
Public Service Motivation in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*¹

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Buffy Summers protected the world from evil for seven seasons on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (*BtVS*). Buffy was to Sunnydale, California what national defense is to the United States: she possessed a license to kill for the protection of the whole. Depictions of public service in popular culture are not unprecedented. Gotham City was home to two prominent public administrators: district attorney Harvey Dent, and police commissioner James Gordon. Diana Prince—aka Wonder Woman—served as a nurse in the Allied Army during WWII. Dr. Bruce Banner—aka The Incredible Hulk—was a physicist in a U.S. government laboratory. And when he’s not ruling the Hallowed Halls of Asgard, the Mighty Thor served New York City as emergency medical technician Jake Olsen. Buffy doesn’t maintain a separate, “secret” identity, and as the series progressed, she increasingly battled evils closer to home.

“Flooded”: The Introduction of Finances and Responsibility

“Flooded”, the fourth episode of *BtVS* Season Six, features a number of important events: Giles returns to Sunnydale, Andrew and the Evil Trio are introduced, and Buffy sees Angel for the first time after her resurrection. An important role of this episode relates to no particular story arc: the presentation of financial issues and Buffy’s function in the economy through her first explicit interactions with economic actors. Despite their arguable insignificance of economic issues to the broader narratives in *BtVS*, my emphasis is warranted; after all, the episode is entitled “Flooded”, and not “Giles Returns”, “Introducing Andrew”, or “Flooded with Emotion after Hearing from Angel”, and etcetera. The simple title “Flooded” suggests Buffy being overwhelmed in general—by finances, others’ expectations, her own resurrection, and—home maintenance.

The episode opens (and closes) with the mundane: a leaky pipe in the basement. Buffy can save the world but she can't seem to fix a leaky pipe, and this vexes her. She feels responsible for everyone in her nontraditional extended family, and with good reason. When the matter of expenses is raised, all stare plaintively at Buffy, waiting for *her* to do something. Before she died, Buffy's mother, Joyce, took care of everything. Giles reminds Buffy in this episode that her mother "took one crisis at a time, without the aid of superpowers, and got through it all" (Giles, "Flooded" 6.04). Now, everyone depends on Buffy to take care of everything from keeping a roof over their heads to saving the world (a lot).

Why now? Edwards, Rambo & South (2009) argue that Season Six is when the Scoobies are forced to grow up, to come into their own, and face adult realities. Financial matters start to appear as never before, and are not met with ease. Xander and Anya have jobs, but until now, only passing reference had been made to Giles' income ("Checkpoint" 5.12), Cordelia's financial woes, and Willow's support for college. Dawn, the youngest member of the group, views the world of work as "assembling cheap toys in a poorly-ventilated sweatshop" ("Flooded" 6.04). And despite Xander's efforts to adjust to life after high school, Anya remains frustrated with his uneven progress and cries, "When are you going to grow up, Xander?" (In fairness, Anya is 1,120 years old and has had more time to figure things out).

Maybe the Scoobs' problems with adapting to a post-high school world have something to do with the only life that they've known up to this point: Not only did Joyce take care of Dawn and Buffy's expenses, but the other characters lived at their parents' homes, too, their lives were centered around the routine of classes at Sunnydale High, its library, Giles, and the apocalypse *du jour*. Graduating from high school complicated the routine that they knew: their meeting place had to change because they no longer could justify their presence in the school library, and each discovered a newfound freedom over how they spent their time.

Public Goods and Services

The economy of Sunnydale, California (and everywhere else) is comprised of people producing and consuming goods and services. Goods are tangible items—everything from cars and houses to contact lenses. Services are intangibles—car washes, house cleaning services, and eye exams. Most goods and services are "private" and allocated by price: if you pay for it, you get it. If you don't, you don't. Dog food, beer, clothing, oil changes, bananas, manicures, air travel, DSL, and DVDs are but a few examples of private goods and services. "Market failures" are said to happen when goods and services that needed are not produced at all, or not in sufficient quantity. Most public goods are due to market failures.² Oftentimes, these are goods and services that no single firm would make enough money from, but are beneficial to society and considered important to provide anyway; so government does so either directly or via policy. For example, VHS tapes are no longer profitable, but VHS tapes are not considered public goods that ought to be produced no matter what. Seat belts and air bags may not be profitable additions from the automaker's point of view, but they must be produced and installed in every car because government says so. Seat belts and air bags make everyone safer, so the argument goes, and reduce the costs of treating critically injured

accident victims. Seat belts and air bags are public goods. Governments enact and enforce safety regulations on all sorts of products because consumer protection is a public or collective good, the costs of which no single producer would voluntarily incur. For instance, keeping an egg farm compliant with U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) standards is costly, so its owner might be tempted to shirk the rules and cut costs in order to sustain profits. USDA fines for noncompliance are meant to deter shirking. The costs of food safety and other public goods/services are obvious, but benefits are diffuse, difficult to measure, and impossible to price. Only when something goes wrong—the summer 2010 salmonella outbreak from contaminated eggs—are food safety regulations appreciated.

Some public goods are ensured through fines and regulations, while others are provided by government directly, like national defense and law enforcement. American society does not leave public safety to only those who can pay because, in part, a general sense of security accrues to all by prosecuting crimes and deterring potential crimes. National defense is law enforcement on a national scale and is a textbook example of a public good. Whether health care is a collective or private good is hotly debated at present. Most countries define health care as a collective good to be provided by government and not available only to those who can pay.

Defining Characteristics of Public Goods

Two defining features of public goods and services are *exclusivity* and *rival consumption*. Consumption of private goods and services is *exclusive* and *rival*; not so for public goods. “Consumption” of national defense—benefitting from the service of national defense—is *not exclusive* to only certain people. Even those who passionately oppose military action experience the effects of government’s efforts in support of national defense. Even those who oppose government regulation benefit from clean air and clean water regulations. Consumption of collective goods is also *nonrival*. My “consumption” of national defense (or clean air or safer food, etc.) does not reduce the amount available to another consumer. Public goods consumption is not a zero sum phenomenon, where one gets the goods at the expense of someone else. To appreciate this point, consider any private good: my consumption of a sandwich is rival to your consumption of it. My sandwich consumption reduces the overall supply of sandwiches and the raw materials used to make it, which no one else can have once I’ve finished my lunch. Views about the effectiveness of government regulations or the propriety of national defense aside, laws exist to address market failures and to create and provide collective goods and services.

Slaying³ possesses both defining characteristics of collective goods: consumption is nonrival and not exclusive. Benefits to the citizens of Sunnydale accrue to everyone, not just the good guys. Indeed, slaying is a public good in the world economy, not just in Sunnydale, for Buffy didn’t just save Sunnydale, she saved the world. Furthermore, the benefits from slaying are nonrival. The protection that accrues to one person does not lessen the amount of protection available to another person, except that she can only be in one place at a time.

Defining Problems of Public Goods

In addition to the two defining characteristics of collective goods—nonrival and nonexclusive consumption—two problems are unique to collective goods and services as well. First is the problem of *pricing*. Safety regulations for toys are desirable, but if one toy maker can cut costs and cut corners by using cheap paint that might contain lead, others will follow, lest they lose business to the cheaper producer. But what price is put on safe toys or clean air or national defense? Prices for private goods are meted out in the market—for example, if I find the price of one brand of cat food too expensive, I buy a cheaper brand. This mechanism is not feasible for public goods because even if I refuse to pay for clean air or clean water or national defense, I can still “consume” it because consumption is not exclusive. Further evidence that slaying meets the definition of a public good relates to the pricing problem. In “Flooded”, the reliably Capitalist Anya (Pasley 2003) suggests redefining slaying from a collective good to a private one. The response is akin to what one might expect from a Canadian or French citizen’s reaction to the American health care system:

ANYA: I know how. Um ... if you wanna pay every bill here, and every bill coming, and ... have enough to start a nice college fund for Dawn? Start charging.

BUFFY: For what?

ANYA: Slaying vampires! Well, you’re providing a valuable service to the whole community. I say cash in.

BUFFY: That’s an idea. *You* would have.

DAWN: You can’t charge innocent people for saving their lives!

The pricing problem inherent in collective goods also underpins a vignette later in the same episode—they key scene in this episode for my argument—between Buffy and Mr. Savitsky, the loan officer at Sunnydale Securities Bank:

BUFFY: Are you saying you won’t give me a loan?

MR. SAVITSKY: Well the problem is ... you have no income. No job ...

They just stare at one another. Buffy sits, silently crushed. And all of a sudden a SECURITY GUARD’S BODY comes crashing through a teller’s window, sending GLASS SPRAYING as he lands with a painful THUD on Mr. Savitsky’s desk, rolls off and falls to the floor. Buffy leaps to her feet, whirls to see: A GIANT MFASHNIK DEMON stands in the center of the bank, ROARING.

BUFFY: (resigned) No job. I wish.

Once Buffy chases the demon off, she broaches the subject again: “Now, about my loan. I’m not saying I’m *charging* you for saving your life or anything, but ... let’s talk rates”. In the end, however, she rejects the idea of charging for services and her loan application is denied.⁴

The second problem inherent in collective goods is the inevitability of *free riders*. Even the bad guys are protected from other bad guys through Buffy's efforts. Non-exclusive consumption can be exploited, resulting in the free rider problem, which is also found in "Flooded":

JONATHAN: Are we really gonna kill her? That's so sad.

WARREN: Shut up, Whine-athan.

ANDREW: But ... I, I don't want to kill Buffy either.

JONATHAN: Yeah, she saved my life a bunch of times! Plus, she's hot.

Buffy's service to the public is collective and its benefits diffuse, so she cannot decide who is protected and who is not. Collective goods benefit everyone, and in the above example, even those who would kill her would take advantage of the fact that they are still alive to devise plans against her. Later in the episode, The Trio surrounds itself with cash from the bank robbery and further articulates the advantages of free riding:

ANDREW: Is this the life or what?

WARREN: Mm.

ANDREW: I mean, here we got all the stuff we ever wanted... and we didn't even have to...

WARREN: Earn it?

ANDREW: Exactamundo.

JONATHAN: It's true, my friends. The way I see it ... life is like an interstellar journey. Some people go into hypersleep and travel at sub-light speeds... ...only to get where they're going after years of struggle, toil, and hard, hard work. We, on the other hand ...

ANDREW: Blast through the space-time continuum in a wormhole?

JONATHAN: Gentlemen ... *He lights a cigar with a burning hundred dollar bill* ... crime is our wormhole.

Up to this point, I hope to have demonstrated sufficiently that slaying possesses both defining characteristics of public goods: nonrival and nonexclusive consumption. Successful slaying on one night does not reduce the "amount" of slaying capacity available on the next night. Though not immortal, slayers heal quickly and when one dies, another steps into her place.⁵ The benefits of slaying are not exclusive to certain humans or demons and not others. Slaying also possesses the two problems endemic to public goods: pricing and free riders. Events in "Flooded" bring these problems to the fore: the Evil Trio represents the free rider problem and the loan officer expresses the pricing problem of public goods. Buffy further confirms her belief in the collective nature of slaying in her rejection of Anya's suggestion to charge a price for slaying. She accepts her role as a public servant. In fact, the only other occupation Giles can think of for her is in public service: "Have you considered law enforcement?" ("What's My Line, Part One" 2.09).

In the public service motivation literature, it remains an open question whether the presence of public goods and services implies the presence of public service motivation. It does not

necessarily follow that Buffy provides slaying services in the spirit of public service motivation. Faith is also a slayer and is also unpaid but she could hardly be accused of acting out of a concern for the public welfare. The next section takes up the definition of public service motivation; and in the section that follows I employ a series of measures alongside evidence from *BtVS* to determine whether, if at all, the public service motivation construct is manifest Buffy's approach to slaying.

Public Service Motivation

Theories of human motivation underpin theories related to workplace behavior, which in turn have shaped ideas surrounding individuals' choices to work for the public interest. Do the motivations of workers in one industry differ from those in others? Do some people work out of a sense of public purpose, while others just want to get paid? Mainstream labor economists theorize that people put in effort only up to the level of wages, regardless of where they work or what they do. People place a price on leisure and are induced to work only once the expected wage exceeds the value of leisure (Prasch 2004, p. 150, 153):

[T]he "labor-leisure" tradeoff ... posits that people hold fixed attitudes regarding the relative merits of leisure versus additional income ... high wages lead to greater effort, greater willingness to learn, improved morale, and lower turnover.

Clearly, there is no room for a sense of higher purpose or altruism in this explanation unless those attributes were incorporated into the labor-leisure calculus, but that would generalize the tradeoff hypothesis to the point of meaninglessness. The idea that individuals only reluctantly submit to "the irksomeness of labor" if given sufficient incentive is a very old one. Economist/sociologist Thorstein Veblen ridiculed this view of human nature more than a century ago, arguing instead that the need to create, build, and act is instinctual and in fact, an aversion to work is unnatural (1898, p. 188-189, emphases supplied):

[A person] is in an eminent sense an intelligent agent ... he is endowed with a proclivity for purposeful action ... *a discriminating sense of purpose*, by force of which all futility of life or of action is distasteful to him ... In the intervals of sober reflection, when not harassed with the strain of overwork, men's common sense speaks unequivocally under the guidance of *the instinct of workmanship*. They like to see others spend their life to some *purpose*, and they like to reflect that their own life is of some use.

Consistent with Veblen's depiction of human nature are psychological motivation theories, which allow for the presence of a public service ethic once certain conditions are met. One's basic physiological, safety, and esteem needs must be met before she or he can develop altruism and the desire to serve others: "Satisfaction of the self-esteem need leads to feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability, and adequacy of *being useful and necessary* in the world" (Maslow 1943, p. 382 emphasis added). In fact, Maslow's hierarchy of needs would place public service motivation at its apex: a person will prioritize the needs of others

and overlook free riders and imperfect valuation of her efforts after all the lower needs have been met (Cofer & Appley 1964, p. 679).

Hertzberg's explanation of employee motivation (1968) emphasizes job enrichment as a strong motivator and concludes that employees are motivated by challenging and meaningful work. But his worldview is not entirely consistent with the idea of a distinct public service ethic. Hertzberg anchors his theory of motivation in the individual workers and not a broader communal purpose. In fact, he recommends keeping individuals workers out of the overall job enrichment process: "it is the content [of the job] that will produce the motivation, not attitudes about being involved" (1968, p. 62). In general, however, theories on public service motivation are indebted to these broader explanations of human motivation and we use them to understand workplace behaviors in the specific context of public service.

Scholars of public service motivation have posited that government and nonprofit workers are motivated by more than just material gain (Perry & Wise 1990, Perry 1996, Perry 1997). Others have expanded this idea beyond the public and nonprofit sectors (Brewer & Selden 1998, Brewer, Selden & Facer 2000). Other scholars, however, have found no difference between public- and private-sector workers' motivations (Maidani 1991, using Hertzberg's 1968 methodology) and still others question whether a specific construct like public service motivation can be isolated, identified, and studied at all (Gabris & Simo 1995). Considering Buffy never received pay for slaying services yet remains committed to her duty, one might be tempted to answer an immediate "yes": that she indeed operates from a public service ethic and possesses public service motivation. However, public service motivation is defined as "an individual's predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations" (Perry & Wise 1996, p. 368). It is situated in the context of institutions and organizations and the slayer is only loosely part of or representative of any organization—the Watchers' Council (until "Graduation Day, Part One" 6.21, returning on a limited basis starting with "Checkpoint" 5012) and the Initiative temporarily. Faith doesn't get paid, either, but her slaying is not grounded in a desire to serve the public interest, benevolence, or altruism. Her motivation is strictly rational utility-maximizing self interest—not money but pleasure—that Buffy might share if, in the following passage, Faith is not "way off base" ("Bad Girls" 3.14):

FAITH: We're Slayers, girlfriend, the Chosen Two. Why should we let [Wesley] take all the fun out of it?

BUFFY: Oh, that would be tragic, taking the fun out of slaying, stabbing, beheading.

FAITH: Oh, like you don't dig it.

BUFFY: I don't.

FAITH: You're a liar. I've *seen* you. Tell me staking a vamp doesn't get you a little bit juiced. Come on, say it.

Faith stops, faces Buffy, folds her arms and waits. Buffy smiles, hesitates, looks away...

FAITH: Aah! You can't fool me. The look in your eyes right after a kill? You just get hungry for more.

BUFFY: You're way off base.

FAITH: Tell me that if you don't get in a good slaying, after a while, you just start itching for some vamp to show up so you can give him a good ...

She makes a stabbing motion and grunts.

BUFFY: Again with the grunting. You realize I'm not comfortable with this.

FAITH: Hey, slaying's what we were built for. If you're not enjoying it, you're doing something wrong.

Unless Faith is indeed wrong about Buffy's motives in this passage, there may well be a glimmer of self-serving utility maximization underpinning Buffy's slaying. So, it is not clear whether slaying—despite being a public good and the slayer a public servant—is necessarily executed (so to speak) in a spirit of public service. Buffy might serve strictly from a sense of “sacred duty, yada yada yada” (2.13); something she was born into that she doesn't really want to do but feels she has little choice in. She may not put it into a larger societal context at all. The concept of public service motivation might not have anything to do with Buffy as the Slayer.

Perry and Wise (1990, p. 370) propose three types of service motivations: rational, norm-based, and affective. *Rational* motives include one's desire for political power, personal identification with a cause, or advocacy on behalf of a private interest, each of which may translate into material gain. Faith represents the rational self interest motivation that transcends monetary remuneration. Rainey (1982) finds material incentives to be only weakly linked to effectiveness for employees operating from a public service state of mind. The second type of motivation defined by Perry and Wise (1990) is based in societal-based *normative* standards. Norm-based motives relate to one's desire to serve the public interest, loyalty to duty and government in general, and a commitment to social equity. Finally, *affective* motives involve emotional investment and can be characterized by a Crusader's passion for a cause. A way to measure these three types of motives will help determine if and where Buffy's slaying fits with the public service motivation (PSM) construct. Perry (1996) elaborates these three motivation types and develops a gauge to measure public service motivation in which respondents indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree to thirty-five statements grouped into the following six categories linked to the three types describe above:

- **Attraction to Policy Making:** A rational motive, this category involves activities that “can reinforce one's image of self importance” (Perry 1996, p. 6)
- **Commitment to the Public Interest:** A norm-based motive; in general, altruism
- **Civic Duty:** Also a norm-based motive related to the previous category but specific to civic institutions such as government agencies and departments
- **Social Justice:** A third norm-based motive, this category “involves activities intended to enhance the well being of minorities who lack political and economic resources” (Perry 1996, p. 7). To Buffy, these would be weaker beings or humans who don't have a slayer's abilities or Buffy's slayer support system.

- **Compassion:** One of the affective motives, this category involves “an extensive love of all people within our political boundaries and the imperative that they must be protected in all of the basic rights granted them” (Perry 1996, p. 7). Buffy protects the pursuit of happiness; individuals’ pursuit of a normal life. She preserves civic participation in events like prom and graduation (Pasley 2003)
- **Self Sacrifice:** A second affective motive, this is “the willingness to substitute service to others for tangible personal rewards” (Perry 1996, p. 7).

Does the concept of public service motivation fit the activity of slaying completely or only in part? And if only partially, which parts and why? I will use Perry’s 1996 survey instrument as revised and abbreviated by Coursey & Pandey (2007) to answer these questions along with quotes from *BtVS* as if Buffy were answering Perry’s survey to test the hypothesis: “Buffy possesses public service motivation.” The revised survey is comprised of the following nine statements,⁶ to which respondents indicate their degree of agreement or disagreement on a five-point Likert scale (Perry et al 2008):

Attraction to Policy Making

1. Politics is a dirty word. (Reversed)
2. The give and take of public policy making doesn’t appeal to me. (Reversed)
3. I don’t care much for politicians. (Reversed)

Commitment to Public Interest

4. I unselfishly contribute to my community.
5. Meaningful public service is very important to me.
6. I would prefer seeing public officials do what is best for the whole community even if it harmed my interests.

Civic Duty

7. I consider public service my civic duty.

Compassion

8. I am often reminded by daily events about how dependent we are on one another.
9. I have little compassion for people in need who are unwilling to take the first step to help themselves. (Reversed)

A number of the items listed above overlap intentionally in order to capture various constructs—Compassion, Civic Duty, etc.—from a number of angles. Relevant quotes from *BtVS* also cover more than one item. So, rather than address each of the preceding seventeen items individually, I will cite passages from the series—including and beyond the touchstone episode for this paper, “Flooded”—and discuss how they reveal what Buffy would have responded had she taken the PSM survey.

Empirical Analysis: Scripts as Texts

Examining scripts as texts is described by Durand (2009), who concludes that the shooting scripts have canonical primacy over other manifestations of the story. Linsley's (2009) essay in response to Durand, argues that the episode and episode transcript should take precedence over other forms, based on the differences between them in "Chosen" (7.22). I use both, starting with the searchable episode transcript database (<http://vrya.net/bdb>) and double checking any differences between the transcript and the shooting script (www.Buffyworld.com). For the extended quotations in this paper I rely on the shooting scripts, which tend to give more detail of the scene. Of course, references to episodes in the Season Eight graphic novels possess no such disparities.

Politics and Policymaking

Buffy Summers, along with most of Sunnydale, California would likely agree strongly with Statements One, Two, and Three. No one in Sunnydale has a reason to trust politicians and community leaders. The most visible example of an elected official is Mayor Wilkins, but other public figures appear as well. "Mayor McSleaze" (Buffy, "Choices" 3.19) is not only the most visible, but also the most outrageous depiction of corrupt politicians. He contracts with Mr. Trick to eliminate the Slayers, fails at that, then uses Faith to kill Buffy, and ultimately arranges for the annihilation of Sunnydale as part of his ascent to demon form. In contrast, Principal Snyder proves more annoying than nefarious in his repeated attempts to frustrate the Scoobs' efforts. His general attitude toward students ranges from cynicism to outright hostility ("School Hard" 2.03): "A lot of educators tell students, 'Think of your principal as your pal.' I say think of me as your judge, jury and executioner". This is not a positive example of leadership in public service.

Other public servants depict government authority about as well: police are ineffectual at best and inept at worst; Colonel McNamara and "the boys at the Pentagon [are] in way over [their] heads" (Buffy, "Primeval" 4.21); and the social worker investigating Dawn's home situation is meddlesome and eventually duped. Although comparatively little evidence of policymaking in Sunnydale exists to inform opinion on Statements Two and Six, the ineffectiveness and evildoing of political and public figures in Sunnydale suggest that Buffy's responses to survey items related to politics would score low on public service motivation.

Selflessness and Service

Several survey items cohere under the theme of selflessness, to which the textual evidence suggests Buffy would respond "Strongly Agree". Statements Four and Seven, "I unselfishly contribute to my community" and "I consider public service my civic duty", evoke strong agreement based on her words and actions throughout the series. Pasley (2003) argues convincingly that although overt expressions of political ideology are absent in *BtVS*, the importance of civil society "shine[s] through fairly clearly and consistently from the Buffy mythos" (emphasis supplied):

It is only when the local humans venture out of the house and make use of Sunnydale's community institutions ... that they become vulnerable. ... It is in these places (or the alleys behind them) where Buffy fights so many of her battles. ... *Maintaining the conditions under which civil society or community life can flourish* is one of the slayer's primary purposes.

Many examples exist of decisions and actions that reinforce Pasley's observations. From day one, Buffy wanted to be a normal teenager, worrying about things like missing classes, making friends, and not having "last month's hair" ("Welcome to the Hellmouth", 1.01). She simply wanted to participate in typical high school activities like cheerleading, dating, and going to parties, and worked hard to preserve adolescent traditions like senior prom (3.20):

You guys are gonna have a prom. The kind of prom everyone should have. I will give you all a nice, fun, normal evening ... if I have to kill every single person on the face of the Earth to do it.

Pasley (2003) further notes: "Buffy wanted nothing more than to participate in this sort of normal community life, but even if she couldn't, she evinced a steely determination to seeing that her fellow citizens could do so." Beyond the high school, Buffy created and preserved the space within which Sunnydale citizens could establish social institutions, as well. "Gingerbread" (3.11) features the most explicit evidence of community action via Joyce's founding and leadership in Mothers Opposed to the Occult (MOO). MOO concludes that the brutal murder of two children was the work of witches, and with Principal Snyder, proceeds to confiscate books, black clothing, scented candles, and detain anyone deemed suspicious. By the end of their Crusade, Joyce and Sheila nearly burn their own daughters at the stake. Despite the potential for civic participation to operate against Buffy's best interests, she protects the citizens (and ultimately its denizens) of Sunnydale, allowing them to engage in social activities. While she may not situate slaying in the context of civic duty, the evidence above indicates that Buffy would score high on Statements Four, Five, and Seven with respect to public service motivation.

Buffy's Support System and Community

Buffy would agree strongly with the eighth statement, "I am often reminded by daily events about how dependent we are on one another." Support for this is found from the very first episode to the end of the television series: Buffy's earliest slayings in Sunnydale included her new friends Willow and Xander, and sealing the Hellmouth in the very last televised episode was a team effort, as well. These same friends brought Buffy back each time she died: Xander after the first time, Willow the second. After vampire Spike's first (nearly dusty) encounter with Buffy, he grumbles, "A Slayer with family and friends. That sure as hell wasn't in the brochure" ("School Hard" 2.03). The appearance of Kendra, a very different kind of Slayer, provides the clearest contrast between Buffy's approach to slaying and the archetypal loner Slayer who operates in secrecy. In "What's My Line, Part Two" (2.10) Kendra articulates this contrast to Buffy:

Your life is very different than mine ... The things you do and have, I was taught distract from my calling. Friends. School. Even family ... My parents, they sent me to my watcher when I was very young ... I don't remember them, actually. I've seen pictures. ... that's how seriously the calling is taken by my people. My mother and father gave me to my watcher because they believed that they were doing the right thing for me, and for the world. You see?

But Buffy doesn't "see" this at all. Kendra's life makes no sense to her, which she tries to explain to Kendra later in this episode. Buffy relies on her circle of friends to fight evil forces—even befriendng vampires and demons—figuratively sharing her power throughout the series and literally sharing her power with all potential Slayers at the end of Season Seven and into Season Eight, actually making Buffy a better Slayer. "This is why Buffy survived" notes Pasley (2003), "while the more traditional Slayer, Kendra, raised by her Watcher and forbidden to have a social life, was easily overwhelmed by Spike's hypnotic girlfriend, Drusilla." Drusilla eventually kills Kendra. In sum, Buffy would agree strongly with the Statement Eight, "I am often reminded by daily events about how dependent we are on one another", which is consistent with the presence of public service motivation.

Self Sufficiency

Buffy would likely disagree with Statement Nine, "I have little compassion for people in need who are unwilling to take the first step to help themselves." Buffy holds herself to a higher standard of behavior than she expects from others. Xander tries to remind her ("Phases" 2.15) "Buffy, you can't blame yourself for every death in Sunnydale ... If it weren't for you, people would be lining up five deep needing to get themselves buried." She accepts her role as slayer and does not expect humans to fight demons themselves. Furthermore, while demons and humans kill other humans, Buffy will not cross that line. To Buffy, "being a slayer is not the same as being a killer" ("Bad Girls" 3.14); demons and other big bads are slayed, and humans are killed, but Buffy will not kill. When she (mistakenly) thought she took a human life in "Ted" (2.11), Cordelia wondered, "she's like this Superman. Shouldn't there be different rules for her?" But as Giles points out, even if there were different rules, Buffy does not allow herself to make such mistakes: "Whatever the authorities are planning for her can't be much worse than what she's doing to herself. She took a human life. The guilt ... it's pretty hard to bear and it won't go away soon." Buffy even refused to kill the hellgod Glory when she transmogrified into the human form of Ben, prompting Giles to do what Buffy would not ("The Gift" 5.22):

BEN: ... She could have killed me.

GILES: No she couldn't. Never. And sooner or later, Glory will re-emerge and make Buffy pay for that mercy, and the world with her. Buffy even knows that, and still she couldn't take a human life. She's a hero, you see. She's not like us.

BEN: Us?

Giles coldly clamps his hand over Ben's mouth and nose. Ben struggles feebly for a while. Then stops. Giles' expression never changes.

In sum, Buffy accepts—however reluctantly at times—her role as the Slayer, holds herself to a high standard of conduct, and does not expect humans to fight for themselves. She would disagree with Statement Nine, “I have little compassion for people in need who are unwilling to take the first step to help themselves.” Excepting the survey items relating to politicians and policymakers, who no one in Sunnydale would be expected to defend, Buffy’s imputed responses indicate that she is a public servant motivated by a public service ethic.

Perry’s original 1996 survey included more than just these nine items. Respondents were also asked a number of questions to gauge how far they would be willing to go to back up their views on public service. In other words, respondents may talk the public service talk, but do they walk the walk? To capture this, I include the Self Sacrifice items from the original survey, which are especially pertinent to this study (as advised by Coursey & Pandey 2007, 556) Buffy’s public service uniquely involves self sacrifice, akin to public safety occupations in law enforcement, the armed services, emergency response, and firefighting, where lives are routinely put on the line in the name of public service. Beyond risking her own life each evening when she patrols for demons, Buffy donated blood to Angel at the end of Season Three and died for Dawn (and the world) at the end of Season Five. It is in this light that the following items are considered:

Self Sacrifice

10. Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievements.
11. I believe in putting duty before self.
12. Doing well financially is definitely more important to me than doing good deeds.
(Reversed)
13. Much of what I do is for a cause bigger than myself.
14. Serving citizens would give me a good feeling even if no one paid me for it.
15. I feel people should give back to society more than they get from it.
16. I am one of those rare people who would risk personal loss to help someone else.
17. I am prepared to make enormous sacrifices for the good of society.

Extrinsic Rewards

Statements 12 and 14 are about money: “Doing well financially is definitely more important to me than doing good deeds” and “Serving citizens would give me a good feeling even if no one paid me for it”; with the former being measured inversely. Ample evidence exists that Buffy would strongly disagree with the former and strongly agree with the latter. Pasley (2003) on Buffy and Dawn’s reactions to Anya’s suggestion to “cash in” in “Flooded”:

Buffy thinks of slaying as anything but a service to be exchanged for money: it is her calling, her destiny, and she will not have it ‘stripped of its halo’ and converted to a form of wage labor.

Buffy also takes advantage of the opportunity to “keep an eye on” Sunnydale High without regard to pay in “Lessons” (7.01):

PRINCIPAL WOOD: We do have a small community outreach program, gets people from the town to teach electives and such ... the money we could pay you wouldn't even fold, but it would just be a couple days a week ...

BUFFY: Are you asking me to be a counselor?

PRINCIPAL WOOD: We have a guidance counselor, but I think the kids could use someone, you know, closer to their age, who still ...

BUFFY: I'm in!

PRINCIPAL WOOD: You serious? You heard the part about the money?

BUFFY: I heard. I've been temping, my schedule could be a little funtastic, but I'll work it out. I'd like to keep an eye on this place.

Both examples—Buffy's rejection of charging fees and her acceptance of the low-paying counselor position—provide insight into her views on serving people and doing good deeds. On both statements, Buffy would score high on the public service motivation scale. Although beyond the scope of this paper, further research should examine the problematic role of money in *BtVS*. Indeed, Buffy's decision in Season Eight to finance their operations via the "victimless crime" of robbing Fort Knox undermines the credibility and legitimacy worldwide Slayer efforts.

Duty and Mission

Statements 11 and 13: "I believe in putting duty before self"; and "Much of what I do is for a cause bigger than myself", respectively, relate to Buffy's role in the larger good-versus-evil context and her place in Slayer lore and lineage. Buffy's response to Statement 11 would depend on when she was asked. Throughout the first two seasons, Buffy was a rather reluctant Slayer particularly with respect to "duty", going so far as to run away at the end of Season Two and not returning until the second episode of Season Three. She seemed to have settled into her role and duty more comfortably from then on, "putting duty before self" and at times even before her friends. For example, Buffy cites the "duty thing" against Willow's plea to "have a girl night ... eat sundaes and then watch *Steel Magnolias*" ("Something Blue" 4.09).

Regardless of whether she wholly accepts her sacred duty, she would certainly agree with Statement 13, that slaying is for a larger cause. But—Buffy would not agree that the cause is the Watchers' Council, but rather, she would place herself in the context of a war between good and evil forces. Giles underscores this point to fellow Council member Quentin Travers: "You're *waging* a war. She's *fighting* it. There is a difference" ("Helpless" 3.12). Ultimately, the Slayer and her Watcher—Buffy and Giles—are not on the same side as the Watchers' Council. Buffy's approach to slaying is not dictated to her from Giles or from the Council: "Orders? I don't take orders. I do things my way" (Buffy to Kendra in "What's My Line, Part Two" 2.10). Giles loses faith in the Council's wisdom as well, declaring, "I don't give a rat's ass about the Council's orders" ("Helpless" 3.12). In short, Buffy would agree to both statements, but only to a renegotiated and redefined "duty" and "cause" to suit her interpretation of the Slayer's role.

Personal Sacrifice

It almost goes without saying that Buffy would strongly agree with Statements 16 and 17: “I am one of those rare people who would risk personal loss to help someone else”; and “I am prepared to make enormous sacrifices for the good of society.” Buffy kills her first love, Angel, to prevent the demon Acatla from swallowing the world and drawing every living creature on the planet into hell (“Becoming, Part One” 2.22). Buffy loses her life. Twice. Marauding zombies crash Buffy’s welcome home party after she ran away to Los Angeles (“Dead Man’s Party” 3.2 www.vrya.net). Buffy’s slayer duties get her kicked out of high school. Twice. Hellhounds attack her senior prom. She has a difficult time transitioning into college while continuing her Slayer duties and eventually drops out. She misses an ice-skating date with her estranged father on her 18th birthday so that she can save her mother from a crazed vampire. She loses her second vampire lover, Spike, during the battle to defeat the First Evil and close the Hellmouth. But perhaps the most poignant personal loss and sacrifice Buffy suffered as a direct result of being the Slayer was the involuntary resurrection she experienced after her death at the end of Season Five. Although subsequent Slayers are called forth each time one dies—and Faith was activated upon Buffy’s death—Willow believed the world needed Buffy back. But as all *BtVS* fans know, Willow’s resurrection spell robbed Buffy of eternity in Heaven.

That’s Nice. So What?

In this paper, I set out to discover and describe aspects of the political economy of Sunnydale, California. First, I established slaying as a public good, Buffy as a public-goods provider—a public servant—facilitating the discussion of public service motivation (PSM). to determine whether or not Buffy, as a public servant, operates from a public service ethic. Applying evidence from shooting scripts and episode transcripts to an oft-used PSM survey, I determined that Buffy is motivated by a public service ethic.

“Flooded” does an excellent job of introducing the formal economy and Buffy’s place in it—all in a single episode. By Season Six, questions must be addressed that were not at issue before: Who buys groceries, pays the electric bill, property taxes, etc? Where do all those cute clothes come from? Joyce took care of all of these things before, “without the aid of any superpowers” (Giles to Buffy, “Flooded” 6.14), but Joyce is gone. This episode establishes slaying as a public good by demonstrating how it meets the economic definition of public goods. Non-rival consumption is illustrated in the bank-robbery scene where all patrons are equally protected by Buffy chasing off the M’Fashnik demon. Non-exclusive consumption is illustrated in the Evil Trio’s conversation about killing Buffy even though each of their lives had been saved by her in the past. The pricing problem is depicted by Anya in her suggestion to “cash in”. The free-rider problem is portrayed in the scene that takes place in the Evil Trio’s den. What’s more, the free-rider problem is explained to the audience overtly by Warren as he expounds upon the benefits of living the life without having to “earn it”; how others work to get by while “crime is [their] wormhole”. Finally, Buffy’s invisibility to the formal economy is illustrated by her interaction with the loan officer, who explains to

Buffy—and the audience—that, from the perspective of the market, she has “no job”. Again, all of these issues needed to occur in Season Six—or soon after Joyce’s passing—in order for subsequent money matters to make sense. For instance, Buffy’s decision to get a “real” job (“Anne” 3.01 aside) in “Doublemeat Palace” (6.12) might have seemed out of context, had economic necessity not been introduced previously.

Establishing slaying as a public good, Buffy as a public servant, and the presence of PSM in Buffy’s slaying allows *BtVS* to inform scholarship on public service by providing further evidence that public service exists outside the public sector, as does public service motivation. Furthermore, Buffy represents public service motivation taking place outside the context of any organization—her purpose is not the product of externally-imposed sense of duty and mission, but rather, a deeply personal duty and mission. On the other hand, she is no vigilante. She voluntarily engages in community and society and maintains her connections with friends, family, and public institutions. Pasley (2003) observes this, as well:

This insistence on a hero who stays connected to her society and draws strength from that, rather than being weakened by it, is somewhat unique in the superhero genre. In the movies, at least, Superman, Batman, and Spider-Man keep much more secret identities and shy away from relationships lest their loved ones be threatened. Buffy (and Angel) fall apart and get beaten when they go it alone. Social capital is their secret weapon.

Although Buffy is unique in her collective approach to slaying, the public servant as superhero is not unprecedented. Harvey Dent was Gotham City’s idealistic district attorney zealously pursuing the most hardened criminals until his own transformation into supervillain Two-Face. Is that the inevitable fate of do-gooders? Does Harvey Dent’s fall from grace represent popular cynicism surrounding politicians and public officials? One poll before the 2000 election (www.telegraph.co.uk) showed that a majority of American voters favored *The West Wing*’s President Josiah Bartlet over Bush and Kerry. Was this an ill-informed electorate or a wish statement from an informed, yet cynical, public? In recent, more optimistic times, popular culture reflected the faith in public service inspired by Barack Obama, most notably Shepard Fairey’s iconic “Hope” poster. In this context, *Buffy the Public Servant* belongs alongside the similarly-motivated public service exemplars created in popular culture.

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Notes

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² When I refer to “public goods”, I always mean both *goods* and *services*. National defense and consumer product safety regulations are quintessential public goods even though they are not tangible products and therefore services by definition. Moreover, I use “public” and “collective” synonymously as well as “private” and “normal”.

³ “Slaying” is the generic term for eliminating predatory demons, which is what Buffy does. “Killing” isn’t used due to the confusion about how one actually “kills” the undead. On the other hand, it may be that calling Buffy a “slayer” is to gloss over the fact that she is a lawless, homicidal pariah, and “demon” is just away to avoid thinking about her victims as sentient beings. See, Hugh? I was listening.

⁴ In *The Watcher’s Guide, Volume 3*, Paul Ruditis interprets the loan officer’s decision as punishment for Buffy’s role in the bank robbery. I do not see a link, however. Willow’s comment, “even if the bank *was* robbed, which you battling demons couldn’t possibly know ...” intimates a conversation between Buffy and Mr. Savitsky after her last words in the scene, but he wasn’t close to approving a loan before the attack based on insufficient documentation of her ability to repay. I interpret the scene as evidence of the problem of placing a value on public goods and services, not as an indication that the bank *would* have loaned Buffy money *but for* the loan officer’s belief that she was a cover for the bank robbery.

⁵ All slayers are female and young. At the beginning of each episode, a voiceover reminds viewers: “Into each generation a Slayer is born. One girl in all the world, a Chosen One. One born with the strength and skill to fight the vampires, to stop the spread of their evil and the swell of their numbers.” Show creator Joss Whedon deliberately juxtaposed the world-protecting, evil-slaying power possessed by the slayer with the stereotypically powerless image of a teenage girl; a southern California cheerleader named “Buffy”, no less.

⁶ PSM 4: “It is difficult for me to contain my feelings when I see people in distress” is not used here for two reasons. First, Coursey and Pandey (2007) found evidence that respondents interpret it in a range of ways, so it fails to capture compassion consistently. Second, research on emotional labor in public service articulates the important differences between feeling strongly about a situation and taking action to address it, compared to failing to control one’s emotions (Guy, Newman & Mastracci 2008).

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