

“Call Us What You Want, Just Not Family”: Corporate Culture and the Subversion the Created Family Whedonverse Trope in *Dollhouse*

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The Fang Gang. The Scoobies. “You’re on my crew. Why are we still talkin’ about this?” One of the hallmarks of Joss Whedon’s work, so prevalent as to be considered a trope, is the concept of family by choice (see: Battis 2005). This was made explicit in the Whedon-penned *Buffy* episode “Family,” with its elucidation of the differences between “kin” and “family,” but both the members of Angel Investigations and the passengers and crew of *Serenity* established similar connections, in which work and home, family and friends, consistently overlapped.

But where is the locus of this created family in *Dollhouse*? The characters are either divested of their personalities or ethically problematic (sometimes both). Those who are not the blank-slate Actives work for the corporation that erased the others. Trust, if it exists, must literally be programmed; hardly an environment in which connections can be established and built with any degree of certainty (see: Souza 2010). Further, while *Angel* and *Firefly* blended home and work space, for the majority of employees and Actives in the *Dollhouse*, there is little evidence of any life outside of the corporate environment. Finally, the reveal of Boyd Langton as the head of Rossum, and his subsequent defense of his actions as an act of love for his “family” is a total subversion of this established element of the Whedonverse. Unlike *Buffy*, *Angel*, and *Firefly*, in which embattled, outcast, or lost individuals found a home with others who accepted them, in *Dollhouse*, it is never certain who anyone really is. Therefore, in this paper, I will examine both how and why *Dollhouse* undermined this established trope; in particular, what this subversion says about the ability (or not) to form connections in a corporate environment.