

**“They told me Sunnydale was gonna be interesting”:
Metaphorical Schizophrenia In *Buffy The Vampire Slayer***

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[1] The idea that television can be seen as more than pure entertainment can be found in various works including James Lawler’s chapter, “Between Heavens and Hells: The Multidimensional Universe in Kant and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.” Lawler cites Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave” as an example that, “the basic nature of human existence is portrayed through an imaginative fantasy.” This statement explains that we, as human beings are unable to understand ourselves without the help of television, films and books showing us our inner selves. We know that the images on television are not our reality, but they do play a part in helping us learn about our reality. Much to this affect are the characters of Ben and Glory, introduced in Season Five of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Through Lawler’s reasoning we can perceive that the characters of Ben and Glory could be something more than just a good story arc.

[2] In the world of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* there are two characters, Ben and Glory. In the story arc of the show Ben and Glory are portrayed as two individual people. Glory is a demon that has possessed Ben. Unlike other shows like *Supernatural*, which show demon possession, as a mind and spirit change not a body change, *Buffy* depicts Glory and Ben as having two separate appearances. When Glory is active, a female plays her, and when Ben is the active character a male plays him. Thus on screen the audience perceives two separate characters. This article argues that the idea of two separate characters is actually a metaphor for schizophrenia.

[3] Further, a “metaphor serves as a way to discuss topics for which we do not yet have a language, or for which our vocabulary cannot reach in a one-dimensional way,” states Tracy Little. She notes that, “Such metaphors taken to their literal extreme were the driving force behind many of the early episodes of *BtVS*. Here the monster of the week could stand in for themes like fear of relationship violence, feelings of low self-esteem, teenage lust and heartbreak” (Little 283). Little continues that, “today’s teens live in a world where their classmates plot their murders, where the threat of gun violence is always present” and “researchers argue that as the fears and threats in a society change, so does the way that we represent such fears and threats as a culture” (282-83). In essence, as the world around us changes so our television shows must depict more fantastical metaphors to help us cope and interpret that world. The more fantastical metaphor is often the idea behind the vampires and

demons in *Buffy*. Little asserts that, “We recognize them for what they are, just metaphors, but sometimes the metaphor is more the reality than the fiction” (282). If Ben and Glory are a metaphor for schizophrenia then it would justify Little’s statement. A mental illness would be more of a reality than demon possession.

[4] To explain the reality of the metaphor in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* we have to ask, “does Buffy have a real world?” Meaning does Buffy really live in a world of vampires, demons and super powerful slayers and why is it important to recognize this? In the Season Six episode, “Normal Again” (B6017) Buffy is seen in an alternate world. In this world she has been locked in a mental institute for the past six years. Upon waking she is told that Sunnydale is all a lie and a figment of her imagination. Waking in an alternate reality is relevant because it puts the television show as a whole into perspective for the audience. If Buffy is not actually living in a world of vampires, demons and super powerful slayers then she is using all that as a coping mechanism. Buffy, like the audience, is playing out their own metaphors and expressions of self in a fictitious Sunnydale. There are two instances in this episode that show Buffy’s reality in comparison to her fictitious world. Towards the end of the episode, after Buffy has chosen to stay in the Sunnydale world and beaten the demon attacking her friends she has the following conversation:

WILLOW: Buffy? We’re okay. It’s all okay. Buffy, sit down. You’ll fall over.
 BUFFY: No...I can’t. Not until I have the antidote.

Buffy is saying that she cannot fall over because her “real self” is already sitting...on the floor of a mental institute. Buffy believes Sunnydale to be a lie and she makes that clear with her statement.

[5] The second instance can be found in the official ending of the episode. In it there is a shot of a catatonic Buffy sitting on the floor while her doctor announces to her parents, “I’m afraid we’ve lost her.” Buffy has already chosen to go back to Sunnydale at this point. If being in Sunnydale is her “normal” and the mental institute is her “dream” then why cut to black on a catatonic Buffy? The idea here is that real Buffy is the Buffy in the mental institute, there is no other reason why that character still exists now that Buffy has solidified her stay in Sunnydale. Both examples show that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* the television series was never intended to be viewed as a type of reality. It is not real for Buffy and it is not a real world of vampire, demons and super powerful slayers for the audience either. It is intended simply to be a metaphor to express things we fear and deal with in real life. Of course, this does not mean the creators decided six years after the fact that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* would be purely metaphorical. The realization that Buffy has created her world of monsters is assumed to be more of an insider tidbit, a mystery surrounding the show the creators accidentally let slip.

[6] Now that it is clear that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is in fact a metaphor we can analyze the characters of Ben and Glory as a depiction of schizophrenia. First, what is schizophrenia? The idea of schizophrenia has been hard for researchers to pin point because it often overlaps with other mental disorders. As published in the Child and Adolescent Health Journal, *The Lancet*, addressing five main categories below can narrow down a diagnosis of schizophrenia.

Analysis of the psychopathological features in the various psychotic disorders suggests that symptoms can be clustered into five main categories: (i) psychosis (encompassing delusions and hallucination); (ii) alterations in drive and volition (lack of motivation, reduction in spontaneous speech and social withdraw); (iii) alteration in neurocognition (difficulties in memory, attention and executive functioning); and (iv and v) affective dysregulation giving rise to depressive and manic (bipolar) symptoms. (Os and Kapur)

This statement is not definitive in the realm of schizophrenia. As Moncrieff and Middleton write in their article “Schizophrenia: A Critical Psychiatry Perspective”, “several scholars have, however, pointed out that there is no unifying pattern of abnormalities among people labeled as having schizophrenia that distinguishes them from people with other mental health problems, or from people without” (265). No one can truly say, for a fact what the symptoms, deformities and specific classifications of schizophrenia are, as “100 years of research has failed to produce evidence of any defect in the structure or function of the brain, or any other part of the body, that is specific to schizophrenia” (Moncrieff and Middleton 265). This is not meant to imply that schizophrenia is not real; it just means that, “schizophrenia is a condition with no particular symptoms, no particular course, no particular outcome and which responds to no particular treatment” (Moncrieff and Middleton 265). However, for the purposes of this argument we will review Ben and Glory under the original five main categories of schizophrenia, as previously mentioned, in order to narrow down a diagnosis.

[7] The character of Ben and Glory are introduced in the Season Five episode, “No Place Like Home” (B5005). Several things in this episode allude to a mental condition. The first are Glory’s mood swings. She goes from crying that she wants the key while torturing the Monk to happy and excited. This is a shift in her physical characteristics from depressed to manic. Depression is obviously associated with schizophrenia; however, it can be associated with several other mental conditions like bi-polar. Depression, in essence, is when your mental stability reaches a point so low that you cannot see yourself coming out of it without help. Of course, crying is not a sure fire sign of this kind of sadness, however it does show that Glory has wanted this key or an exit from Buffy’s reality for a long time and only through the hope of finding this exit does she manage to pull herself from depression to a sense of happiness. This “exit” could be interpreted as a metaphor for death. Of course, the story idea is Glory wants to go

back to her demon world, but demons live in Hell and Hell is a form of afterlife. Crying may not be a definitive sign of depression, but wanting and actively planning to commit suicide is.

[8] Another, less subtle sign of schizophrenia is mania or manic. Mania is a physical characteristic that expresses itself with fast talking, needing something so badly right at that moment and a sudden feeling of elation and happiness. This is evident in Glory because she quickly cuts off her tears and says to the Monk, “I want it, I need it and I gotta have it now.” Mania is a more relevant sign of various mental disorders because unlike depression it does not occur on its own. It is quite common for a human being to have low moments, but not a lot of people understand that you can also have equally violent and destructive happy moments. How can a moment of pure happiness be destructive? In real life it can cause you to make a really bad decision. Again, mania is not a guaranteed diagnosis of schizophrenia: “this psychosis is not exclusive to schizophrenia and occurs in various diagnostic categories of psychotic disorder” (Os and Kapur 635). “Medicine has evolved a standard programme for arriving at a diagnosis,” “all of the afflictions which could possibly account for the data are named as possible diagnoses and the evidence for and against each one is set forth. Nearly always the evidence will exclude most diagnoses and allow implicit probabilities to be assigned to those remaining” (Heston, Heston and Speer). Therefore, the signs of mania and depression are merely evidence adding to a long list of symptoms that help rule out other possible diagnoses of the Ben and Glory characters.

[9] More clearly, schizophrenia can be seen later in scene eleven of “No Place Like Home”. In this scene Glory has a Monk tied to a chair and is torturing him in the interior of an industrial building. After several attempts at persuading the Monk to tell her where the key is, she begins to have a very evident break down. Glory says,

“It’s typical! The whole mortal meatsack comes complete with stink and bile sweat and protein. Yes, I said humans! Not now, Mommy’s talking! Wriggling, piling, prowling, crawling, clowning, cavorting, doing it over and over and over and over until someone’s gonna sit down on their tuffet and make this birthing stop!”

Besides the fact that her statement makes very little sense it is the scene editing on top of her words that really displays a mental break-down of Glory’s character. The scene is cut and overlaid on top of each other to create the sense that Glory is violently shaking her head and rocking. It essentially speeds everything up interjecting indistinguishable flashes of light, again, to reflect a mental breakdown. This is a brilliant use of editing and really gives a sensation and uncomfortable feeling that you, as the viewer, should probably not be witnessing this personal event. This edit further emphasizes the idea of “alterations in neurocognition (difficulties in memory, attention, and executive functioning” (Os and Kapur 635). It shows she is unable to function mentally, keep her attention on the subject matter specifically in her monologue

referencing “mommy” and “birthing.” Obviously, Glory is no mother and is not giving birth; therefore, her attention is elsewhere. This is further shown when Glory actually sucks the brain out of a nearby security guard and states afterwards, “Ahhh...that is so much better.” It is evident through this statement and the stealing of another’s brain that Glory’s brain is broken and she needs a non-broken brain to replace it so she can regain focus and function. It has previously been assumed by researchers that, “the most consistent evidence presented as discriminating people diagnosed with schizophrenia comes from studies showing reduced brain size and larger brain cavities compared with normal controls” (Moncrieff and Middleton 265). Like all science, as our knowledge and technology increases so do our understanding of things we previously understood. It is because of this that schizophrenia is still under discussion amongst researchers today, however, the idea of a “broken brain” as mentioned in reference to Glory comes from our previous understanding that a schizophrenic must have some type of physical deformity to function so outlandishly. Needing a new brain or sucking out the brain of the nearby security guard would justify then that she is missing something internally that a seemingly normal person has. Thus, her brain may in fact be smaller or lacking compared to a normal brain showing another supposed symptom of schizophrenia in her character.

[10] The shooting script unlike the verbatim transcript details the above-mentioned scene with the following preface, “Glory starts to CONVULSE. And it's not a part of some act. A very real seizure is coming on and she can't control it. Somehow, it makes her just talk faster. Building...” (*Buffyworld*). These stage directions could be construed in several ways. First Douglas Petrie, the writer emphasizes that it is not, “part of some act,” implying that she is not putting on crazy airs, but that there is really something wrong with her. The confusing word is “seizure;” the writer may use the word seizure not as a medical doctor giving a diagnosis, but purely as a placeholder. What is actually depicted on the screen is not a visual seizure. A human being can have one of two types of seizures, a petit mal which, “can cause rapid blinking or a few seconds of staring into space,” (CDC) or a grand mal which can, “make a person lose consciousness, fall to the ground, have muscle jerks or spasms,” (CDC). Neither one of those translates onto screen as what we actually see Glory doing; therefore, despite the word use she is not having a seizure. We can rule out then the idea that the writer specifically wanted Glory to show signs of a seizure and assume it is just a placeholder and does not deface the depiction on screen as another symptom of schizophrenia. The director is therefore helping solidify the idea of schizophrenia as a metaphor. Finally, the writer states in his stage directions, “it makes her just talk faster,” This goes back to the idea of mania or manic which is clearly involved with mental disorders as we have previously mentioned.

[11] It is logical to assume that during Glory’s mental break when she can no longer control herself and requires a new brain to regain control that she should have switched back to the face of Ben, but this does not happen. The story behind Glory is that she was sent to this world to be born through and live as a human for cosmic punishment; therefore, the face of Glory is not the

real face of the character. Meaning, Ben is the human vessel and Glory is the insert that is encompassing Ben's body to have form. Therefore, you could assume that at any time Glory cannot maintain control of that form then Ben should pop back up. There are several reasons for this switch not to occur at this particular moment in the story. The characters, as the audience originally sees it, are meant to be separate early on to create a big reveal moment later in the season. This is actually a great writing technique and can be interpreted many ways. Glory is depicted throughout the show to be completely evil, whereas Ben is depicted as overly nice and compassionate. The separation of characters could be a literal metaphor of our own good and evil inherent personalities that we struggle with each day. When the audience realizes these two characters are actually one it is then easier to understand their own conflicting human nature of good and evil. However, in reference to the papers theme of schizophrenia, the lack of switching could show the symptom of "psychosis (encompassing delusions and hallucinations)" (Os and Kapur 635). The reason the face of Glory does not switch back to the face of Ben could be because it has been Ben's face all along. He could be expressing symptoms of delusion and hallucination, symptoms which we will continue to explore further.

[12] First, let us look at an outside perspective of the scene. Next to Glory is a tied up security guard, the same security guard whose brain saves her from her mental break. During the guard's observations of Glory he says, "Lady, whatever you are...whatever you're on, please". The line, "whatever you are" implies that the guard is obviously confused at the presence of Glory. Glory has not shown any significant signs that she is not from this world. She has not performed any feats of strength in front of the security guard. She has simply tortured and threatened the Monk through regular human type means. Therefore, the security guard should have no visual evidence that would allow him to imagine Glory a demon, monster or supernatural being. So, the fact that he is confused by what she is could imply that he is unsure if she is actually a female. Meaning, the security guard may be seeing a schizophrenic Ben pretending to be a female Glory. This would be the literal case, if the character of Ben and Glory holds true as a metaphorical schizophrenia. The security guards following stammer of "whatever you're on, please," further solidifies that Glory is not normal. He is assuming she is on some type of drug, which implies that she is acting weird, and unlike a sensible, stable person.

[13] Second, to continue to back up the idea that Ben is expressing a sense of delusion and hallucination we have to move to the Season Five episode, "Listening to Fear" (B5009). This episode shows Ben as an authoritative figure. In it he summons an alien to get rid of the ever-growing population of mental patients accumulating in the hospital, victims of Glory acquiring her missing necessity. This implies that Ben much like Glory has power. If the characters were intended to be completely separate then you would assume that Glory would have all the power because she is the supernatural being and Ben none because he is human, however this does not prove to be the case. To further show Ben has power, a character named Dreg who is a henchmen or follower of Glory says to Ben, "Sir, forgive me" and quickly gets out of Ben's car

at his angry request. Dreg obviously accepts Ben as an authoritative figure and follows his orders. A subordinate would not follow the orders of a completely separate individual; he would, however, be cautious and respectful if he were unable to visibly tell which individual he was talking to. With common interpretations of schizophrenia, patients have been known to show symptoms of multiple personalities. As an onlooker in this situation, it would be very difficult to know exactly which personality you were talking to at any given moment. This could explain why Dreg is fearful of Ben and shows that Ben is displaying symptoms of multiple personalities thus furthering the delusions that the character of Glory is real. However, Glory is not real, but a delusion of Ben's in this metaphor.

[14] Finally, in reference to Glory being merely a delusion of Ben we move to the Season Five finale, "The Gift" (B5022) and the death of the characters. Giles smothers the character of Ben and says while doing so, "sooner or later Glory will re-emerge." I want to point out specifically that Giles does not kill the character while it is donning the face of Glory, but as it holds the image of Ben. This is significant because according to Buffy and her friends Glory cannot be killed. This could further implicate the delusion that Glory cannot be killed because she is not real, but a figment of Ben's imagination and the "re-emergence" that Giles references supports another link in the idea that Ben is displaying a schizophrenic type multiple personality.

[15] Now, let us explore why no one in *Buffy* seems to acknowledge Ben and Glory as a schizophrenic patient. The episode, "Listening to Fear" is dedicated entirely to depicting mental disorders. As previously mentioned, it centers on an alien that kills mental patients. Throughout this episode one common theme pops up again and again, that mental patients are annoying, overlooked and something to be afraid of. In the psychiatric ward of the hospital, as depicted in the episode, a nurse is covering a cold patient; she leaves the patient despite him screaming, "Please! Please don't go! Please!" The nurse ignores the patient thinking it is just his mental disorder that is causing him to say such things, but in fact he is afraid of the alien that is hovering over his bed waiting to take him victim. Not once does the nurse get up to check on the mental patient as he screams in agony during his brutal killing. This scene implies that as human beings we overlook the rantings of mental patients; we do not take them seriously. Later in the episode, Buffy's mom Joyce is taken home to relax and heal. During the night she begins to talk to herself in nonsensical terms which leaves Dawn distressed and covering her ears in an attempt to ignore her mom's screams. However, Joyce Summers is being stalked by the same alien from the hospital and is about to meet her demise. Again, with this scene the idea is presented that mental patients are ignored, overlooked and their problems are unimportant, unreal. The characters in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* have been shown not to take mental illness seriously, by ignoring the previously mentioned screams so it can be understood that they would also ignore Ben and Glory in the same respect. This could explain why the schizophrenia of Ben and Glory is not mentioned amongst the characters.

[16] To further emphasize the idea that we as human beings ignore what make us uncomfortable and angry can be found in the article “Perilous Patches and Pitstaches: Imagined Versus Lived Experiences of Women’s Body Hair Growth.” In this article published in the *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, Breanne Fahs states that women “who resist body hair depilation face social stigma and negative social penalties, particularly because women who refused to shave felt negatively evaluated by others as ‘dirty’ or ‘gross’” (Fahs 169). Some participants in Fahs’ study even experienced anger and hostility from fellow human beings over their choice to stop shaving (Fahs 174). The article does not imply we ignore hairy women. It implies that human beings can become angry when someone goes against the “norm” of our perceived understanding. The American Psychological Association (APA) website describes anger as “an emotional state that varies in intensity from mild irritation to intense fury and rage (*Controlling Anger Before it Controls You*). It further explains the concept of avoidance as an appropriate coping technique to keeping anger under control. According to the APA if something infuriates you then “don’t make yourself look at what infuriates you” (*Controlling Anger Before it Controls You*). Thus, it can be said that the “abnormal” makes us angry then we are to ignore the abnormal all together in order to control our rage. If Ben and Glory are the ultimate abomination of abnormal, due to the fact that they are displaying signs of mental illness, then it would explain why Buffy and her friends disregard aspects of their appearance and ignore their characteristics of schizophrenia. Someone could contort this argument and say that if we ignore the abnormal then why do Buffy and her friends see the vampires and other monsters on a regular basis? Tracy Little answered this, asserting that the villains we see on the screen as monsters, are in fact metaphors for “relationship violence, feelings of low self-esteem, teenage lust and heartbreak” (Little 283). This being said, Buffy cannot ignore the vampire character, Angel because he is not a vampire, but her first high school crush. A high school crush is not an abnormality, however Ben and Glory are.

[17] Having presented the evidence of how Ben and Glory can be a metaphor for schizophrenia in the series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* raises the question; why is it important? It is important because it is an example of how a television show can display the depth and literary techniques of a novel. On the surface Ben and Glory are a great visual story. The fact that Ben and Glory are set up to be two separate characters plays great on television. The writers set up the opportunity for a big reveal as the season progresses and it keeps the audience in suspense and the show in mystery. It is because of Ben and Glory’s great visual element that the regular viewer often overlooks what they are. By interpreting Ben and Glory as a metaphor we can show that every aspect of *Buffy* can be examined. If we can find literary techniques in overlooked or unexpected areas of *Buffy* then it can be the stepping-stone to researching other shows. Essentially, television has been designed for academic study and it should be studied further.

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