

'Bite Me': Buffy and the penetration of the gendered warrior-hero

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Introduction

Can the ultimate girl be the ultimate warrior? If warrior identity is simultaneously a quintessentially masculine identifier, and one of the core expressions of 'innate' masculinity, then the biggest transgression of warrior iconography posed by *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is Buffy's gender. Buffy is both like and not like 'other girls'. The social conventions of mainstream femininity, which have so often been used to argue that women cannot be warriors, are often precisely what make Buffy such an effective soldier in her speculative world. The blurred boundaries that are possible in speculative texts open up space necessary to examine the arguments and gendered ideologies which govern what is, and what is not, possible in the 'real' world. Such texts can often make explicit what is implied in more 'realistic' representations, and can either destabilize or reinforce gendered cultural conventions.¹

Established as the 'chosen one' in the 1992 film, and then in the television series which debuted mid-season in 1997, Buffy has slashed her way not only through the fictional constraints placed upon her predecessors in vampire carnage, but through the conventions governing gendered constructions of the warrior.² Warrior tradition constructs a coherent masculinity, including impenetrable male bodies, as the key to warrior identity, and renders 'slay-gal'³ not only paradoxical but, arguably, impossible. It is this (im)possibility, and the ways in which *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fractures and reinvents the gendered identity of the warrior-hero, which are explored in this article.

Although the 1992 film is an important starting point for this analysis, most of my references are taken from the television series. The character of Buffy herself underwent major revision between the two texts. Joss Whedon's original concept of the beautiful blonde who is able to walk into an alley and not only come out alive but pulverize the monsters pursuing her is still very much a part of the television series, as he has stated in a number of on-line interviews:

I'd seen a lot of horror movies which I'd loved very much, with blonde girls getting themselves killed in dark alleys and I just germinated this idea about how much I'd like to see a blonde girl go into a dark alley, get attacked by a big monster and then kill it! (Whedon, 1998).

However, television Buffy is no longer just a kickboxing cheerleader. She was actually kicked off the cheerleading squad during the first season ('Witch'), possibly in an active distancing tactic between one text and another. She is no longer just the pay-back for all those girls who have been slaughtered in horror films since the beginning

of cinematic history. On television, Buffy is a warrior and a hero, active rather than reactive, a long way from the smart-mouthed 'valley girl' of the film, and definitely *not* a bimbo.⁴

Vampires are creatures of transgression in relation to gender and sexuality. 'Undead' rather than dead or alive, sexual yet only able to reproduce through death, penetrable and penetrating, the vampire blurs traditional binary oppositions underpinning heterosexual constructions of masculinity and femininity. The vampire exists outside human society, and yet is able to 'pass' for human, a constant fear often associated with homosexuality. Regardless of whether the vampire in question is 'male' or 'female', in contemporary constructions the vampire seduces, and penetrates, members of both sexes.⁵ It is fitting, therefore, that the agent of their destruction should also be a transgressor of gender constructions—and of the gendered body. The importance of 'bodies'—physically and metaphysically—to both vampire narratives and the gendering of the warrior is an important connection creating a nexus between *Buffy* and analysis of the subversive potential of the female warrior-hero. Another important strand in this intersection is the reference to soldiers and the military within the televisual text. Soldier identities are 'embodied' by, and embody, *heterosexual* masculinity—an embodiment whose integrity depends upon the externalization of the feminine (Theweleit, 1987; Herbert, 1998, p. 8). The soldier identities portrayed in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are no different.

Surrounding these textual representations are contentions that have been the subject of constant and public argument throughout the 1990s. In the United States (and other Western countries like Australia and the United Kingdom) there have been ongoing debates over the role of women in the military, and in particular whether or not women should be 'allowed' to engage in combat. In Australia a three year report, commissioned by the federal government, into the potential expansion of women's military roles into combat areas was handed down in May 2001. This report was greeted with a storm of radio-talkback debate, and letters to newspapers. There has, as yet, been no definitive action taken on the recommendations made. Arguments against women in combat ranged from 'protecting the femininity of our race', to perceived biological 'inferiorities' like menstruation and the age old bug-bear, upper-body strength (The Rehome Report, May 2001). The disruption to unit cohesion is also always present whenever these issues are argued. There was also the ubiquitous reference to women needing to shower more, and the need for separate showering and toilet facilities (Allen, 2001). Despite the fact that this report provides evidence that there are women who cope equally as well as some men in combat situations, no further movement on this issue has been made. There has also been no comment on evaluating women as individuals for their suitability to combat roles, just as men are evaluated, rather than as a group assigned collective 'feminine' attributes. Defence reporter for *The Australian*, Robert Garran, even opened his report on this issue with the following: 'Women should be allowed in combat roles, providing enough of them are up to the job, said Defence Force Chief Admiral Chris Barrie' (Garran, 2001).

Similar comments abound in the United States whenever the issue of women being 'officially' in combat is raised. As Carolyn H. Becraft (then Assistant Secretary of the US Navy, Manpower and Reserve Affairs) quipped in her keynote address at the 'Women in Uniform' conference held at the Australian Defence Force Academy in 1999: 'It always gets back to sex and toilets.' These debates inform, and are informed by, gendered constructions of warrior identity which appear, and are played upon, in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. These constructions have also been inflected by a growth in masculinist paramilitary culture in the post-Vietnam United States, and by continuing

parallel references to an embattled masculinity, wherein the soldier is often seen to be the last bastion (Gibson, 1994). Indeed, the notion of an 'embattled masculinity' is prominent in much US commentary on issues to do with women and combat, and is often an underlying theme in much criticism of gender equality in the military (Collins, 1997; Ricks, 1997).

Another way *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* operates intertextually with debates on women in the military is military recruiting advertising, targeting both young men and women, which has appeared throughout the programme in 2001. In Australia this advertising presents young women in active but supportive roles, with an emphasis on peace-keeping and medical support—even when the female recruit being depicted is flying a helicopter.⁶

In the United States there was some controversy over a new campaign for the US Army with the slogan 'An Army of One' which appeared during *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* during Season V early in 2001. An appeal to increasingly individualistic youth culture does not appear to be congruous with emphasis on cohesion and team work (Dao, 2001; Truscott, 2001). However, 'An Army of One' does appear to stress the importance of individual skills and abilities within a team and this may indeed be important to the recruitment of women to the armed forces. The placement of some of this advertising during *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* rather than more exclusively during programmes with a more heavily male-dominant audience implies a greater emphasis on recruiting women than in previous campaigns (Truscott, 2001). The slogan, 'An Army of One' is particularly fitting for an audience tuned into a chosen one fighting to save the world. Buffy doesn't fight in isolation, and neither do army recruits, but this should never undermine the benefits of individual capability.

'Soldiering' was introduced directly in Season II of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* ('Halloween', 1997). As a result of a spell cast by the evil chaos-worshipping sorcerer Ethan Rayne, people became what their Halloween costumes were—they literally became what they wore. Xander, one of Buffy's male sidekicks, became a seasoned warrior by dressing up as a soldier. Xander, a member of Buffy's circle of friends and supporters dubbed the 'scoobie-gang', is a sometimes bumbling, often witty character who in previous episodes often needed to be rescued. His 'transformation' through donning a uniform is not unlike rhetoric associated with the ways in which the military claims to 'make men out of boys'. This sartorial metamorphosis is a playful juxtaposition to Buffy's 'camouflage', parts of which are her trappings of conventional femininity.⁷ Play with post-Vietnam cinematic constructions of the warrior, and soldier narratives, continue throughout the series until direct reference is made to *Apocalypse Now* at the end of Season IV (1999), concluding the season's main narrative of conflict between the Slayer and the military unit named 'the Initiative'. 'The Initiative' is a large, government-funded military unit set up to neutralize the demon scourge of Sunnydale who, despite differences of species, motivation and degree of threat, have all been reduced to the ubiquitous three letter acronym 'HST's' ('Hostile Sub-Terrestrials'). The 'commandos' in this unit are all highly trained, elite soldiers and—like the Navy SEALs in the United States or the SAS in Australia—they are all male. The hidden (and actual) agenda of the Initiative, however, is to create the ultimate soldier by combining parts of demons, human beings and cyborg technology. Its scientific, high-tech approach appears to epitomize another gendered binary—the association of masculinity with science and technology. By contrast the 'scoobie-gang' uses a mixture of the arcane and the technological, and its use of magic characterizes it as a 'feminine' part of the battle equation.

In the United States, and other Western countries such as Australia, the Vietnam War has been depicted as a turning point in military recruiting strategy and the construction of soldier identity. It has also been represented as a turning point in national identity. Susan Jeffords asserts that the military and American national identity are so closely interconnected that following the Vietnam War a process of 'remasculinization' was necessary to recover the 'integrity' of the masculine body—and body politic (Jeffords, 1989). This 'integrity' was damaged by Vietnam not being a 'just war'—the American presence in Vietnam was highly questionable and incidents like the massacre at My Lai meant that soldiers returning home were reviled rather than revered. In the aftermath of no previous war was the damaged body, and mind, of the warrior, so much in the public eye—often through televisual representation. And it has been through cinema and television, in texts ranging from *Platoon* and *Born on the Fourth of July* to the *Rambo* movies, to television series like *The A Team* and *Rip Tide*, that attempts at healing wounded masculine identities took place (Jeffords, 1989; Gibson, 1994). This breach in the appearance of impenetrability of the soldier body has been compounded by the need to reinvent military identity and, following the abolition of the draft in 1973, the need to recruit increasing numbers of women to make up for severe shortfalls of military personnel. This change in recruiting strategy was accompanied by, and partly resulted from, the rise of second-wave feminism. This has also been interpreted by some as a 'feminization' of the military, a terminal weakening despite the *need* to use women to make up for the shortfall of male personnel.⁸

Xander's 'soldier-guy' experience connects the body of post-Vietnam cinematic texts and the fundamental flaws of a masculinist construction of war, depicted through 'the Initiative'. This depiction includes many of the fissures that became visible as a result of the Vietnam War, like the abrogation of blame for My Lai and other similar events when soldiers and officers were 'just obeying orders'.⁹ The fear of an enemy who is difficult to identify is also present, particularly in vampires who 'pass for' human. The eventual separation of military from government is also evident in both the Initiative and post-war analyses of the 'loss' of the Vietnam War. Indeed, the government is blamed for the (ab)use of project 314—the project headed by Professor Maggie Walsh which attempted to create the ultimate soldier by harnessing demon energies and attributes and grafting them (literally) onto the bodies of men—which cost so many soldiers their lives, just as the high-brass and US government are often blamed for 'losing' the Vietnam War.¹⁰ When Buffy enlists Xander's aid in gaining access to the Initiative bunker, his girlfriend Anja complains that 'It's not like he was in the Nam, he was GI Joe for one night.' This statement is Anja's way of expressing her concern for Xander's safety, and reminds the audience that Xander is by no means always a warrior ('Goodbye Iowa', Season IV, 1999).¹¹ It is also a way of overtly connecting representations of the Vietnam War and Buffy's ongoing quest to wrest the world from the grasp of apocalyptic demons—the Hellmouth is a constant reminder of how apocalypse *can* be now. Xander's soldier identity is temporary, but is not threatened by a woman giving orders, or slaying, and there do not appear to be any negative side-effects from his experience. The 'real' soldiers, the Initiative commandos, are threatened by the feminine identity of the Slayer, but her portrayal overall is not a negative one, unlike the active vilification of strong women in many of the cinematic and literary texts discussed by both Jeffords and Gibson.¹² The ways in which the story lines from Season IV directly pit the 'feminine' Slayer against the boys' own, 'shoot to kill, obey orders' Initiative is particularly interesting for this analysis of just how subversive of warrior constructions *Buffy* actually is.

Not Like Other Girls?

In the film, according to her Watcher, Buffy does 'everything wrong', and this is what ensures her survival where other Slayers have failed. Her female-teenager 'get-a-life' lack of discipline works in her favour when confronting the master of the vampires, Lothos, and she does not fall prey to the 'games' that have been played for centuries and which have resulted in her predecessors' destruction. While Buffy responds to her boyfriend Pike's statement that 'Buffy, you're not like other girls', with an insistent 'Yes I am', she has already been set up and set apart as different, both because of the trappings of traditional femininity—her 'keen fashion sense'—and what lies beneath them.

This is also the case in the television series, where Buffy is the girl for whom 'the Slayer handbook' is no use ('What's My Line', Part 2, Season II, 1997). Her unconventional involvement in life, rather than having a pure focus on training as the Slayer, means more hazard in some respects, but in others this is her salvation. In the very first episode ('Welcome to the Hellmouth'), Buffy identifies a vampire by his dated clothing (she concludes that he must have been underground for ten years to go out in public like that!) rather than by the heightened senses of the Slayer her Watcher, Giles, is expecting. Where Buffy is 'not like other girls', the difference is as much about her separation from Slayer traditions, as it is about her isolation from other young women her age. This isolation is crucial to any narrative construction of the hero, who must be somehow separated from, and elevated above, the rest of the population. However, where masculine heroics require elements of continuity between the hero and the group from which he is separated, and by which his 'uncommon valour' can be measured, the construction of feminine heroism necessitates that the individual be 'not like other girls'.¹³

In Each Generation there is a Chosen One? Buffy and the Female Warrior Tradition

Slayer mythology dictates that there is one girl in each generation who can 'kill the vampires' and other demons who threaten human life in this world. Nothing visibly distinguishes Buffy from other girls, and the secret of her identity is supposed to assist in her efforts to banish evil. Buffy's gender is the key to her camouflage, and early on she is reminded she is supposed to be 'just a girly girl like the rest of us' ('Phases', Season II, 1997).¹⁴ Sherrie Inness has argued that in early television depictions of 'tough' heroines, the potency of their toughness was mitigated by the disguises they were required to adopt when going into 'action'. In her discussion of the 1970s series *Charlie's Angels* and *The Bionic Woman* she states that 'masquerade is often used to reveal a woman's attitude is only skin-deep' (Inness, 1999, p. 36). According to Inness the use of disguise allows a revelation of 'true femininity' under a tough exterior. This defuses the threat these women pose to a gender order which associates strength with masculinity—not femininity. Inness argues that *Xena: Warrior Princess* breaks with this convention as Xena is strong, doesn't hide, and is self-assured in her identity.¹⁵ However, the distance in time alters Xena's impact as a warrior-hero in much the same way that masquerade watered down the potency of her predecessors, or elements of the fantastic dilute Buffy's potency. Cloaked in fictional antiquity, the exoticism of Xena opens up space for her violent lifestyle, in much the same way women of 'other cultures'¹⁶ are constructed as being outside civilized conventions of femininity.¹⁷

The constant tensions evident in televisual depictions of powerful women in non-conventional roles, and the problems in reconciling these depictions with more conservative gender ideologies present in the wider community, have been present since television (and second-wave feminism) was a nascent force in the 1960s. Julie D'Acci discusses ways in which the subversive and the conventional were combined in the transition between book heroine, and television heroine, for the character Honey West—a female 'dick' (detective). Honey West's ability to solve cases on her own, and her intellectual superiority over her 'boyfriend', were countered by her 'sexy' appearance. In turn her 'sex appeal' was toned down for 1960s audiences by the presence of said boyfriend and a live-in middle-aged female chaperone (D'Acci, 1997). These tensions between exploring new character constructions and societal norms continue—even, or perhaps especially, in the figure of the female warrior-hero. *Wonder Woman*, who made the transition from comic book to television in the 1970s, is another example of these tensions, and her presence first within the military and then within a government/military intelligence agency make her an interesting predecessor to Buffy. By day Linda Carter played demure but capable Diana Prince who hid behind a desk and enormous pair of spectacles, in times of need she was Wonder Woman who 'in her satin tights' fought for the 'red white and blue'. As Diana Prince she deferred to the judgement of the men/commanding officers around her, as Wonder Woman she fought for their causes. Helpless femininity is a part of Diana Prince, and this is traded for overt sex appeal when she dons her skimpy star spangled costume as Wonder Woman.¹⁸ Buffy has a much more complicated relationship both with authority and with her sexuality. She regularly disobeyed both Giles, her Watcher, and the Watcher's Council (until she quit the Council in Season III) and was never the 'regimental soldier' that would have allowed her to fit into, and be manipulated by, the Initiative. Unlike many of her predecessors (or contemporaries) Buffy, although 'sexy', does not use her sexuality as an artifice or a weapon, nor does it detract from her ability as a warrior.

While Buffy's camouflage is her gender, she is never actually 'in disguise'—unlike her predecessors she doesn't pretend to be someone she's not, and her mainstream femininity (and the colour of her hair) mean she is not constructed as 'other' in the same way as, for example, Xena. Even when Buffy is flexing her Slayer-muscle and has to be reminded not to be too obvious, being 'girlie' is as much a part of her character as being the Slayer is, thus undermining the conflation of culturally constructed attributes of femininity and 'innate' capabilities.

From depictions of Cane, the werewolf killer, who claims there's 'no-one man enough' to do the job ('Phases', Season II, 1997), to the incredulity of Riley (Buffy's boyfriend of Season IV/V) at her physical strength, humans of both sexes are constantly shocked by Buffy's abilities. This incredulity (which appears to be largely absent in the demon population of Sunnydale) might be mirrored in the audience itself. 'Buffy's body is a site of considerable struggle in the narrative. She is recognizably coded as slim, youthful, fit, and stylish', while still capable of kicking serious demon-butt (Owen, 1999, Part 1). Owen's claim that Buffy's body is the site of struggle extends to the increasingly visual fragility of Buffy's body from the film to Season 1 and then in transition from one season to the next. Buffy's strength, by Seasons IV and V is palpably much more supernatural than 'corpo' real'. Where the bodies of male warriors are visibly strong (and often bulky), exemplified in the use of actors like Sylvester Stallone in the *Rambo* movies and even the 'hunk' factor of Riley within *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* itself, Buffy complies with the visible constraints of conventional femininity. Unlike Sarah Connor in *Terminator 2*, whose obvious muscularity was a visible distancing between herself and

her helpless femininity in *Terminator*,¹⁹ or *Xena: Warrior Princess* who is six feet tall and muscular, Buffy is visibly coded with the vulnerability implicit in the conventions of femininity as a consumer item (Bordo, 1995). The factor which assists her invisibility, and therefore her 'unconventional' mission as the Slayer, is also what makes her acceptable on an ongoing basis to a mainstream television audience. The conventions of femininity are necessary to the survival of the show as a consumer product, as much as they are to the survival of the Slayer within the show itself.

While there has always been emphasis on Buffy's difference from other Slayers, her increasingly supernatural abilities reinforce a much more traditionally gendered model for heroism. There are common elements between the construction of Buffy as a warrior and other historical and mythic female heroes, like Joan of Arc who has also been prominent on television and in cinema in the 1990s.²⁰ Buffy's strength does not stem purely from her own physicality. Just as Joan of Arc mythology draws on ideas of spiritual strength, her gifts in war being bestowed by God, Buffy's position as a 'chick with attitude' endowed with special, magical powers recasts and represents this 'supernatural', especially feminine, strength. During the first three seasons in particular, the sacrifices Buffy makes in order to be 'the Slayer' lend more than an aura of martyrdom to her stormy adolescent demeanour. Buffy's adolescent understanding of the world she is trying to save is another element of commonality between the two narratives, as are her prophetic dreams or visions. In 'Gingerbread' (Season III, 1998), a group of adults led by her own mother attempted to burn Buffy at the stake, an outcome resulting from their inability to understand her role or the nature of the 'Hellmouth' upon which they live.²¹

Buffy's status as 'the chosen one', apart and hidden from the majority of the populace she protects, is not far distant from Western traditions which isolate female heroism and classify it as aberrant. Figures like Joan of Arc and Molly Pitcher²² have been separated from mainstream constructions of feminine collectivity. Joan of Arc stands out as a heroine chosen by God, and Molly Pitcher is a figure whose origins lie in the activities of a group of women during the American War of Independence distilled by narrative tradition into one individual. In the twentieth century, groups of women have participated in myriad wars but their experiences have been encapsulated by the narrative parentheses of history, thus perpetuating the ways in which femininity is signified as external to the masculine sphere of war. Until the Vietnam War the roles of women in Western militaries have been characterized by the idea that their participation is temporary due to states of emergency—abnormal actions for abnormal times. In debates surrounding the entry of women into the military of Western countries such as the United States, women as a group have either been designated as physically incapable, or individuals have been singled out as exceptions (Francke, 1997). Buffy is not as isolated as either her predecessors, or Kendra, the character who arrives in Sunnydale to take her place as the Slayer after Buffy 'died' (but only for a minute!) at the hands of the Master ('What's My Line', Season II, 1997). This difference between Buffy and other Slayers is actually commented on by Spike, a vampire, who has killed two Slayers in the past. When Buffy makes a narrow escape due to the assistance of her friends, for example her mother hitting Spike over the head with an axe, he whines 'A Slayer with family and friends. That wasn't in the brochure' ('School Hard', Season II, 1997). In spite of her 'gang', Buffy nonetheless remains a largely hidden entity. While this camouflage releases Buffy from some of the constraints which conventionally operate for the gendered warrior, it also reflects part of a broader Western tradition of the exclusion, and invisibility, of female heroism. The factor that negates this invisibility is the television

audience—the audience *sees* Buffy in all her guises for what she is, while in order for the plot lines to operate other characters within the show may not. The popularity of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* means that while the narrative constraints operating *within* the text swathe Buffy in the traditional invisibility cloak of femininity, the medium of television renders the cloak, rather than the girl, transparent.

Taking ‘the Initiative’: Slay Gal versus Soldier Boy

Riley: ‘I’m not even sure I could take you.’

Buffy: ‘That all depends on your meaning.’ (‘A New Man’, Season IV)

In Season IV Buffy takes ‘the Initiative’, with all the connotations of ‘taking’, her position as the Slayer threatened by, and threatening to, the all-male commando unit.²³ Buffy is ‘taken’ by Riley, in that she really likes him and has sex with him (but in bed, as when they are sparring, it is arguable who is taking whom). She takes on ‘the Initiative’, and finally takes them out. Buffy also damages the integrity of the Initiative by asking questions and taking charge. Her refusal to mitigate her visible femininity by donning combat fatigues similarly disrupts the Initiative’s cohesion. One of the differences between the Slayer and the Soldier is evident in the portrayal of Riley (an officer) obeying orders, where Buffy questions them. When Buffy saves Giles from his ignominious transformation into a demon, Riley comments: ‘You’re really strong, like spider-man strong ... and you’re in charge. You’re like make the plan, execute the plan, no-one giving you orders’ (‘A New Man’, Season IV, 2000).

Asking questions is a part of what makes Buffy different from Riley and his commandos, and approaching things differently is a part of the rhetoric military women deploy when arguments which centre on less physical strength are raised (De Pauw, 1998; Holm, 1982). In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* the notion of women fighting differently is often unspoken, but there are instances when an overt distinction is made. In Buffy’s first encounter with Kendra²⁴ (‘What’s My Line’, Part 2, Season II, 1998) it is Buffy’s unusual manoeuvres which even the fight between the two Slayers in her favour. Buffy is forced to use ‘chick-fight’ tactics, i.e. digging her nails into her opponents arm, to gain the upper hand—a move denigrated and trivialized by the very use of the term ‘chick-fight’, but effective nonetheless. Different approaches to battle and not playing by ‘the rules’ are reasons cited for keeping women off the battlefield—women have been constructed as more dangerous than men because they are supposedly uncontrollable when violent.²⁵ The ‘mirror effect’, where angles from the same arguments are used by both sides of a controversy, is ever present in discourses surrounding women in combat. The claimed unpredictability of women in combat partly stems from misogyny inherent in soldier identity. The association of women with civilian society means that the fear of the woman warrior stems from an inability to identify her easily. The exclusion of femininity from the coherent masculinity of the warrior adds to this—it’s against ‘the rules’ for women to fight and be good at it. Many of the atrocities directed at female Viet Cong during the Vietnam War stem from this fear (Baker, 1982, p. 215). The Viet Cong women, having transgressed the rules of gender roles, were viewed by their enemy as fair game; the rules of fair treatment as prisoners of war did not apply, leading to an extremity of violence in their treatment that has been represented as unprecedented.²⁶

While the naturalization of male warrior identity relies upon the negation of masculinity as a cultural construct, it is simultaneously dependent upon the immediate visual

recognition of the gender difference of women. A way of containing the threat to the gender hierarchy that women embody is to characterize them as guerrillas and terrorists (De Groot, 1995, p. 259). This is evident in the representations of Viet Cong women and has echoes in late twentieth-century speculative constructions of the female warrior like Buffy. If these women cannot be recognized as a part of an organized military outfit which plays by 'the rules', they are not only fair game, but can be constructed as not real soldiers. They are not a threat to arguments of exclusion that depend on constructions of biological difference—the lone female warrior, the terrorist and the guerrilla, are 'not like other girls', despite visible coding to the contrary.

While the inability to clearly identify women as soldiers has been constructed as threatening to masculine warrior identity, being able to identify soldiers as women is possibly a bigger threat. Military uniforms are crucial as signifiers of military masculinity turning men into soldiers and separating them from civilian society. Women in the military have found the wearing of uniforms a mixed blessing, forced to subsume their gender identity in institutions coded by their very clothing as masculine (Herbert, 1998). Buffy's refusal to don a uniform when temporarily inducted into the Initiative ensures her continued separation from the group's identity, and can be construed as a refusal of the gender camouflage so integral to the functioning of late twentieth-century military institutions. When pursuing a Polgara demon, Initiative chief Maggie Walsh says '... you might want to be suited up for this', to which Buffy replies 'Oh you mean the cammo and stuff. I thought about it but on me it's going to look all "Private Benjamin"'. Don't worry I've patrolled in this halter many times' ('The I in Team', Season IV, 2000). Buffy's maintenance of a visible female identity from *within* the masculine warrior group is even more disruptive than the inability to immediately identify women in uniform as women.

Buffy rends the seamlessness of masculine warrior identity through her visible difference, and her refusal to operate completely outside the Initiative's boundaries. Her visible femininity in no way detracts from her performance as the Slayer, mocking the masculine coding of warrior tradition and the military. A 'girl'—no matter how powerful—is a threat rather than an asset to this code, and while Riley is initially immune to the threat Buffy poses to his masculinity, other members of his 'team' are not. Forrest, a fellow commando, complains bitterly at his perception of the privileging of Buffy over the rest of the team, despite recurrent proof of her fighting prowess: 'It just isn't right ... I've always been Riley's second in command instead he picks a girl' ('The I in Team', Season IV, 2000). In Season V Riley becomes increasingly uncomfortable with Buffy's independence and super-hero status. Graham, another of his compatriots, points out that Riley still has a sense of belonging with his unit and has the insight to recognize that Riley cannot be content as 'the mission's boyfriend'. Riley constantly needs to assert and prove his fighting prowess, and his masculinity. Buffy has no such problems with her gender identity.

Impenetrability and stability are two elements of masculine warrior identity which are simultaneously crucial to, and constantly embattled within, this construction. Impenetrability presents the ultimate paradox for the soldier—while he must appear impenetrable, his bodily integrity is constantly under threat when in combat. Military jargon reduces dead soldiers to a 'body count', and weaponry potentially reduces a whole to less than the sum of its parts. The construction of 'Adam' by the heads of the Initiative inverts the appearance of bodily integrity for the ultimate soldier. 'Adam' is constructed from 'parts'—human, demon and machine—each part welded onto the other and visible to viewers and characters alike. Indeed, 'Adam' needs Buffy to 'even up the kill ratio' as

a part of his final plan to create the ultimate army so he ends up with equal human and demon body parts ('Primeval', Season IV, 2000).

In terms of (hetero)sexual symbolism, for masculinity to remain dominant it must appear impenetrable or risk being coded as feminized. This rigidity of masculine identity contrasts directly with ways in which the feminine has been associated with fluidity, and this fluidity is threatening to the solid stability of the masculine warrior (Theweleit, 1987). The penetrability of the masculine body implies the 'threat' of homosexuality, and a passivity that is anathema to heterosexual masculinity. Fears surrounding the 'threat' of homosexuals in the US military resulted in a number of purges of personnel and culminated in the 'don't ask, don't tell, don't pursue' policy which was the Clinton administration's solution to the detrimental effects these purges had on the military effectiveness (Shilts, 1993). Penetration does not pose the same threat to representations of femininity, partly as a result of this fluidity, as it does to the iconography of the male warrior-hero. Buffy has herself thrice been bitten by a vampire (by the Master in Season I, by Angel her boyfriend ('Graduation Day', Part 1, Season III, 1999), and once by Dracula in the first episode of Season V), and her identity remained intact. She was not transformed into a vampire, nor did she die. Buffy also wields weapons which 'penetrate' in order to slay vampires, proving that the Slayer, like her prey, is both penetrating and penetrable. Warriors, too, are both of these things, but the latter factor must constantly be denied in order to maintain male-warrior mythologies, and penetration is to pervert and undo masculine warrior identity as can be seen in the character of 'Adam'. The female warrior-hero embodied by the Slayer has not yet been punctured to her detriment and requires no such fiction to establish and maintain her potency.

Transformation is crucial to soldier identity, and yet it is also a factor which undermines the stability of the construct—soldiering 'makes' men in direct contradiction to claims that warrior identity is a *natural* expression of masculinity. Within Season IV of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, although Buffy's strength is *supernatural* it is still a part of her, while Riley and his fellow commandos are unsuspectingly fed 'meds' to induce super-strength. This chemical tampering with the male body can be viewed as an extension of the ways in which the military transforms men into soldiers. It also resonates with stories that have emerged from the Gulf War, of soldiers being 'immunized' with experimental drugs (Washington-Valdez, 1999; Miller, 1996). The use of this kind of reference also brings to mind the casting of actors like Sylvester Stallone in Vietnam War film texts, his steroid-pumped body enhancing the visibility of his heroics (Tasker, 1993, p. 78). The hyper-muscularity of the Initiative commandos is an expression of their masculinity but it is *not* natural. The ultimate soldier, 'Adam' is visibly coded as masculine, but is unnatural in the extreme and is constructed in a laboratory.²⁷ Like the vampires they hunt, the Initiative commandos have been 'transformed', and the ultimate transformation is the creation of a monster.

Conclusion

Buffy clearly demonstrates many similarities to traditional Western constructions of female heroism—including her aberrant and mythic status. Her disruption of masculine warrior identity is also not far removed from the ways in which women have been conceptualized in opposition and external to soldier identity. Many of the issues raised in Season IV parallel arguments which surround women in the military, and particularly in combat. In the attempt to exclude women from the armed forces they have been characterized as 'unpredictable', dangerous to unit cohesion, sexual distractions and

weaker links in the team structure. All of these elements are present in Season IV of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. As Professor Walsh, head of the Initiative comments 'So she walks in and the rules just suddenly break ... be careful with her, she reacts on instinct, there's no discipline there, her loyalties are uncertain' ('A New Man', Season IV, 2000). The intimate connection with the 'nature' of the Slayer, her instinctive reactions, inherent strength, and her 'lack of discipline' can also be viewed as extensions of traditional constructions of femininity and female heroism. However, while elements of mainstream iconography of both male and female identities all colour depictions of the Slayer, they are simultaneously exposed and blown apart within the parameters of the show—in the case of the soldiers of 'the Initiative' this final explosion is both literal and figurative. Transformation, camouflage and the transgression of gender identity are common to the Slayer, the soldiers and the hordes of hell. The Slayer makes female heroism not only visible to her audience, but very stylish: the soldiers are neither 'natural' nor impenetrable, and vampires and other monsters are often less monstrous than human beings, as is evidenced by the creation of 'Adam' by a government authority. While Buffy may wear the latest fashion it never restricts her movement, and even after being thrice bitten she never ultimately shies from her duties as the Slayer.

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Notes

- [1] In her examination of the relationship between history and Hollywood, Karen Hall argues that the impact of speculative constructions of militarized masculinity, like that depicted in the 1998 film *Small Soldiers*, can often be more effective than those in more 'historically' based texts like *Saving Private Ryan*. She uses *Small Soldiers* to discuss post-Vietnam anxieties about undefinable enemies, the 'domestication' of war through the media of television and toys, and the perceived threats of globalization. 'As I have interpreted it, *Small Soldiers* is a film about masculine anxiety and the changing face of the workplace and the military. This masculine anxiety has been projected into the realm of a feminized filmic genre—an animated children's film.' In terms of genre it is more difficult to place *Buffy* in a feminized space, but the elements of the fantastic, adolescent characters and intended audience, all indicate that this might be the case. Just as children's texts should never be dismissed as such, as somehow less serious than 'adult' cinema, speculative television texts can provide insights that more conventional, 'realistic', texts hide beneath their appearances of 'serious' or 'realistic' drama. See Hall (1999). In the case of 'Buffy' and other female warrior-heroes in Western culture, regardless of the genre in which they appear their bodies, and the scenarios in which they appear, must be speculative, as in the 'real' world Western women are not 'officially' ever in combat. Thus a film text like *GI Jane* which was released in 1998 could also be classed as 'speculative', despite its existence as a more 'realistic' text, as there has never been an occasion when women were allowed into the Navy SEALs nor is there likely to be in the very near future. However, if it is possible to read films like those in the *Rambo* series as belonging to the body of work relating to the Vietnam War and the post-Vietnam reconstruction of military (and militarized) masculinity, then despite the placement of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in genres which deal with the 'fantastic' (whether it be fantasy or horror) this text can be read alongside more 'realistic' texts which construct soldier identities.
- [2] The fictional constraints are both textual references within the 'Buffy' constructions, and intertextually related. For example, in the 1992 film, Merrick (Donald Sutherland) constantly harps on how he never had as much trouble with the other girls, to which Buffy retorts 'And where are they now?' In the final two episodes of Season IV (1999–2000) of the television series, Buffy and her friends tap into the power of the 'primal' Slayer—a power no one appears to really understand. An attempt to understand this power, and the generations of previous Slayers, seems to be a premise upon which Season V commences. When Buffy confronts the primal Slayer in a dreamscape in the final episode of Season IV she points out the ways in which things have changed, and the way in which seemingly superficial details, like 'I sneeze, I shop', affect the construction of the Slayer and warrior tradition.

- [3] This term for Buffy was coined by her classmate Cordelia in 'Graduation Day, Part II', when Cordelia was expressing her (somewhat dubious) support for Buffy's plan for foiling the scheme of the evil Mayor Wilkins to become a demon and snack upon the student populace at the high-school graduation ceremony.
- [4] For a more in-depth look at the differences between the film and television texts, and some of the textual and social contexts which surround both texts, see Moss (2001). Interestingly, Sarah Michelle Gellar, who plays television Buffy, has actually been the blonde who 'gets it' in two films, *Scream 2* and *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, both released in the United States in 1997 the same year *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* debuted on television. So not only has Buffy moved from the bimbo her name implies to a much more complex character, but Whedon's retribution for the victims of traditional horror-flicks occurs on an intertextual level, where the slain from two cinematic texts has literally become 'the Slayer' on television.
- [5] For a description of the ways in which the vampire transgresses heterosexual norms, see Schopp (1997). See also Wisker (2001).
- [6] It is worth noting here that while this is a fascinating link between *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the military, this advertising runs through other programmes on other channels in the same time slot, like *The West Wing* and *Star Trek*.
- [7] During this identity crisis, Buffy is dressed as a noblewoman from the eighteenth century and is trapped in the helpless femininity so often portrayed as characteristic of that period. Her helplessness is a liability and continuing with the theme that clothes can be a part of transformation, but also acknowledging the evidence of broader trends during the 1990s to portray female warriors on television, Buffy's best friend Willow asks 'Couldn't she have dressed up as Xena?'
- [8] There are many examples of this kind of commentary. A more populist text which created a considerable amount of controversial publicity is that by Stephanie Gutmann (Gutmann, 2000). For an example which is aimed at a more scholarly audience see the paper by military theorist Martin Van Crefeld (Van Crefeld, 2000).
- [9] My Lai was the name of a village in Vietnam where a massacre of men, women and children took place in 1968. The name My Lai has become synonymous with unspeakable atrocities, and has become even more infamous for the way in which punishment for the perpetrators has never really occurred. They were 'following orders', and even Lt Calley (the officer in charge of the company who 'took' My Lai), was not imprisoned for very long and he too used this defence.
- [10] Jeffords discusses this separation as another means of reconstituting the integrity of the warrior in post-Vietnam society. The betrayal of troops on the ground meant a shifting of responsibility for their actions and added to the grievances of returning veterans. In Season V, Riley intensely distrusts 'the Government' but rejoins a crack military unit upon assurances that it was not a government operation being embarked upon, but a military one.
- [11] Anja's complaint is also a potential signifier for the difference between *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* with its butt-kicking blonde hero, and the previously mentioned texts which form the post-Vietnam representational tradition.
- [12] Initiative chief Professor Maggie Walsh is the exception here within *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and her betrayal of her 'boys' is the ultimate one, making the break with post-Vietnam constructions in which women are allied with those who would ultimately betray the soldiers on the ground much more complex, and by no means clean. That Professor Walsh is an intellectual—not a soldier—herself, reinforces the gendered boundaries of the masculine warrior, but also establishes a conservative pattern, despite the subversive potential of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as a whole.
- [13] For a discussion of the conflicting requirements that a warrior be both 'everyman', and someone exceptional see Morgan (1994, p. 174).
- [14] In the film, one of the differences between Buffy and her predecessors is the fact that she has had the 'mark of the covenant' removed from her body—for cosmetic reasons. This visible signifier inscribed on the Slayer's body is absent from the television series as well assisting the seamless integration of Buffy into her high-school and then college population. Distinguishing marks or insignia are dangerous breaches of camouflage—and should never be underestimated. This was explored in 'The Dark Age', Season II, 1997, when parts of Giles's (Buffy's Watcher) past come to light. He was a part of a demon-worshipping cult as a young man and was tattooed to indicate his membership. This tattoo acted as a beacon to the spirit of the demon, and an invitation to possession.
- [15] I would like to argue that although the homosexual subtext of *Xena: Warrior Princess* makes it a subversive text for mainstream, prime-time television, this 'subtext' does not actually make it subversive of a military culture that castigates women as simultaneously heterosexually promiscuous and lesbian.

The fact that this portrayal of homosexuality is largely present through 'subtext' can also possibly be seen as an extension of the 'Don't ask, don't tell' military policy regarding homosexual personnel. For a discussion of the issues surrounding a homosexual reading of *Xena* and the connection to this policy as an attitude of the 1990s, see Helford (2000).

- [16] See the discussion of women in the Viet Cong below.
- [17] An earlier female warrior figure who was constructed as well and truly outside the 'constraints' of civilized behaviour was Leela, who appeared in the British television series *Dr Who* between January 1977 and March 1978. Leela was a part of a 'warrior tribe' and was set up as a counterpoint to the Doctor's rational (if eccentric) ways of solving problems, and getting out of life-threatening situations. On more than one occasion Leela had to be prevented from simply drawing a knife to solve problems. Leela was constructed as sexy and rather simple, and she came from a 'tribe', thereby implying a primitive lifestyle. Whether from another planet, or another time, these television warriors are distanced and thus defused by their placement on the boundaries of 'civilized' (and 'real') time and space.
- [18] The need to display sex appeal is one of the contradictions in female soldier identity in the twentieth century. In Australia and in the United States recruitment was affected by the supposed lack of femininity of servicewomen, which led to an emphasis on glamour in recruitment advertising.
- [19] James William Gibson has argued that Sarah Connor and Ripley in the *Alien* movies actually do not disrupt what he calls the culture of the 'New Warrior', despite their gender. Their bodies are not coded as overtly feminine, and they are separated from 'other' women who are eroticized, or more closely connected to the domestic sphere. Despite Buffy's separation from 'other girls', she is very attached to other spheres in her life. Her separation is not total, like that of Sarah Connor or Ripley, further blurring the lines demarcating gendered roles and identities. See Gibson (1994, pp. 63–64).
- [20] The importance of Joan of Arc to traditions of female heroism has been reasserted in the late 1990s—and illustrates the ways in which conventions of the female warrior operate both within and between different texts. In 1999 there were two films and one television mini-series, all of which add to a body of visual material dealing with the 'Maid of Orléans': *The Messenger: the Story of Joan of Arc* (Luc Besson, 1999); *Joan of Arc* (Christian Duguay, CBS Television, 1999); *Joan of Arc: the Virgin Warrior* (Ronald F. Maxwell, 1999). In the two cinematic texts there are connections with other films about war and warriors through their directors. Luc Besson directed *The Fifth Element* (1997), a science fiction story in which the ultimate weapon—and chosen one—was a woman; and Ronald Maxell directed *Gettysburg* (1993), a Civil War epic.
- [21] The connections to Joan of Arc reappear in Season IV, in 'Fear Itself', when Willow (an aspiring witch) dresses as Joan of Arc for Halloween—she too was burned at the stake in 'Gingerbread' in the previous season.
- [22] Molly Pitcher is a figure who emerged during the American Revolution. As legend has it she followed her husband into battle and then 'manned' his cannon when he was shot. Linda Grant De Pauw cites this as an example where the actions of many women were conflated into one figure to maintain the historical fiction that women have always been absent from the battlefield. 'Molly Pitcher' was actually a term used to refer to women who carried the water necessary for the maintenance of the cannons. See De Pauw (1981, p. 209, 1998). See also Holm (1982, ch. 1).
- [23] The commandos are all male. However, the project leader is a female scientist, Professor Maggie Walsh. Professor Walsh is ironically referred to as 'Mother', and is the key figure in the research which produces 'Adam', a monstrous construction Dr Frankenstein would have been proud of—part human, parts of different demons, and part machine.
- [24] While there is only ever supposed to be 'one girl in all the world' who can be the Slayer, Buffy died (for a minute) when the Master drowned her in Season I ('Prophecy Girl', 1997) leading to the activation of the next Slayer—Kendra.
- [25] For an examination of images of women and their uncontrollable violence, see Dijkstra (1986). For a World War I example of the ways in which women are characterized as more ruthless and blood hungry in the imagination of soldiers, see Matthews (1986). See also Bruce Clunies-Ross (1997, p. 175). Clunies-Ross avers that this recognition of the misogyny of soldiers is 'hardly compatible' with the legend of Australian soldier prowess in the figure of the Anzac, a part of which has traditionally been a certain amount of chivalry. However, he has not dealt with the gendered construction of the soldier and I would argue that this misogyny, although never overtly recognized, is very much a part of the way in which the Anzac is constructed.
- [26] The violence towards women during the Vietnam War has been represented as unprecedented; however, this is part of the discourse of military history has often ignored the violence enacted upon civilian populations, where most of the casualties occur among women. An example of this has been the long and ongoing struggle to designate the rape of civilian women as a war crime.

[27] In the film version of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* the 'naturalness' of Buffy's femininity is placed in direct opposition to the 'unnaturalness' of vampires. When Buffy is in the proximity of vampires she experiences abdominal cramping to which her direct response is 'Great, my secret weapon is PMS.' Merrick, her Watcher, responds that this is merely the natural response on the part of the Slayer. That menstruation can be constructed as an asset in the battlefield is in direct conflict with a lot of statements made about women in the battlefield. That menstruation as a phenomenon experienced only by women can be an asset enhances the subversion of masculine warrior iconography which relies on anything feminine being detrimental to successful participation in combat. This emphasis on biological processes being an asset is missing from the television series and may partly be due to the impossibility of maintaining it as a feature over a long series. However, it may also be due to the programme's prime time television slot, where it is still largely unacceptable to make unmasked comments about menstruation.

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