Bad Girls Like It Rough (-And Good Girls Don't?): Representations of BDSM in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer.*

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The difficulties in discussing and validating non-normative sexual choices, particularly those of women, are widely recognised. For example, Vance (1989) challenged the ways in which feminist arguments and campaigns against pornography and so-called 'perverted' sexual practices may in fact have undermined women's attempts to achieve sexual liberation.

It may be argued, therefore, that TV shows that attempt to go some way towards exploring aspects of sexuality that may be seen by society as less desirable deserve our attention. Jowett (2005) adopts postmodernism as a theoretical perspective, and locates popular culture as a site where important aspects of our identities, such as gender and sexuality, may be struggled after and contested. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) has never avoided the exploration of uncomfortable issues surrounding relationships, sex and sexuality, and they are evidently the focus of concerns and anxieties for many teens and young adults. As a show targeted primarily at young people, one of its central themes over its seven-year run has been sexual relationships. As a result, it has attracted a good deal of criticism from those who claim it is unsuitable for young people and undermines 'family values'. The show is widely understood as of hybrid genre, combining elements of sci-fi, horror, soap opera, and teen drama, but its supernatural theme and use of vampires and monsters as narrative devices have been central to its capacity to metaphorically explore sensitive issues that would have been much more difficult to address directly.

The premise of the show

Sunnydale, California, is a town built on the site of the 'Hellmouth', an opening to the underworld, and as such it is a magnet for all kinds of demons and monsters, including vampires. Throughout history there has always been a Slayer, or a 'Chosen One', 'one girl in all the world' given special strength and fighting skills for killing demons and vampires. The Slayer is trained and mentored by her 'Watcher'. Today's Slayer is Buffy Summers. Buffy, as our contemporary Slayer, executes her demon-fighting duties with the help of her friends, principally Willow, Xander, Tara and Anya, and her Watcher Rupert Giles. Other central characters are the men who have been Buffy's sexual partners: Angel, a vampire with a soul, the human Riley, and the vampire Spike who also becomes ensouled at end of the season six. And finally there is Faith, a second Slayer who, in brief, was 'called' due to Buffy's technical death by drowning in season one, from which she was revived.

Challenging stereotypes

The show's rejection of stereotypical gender roles has been praised by both academics and fans. Its creator, Joss Whedon, stated that he was keen to

reverse the usual horror genre scenario where the pretty, young blond is a powerless victim: "I would love to see a movie in which a blond wanders into a dark alley, takes care of herself and deploys her powers" (Bellafante, 1987: 82). He clearly sets the tenor of the show at the beginning of the very first episode, where the pretty, young blond (whom we later know to be Darla) turns out to be a vampire and the confident, street-wise male her victim. The character of Buffy herself is a superhero, demonstrating the stereotypically masculine traits of physical and moral strength, decision-making ability and leadership.

Further, *Buffy* clearly does not endorse a passive and objectified female sexuality. The season five episode 'I Was Made to Love You' features April, the 'perfect girlfriend' robot designed and built by the evil Warren. Jowett (2005) notes that April, like other stereotypically 'good' girls, does not survive in the Buffyverse. All the major female characters are shown to enjoy sexual relations, and so sex for young, unmarried women is represented as compatible with being a good person. The lesbian relationship between witches Willow and Tara, both 'good' characters, additionally extends the parameters of acceptable sexuality. The significance of this relationship for many fans in endorsing non-normative sexuality was underlined by the criticism that Whedon attracted when Tara was killed in season six. Many fans argued that the show had resorted to 'killing off the bad lesbian'; this choice was seen as bringing the show down to the level of those where characters who are seen as 'other' because of their sexuality, ethnicity or class are routinely killed off and their sexuality thereby confirmed as unacceptable. In the online magazine 'Salon', Stephanie Zacharek reported "weeks of buzzing on "Buffy" online message boards, some of which have been vibrating resoundingly with charges that "Buffy" is anti-gay, misogynist, or both. Some fans in the lesbian community have asserted that by killing off one-half of the show's lesbian couple …Whedon destroyed one of the few positive lesbian role models on television" (May 22, 2002). Whedon subsequently responded with a posting on the Bronze, the show's official website chat room: "I killed Tara.... Because stories, as I have so often said, are not about what we WANT. And I knew some people would be angry with me for destroying the only gay couple on the show, but the idea that I COULDN'T kill Tara because she was gay is as offensive to me as the idea that I DID kill her because she was gay."

But *Buffy*'s characters are never wholly good or evil, and are constantly in flux, offering opportunities to explore identity issues of relevance to its audience. In particular, citing McRobbie (1994), Jowett (2005) suggests that the conjunction of representations of what can be seen as both 'feminism' and 'femininity' in the show renders it a useful medium for exploring gender issues as they are experienced by people in the real world. Furthermore, Jowett argues that *Buffy*'s hybrid generic nature, with its mixture of sci-fi, gothic horror, teen drama and soap conventions, operates to unsettle audience expectations and offers opportunities to subvert generic roles and narratives.

Buffy makes reference to a number of non-normative sexual practices, and in this paper I will focus on its treatment of Bondage and Discipline, Domination and Submission, and Sadomasochism (BDSM), particularly in relation to its female characters. BDSM practices are depicted and referred to in relation to a variety of character types in the show- the morally good, the morally bad, the morally ambiguous, the human, and the demon. Through its handling of BDSM in relation to these characters, I will explore the extent to which *Buffy* makes BDSM visible and challenges stereotypical and pejorative accounts of it. I will argue that, while *Buffy* goes some way towards endorsing forms of sexual expression that are commonly seen as lying beyond the pale of the normal and healthy, ultimately it chooses to align these with evil rather than good. I will also examine the extent to which it can be seen as contributing to the circulation of a BDSM 'sexual story' (Plummer, 1995) that can potentially be adopted and lived by its audience. Plummer argues that we are living in an age of new sexual stories. Sexual stories are the joint productions of individual story tellers (and here we might include TV shows) and of those who receive and hear them, that is audiences. An important part of this is the interactive social world in which the story is received and reproduced. Stories are not just heard and internalized by individual consumers; they are retold, discussed and debated, and reproduced by members of a social community, and in this context it is pertinent to note the high degree of discussion, for example on fan and academic internet sites, that has grown up around *Buffy*.

BDSM in *Buffy*

The show's central conceit of the vampire and other monsters and its supernatural themes allows a variety of human problems and experiences to be explored metaphorically through the use of demon characters. It could be argued that in the show's attendance to sexual relationships, it has been unusually bold in making available to its young audience representations of sexuality that lie outside of prescriptive heterosexuality. For example, the lesbian relationship between Willow and Tara, initially coded as 'magic' but later made explicit, has probably excited more than its fair share of comment and debate due to the fact that young, impressionable people are assumed to be watching. Regular viewers of *Buffy* will know that many scenes also contain BDSM connotations.

As Jowett (2005) points out, *Buffy* employs a range of binary oppositions which are given physical form, often through the show's supernatural narrative, allowing a clear depiction of good versus evil (although it is important to note that the characters themselves are never unproblematically one or the other). Many episodes have used character 'doubles' or splits of various kinds, alternative universes and dimensions, and certain characters are widely understood to be the 'shadow side' of others. Additionally, Angel and Spike allow some interesting comparisons, since the evolution and change of these characters includes both 'evil' and 'good' phases. During their dangerous phases, they are frequently

shown chained and manacled, usually semi-naked; as Saxey (2001) notes "Angel spends a ludicrous amount of time in chains, shirtless" (p203); and on the occasions when the 'good' characters are captured, abducted and imprisoned, we often see them too chained up. The gothic-horror genre in which *Buffy* is partially located renders the appearance and use of chains and manacles unsurprising, and allows their implicit sexual connotations with BDSM to be legitimately enjoyed by the spectator. For example, in the season four episode 'Something Blue', Spike is shown restrained by chains and shackles in Giles' bathtub, and is fed warm blood through a straw by Buffy, an arguably erotic image. When Angel returns in season three, having apparently been imprisoned in a Hell dimension for an immeasurable period of time, he has been reduced to a dangerous, animalistic creature without language or understanding. Until she is able to rehabilitate him, Buffy chains him to the wall. In these scenes he is frequently semi-naked and once again an erotic reading is readily accessible.

But there are also numerous explicit references to sexual violence and BDSM, and it is on these that I will focus. *Buffy* not only links evil to sexual sadism, but also to BDSM and power-play as a sexual choice, and I will explore each of these in turn.

Evil and sadistic sexuality

Through its use of evil characters, or at least characters going through an evil phase, *Buffy* establishes a link between evil and a sadistic sexuality. This is achieved through the suggestion that evil-doers are sexually aroused by the infliction of pain on others or by having pain inflicted on them. Among vampire characters, there are numerous references to the giving and receiving of pain. Early in season one, Angel (who at this point is ensouled and therefore 'good') fights with his own sire and former lover, Darla. Darla clearly wants to see the return of Angel's evil alter-ego, Angelus, and she uses her sexuality to try to achieve this. As he angrily pins her against a wall, she seductively says: "You're hurting me. That's good too."

In seasons one and two, Spike is in love with the vampire Drusilla, and it is implied that their relationship had a strong sadistic element. In 'Lover's Walk' (season three), Drusilla has abandoned Spike and he is desperate to regain her love. He finally says: "I want Dru back, I just have to be the man I was. The man she loved. I'm gonna do what I shoulda done in the first place. I'll find her, wherever she is…and I'll tie her up and torture her until she likes me again". In the season four episode 'Harsh Light Of Day', Spike refers back to their sexual activities as he gets into bed with his current vampire girlfriend, Harmony, and we are shown that, in this relationship too, violence and pain play an erotic part. This link between desire and physical pain in *Buffy* is also noted by Heinecken (2003).

In addition to apparently enjoying sexual violence, vampires are also portrayed as aroused by violent acts. In the season three episode 'The Wish', an

alternative universe (evidently a dystopia) is conjured by vengeance-demon Anyanka (later simply 'Anya' as she is stripped of her demon powers and becomes mortal). In this universe, Xander and Willow are not Buffy's friends and helpers but vampires. They appear attired in black leather with clear BDSM connotations; Willow is styled as a dominatrix. They engage in sadistic acts toward the imprisoned Angel (who, incidentally, is once more depicted semi-naked and in chains), which they evidently find sexually arousing. But as Jowett (2005) points out, this 'dark' Willow, like Darla, is punished for her transgressive behaviour (in this alternative reality, both are killed by their former lovers). We see the relationship between sexual arousal and violence explicitly drawn in the season five episode 'Fool For Love'. In a back-story sequence taking us to the Boxer rebellion in early 20th century China, we see Spike's first killing of a Slayer. This is shown as sexually arousing to both him and Drusilla: "Ever hear them say the blood of a Slayer is a powerful aphrodisiac?" he asks, pulling her forcefully to him and kissing her passionately.

Buffy appears to suggest that, for the evil-minded, sexuality is infused with the desire to hurt and be hurt, and to the extent that BDSM connotations are woven through representations of evil and the infliction of pain in *Buffy*, these become confounded. It may be argued that this image is a far cry from the agenda of real people who engage in BDSM. Academic interest in BDSM practices and identities has more recently focused upon a non-pathologizing approach to understanding these (for example, Barker and Langdridge, 2005; Langdridge, in press; Langdridge and Butt, 2004; Langdridge and Butt, 2005; Taylor, 1997); research investigating real people who engage in BDSM demonstrates that popular representations are misleading (Beckman, 2001; Taylor and Ussher, 2001) and, as Amy-Chinn (2005) points out, Califia (1997) draws attention to the ethic of care among SM practitioners.

BDSM practices

Sex for the human characters, with the notable exception of Faith, whom I will discuss presently, is predominantly 'vanilla' by contrast. Buffy's sexual relations with both Angel and Riley are portrayed as tender and loving, and the missionary position seems to be the norm. There are no references to BDSM practices.

Xander and Anya's relationship may, in a minor way, be seen as an exception to this rule. Xander is perhaps the most 'normal' of men in the Buffyverse, in that, apart from being an ordinary human, he regularly presents the characteristics of normative masculinity. Anya, however, is an ex-vengeance-demon. Having been divested of her powers, she becomes mortal and must face the task of working out what it means to live a life as a human being. Her learning curve is steep and hilarious. We see her struggle to grasp the subtleties of human social life and relationships, and her character reveals the apparently illogical nature of some of society's rules. She doesn't 'get' politeness, humor or

tact, and she suffers from no sexual inhibitions. She is delightfully direct, for example revealing, during casual conversation, the details of her sex-games with Xander, including their enjoyment of spanking. But this is the extent of the legitimation of BDSM for 'good' people. We feel we can forgive Anya for her sexual experimentation, since she is, developmentally, a child in the human world. Xander too is in many ways a perpetual adolescent, and we can read his comparatively tame BDSM activities within a version of traditional masculinity that is sexually hungry and open to a variety of ways of gaining pleasure.

The human character of Faith provides the most stark contrast with what human female sexuality is supposed to be. Faith is widely recognized as Buffy's shadow self. She is the rogue Slayer, the one who has abandoned ethical principles. Faith's relationships with human beings are impersonal and instrumental. She, like Anya, unashamedly makes open reference to her sexual activities, but unlike Anya has no excuse for this behavior. Jowett (2005) points out that Faith adopts a 'masculine' sexual independence, rejecting emotional ties and using sexual partners to satisfy her desires.

Faith's attitude to sexual relationships is represented as unhealthy, and part of her more general character flaws. For Faith, like vampires, sex and violence are related. Jowett (2005) points out that Faith is 'bad' not because she participates in sex and violence, but because she evidently gains pleasure from them. Furthermore, she is sexually predatory. This is coded in her dress, since we see her most often in tightly fitting leather wear, and she unashamedly makes explicit sexual advances to several of the male characters during her appearances in seasons three, four, and seven.

Our awareness of Faith's sexuality includes numerous explicit references to BDSM practices. The season three episode 'Consequences' is especially informative. Here, she hostilely rejects Xander's offer of friendship, and tries to turn this into a sexual encounter, one where she is unambiguously in the driving seat. She throws him onto the bed and climbs on top of him, saying: "I could make you scream…I could make you die." Xander won't play, and Faith desperately turns to real force and begins to throttle him. He is rescued by the timely arrival of Angel, and in the next scene we see Faith chained up in Angel's mansion. She says: "Finally decided to tie me up, huh? I always knew you weren't really a one-Slayer guy" and then: "That thing with Xander- I know what it looked like, but we were just playing", to which Angel replies: "And he just forgot the safety word, is that it?" "Safety words are for wusses", she retorts.

Faith appears in season seven, now a reformed character, at the beginning of the provocatively entitled episode 'Dirty Girls'. She gets into conversation with the newly-ensouled Spike (who appears in bed, semi-naked, manacles hanging from the wall). Faith shares stories of her past sexual experiences, including "dressing up as a schoolgirl for a guy with a bullwhip". Faith acknowledges that she was 'dangerous for a while'. When Spike asks if she is over it, she replies "More or less- I pull for the good guys now". "And the less?"

asks Spike. "I was thinking of looking up the guy with the bull-whip", she replies. Her BDSM tastes are here clearly aligned with the side of her character that has not yet fully become good.

In season four, she (and the audience) is also taught that sex without love is hollow. In 'Who Are You?', 'disguised' in Buffy's body she visits Riley, Buffy's boyfriend. They have sex and Faith is shown to be confused and unsettled by the experience of a loving sexual relationship. As Jowett (2005) (drawing on Forster, 2003) points out, Faith realizes that Buffy has a better sex life because Riley loves her. Jowett further argues that Faith's redemption in season seven becomes complete in the series finale, 'Chosen'. Here, she wins the 'reward' of romance (with Robin Wood, who is seen as able to pose a challenge to her sexual dominance), and we are invited to see her as finally becoming wholly good through valuing relationships over sex. Faith's amorality, her instrumental attitude to relationships, and her dangerousness are all here intimately connected to her sexual tastes. What she regards as sexual power play is seen to easily cross the line into the infliction of real pain and physical damage, and so the line between consensual BDSM and the non-consensual infliction of pain and injury is blurred. It is hard to escape the message that being bad and practicing BDSM go hand in hand.

But in season six we discover that Buffy too, who is the most morally reflective of the characters and a role model for the others, is not averse to a little rough sex play. Is it possible that 'good' girls too can engage in BDSM? Buffy dies a supernatural and sacrificial death at the end of season five, and at the beginning of season six she is brought back to life by her friends through a magic spell. Season six is therefore the unfolding story of her struggle to make sense of this literally new lease of life she has been given, a life, we later find out, she never asked for nor wanted. She finds consolation and some sense of shared experience in the company of her long-time adversary, the undead vampire Spike. Spike, at this stage in the story-arc, is still of ambiguous morality; he is in love with Buffy and does numerous good deeds on account of this, but he has not yet sought and regained his soul and so is represented as without a strong moral compass. Buffy becomes involved in a sexual but loveless relationship with Spike. The episode 'Smashed' shows Buffy and Spike engaged in a violent physical and verbal fight against each other in a derelict house. The fight is brought to an end by Buffy when she throws Spike against the wall and kisses him forcefully. They unromantically consummate their relationship at the end of the episode; Buffy is shown as taking the lead sexually here, as she mounts Spike, unzips his pants and lowers herself onto him. In the subsequent episode, 'Wrecked', we are left in no doubt that their sexual encounter has been a violent one.

Early in their sexual relationship we are told that this involves a mixture of sex and violence. But at the beginning of the later episode 'Dead Things', we get the first indication that sex between them may include BDSM practices. The

episode begins with loud 'noises off' suggesting that Buffy and Spike are in the throes of a particularly violent session of lovemaking. We encounter them in disarray on the floor immediately afterwards, and Spike's words tell us of the nature of their sexual engagement: "You were amazing…the things you do, the way you make it hurt in all the wrong places." A little later he reaches among the debris and reveals a pair of handcuffs, and later in the episode we understand that Buffy has consented to their use.

The sexual liaison between Buffy and Spike continues for several episodes. Heinecken (2003) points out that: "Buffy initiates most of the sex, and she is almost always shown on top of Spike. Throughout the season it is quite easy to read Buffy as the sexual aggressor" (p119). As the season continues, we find Buffy becoming increasingly disturbed by her own desires. She is convinced that her liaison with Spike can only be explained by some pathology within her- something must have gone wrong with the spell that brought her back from the dead. She must be less than human, a monster. She entreats Tara to find out what is wrong with her, hiding from view her wrists which we know bear the marks of her bondage games with Spike. And when Tara finally tries to reassure her that she is fully human, Buffy breaks down, apparently ashamed of herself, crying: "Why do I let Spike do these things to me?". She eventually ends the relationship with Spike, as she now believes that she has been using him.

In the end, we are left in no doubt that Buffy's relationship with Spike, including their BDSM sex games, is a symptom of her struggle to emerge from the depression and numbness that she has felt since being plucked from heaven and thrust back into the living hell that she feels is her Slayer life. So good girls can like it rough too- but only if they have a good excuse. Jowett (2005) further points out that when Buffy asks Tara "Why do I let Spike do these things to me?" through this passive language the show invokes a stereotypically feminine position for Buffy, appearing to contradict the active sexual role we have seen her adopting.

Sexual stories and *Buffy*

The difficulties in discussing and validating non-normative sexual choices, particularly those of women, have long been recognised. But even well-intentioned feminist arguments and campaigns, for example against pornography, have been called into question, since their attack on so-called 'perverted' sexual practices may in fact have undermined women's attempts to achieve sexual liberation. Most notably, Andrea Dworkin's (1983) stance against pornography was later extended to include fantasy by some cultural feminists. Fantasy was the 'theory' and rape the 'practice' (Morgan, 1974). BDSM 'play' may thus be criticised as a version of sexuality that endorses and encourages male sexual violence. However, since this claim was made it has not been supported by empirical evidence, and Rubin (1989) and others have convincingly argued for a widening of the boundaries of acceptable sexual expression for

women. Vance (1989) claims that feminism may well have replaced old sexual taboos with a set of new 'no go' areas for women: 'Women are vulnerable to being shamed about sex, and the anti-pornography ideology makes new forms of shaming possible'(p6); and Webster (1989) argues that the rush to "denounce media depictions of feminine desire and desirability" (p386) meant that feminists had put themselves in a position where they were unable to own up to and legitimate images of female sexuality that might in some way be seen to play into oppressive male fantasies, leaving the door open for putting women back on the pedestal of innocence and purity.

Rubin (op cit) organises sexual practices into a 'sex hierarchy', comprising a 'charmed circle' which contrasts with the 'outer limits'. It illustrates a discriminatory and oppressive sexual value system where 'good' sexuality is seen as natural and normal; this is 'vanilla' sexuality which takes place within a monogamous, heterosexual relationship. In the 'outer limits' are 'bad' forms of sexuality, inevitably regarded as abnormal and unnatural. BDSM practices are located here, alongside other forms of sexuality that do not fit the prescriptive and ideological norm. Rubin points out that although some non-normative sexual practices were, at that time, becoming more acceptable, this was only provided that they were located within coupled, monogamous relationships. But many other practices, including BDSM, were still viewed as "unmodulated horrors incapable of involving affection, love, free choice, kindness or transcendence" (p283). She argues that feminist anti-porn rhetoric often focused selectively on the supposed violence of BDSM and notes how, in one famous court case, the judge ruled that consent could not have been given because no sane person could freely consent to actions likely to cause bodily injury. Langdridge and Butt (2004) note how this strain of feminism endorsing BDSM identities has developed more recently through the work of writers such as Pat Califia, Susie Bright, and Camille Paglia.

Television is arguably an important medium for the transmission and circulation of ideas that can be taken up and lived out by members of the audience. In recent years, soaps have explored a number of social issues in sensitive and more or less realistic ways, including homosexual and lesbian relationships, domestic violence, alcoholism and drug addiction. It may be argued that such representations are making available to audiences a taste of a wider array of possible ways of life than formerly. Although attitudes portrayed through television shows are not necessarily taken up and lived out by members of their audiences, nevertheless it may be argued that TV plays a major role in the dissemination and circulation of new ideas and alternative lifestyles. One way of conceptualizing this is Plummer's (1995) notion of 'sexual stories'. Plummer aligns himself with those who wish to champion the acceptability and normalisation of a wider range of sexual practices. He notes that currently in western societies there is an emerging cluster of narratives around the theme of sadomasochism, and conjectures that perhaps this constitutes the rise of a new

sexual story. So to what extent can we see *Buffy* as making a contribution to the circulation of positive images of non-normative sexuality for young women, particularly BDSM practices?

Buffy has been applauded for its challenge to traditional gender roles, and for its willingness to address material often thought inappropriate for a youthful audience. Due to its use of monsters, demons, and vampires to stand metaphorically for the reality of human life and through its use of themes in the gothic-horror genre, *Buffy* is unusual in being able to include sexual material that might not otherwise be seen as appropriate for a teen and young adult audience (however it must be noted that, in the UK, in some episodes there has been severe editing of violent and sexual scenes for the 6:45 pm airing on BBC 2). Elsewhere (Burr, 2003) I have argued that *Buffy* allows us to recognize the 'dark' side of sexuality, one that is not usually visible in TV shows aimed at young people. The device of vampire/human relationships (notably between Buffy and Angel, and Buffy and Spike) offers a way of representing human sexuality that potentially subverts current ideologies of love and sex. While superficially it may be seen to endorse the more acceptable view that human relationships are (and should be) unambiguously loving, we are allowed to view and engage with a more conflictual and perhaps more valid representation of human sexuality.

It is possible to argue that the very 'visibility' of BDSM practices in *Buffy* (even though they are mostly not explicit) is progress that should be welcomed. The frequent depiction of chains and manacles in a variety of contexts, which do not necessarily involve violence or pain and where an erotic reading is invited, may well contribute to the circulation of BDSM sexual stories. At a broader level, the frequent eroticization of images of bondage, pain, and suffering, notably inflicted on the aesthetically beautiful, young, male body, echoes forms of sexuality where domination and power are manipulated. References to spanking games, mostly but not exclusively made with respect to Xander and Anya, can be seen as normalizing this activity.

But the handling of BDSM in relation to humans and monsters, good and evil, may be seen as ultimately disqualifying BDSM as a legitimate form of sexuality. In *Buffy*, explicitly BDSM practices are referred to principally in the context of vampire relationships, and are therefore coded as bad. Xander and Anya's spanking games may be seen as a deviation from this pattern; however, references to this are introduced mainly for comedic effect, and it might be argued that spanking occupies the more acceptable end of the BDSM continuum in public attitudes. For example, spanking was widely used in film as a code for sexual relations before explicit representations of sex were allowed past the censor. Monsters combine sex, power, and pain because they are naturally evil. Humans do so if they have 'gone bad' or are in other ways marked as psychologically unhealthy. Through an exploration of the major characters of Buffy and Faith, we find the message that bad girls like it rough, and good girls might too- but only if they are sick. Although BDSM is regularly portrayed in *Buffy*

and is therefore made available as a sexual story for audiences to engage with, it is associated only with 'perverted' sexuality. As Langdridge and Butt (2004; 2005) point out, although BDSM is a new sexual story that is becoming increasingly available and seen as a viable practice, it is still widely pathologized.

Jowett (2005) argues that, in some ways, instead of challenging stereotypes of good girls and bad girls the show has emphasized them. While *Buffy* offers highly positive images of sexually active, independent women, it still does not escape the narrative constraints of conventional heterosexual romance: "Generic hybridity in Buffy opens up spaces for new representations of gender, but traditional generic and narrative conventions can be difficult to escape" (191). To the extent that these conventions tend towards the resolution of sexual issues through romantic, heterosexual relationships, it will be difficult to create spaces where alternative versions of sexuality can be legitimated. Horror conventions, she notes, encourage narrative resolution with a conservative moral closure. Further, she is critical of the way that *Buffy*'s use of binary oppositions (good/evil, doubles, splits, etc) seems to inevitably link gender and morality:

> Morality and gender are inextricably linked, because transgression of gender boundaries is most obvious in "bad" characters and the show cannot always reconcile transgressive behavior in "good" characters. Buffy tries to blur clear-cut moral definitions, but characters and viewers tend to identify actions and characters as good or bad, and the many transformations of regular characters make use of binary positions. (p194-195)

However, Jowett concludes that, despite these criticisms, *Buffy* has at least been successful in drawing attention to the difficulties involved in challenging conventional and stereotypical representations through TV.

Conclusion

The visibility of non-normative sexual relationships and practices on television has increased significantly in recent times. But, as Rubin noted in 1989, although non-normative practices like gay and lesbian sex are often legitimated, provided that they are located within a monogamous couple relationship, a diversity of other practices, including BDSM, are still regarded as unacceptable, as probably unhealthy, and are unlikely to feature routinely in TV programs, especially those airing before the 'watershed' in the UK. BDSM is not yet seen, alongside gay and lesbian sex, as something that ordinary, good, healthy people can enjoy.

Buffy to some degree challenges prevailing ideologies relating to pre-marital sex and sexual agency in young women. It makes explicit reference to BDSM practices and thereby makes them more visible. However, this progressive tendency is checked by consistently aligning BDSM practices with

evil and perverted pleasure. BDSM is aligned with vampire, and therefore evil, characters. Both Angel and Spike, when they become ensouled and therefore good, are shown as no longer interested in such practices. The characters of Buffy and Faith add weight to this. Faith is coded as bad in numerous ways and therefore her BDSM interests become conflated with this; it becomes one of the many ways in which we see that she is a bad person. Her sexual independence and agency, something we may wish to recommend for young women, becomes conflated with her sexual tastes and her pathological personality. Buffy's engagement in BDSM is represented as something that needs an excuse and is explained by her temporary pathology, her depression since being resurrected from the dead. It is only in her relationship with Spike that she is shown as having sexual agency, initiating sex and being 'on top'. As in the case of Faith, this becomes conflated with her BDSM practices and thereby coded as bad along with them.

Buffy went further than most shows targeted at young people in challenging stereotypes, particularly for women. But its representation of BDSM, while extensive, has been conservative. BDSM as a sexual story and an ethical choice available to young people through the medium of TV drama still seems a long way off.

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