

Double Coded Feminist TV- Overlooked Contradictions within Buffy the Vampire Slayer

Timothy M. Foley

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master's of Arts In Interdisciplinary Studies

University of Washington Tacoma

2012

Committee:

Dr. David Coon

Dr. Anne Beaufort

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences

Intro-A Telling Scene

In the “Dirty Girls”, episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (*BtVS*, 1997-2003)

Buffy’s home is over-run with new slayer recruits. These women are the epitome of girl-power: strong, tough and there to hone their fighting skills. There are no men in the chain of command, just Buffy and the recruits. She commands their respect, looks out for them, teaches them and is a leader in every sense of the word. This is the perfect scene of female empowerment and cooperation.

Yet there are other elements here as well. All but two of the thirteen recruits are white and when shown as a group, the two non-white recruits are toward the back. All conform to the Hollywood idea of ‘young woman’: 5’5”, slender build, and dressed in trendy, high fashion. Absent is any representation of the average-sized American girl. So what is the young female viewer to take away from this? The women’s empowerment element is there and so too is the message that empowerment is available only to a select few. Therein lies the contradiction, and this contradiction permeates the series. It promotes female empowerment but reserves that empowerment for only a select minority of women. These contradictions call for further analysis and offer an opportunity to look more closely at the complex coding within the series.

It is the purpose of this article to explore those contradictions, offer explanations as to why they exist and to demonstrate that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is a complex text with multiple levels of coding. I begin by demonstrating that *BtVS* enjoys favorable reviews from feminist and other scholars. My analysis of *BtVS* continues by considering a similar program from the same era that also features a female lead, *Xena: Warrior*

Princess. *XWP* portrays powerful women who are other than Hollywood's ideal and is free of contradiction in this way. *XWP* establishes a baseline for my analysis of *BtVS*. I review arguments from key feminist scholars on the theory of Postfeminism that provide a lens through which to analyze the episodes. My episode analysis provides examples of how *BtVS* promotes consumption and materialism among women, and demonstrates how *BtVS* presents the need to work in a negative light. Finally, I provide commentary that ties together the episode analysis. Although *BtVS* is popular among feminist scholars for its positive portrayal of women, I conclude that it presents an empowerment reserved for only a select, specific minority of women.

Buffy Studies-A Positive Review

BtVS is notable for gaining the interest of academia. It has generated its own subfield among feminist scholars, been the topic of academic conferences, led to the creation of many books and had its main character recognized as extremely influential. Lavery and Wilcox report, "National Public Radio describes Buffy as having a special following among academics, some of whom have staked a claim in what they call 'Buffy Studies' " (16). Buffy scholar David Lavery states, "Though not widely recognized as a distinct discipline, the term 'Buffy Studies' is commonly used amongst the peer-reviewed academic Buffy-related writing" (3). Lavery was convener of The Slayage Conference, the largest-ever academic conference devoted to a single television

program. One hundred Buffy scholars from six countries presented 180 papers during the three-day conference (Lavery 3).

Emerging from this widespread academic interest has been the publication of more than twenty books and hundreds of articles examining the themes of the show from a wide range of disciplinary perspectives. Steven Schlozman writes about using *BtVS* as a tool in adolescent therapy. Rhonda Wilcox authored an article dedicated to the series in which she discusses the show's literary narrative, symbolism, visual imagery, and sound. In the article, Wilcox mentions that in 1998, *George Magazine* placed Buffy in the number two position on a list of the 20 most influential women in politics, noting that, "what Buffy is really taking on is a regular assortment of challenges that threaten to suck the lifeblood out of teenage girls, like a suffocating school hierarchy and a sexual double standard" (18).

Beyond the general academic interest, *BtVS* has enjoyed a great deal of interest among feminist academics for its positive portrayal of women. Sarah Buttsworth is among the feminist scholars who have explored the ways in which *BtVS* helped to expand the boundaries of what a woman can do. "*Bite Me: Buffy and the Penetration of the Gendered Warrior-Hero*" explores the ways in which the character of Buffy challenges traditional conventions that define what a warrior is. According to Buttsworth:

The social conventions of mainstream femininity that argue women cannot be warriors are precisely what make Buffy an effective soldier. Buffy stands out because not only is she a female but she also has no visible warrior traits. She is not muscular, mean or male. She is a frail blonde female. (187)

Buttsworth uses the debate around women in the military to examine Buffy's permeation of the traditional warrior. Historically, warriors in film are heterosexual males. Comparing Buffy to female warriors like Wonder Woman who came before, Buttsworth notes that Buffy's camouflage is herself. "Unlike previous female warriors, she does not wear any disguises" (189). Ultimately, Buffy disrupts the traditional western convention of what a warrior is by proving that a warrior can be both beautiful and tough.

Anna Free and Jenny Bavidge praise Buffy for, among other things, her ability to challenge the traditional power dynamic. In *Re-Vamping the Gothic in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Anna Free examines the links between Buffy and Dracula in a modern context. The original gender representations have changed a great deal over time. From the beginning, Buffy is linked to Stoker's Dracula but Buffy changes the traditional power dynamic. As Free observes, "In one episode she (Buffy) makes Dracula seem like a fool by joking about him with her knowledge of popular culture" (139). Traditionally the lead vampire was male: the female vampire is there to serve him. Buffy changes this traditional power dynamic by refusing to recognize Dracula's dominance.

In her short article entitled *Chosen Ones: Reading the Contemporary Teen Heroine*, Jenny Bavidge speaks to Buffy's positive utility for teens saying, "she successfully dramatizes the Anglo American girl as a construct, one which is useful, charming and fun" (43). According to Anna Free, Buffy's power comes from being able to "successfully integrate being powerful with being fashionable, both a ferocious

defender and an emotionally sensitive sister/girlfriend/daughter" (141). Free notes that "Buffy addresses the complications faced by young people as they form their identities in the post modern world" (138).

As the feminist scholars suggest, *BtVS* is a pioneer in advancing the notion of what a female lead can accomplish. However, there is more beneath the surface. *BtVS* contains complex, contradictory coding that ultimately suggests empowerment is available to only a select group of women.

Girl-power-Buff vs. Buffy

In order to establish a baseline for analysis, again consider *Xena: Warrior Princess*, a comparable program from the same era that is not contradictory in its message. *XWP* hit the airwaves in 1995 (IMDB), enjoying widespread popularity. *XWP* was the first in a wave of female action leads to emerge. It is set in a mythical land with characters fashioned from Greek and other mythologies. What is unique about *Xena* is the degree to which the show centers on the main character's physique. *Xena's* physical stature gained her notoriety, setting her apart from other female action leads.

Throughout the series, she physically defeats human and non-human foes to no one's surprise: after all, she is physically impressive and extremely capable. *Xena* set a new standard for female action leads. Like *Xena*, *Buffy* defeats human as well as supernatural foes but unlike her strapping counterpart, *Buffy's* abilities surprise due to her petite, vulnerable appearance.

BtVS continues the legacy of *XWP* by featuring a female action lead with extreme powers. However, *BtVS* moves in a very different direction. Like *XWP*, *BtVS* emphasizes girl-culture and girl-power. *BtVS* features a quiet, apparently vulnerable female in the lead role, a contrast to Xena who shed her feminine traits to become tough. Buffy retains all the fragilities of a feminine teenage girl in a typical suburban setting. The key difference between the two series is that *BtVS* takes place in a contemporary, representative environment that teen fans are able to relate to, while *XWP* exists in a fantasy world and contains characters representing many races, body types and no one specific dress style. Fashion and social status never come into play in Xena's world because her world is created that way. Xena is unadulterated, masculine girl-power with no contradictory subtext. Its message is clear: you can be a buff, tough warrior woman without having to conform in superficial ways -- as long as you live in a world that does not exist. *BtVS*, on the other hand, suggests that for those living in the very real world of contemporary America, strength and success go hand in hand with consumption and image. The key differences between the two series lie in how consumption is promoted and who has access to empowerment.

Postfeminism-A brief discussion

The differences between *XWP* and *BtVS* reflect similar tensions that exist between feminism and the phenomenon that scholars and critics refer to as Postfeminism. Many scholars have expressed concern that the feminist movement has

declined to the point of losing all momentum and further suggest that the media has been the key force in unraveling the movement. As we will see, *BtVS* provides a working example of what they have identified.

Rory Cooke Dicker and Alison Piepmeier report, “By the late 1990’s, networks from NBC to PBS and newspapers from the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette* to *USA Today* were portraying feminists as hateful, hysterical demagogues waging unjust sex wars, in particular ‘war on men’” (38). They suggest that mainstream media ignore the connections between the oppression of women and the subordinate status of all disenfranchised groups, promoting sexist ideas about “women’s issues”.

This negative view of feminism led many women to turn away from the movement and adopt a Postfeminist attitude. Postfeminist viewpoints rest on the largely false premise that feminist demands have been met, and that changes incorporated into the mainstream render questions of gender inequality unnecessary. Part of what makes the era of Postfeminism striking is the abandonment of gains made after so much progress. After much work by women to gain equality in many arenas, there is now a lack of interest in retaining it. Amber Kinser suggests in the era of Postfeminism, the average woman “accepts a *sense* of empowerment as a substitute for the work toward and evidence of *authentic* empowerment” (134). Programs like *BtVS* provide just such an example. They display powerful young women, falsely conveying the image that equality between men and women has been achieved.

Rather than being encouraged to participate in political activism, modern women are directed toward purchasing as a road to satisfaction and possession as a form of empowerment. Corporations recognize the desirability of satisfaction and empowerment and respond by offering products that fit the bill. Purchasing becomes the vehicle through which women express their independence and assert their individuality.

As Ann Braithwaite suggests, “The emphasis of this newer ‘more fun’ and ‘groovier’ Postfeminism now allows women to (re)emphasize or return to lifestyle choices and personal consumer pleasures, rather than those older agendas for more direct kinds of social activism” (24). In reality, what *BtVS* is doing is encouraging young women to focus on individual consumption and personal appearance rather than social or political collaboration.

Two of the most referenced scholars on the subject, Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, specifically define Postfeminism as: “(1) Portraying an emphasis on girl-power and image (2) Showcasing white and middle class women by default (3) Promoting consumption as a strategy (and leisure as a site) for the production of the self (4) Glossing over any and all other social differences” (41). With these identifying factors in mind, let us consider some key episodes from *BtVS*.

BtVS- Want, Buy, Have!

McRobbie suggests that the era of Postfeminism includes “encouragement of forms of consumer citizenship which are beneficial only to the wealthy” (29). With that in mind, consider the pilot episode. It begins with the main character, Buffy Summers, transferring to a new school. During Buffy’s first day at Sunnydale High School, she is befriended by the popular girl in school, Cordelia. Cordelia asks Buffy where she is from, and when Buffy says LA, Cordelia responds, “Are you kidding? I’d kill to live in LA, close to that many shoes”. This is a good example of contradiction. On the one hand, there is Buffy, the main character, portrayed as a strong, confident young woman. On the other hand, Cordelia, the popular girl, refers to the thrill of having access to buying shoes. A reference such as this allows the program to promote consumerism, promote behavioral expectations of young women, and most importantly, to connect with existing consumers.

As the episode continues, Buffy walks with Cordelia in the hall. Cordelia guides the fledgling Buffy Summers by assuring her that, “It will be ok here; if you hang with me and mine you’ll be accepted. Of course, you will have to test your cool factor.” Cordelia tests Buffy’s social skills and explains the hierarchy in the school after which she attacks a fellow female student for her lame dress. To a critical viewer it is evident that Cordelia’s character is promoting consumption, materialism and bullying based on image. To the average young woman watching the series, Cordelia is someone they can identify with who provides a model of consumerism. This provides an example of

McRobbie's suggested, "double movement - disarticulation and displacement accompanied by replacement and substitution" (26). Collaboration is replaced by a focus on superficial differences based on consumer choice. Purchasing becomes the emphasized substitution for real empowerment.

Later in the episode Rupert Giles, who is to become Buffy's mentor, asks, "What do you know about this town?" to which she replies, "Its two hours away from Nieman Marcus." This is a direct reference to consumer culture. It is important that this occurs in the pilot episode. Pilot episodes provide a hook for potential viewers by highlighting what is to come in the series. Young viewers can identify with the consumerist bent shown by the characters. In a similar example, Buffy acts surprised when a student tells her that she is big news on campus. He says, "You are big news, not much goes on in a one-Starbucks town like Sunnydale." This is an overt example of product placement encased in a humorous play on words. Some emphasis on consumerism is expected and necessary for any television series to survive. Shows must sell advertising, but if Buffy is considered a feminist role model, we must look at all aspects of what is being presented.

As the episode continues, women are shown as superficial and vain, focusing on fashion and looks as a way to self-empowerment. Buffy is preparing to go out to the local club. She stands in front of the mirror comparing outfits, struggling with what to wear. This is a short but powerful scene helping to establish the importance of physical appearance and popular fashion. Arguably, Buffy is exhibiting *normal girl behavior*, but

it is another example of contradiction. At the club, Buffy talks with her mentor Giles and comments about one of the patrons. "Look at his jacket; he's got his sleeves rolled up. And that shirt... its burgundy! Only someone who's been underground for 10 years would think that's a cool look". Here, Buffy is not only demonstrating a focus on physical appearance and fashion but also making disparaging comments about someone who does not fit the correct fashion image. To an academic viewer this is identifiable as superficial, consumer behavior, which portrays women in a negative light. To a young woman watching the series it reinforces consumption and materialism.

Another example of female vanity occurs later in the episode when some students are found dead because of vampire attacks. In order to help the students cope with attacks the school schedules grief counseling sessions for all. During her counseling session Cordelia comments "I lost 7.6 ounces because of all the stress, it's better than the diet my dietician put me on. Not saying we should kill a teacher everyday so I can lose weight but it would be nice." This scene portrays women as so obsessed with image that they would not mind people dying if it meant they get to look good. This reinforces what girls are taught by mass media; image is the most important thing, you need to be skinny. Meredith A. Love and Brenda M. Helmbrecht accurately describe what is taking place describing the modern girls as "more concerned with what they need to do and buy to maintain their image" than with the acquisition or contestation of cultural power (41). Again, can we consider a television show a positive portrayal of women when it teaches such things?

As some of the comments above suggest, there is a strong theme of consumption in the plot line. The lead female actors are compliant champions of the material and fashion culture. There is concern for shoes, major retail outlets, product placement, disdain for unpopular fashion and a very real concern with body image. Whether or not Buffy is an empowered female is not relevant from this vantage point. What is important for teenage female viewers is that *BtVS* reinforces the notions, as described by feminist scholars, of women focused on purchasing rather than empowerment. Educated, mature viewers quickly recognize these references as humorous and brush them off, but it is unlikely that young teen girls do the same.

As the above examples demonstrate, the pilot episode of *BtVS* emphasizes consumption in a variety of ways. This emphasis does not end with the pilot, but is instead present throughout the series, with later episodes revealing the same messages in new ways. Let us consider a key episode from later in the series – one that not only emphasizes consumerism, but also portrays women as materialistic and shallow.

Season 6's episode "All the Way" opens with a busy store full of eager customers. In fact, it is the "Magic Box," a local specialty boutique owned by Giles, Buffy's mentor. By this point in the series, Buffy's group of friends 'the Scooby Gang' has made the 'Magic Box' a primary hang out. On this particular occasion, it is Halloween and the entire gang is helping with the Halloween rush of customers. Dawn asks Anya where her angel wings are, to which Anya replies, "I'm not a real angel I'm an angel that skates around fighting crime with perfect hair." This response seems to show an

emphasis on looks over substance. After the big Halloween sale is over and the customers have left, Anya is counting handfuls of money, dancing and laughing. Dawn joins her in her celebration dance and asks, "Do you do this every night?" To which Anya replies, "I do this every time I close out the cash register, the dance of capitalist superiority." The camera then pans to Zander who is staring admiringly at Anya and says proudly "I'm going to marry that girl." The references toward consumption do not get much more direct than this comment by Anya, but they do continue. Here is a young woman with a petite figure concerned with her image and clearly motivated by money. This communicates a preferred body type, as well as an emphasis on looks and money. The scene clearly portrays women as very vain and materialistic. Of course, she is not the only female character in the group but by this point in the series, she is a main character.

As the episode continues, a party is taking place at Buffy's home. This is an engagement party for Zander and Anya. After sweeping the room the camera lands on Anya, glowing as she holds up her engagement ring and says, "Look at this beautiful ring" to which Zander says, "Which I'll be paying for the rest of my life." These are more portrayals of women as materialistic and money oriented. Rather than discuss how excited she is to begin her life with Zander, she focuses on the prize she is getting. The discerning viewer recognizes and dismisses her as a gaudy, materialistic joke. The young female relates to her and takes cues on how to behave. After all, she is very beautiful and successful. Her life is very desirable.

As the conversation continues, Anya makes several statements regarding the party and the upcoming marriage. Someone mentions that the party is nice to which she replies, "Don't worry this is just the first pre-marital celebration. There will be lots more with gifts." After the camera pans the house to show exquisite decorations, Anya says, "This looks so much better than it normally looks." She continues her assessment and discussion by saying, "There's just so much to consider, planning the wedding, new cars, house and babies." There are key messages to young women taking place here. Get married, worry about your looks, focus on material items- this is the life that a woman should choose. As a role model, Anya effectively embodies the era of Postfeminist media. She is white, thin, and middle class; she teaches consumption, materialism and emphasizes consumption as a requirement for happiness. Again, to the discerning viewer Anya is obviously obnoxious, to a young teen she is a beautiful example of who to be.

***BtVS*- A caution to the career girl**

BtVS also contains a very strong message about employment for young women. Work is one of the many ways that women gain empowerment, but *BtVS* seems to portray working in a very negative light. Let us return to the definition of Postfeminism that states it is reserved for the wealthy. In Season 3's episode 1, entitled "Anne" the opening scene shows the kids on their first day back from school. After a sweep of the busy halls, the camera focuses on Willow and Cordelia. Willow asks Cordelia how her

summer went to which Cordelia replies, “Los Palmas was a nightmare resort, they order you around and make you have organized fun.” In contrast to the luxurious summer experienced by Cordelia, whose biggest frustrations come from her free time and spending money, Buffy finds herself in a miserable job. After the discussion between Willow and Cordelia the scene transitions to Buffy waiting tables, being harassed by men and looking very unhappy. She is slapped on the rear end by a rough looking, middle-aged character and pauses to collect herself before being identified by a young couple of patrons. One asks, “Don’t I know you?” to which Buffy turns around and quickly exits from the shame of being identified by someone from her past, more affluent life. Next, Buffy walks by homeless people who beg for money as she passes along streets covered with trash. As the camera pans out, a police car with lights speeds through a very dingy, dangerous looking part of the city. In order to add drama to the scene, slow, depressing music is played. The music adds to the despair of the scene and is in great contrast to the type of music that is normally contained in the episodes. Buffy runs into a man who looks her over and says, “This is not the life for a kid; this place drains the life from you. You get old quick here.”

This episode is significant in part because of the motivation behind the work. In other episodes, Buffy and her friends assist at Giles’ store, The Magic Box. They volunteer and sometimes are paid, but they do it for fun, not out of necessity. None of them is employed there – they help because they choose to. In this episode, Buffy works out of necessity. Many women have to work to support themselves as Buffy does in this episode, and it is that which is portrayed as very uncomfortable and undesirable.

While feminist critics may praise the episode for showing Buffy working and supporting herself, the problem is that work and the life around it are shown as undesirable. This episode ultimately promotes consumerism by showing the negative side of not being able to participate in it. It uses proven scare tactics by portraying a very negative side of what happens when a woman is forced to support herself. She may be independent but is also broke and unhappy.

***BtVS*- Common Themes**

Throughout all seasons, *BtVS* portrays women as being materialistic and image oriented. Plots also involve vampires, demons and other supernatural but those things are irrelevant to a non-discerning viewer. Through the series, female characters are consistently dressed to align with white, middle class culture. Buffy Summers, the main character is always dressed in new, expensive, conservative, attire. Even when patrolling for vampires she dresses as though she were going to a job interview. Part of this may be the attempt to reinforce that a girl can look good and be tough as well but the message is open to interpretation. One reading is you need to wear expensive clothing and align with white middle class culture in order to fit in. This also may reinforce the consumerist alternative to empowerment for young females. We continually see examples of what Tasker and Negra describe as women who are “More concerned with what they need to do and buy to maintain their image” than with the acquisition or contestation of cultural power (41).

In contrast to the women who clearly spend a great deal of time and money on their clothing and appearance, the men in the series tend to dress more casually. For example, characters such as Xander and Oz typically wear less formal clothing such as T-shirts and jeans, suggesting a double standard for men and women when it comes to their appearances. McRobbie suggests that in the era of Postfeminism “Young women can come forward as long as their feminist leanings fade away” (88). Other feminist scholars expand this definition to suggest that young women may come forward as long as they do not appear threatening. One of the ways Buffy is prevented from appearing threatening is her fashion. She typically is dressed in very conservative attire. Risqué attire works its way into the plot line occasionally but is saved for characters like Faith who are portrayed as confused, demented and undesirable. Had the producers dressed Buffy and the other main females in revealing or rebellious attire, as is typically done in teen-targeted shows, it would have removed her ability to appear compliant and cast her outside the bounds of the traditional female.

There is also an emphasis on white, middle-class culture. As McRobbie, Tasker, Negra, and many others suggest the era of Postfeminism is a return to a racial mix that is white and middle class. *BtVS* provides a working example of this phenomenon. As a view of the seven seasons of the show demonstrate, absent from the character mix of Buffy’s high school are any “minorities” of any type whatsoever. Sunnydale High School is comprised of well-dressed Caucasians who appear to be wealthy. All of the main characters shown in the series are white as well. Buffy, Cordelia, Zander, Giles and Willow are all white. Buffy’s home is clearly upper class. It is a large home in a very

wealthy area with all of the dressings and decorations of custom, upscale living.

Minority characters are shown sparsely throughout the series but never play a pivotal role. Feminist scholars who praise *BtVS* for its positive portrayal of women seem to be ignoring the other side of the message. The message is a girl can do whatever she wants so long as she appears compliant with the white, middle class standard.

BtVS-Closing Thoughts

As with any other program on a broadcast network, a primary function of *BtVS* was to provide a vehicle for selling advertising. Shows that are successful at selling advertising generate profits and get additional seasons. Shows that do not generate a profit get canceled. To put it simply, shows like *BtVS* may well contain positive portrayals of women but that is not why they exist. They exist to make money, and to make money they must appeal to an audience that advertisers see as desirable.

Aesthetically, *BtVS* represents traditional, upper class, white, conservative values. This is not an accident. The aesthetics in *BtVS* represent the viewers the show is targeting – young white women with large amounts of discretionary income.

Corporations are well aware that teen girls are watching television and movies in record numbers. As Alisa Quart reports from the fourth annual APK (Annual Advertising and Promoting to Kids Convention) “Kids are still watching over twenty hours a week of television” and she warns, “Do not underestimate the power of television, do not underestimate the power of kids.” There exists a new and aggressive media marketing campaign directed exclusively at teens and children. “Kids are the most powerful sector

of the market and we should take advantage of them” (61). These comments suggest teen television has a very planned and focused agenda, which represents upper class, suburban whites and involves selling products and values.

With its contemporary teen heroine *BtVS* provides the perfect vehicle for marketing to teens. As Jeffrey Brown suggests about teen heroines, “The emphasis on youth in these contemporary heroines, both in their depiction as young girls and in marketing them to young female consumers marks a significant change in how action heroines are conceived and perceived in the contemporary media” (142). While *XWP* does much to advance the notion of women’s empowerment, it does not contain a teen heroine. *BtVS* is constructed in a way that offers a positive portrayal of women to young female viewers while also promoting a contradictory agenda. *BtVS* utilizes a popular girl action heroine to capture a much larger and wealthier audience than *XWP*.

According to Brown, the “Girl action heroine has become a mainstay of youth oriented culture. All of the girl action heroines have in common, exceptional fighting ability, intelligence, beauty, sense of humor and they balance being girlie with saving the world” (142). Buffy is the premier girl action heroine with all of the qualities above. Her appeal comes from her ability to balance being a teen heroine with being a high school student. However, this is far from a coincidence. In fact, it is likely part of a marketing phenomenon referred to as ‘Girl Power’. ‘Girl Power’ is all about reducing the complexities of feminism to ‘Girls Kick Ass’. It provides a focus on simple things such as fighting and being cool while ignoring other key components to feminist empowerment.

As Brown suggests, “‘Girl Power’ tricks us all into believing that girls are naturally powerful and therefore ignores the many ways their power is contingent on adhering to cultural expectations of female behavior” (155). *BtVS* is unique in casting a small, attractive, vulnerable looking female in the lead role and equipping her with the skills to physically defeat a multitude of aggressors. Buffy Summers, the main character is much more than just a tough girl: she is a Postfeminist marketing machine attracting millions of fans, lulling them into believing that girls are empowered while selling them consumer culture and traditional gender expectations.

BtVS will likely be remembered as a pro feminist television show as it well should be. However, as I have shown, contradictions permeate the series. While it does portray women positively it simultaneously promotes consumption and emphasizes a traditional view of women. Although *BtVS* is a popular program among feminist scholars it is a complex text. Its complexity may be hidden to a non-academic viewer but this essay has illustrated that it does exist. Feminist scholars may be correct that *BtVS* advanced the notion of what women could do. However; it also did much to promote gender inequality.

Works Cited

- Baumgardner, Jennifer, and Amy Richards. *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000. Print.
- Bavidge, Jenny. "Chosen Ones: Reading the Contemporary Teen Heroine." *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption, Identity*. By Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson. London: BFI Pub., 2004. 41-53. Print.
- Bolotin, Susan. "Voices from the Post-Feminist Generation." *The New York Times* 17 Oct. 1982: 29. Print.
- Braithwaite, Ann. "Politics Of/And Backlash." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 5.5 (2004): 18-33. Print.
- Brown, Jeffrey A. "Chapter 6- She Can Do Anything-The Action Heroine and the Modern (Post-Feminist) Girl." *Dangerous Curves: Action Heroines, Gender, Fetishism, and Popular Culture*. Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2011.
- Buttsworth, Sara. "'Bite Me': Buffy and the Penetration of the Gendered Warrior-hero." *Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 16.2 (2002): 187-99. Print.
- Dicker, Rory Cooke, and Alison Piepmeier. *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century*. Boston: Northeastern UP, 2003. Print.

- Dickinson, Kay. "'My Generation': Popular Music, Age and Influence in Teen Drama of the 1990's." *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption, Identity*. By Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson. London: BFI Pub., 2004. 99-111. Print.
- Free, Anna. "Re-Vamping the Gothic in Buffy the Vampire Slayer." *Screen Education* 46 (2002): 138-44. Print.
- Gramsci, Antonio, and Joseph A. Buttigieg. *Prison Notebooks*. New York: Columbia UP, 1992. Print.
- Hollows, Joanne. *Feminism, Femininity, and Popular Culture*. Manchester, U.K.: Manchester UP, 2000. Print.
- Hubel, Teresa. "In Pursuit of Feminist Postfeminism and the Blessings of Buttercup." *ESC: English Studies in Canada* 31.2 (2005): 17-21. Print.
- Jervis, Lisa, and Andi Zeisler, eds. *Bitchfest: Ten Years of Cultural Criticism from the Pages of Bitch Magazine*. Union Square West: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006. Print.
- Jervis, Lisa. "The End of Feminism's Third Wave: The Cofounder of Bitch Magazine Says Goodbye to the Generational Divide." *Ms. Magazine*. Ms Magazine, 28 Jan. 2007. Web. 5 Mar. 2010. <<http://www.ms magazine.com/winter2004/thirdwave.asp>>.
- Johnson, Merri Lisa. *Third Wave Feminism and Television: Jane Puts It in a Box*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2007. Print.

- Kaveney, Roz. *Teen Dreams: Reading Teen Film and Television From Heathers To Veronica Mars*. New York: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2006. Print.
- Kinser, Amber E. "Negotiating Spaces For/Through Third-Wave Feminism." *NWSA Journal* 16.3 (2004): 124-53. Print.
- Lavery, David. "I Wrote My Thesis On You: Buffy Studies As An Academic Cult." *Slayage: The Journal of The Whedon Studies Association*.
[Http://slayageonline.com/essays/slayage13_14/Lavery.htm](http://slayageonline.com/essays/slayage13_14/Lavery.htm), n.d. Web. 13 July 2012. <<http://slayageonline.com/>>.
- Love, Meredith A., and Brenda M. Helmbrecht. "Teaching the Conflicts: (Re)Engaging Students with Feminism in a Postfeminist World." *Feminist Teacher* 18.1 (2007): 41-58. *Project Muse*. University Of Illinois Press, 14 Apr. 2011. Web. 11 Jan. 2012. <<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/fttr/summary/v018/18.1love.html>>.
- McRobbie, Angela. *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2009. Print.
- Quart, Alissa. *Branded: The Buying and Selling of Teenagers*. New York: Basic, 2003. Print.
- Ross, Sharon M., and Louisa E. Stein, eds: *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*. Jefferson: McFarland &, 2008. Print.
- Savage, Jon. *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture*. New York: Penguin, 2007. Print.

Schor, Juliet B., and Douglas B. Holt. "Theodore W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer: The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." *The Consumer Society Reader* (2000): 4-19. Print.

Schor, Juliet B. *Born To Buy*. New York: Scribner, 2004. Print.

Tasker, Yvonne, and Diane Negra. "In Focus: Postfeminism and Contemporary Media Studies." *Cinema Journal* 44.2 (2005): 107-10. Print.

Thompson, Jim. "'Just a Girl' - Feminism, Postmodernism and Buffy the Vampire Slayer." *Refractory-A Journal Of Entertainment Media* (2003) 10 Oct. 2010. <<http://refractory.unimelb.edu.au/2003/03/18/just-a-girl-feminism-postmodernism-and-buffy-the-vampire-slayer-jim-thompson/>>.

Valenti, Jessica. *Full Frontal Feminism: A Young Womans Guide to Why Feminism Matters*. Berkeley: Seal, 2007. Print.

Weber, Brenda R. "Teaching Popular Culture through Gender Studies: Feminist Pedagogy in a Postfeminist and Neoliberal Academy." *Feminist Teacher* 20.2 (2010): 124-39. Print.

Wee, Valerie. "Selling Teen Culture: How American Multimedia Conglomeration Reshaped Teen Television in the 1990's." *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption, Identity*. By Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson. London: BFI Pub., 2004. 87-98. Print.

Whedon, Joss. "Welcome To The Hellmouth." *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*. The WB. 10 Mar. 1997. Television.

Whedon, Joss. "Anne." *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*. The WB. 29 Sept. 1998. Television.

Whedon, Joss, and Steven S. DeKnight. "All The Way." *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*. 30 Oct. 2001. Television.

Whedon, Joss, and Drew Goddard. "Dirty Girls." *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*. The WB. 15 Apr. 2003. Television.

Wilcox, Rhonda V. "There Will Never Be a 'Very Special' Buffy": *Buffy and the Monsters of Teen Life*. PP. (16-23) Print.

Wilcox, Rhonda. *Why Buffy Matters: The Art of Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2005. Print.