was once one of the marginalized nerds he now torments.) He even challenges the ascended Wilkins in Part II of "Graduation Day" (3022) before being eaten by him. He is a petty and manipulative "stupid little troll" (as Buffy calls him in "Becoming" Part II [2022]), who, we find out in "School Hard" (2003), is involved in covering up the supernatural causes of violence that occur at and around Sunnydale High. Prior to this revelation, we have seen a teacher who is really a She-Mantis in disguise and a Gypsy-witch "technopagan" computer teacher, but with Snyder we see school authority as corrupted by the supernatural powers that have preyed so heavily upon the students of Sunnydale High and the citizens of Sunnydale. It's a minor comment in "School Hard" that he makes to the police about blaming the violence at Parent-Teacher Night (brought on by Spike and his cohorts) on gang members on drugs. It implicates both Snyder and the police in a cover-up and suggests that Snyder's dislike for Buffy goes beyond her disruptive presence in school—that he would rather let the Forces of Darkness prey on his students than have a Slayer whom he cannot control in their midst to protect them.

(10) The abuse of authority doesn't end with high school. When Buffy goes to college she meets a cruel pop culture professor who kicks her out of class after accusing her of draining all of the energy out of the room. And she meets Professor Maggie Walsh, a woman who describes herself as a "bitch-monster from hell" ("The Freshman," 4001). Though this is not a literal description (one has to clarify that in writing about the Buffyverse) she is co-opted, if not corrupted, by her relationship with the demons of Sunnydale. As a leader of the Initiative, she attempts to create a weapon using computers, mechanical parts, and parts of demons—a cyber-demon (a "kinematically redundant,

biomechanical demonoid" ["Goodbye, Iowa," 4014]) she calls "Adam." Like Snyder, she has a control fetish, and although she initially values Buffy as a force to be used against the demons of Sunnydale, she ultimately finds Buffy too hard to control (something Snyder, Giles, Wesley, Joyce, and any number of other adults have already found out for themselves) and she attempts to have Buffy killed.

(11) Between Snyder and Walsh, we see teachers both as victims of the Forces of Darkness and as agents. Buffy's guidance counselor, a man who has the potential to actually help Buffy cope with some of the events in "Becoming" and the aftermath, is killed by a student who has become a Jekyll/Hyde monster ("Beauty and the Beasts" [4004]). Jenny Calendar is killed by Angelus ("Passion" [2017]). Several anonymous teachers are killed, assaulted, or otherwise victimized in episodes such as "School Hard" (2003), "Go Fish" (2020), "Bad Eggs" (2012), "Invisible Girl" (1011), and "Pangs" (4008). Aside from students, teachers probably make up the largest group of victims in the Buffyverse. But they are also villains, usually with exaggerated desires for order (as in the case of Snyder and Walsh) or for glory. In "Revelations" (3007), Gwendolyn Post, a Watcher-gone-bad, uses Giles, Buffy, and Faith to obtain the Glove of Myhnegon. Coach Marin uses old Soviet performance-enhancing drugs to create a champion swim team ("Go Fish" [2020]). The coach in "Nightmares" (1010) terrorizes a boy so much that his nightmares become reality for Sunnydale.

(12) National and civic authority come to dominate the third and fourth seasons of *BtVS*. In Season Three, the story arc of Mayor Wilkins' preparation for his ascension into full demonhood dominates the action. In Season Two, with Principal Snyder's comment to the police about covering up the true causes of violence in "School Hard," we began to infer that the civic authorities at the very least *know* about the Hellmouth, if not actually operate in collusion with the Forces of Darkness. The only other times that civic authority is invoked are in "Ted," in which Buffy is interrogated by police for Ted's "murder"; "Becoming" (2021/2022), in which Buffy is sought for Kendra's murder; "Dead Man's Party" (3002), in which Joyce threatens to go to the mayor if Buffy is not allowed to return to Sunnydale High (Principal Snyder scoffs at this threat, which foreshadows events to come); and "Homecoming" (3005), in which the mayor hires the vampire Mr. Trick. At that point we are launched into the ascension story arc.

(13) So civic authority, when not at the center of a story line, is represented as incompetent and easily thwarted. In both "Ted" and "Becoming" the civic authorities are the police. In "Ted," we the audience are perfectly aware that Ted's "death" is accidental and that his behavior was outrageously provocative. The police are not impressed by Buffy's explanations, and, in fact, do not believe them because Buffy's recuperative powers have already healed the marks left on her by their struggle. It is the fact that Ted is not dead— not an understanding of the circumstances— that puts an end to the case. In "Becoming," Buffy is accused by Snyder for Kendra's murder. Buffy manages to escape arrest because of her Slayer strength and reflexes and continues to elude police until she leaves Sunnydale after closing the vortex. Upon her return, there is a passing comment that the police now know that she did not commit Kendra's murder. Who they think did it and why Buffy suffers no legal repercussions for beating up the police and resisting arrest is never explained. More than anything, else the police seem to appear in the show as an indication of how much Buffy's role as The Slayer marginalizes her. A normal teenager might naturally be angry or suspicious of a mother's new boyfriend. Add to that the fact that her friends and mother think he's a great guy and she feels even more alone. Add to *that* the life Buffy leads as Slayer, and she's *got* to feel isolated. The police threat disappears once Buffy returns to the comfort of her friends and Watcher. Even though she does "kill" Ted, everyone else (including Joyce) sees she was right about the guy. And when she returns to Sunnydale after her self-imposed exile, she has the companionship and sympathy of Watcher, mother, and friends. The warrant for her arrest evaporates.

(14) National authority first appears in "Invisible Girl" in the form of two FBI agents who appear at the end of the episode to "recruit" Marcie, but it doesn't appear again until Season Four in the guise of the Initiative. In "Invisible Girl," Buffy and the audience are surprised by the appearance of the FBI; we almost wondered if *BtVS* was going to crossover with *The X-Files*. As in *The X-Files*, the government appears to be engaged in insidious activity. Buffy offers no resistance and the episode has less of a sense of closure than most episodes. "Invisible Girl" precedes "School Hard" by several episodes, so it is the earliest foreshadowing of some kind of collusion between governmental authority and the Forces of Darkness.

(15) In Season Four, The Initiative is a project designed to capture and study supernatural beings, learn about the source of their power and create a weapon based upon both science and the supernatural. Our first glimpse of the Initiative is the sight of commandos stalking demons and vampires on the campus of UC-Sunnydale. At first we are not sure what they are doing with or to the bad guys; we just see these menacing figures in camouflage advancing on creatures they have rendered helpless. Seven episodes into Season Four in "The Initiative," we find out that Riley Finn (Buffy's new crush) and Professor Walsh (Buffy's psychology teacher) are part of the Initiative. Riley is a commando and Walsh is some sort of high-ranking project leader. This softens the image of the Initiative for awhile, but we soon learn there are many secrets being kept in the tunnels under UC-Sunnydale. When the Initiative is

mysterious, Buffy and the Scooby Gang are suspicious and distrustful. Once the Initiative is given the shape of people they know and like, most of the wariness disappears. Buffy trusts Walsh and Riley, but soon learns that some of that trust was misplaced. The initial impression of national authority is that it is suspect—that it is keeping secrets. Season four complicates this view by having well-intentioned people involved in the government's secret activities. Ultimately, however the secretiveness of the government becomes one of the elements that leads to its failure.

(16) Whatever the source of their power, authority figures in *BtVS* are usually either corrupt from their first appearance, like Mayor Wilkins, or eventually corrupted, like Gwendolyn Post and Faith, by the seduction of power. However, the corruption of authority and power in the Buffyverse literally means not only a loss of morality and ethics, but also the loss of one's soul. In other words, authority leads to power, power leads to corruption, and corruption leads to the Dark Side.

(17) The search for power motivates many of the minor villains in the show as well as the major villains like Mayor Wilkins. Those without power or authority will often seek it through evil or corruptive means. For example, in “The Harvest” (1002), Jesse, Xander's friend, prefers being a vampire with all of the power it entails over his mortal life. In “Lie to Me” (2007), Buffy's old friend, Billy Fordham, seeks the immortality and perpetual youth of being a vampire and is willing to betray Buffy in order to get them. On a lighter note, Jonathan in “Superstar” (4017) uses dark magics to make his every wish come true, but he redeems himself by giving up his power to save Buffy and the others.

(18) Though power tends to be an absolute corrupter in BtVS, the show provides a few alternatives to that scenario. For instance, characters can retain their soul and moral integrity if they are removed from the position of power and authority. Giles is a good example. First, his authority over Buffy as her Watcher is questionable to begin with. Buffy usually does as she pleases, how she pleases. She subverts Giles authority over and over. As he tells Kendra, he threw out the Slayer's Handbook soon after meeting Buffy. But the critical episode is “Helpless,” when Buffy turns 18 and must undergo a rite of passage that has been traditionally inflicted upon any Slayer to survive to that age. She is to be locked in a house with a vampire and must kill it without her Slayer powers. Though Giles objects to this hazing, he complies with the wishes of the Watcher's council and administers the drugs that will keep Buffy from accessing her abilities. Giles eventually reveals everything to Buffy and she is furious, feeling betrayed by Giles and the Council. Giles obviously has an internal conflict with the whole ordeal as well. He finally rejects the Council and its authority and helps Buffy survive. Because of his actions, he is removed as Buffy's Watcher. His position of authority is taken from him, but he can keep his soul.

(19) After being dismissed from the council, he firmly steps into the role of Buffy's foster father, another possible position of authority. But Buffy is now 18 and a legal adult. Therefore, a foster father can provide emotional (and in this case slaying) support but is no longer an authority figure and no longer in a position of power. He becomes a helper instead.

(20) Wesley Windham-Price undergoes a similar change in status. Sent to be Faith's Watcher, he is given charge over both slayers after Giles is removed. Buffy subverts and refutes Wesley's authority even more than she did Giles'. She has an open contempt for him and the subsequent episodes demonstrate that it might be well placed contempt. He is a klutz, he fawns over Cordelia, and he “screams like a woman” when in danger. When he tries to tell Buffy what to do about saving Angel, she severs all ties with the Watcher's Council, effectively cutting off Wesley's power and authority (“Graduation Day”). He later joins in the Scooby Gang's final fight against the mayor, but not as a representative of the Council. (And as we find out in the first season of *Angel*, he is later fired from the Watcher's Council and this is a good thing, as the Council seems to be becoming more amoral, if not outright immoral, and Machiavellian.)

(21) Riley Finn is another example of a character who has to be removed from authority and power in order to save his soul. When the Initiative is first glimpsed in the first episode of Season Four, they are shadowy figures armed to the teeth and hunting vampires. They continually appear in the early episodes of the Season Four, and all the foreshadowing techniques, as well as viewers' previous experience with watching the series, lead viewers to believe that these GI Joe guys are going to be the season's villains. So when Riley is revealed to be a member of the Initiative, viewers are dismayed that Buffy has once more fallen for the wrong guy.

(22) For awhile though, Buffy looks like she has met her perfect match, a mortal demon hunter with no soul-stealing curse attached. And she, and the viewers, seem to have been mistaken about the Initiative. Buffy is welcomed into their midst by Riley and Maggie Walsh. She thinks about how much she can accomplish working with them. But then Buffy starts questioning authority, literally. Her repeated questions about why they are collecting demons disturb the well-ordered and quiescent ranks of the Initiative. The possibility that she might infect Riley with her impertinence and independent thinking marks her as dangerous, and Professor Walsh tries to have her killed. When Maggie Walsh reveals that her power and authority have made her corrupt, she loses both life and soul (“The I in Team,” 4013). Killed and reanimated by Adam, she becomes the monster in reality that she appeared to be in personality.

(23) After Walsh's “outing” as the bad guy, many of the secrets of the corruption of the Initiative come out as well. Drugged food. Secret testings. The abomination of Adam. Riley is a part of all of this. After losing a battle to

Adam and suffering from withdrawal, Riley is confused about his role in the Initiative and whether or not he's on the right side. He continues to question what is going on, but does not leave the Initiative right away. It is only after the Initiative captures the werewolf Oz that he decides he must act it. This results in his capture and eventual escape from the Initiative, only to become a fugitive. And his commanding officer calls him an anarchist, because he rejects the rigid order and corruption of the Initiative ("New Moon Rising," 4019).

(24) But the show emphasizes that Riley's defection has saved his soul. This is done through comparison with Forrest. Forrest remains a loyal and unquestioning member of the Initiative. He even suggests that maybe there was a good reason why Professor Walsh wanted to kill Buffy and that murder is acceptable. He is antagonistic towards Buffy once she becomes a "threat" to the rigid, patriarchal order of the Initiative. The cost of Forrest's intransigence? He is also captured and converted by Adam, becoming part demon. But he seems to revel in his new power and evil, like many of the "hostiles" he once hunted. He has lost his soul, like so many before him.

(25) Of all the characters who wield power and authority, Buffy is the only one that doesn't succumb to the temptations and corruption of power. There are several reasons for this. One, she is the hero of the series and therefore must remain uncorrupted. Of course the reason she works as a hero is because she does reject the corrupting influence of the power she has. She does not particularly like being the Slayer, no matter how powerful it makes her. This power also prevents her from leading a normal life with normal friends and loves. She knows she may die at any time and in fact, she does. (First in "Prophecy Girl," but she gets better, and later in "The Gift," though we doubt that this death will be permanent either.) Yet she does not shirk her destiny and refuses to give up. She has a moral compass that points her in the right direction. In "Bad Girls" (3014), we see her being tempted by Faith into giving into the seduction of the Slayer's power, as she smashes glass cases and takes what she wants. For awhile, she revels in the feelings Faith evokes. But after Faith accidentally kills the deputy mayor, Buffy sees what happens when you give into the corrupting nature of power. She refuses to give in and become like Faith.

(26) Part of the reason that Buffy does not "go over to the Dark Side" is because she is not alone. Giles and the Scooby Gang provide a support network for the Slayer. She can share her feelings with Willow and Xander and Giles, and they also help to keep her humble. Where most of the authority figures are solitary megalomaniacs seeking personal power, Buffy is chastised for trying to handle things by herself. At the beginning of Season Two, she insists on working alone and handling things alone and nearly gets Giles and Willow killed ("When She Was Bad," 2001). When she tries to confront Adam by herself, the Gang won't let her. And together, through the help of magic, they provide more power together than even Buffy could by herself. Power shared does not corrupt. This is one of the reasons the show is so popular. Even someone as powerful as Buffy needs a little help from her friends. And those friends just happen to be the (attractive) outcasts and geeks of their high school and town.

(27) The events of Season Five also serve to illustrate how limited Buffy's power is, how limited any supernatural power is. Glorificus, a god, is constrained by the conditions of her imprisonment in this dimension. Magic cannot truly bring Joyce back. The Slayer's power, which warped Faith's soul and is on par with the power sought by her vampire foes, cannot save her mother or ease her own or her sister's pain. Alone, she is no match for Glorificus. Being the Slayer obligates her to kill Dawn, but loving Dawn prevents her. Her strength and reflexes cannot save the world from another apocalypse. Even as she grows in skill, the nature of her power disturbs her. In her vision, the First Slayer tells Buffy that her "gift is death" ("Intervention," 5018) At first, Buffy takes this to mean that her powers are only those of a killer, a destroyer, not a protector. Buffy recognizes the limitations of her power before anyone else and chooses to flee in "Spiral" (5020), a course of action that she hopes will protect Dawn and her friends. When that fails and she is faced with what appears to be an impossible role -- a destroyer who must preserve-- she falls into catatonia ("The Weight of the World, " 5021).

(28) Willow helps Buffy to see that even though she has the abilities of a killer, she has always been a protector, that she has always saved the world and protected the helpless. We are reminded of the episode "The Prom" (3020) in which the students of Sunnydale High name Buffy the "Class Protector." Armed with the determination to protect both Dawn and the rest of the world, she leads the Scooby Gang into battle. As in the climactic battles of

previous seasons, each of the Gang contributes with his or her particular strength, and Buffy's leadership emphasizes the strengths of her friends: Willow uses her growing magical powers; Spike is charged to be Dawn's protector; Xander (a self-described construction worker who likes to bowl) charges in with a wrecking ball; and Giles, who recognizes the self-imposed limitations of Buffy's role, kills Ben/Glory.

(29) Ultimately, she chooses to sacrifice herself. "She is," as Giles says, "a hero, you see; she's not like us." Though she is the Slayer, she will not harm-- or allow to come to harm-- the helpless. She rejects the killer in herself and in sacrificing her life, she preserves her soul.

(30) *BtVS* is a show about youth and marketed to a youth audience. The heroes are characters who are disempowered by the social structures that traditionally govern or control their lives. That authority becomes corrupted and monstrous (literally) when it abuses its power or seeks power as an end itself. As the conclusion of Season Four suggests, even the power of The Slayer can be corruptive. The spirit of the first slayer is angry because Buffy shares her power, and it tries to harm Giles, Willow, and Xander. But Buffy knows where true strength and power lie: in the sharing and love of friends. Buffy and the Scooby Gang are not anarchists (no matter what the Initiative might claim), but they do recognize the threat of authority coupled with power. The bonds of friendship and family and love and compassion can save individuals from the seduction of power. They can also provide a measure of wisdom in the responsible use of power. The targeted audience is one that has little influence over its social conditions, but *BtVS* provides a vicarious sense of control. Not only do the young heroes take control over their immediate conditions, they also save the rest of the world from those who would abuse power for their own selfish motives. One can almost hear the villains collectively crying out ". . . and I would have gotten away with it too, if it hadn't been for those meddling kids!"