

Tamy Burnett: Humanity, Monstrosity, and Reproductive Rights: Joss Whedon and Feminism's Most Contentious Topic

Joss Whedon made headlines in December 2015 by pledging to donate up to \$100,000 to Planned Parenthood, an organization that provides free and low cost reproductive health care, primarily in the U.S. Although Whedon rarely ventures into public politics so directly, his stories are frequently political, regularly engaging themes including ethnic/racial identity (e.g.: Bacon-Smith, Curry, Fuchs, Hautsch, Lerner, Middents, Rabb and Richardson), LGBTQ identity (e.g.: Boulware, Frohard-Dourlent, McAvan, Tabron, Wilts), and feminism (e.g.: Beadling, Coker, Levine, Jowett, Spicer, St. Louis and Riggs, Vint). Whedon's pledged donation is especially notable coming at the end of a year when Planned Parenthood was subject to much controversy. Announcement of Whedon's pledged donation similarly garnered divisive responses, ranging from celebratory enthusiasm to denunciations of Whedon and threats to burn DVDs in protest.

Although existing scholarly work has investigated Whedon's relationship to women's rights, his engagement with reproductive rights—arguably the most controversial area of feminist ideology—remains under-examined. This paper will explore three storylines from Whedon's works dealing with women's reproductive rights: Ripley's forced maternity in *Alien Resurrection* (1997), Buffy's choice to have an abortion in the *Buffy Season Nine* comics (2012), and Black Widow's revelation in *Avengers 2: Age of Ultron* (2015) of being forcibly sterilized. Additionally, these characters have complicated relationships to human identity. Ripley is a human/alien hybrid clone, Buffy's consciousness is unknowingly residing in a robot body at the time of her decision, and Black Widow compares herself to a monster immediately following disclosure of her infertility. By exploring issues of what it means to be human, the common cultural conflation of women's reproductive systems and choices with monstrosity, and how such narratives intersect with feminist ideology, this analysis will offer increased understanding of Whedon's support of women's reproductive rights through fantastical storytelling and real world activism.