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Someone to Sink Your Teeth Into: Gendered Biting Patterns on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* – A Quantitative Analysis



ABSTRACT

Heralded as a groundbreaking television series throughout its seven year run, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is said to have challenged traditional gender and sex role stereotypes. Although the title emphasizes the word *Vampire*, most episodes did not, actually, contain vampire attacks. Through an in-depth quantitative content analysis we discover that in only 46 of the 144 episodes (32%) is there a clear-cut vampire bite or attempted bite. Only 34 episodes (23.6%) portray a successfully consummated bite. Of the 70 total vampire attacks, most are presented in real-time ($n = 61$, 87%), while 6 (9%) are present as flashbacks, or in a historical context. In 3 cases (4%), the bites occurred during explicit dream sequences. While much of the literature discussing the multiple facets of *BtVS* focuses on classic relationship dynamics, empowerment issues, feminist theory, and “girl power,” this statistical analysis of the vampire biting patterns and their chosen victims, offers another perspective entirely. This paper argues that through the vampire biting activities presented to viewers, traditional, heterosexual norms and values are consistently reinforced along with a disturbing pattern of female victimization. Not only do these statistics flesh out a mostly heterosexual coupling of vampire and victim, but a male-empowered world (albeit a demonic one) with the female characters who, more often than not, end up on the losing end of the fang.

INTRODUCTION

[1] Buffy has battled a wide assortment of creatures: human and otherwise. From a preying mantis woman (“Teacher’s Pet,” 1004), to a giant troll (“Triangle,” 5011), to a miniature fear demon (“Fear, Itself” 4004), we’ve all been amused, horrified, and, obviously, captivated by her seven-year struggle. While Buffy is clearly tasked with protecting us from all the underworld creatures; vampires have always been a recurring theme. Obviously, the show’s title, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, demands it. But there’s more. By integrating Buffy’s love-life with vampires viewers are forced to connect her emotional wellbeing to the delicate balance she has to maintain while battling evil and fulfilling her destiny. And, of course, Angel, Spike, Darla, and Drusilla have become so important to the story lines that, I suspect, they have as many fans as does Buffy or any of the other characters.

[2] When we examine the *Buffy* phenomenon—as we read the books, the *Slayage* articles, or attend the conferences—the big issues pertaining to Buffy, the Scoobies, vampires, good, evil, right, and wrong, predominate. I have always been impressed by the breadth of topics that *Buffy* scholars pursue. From adolescent sexuality (Cocca 2003), to female empowerment (Symonds 2004), to religious imagery (Playdon 2002), to the subversion of authority (Clark and Miller 2001), and to redemption itself (Wilcox 2002), there appears to be no limit as to what may constitute legitimate inquiry. The characters’ language (Kirchner 2006), slang (Adams 2003), aesthetics (Pateman 2006), fashion (Clemons 2006; Jarvis and Adams 2006), music (Dechert 2002), or the songs they sing (Albright 2005) have been academically dissected. Even the show’s opening title sequence was recently critiqued (Kociemba 2006).

[3] As I've read the books, articles, and attended the conferences over the years, I became interested in the wide range of scholarly disciplines that have taken some degree of proprietary ownership over *Buffy* studies. Of course, much is written about the episodes, plots, characters, and the words spoken—the so-called “text” of the episodes. So, logically, English departments, the literary disciplines, and the humanities, have taken a large bite out of the *Buffy* studies pie. We also have feminist and women's studies, Gothic studies, Queer studies, philosophy, and communications, all pursuing various foci within the academic *Buffy* world. Even the natural sciences, in *The Physics of the Buffyverse*, now can lay such a claim.

[4] My own discipline, sociology, to a lesser extent, has entered into the *Buffy* studies arena. One cross-disciplinary methodological absence that I started taking notice of was the absolute lack of quantitative material. I'm somewhat guilty of this oversight myself. My first venture into this domain was a strictly qualitative piece, *Alexander Harris: Buttmonkey No More*, which I presented at the Slayage Conference three years ago in Nashville, TN. But that was a methodological departure for me. Most of my research and publications are quantitative.

[5] How is it that no one is counting observable facts in *Buffy* studies? How is it we have so little numerical data in our papers? Obviously, many of the disciplines mentioned above, by design, tend to be qualitative in nature. A few, especially the postmodernists, tend to disdain the numerical. I also think it has something to do with the quantitative scholars themselves. Perhaps, my traditional quantoid colleagues see this area of interest to be lacking, or folly, or beneath them. I don't, obviously, but I do think it's an interesting omission in the wide scope of papers and academic thought that is devoted to the Buffyverse.

[6] So, in bold defiance of the established orthodoxy, this paper attempts to address the numerical deficit by conducting a quantitative content analysis on one aspect of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: the vampire bites.

LITERATURE

[7] On *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the two primary recurring male vampire characters, Angel and Spike, have often been described as “openly sexual beings” (DeKelb-Rittenhouse 2002:150). Angel is frequently portrayed as “dark and handsome” (Wilcox 1999:16); “a real beauty” (Owens 1999:27); “a Prince Charming” (Levine and Schneider 2003:307); and “a school girl's fantasy” (Jarvis 2001:262). There is no real public debate over Angel's sexuality, however, as he is consistently coded as one of the most masculine characters on the show (Spicer 2002). Spike, on the other hand, is described as having “a Billy Idol sense of style” (Early 2001:14), and “personifying eroticization” (DeKelb-Rittenhouse 2002:146), but at the same time he does challenge traditional male coding. According to Spicer (2002:1), Spike “initially appears as a strongly masculine character” but eventually “crosses the boundaries of conventional gender identification.” Spicer is not alone in her characterization. Boyette (2001:3) refers to Spike's “contradictory personality,” while Heineken (2004:4) describes him on one hand as “excessively hard and masculine” but on the other hand, “feminized and possessing feminine traits.”

[8] Drusilla, Darla, and Harmony, the three primary female vampires in the series, tend to be coded in traditional female [re: heterosexual] categories. Drusilla is classically beautiful and described by Diehl (2004:10) as “hyper-feminine” in her floor-length, flowing white baby-doll dress. Darla, who Wilcox (1999:18) calls “pretty,” “demure,” and “a little cutie,” and Harmony, who Spicer (2002:5) calls “ditzy” along with Drusilla do, nevertheless, get targeted with the “uninhibited, sexually promiscuous” label. According to Levine and Schneider (2003:307), these are the girls that one “has sex with...not the ones who are love objects.”

[9] The connection between vampires and sexuality (and passion, romance, and eroticism, etc.) clearly predates the *Buffy* series. “Vampires are sexy” says Chandler (2003:2), who argues that the key ingredient to the myth of the vampire is his—and the use of the male pronoun is intentional—seductive, often forbidden, sexuality. According to Busse (2002:214), “Sucking blood and suckling on the breast is recurrent throughout vampire fiction.” For example, in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Craft (1984:109) represents *demonism* as “the power to penetrate.” Stater (1997), reports that all vampires penetrate via their bite. And, of course, the penetration is seen as being naturally male. This, Pope (1990:203) tells us,

identifies a vampire bite on a female body (for all practical purposes) as "mimetic representation" of female sexuality: "a hole to be filled and/or made by men."

[10] The parallel between vampires biting, feeding, and sexual activity has also been explored by many, including (Wilcox 1999, Wisker 2001, Buttsworth 2002, DeKelb-Rittenhouse 2002, Chandler 2003, South 2003, Spaise 2005). Regardless of whether the vampire is male or female, according to Buttsworth (2002), the vampire seduces and penetrates. Spaise (2005) says the embrace and bite are a parody of the sexual act, particularly because they are traditionally performed by a male character on a female victim. Stater (1997) reports the bite is almost always on the victim's neck. On one hand this makes sense, as both the carotid and jugular arteries (a rich supply of blood) are located there, but the neck is also a highly sensual area of the human body. According to Stater (1997), biting of the neck simulates kissing and places the vampire and victim very close together. In this way, the scene appears quite erotic. While Krzywinska (2002:190) says the "primal" is linked to the release of sexual desires, Wisker (2001) reports vampirism itself is depicted as an uncontrollable desire as well as a sexual swoon for both victim and vampire. The bite itself stands as a euphemism for sex, forbidden by social mores.

[11] In the episode "Innocence" (2014), soon after Angel and Buffy had sex for the first time, the now de-souled Angel/Angelus feeds on a prostitute in an alley. Afterwards, he "lifts his head and blows steam out his pursed lips in a gesture that suggests a post-coital smoke" (Wilcox 1999:21). In "Fool For Love" (5007), we see two examples of the explicit sexuality and eroticism of biting. First, when Drusilla bites and sires William/Spike; and then later, after Spike kills and feeds from a Slayer, he offer Drusilla some of her [the dead slayer's] blood as an aphrodisiac. He then proceeds to have sex with her [Drusilla] while the room around them burns (Spaise 2005). At no time, though, in the series is there a connection between biting and sex more evident than in the episode "Graduation Day, Part Two" (3022), when Buffy forces Angel to bite and drink from her [to cure him from a mystical poison] as the viewer witnesses "Buffy's thinly-veiled orgasmic reaction" (Busse 2002:213). The sexuality is blatant during the scene as Buffy "reaches to embrace her lover, raises her knee to stroke along side his thigh, grips a pitcher until it crumbles in her hand and, at the culmination of the act, kicks over a bench" (DeKelb-Rittenhouse 2002:150). Clearly, the erotic elements of sharing blood can be experienced by victim as well as vampire.

[12] Obviously, the biter/bitee relationship is very complex. It's complicated; it's rich; and it's passionate. Yet, what do we actually know about these bites? No one has ever looked at the specifics. For example, how many episodes have vampire bites? How many bites are there per episode? Who does the biting? Who is getting bitten? Do we actually see the bite? Or, do we just "know" of the bite? Was the bite in real time, in a dream, or in a flashback? When the two dominant male vamps Spike and Angel bite, whom do they typically bite? When the two dominant female vamps, Darla and Drusilla bite, whom do they bite? Are their patterns of biting the same as when a nameless or throwaway vamp--whom we don't really know--does the biting? And then finally, let's look at the gendered picture. When male vamps bite, whom do they bite? When female vamps bite, whom do they bite? What's the relationship? Is there a gender bias? Are gender roles being challenged? Are heterosexual norms being maintained? And if they're not, who's challenging them?

METHODOLOGY

[13] Content analysis is a technique for gathering and analyzing the content of text (Neuman 2000). The content can refer to words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes, or any message that can be communicated. The text can be anything written, visual, or spoken that serves as a medium for communication. Texts may be books, newspapers articles, advertisements, speeches, official documents, lyrics, photographs, articles of clothing, or in this case, television shows. In content analysis, a researcher uses objective and systematic counting and recording procedures to produce a quantitative description of the symbolic content (see Krippendorff 1980). Coding the visible, surface content in a text is called manifest coding. Manifest coding is considered highly reliable because the phrase, or word, or action is either present or not (Neuman 2000). The task at hand, then, is to make logical inferences from the data and to justify these inferences.

[14] Every episode, from season 1, episode 1, "Welcome to the Hellmouth," to season 7, Episode 22, "Chosen," was examined in detail. For each episode that contains a vampire bite or attempted bite,

certain demographic characteristics, behaviors, and situational contexts were identified, recorded, operationalized, and coded. Each individual piece of coded data was later entered into an SPSS [Statistical Packet for the Social Sciences] file, and analysis was conducted.

Vampires and Victims

[15] To address the gendered biting research questions, every vampire's sex and name was documented for each bite or attempted bite, as was the victim's sex and name. If the victim's or vampire's names were unknown, they were coded as "unknown." If, at a later time, the audience [viewer, researcher] learned the victim's or vampire's name, the data was recoded.

Other Biting Data

[16] In addition to specifically addressing the gendered biting questions, other biting data was collected. For example, was the vampire attack successful, culminating in a completed bite, or was this an unsuccessful attempted bite? Obviously, assuming intent for attempted biting is open to some degree of interpretation. The standards used here focus on whether or not the vampire has his or her "game face" on, whether there is a clear and focused concerted forward-moving effort to bite, and whether or not there ever is a realistic chance for a successful bite. Some bites are also categorized as "fake-out" bites. These present as legitimate biting attempts, and for all we know, as the scene fades out to commercial, they could be completed or consummated bites. But as we fade back in, however, we discover that not only had no bite occurred, but there never really was a true intent to bite. Spike's training session with the potential Vi in "Potential" (7012) for example is a "fake out" bite.

[17] Is the bite actually seen? Do we, the audience, actually witness the biting? Some bites are alluded to, some are referenced, some we can safely assume did occur. Did we actually see them? In "Welcome to the Hellmouth" (1001), we know Darla fed from Jesse. He stumbles into the crypt holding his neck. Darla is right behind him. Her "game face" is on and she's licking her lips. Obviously a completed bite has occurred. But did we see it? No. In "Phases" (2015), Angel/Angelus is seen standing over Teresa's body in a dark alley. There are bite marks, his "game face" is on, he's licking his lips, but viewers didn't actually see him bite her either.

[18] And finally, was the bite, or attempted bite, presented in real life, or in some other time frame? Most of the biting in *Buffy* is presented in real time or in real life (or as "real life" as possible in the context of a fictional tv show). Is the attack part of the current, on-going story-line? Occasionally we see bites in flashback, such as when Darla first bit Angel (when he was Liam) in "Becoming, Part One" (2021). Or, the attack can be part of a dream sequence, as when Buffy dreams the Master is about to bite her in "Nightmares" (1010).

THE RESULTS

[19] Table 1 displays a numerical overview of biting occurrences over the series' seven seasons. The number of bites, attempted bites, completed bites, bites per episode, bites per episode per year, and bites per episode that contains biting are presented. It is not surprising that the largest proportion of bites per episode [column VI] occurs in the first season. As a new show with the word "vampire" in its title, *Buffy* sought to establish an identity and audience. As the series evolved, and the plot lines developed, the number (and rate) of vampire attacks decreased. Season 4, which featured the Initiative story arc, contained the fewest number of bites and attempted bites per episode. Season 6, which mostly deals with Buffy returning from the dead, also contains very few vampire bites. It should be noted [in column VII], though, that in the few season 6 episodes that did have vampire attacks, they were particularly violent episodes with the number of bites per episode at the highest rate in the series' history.

TABLE # 1

NUMERICAL OVERVIEW OF BITING OCCURRENCES ON *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*: BY SEASON

Season #	I # of Episodes	II Total # of Bites and Attempts	III # of Episodes with Bites and Attempts	IV # of Completed Bites Only	V # of Episodes with Completed Bites Only	VI # of Bites & Attempts per Episodes/(year)	VII # of Bites & Attempts Per Episode That has Biting
1	12	11	7	7	5	.92	1.57
2	22	14	9	10	7	.64	1.55
3	22	16	9	12	6	.73	1.77
4	22	5	5	4	4	.23	1.00
5	22	10	7	9	6	.45	1.43
6	22	6	3	3	1	.27	2.00
7	22	8	6	5	5	.36	1.33
Totals	144	70	46	50	34	.49	1.52

[20] Table 2 presents descriptive demographic characteristics for all bites and attempted biting action (N = 70). As the data shows, most vampires (74.3%) are male, while most victims (65.7%) are female. Nearly all (94.3%) of the attacks are witnessed by the audience. And the majority of those attacks (N=50, 71.4%) result in a completed/actual bite. The attacks mostly (N=61, 87.1%) occurred in real time while six (8.6%) appear in flashbacks, and three (4.3%) occur in dream sequences.

TABLE # 2
COMPARISON OF BITING DEMOGRAPHICS
All Bites and Attempted Bites: (n = 70)

		<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Sex of Vampires :	Male	52	(74.3%)
	Female	18	(25.7%)
Sex of Victims :	Male	24	(34.3%)
	Female	46	(65.7%)
Bite Status :	Completed/Actual bites	50	(71.4%)
	Attempted	18	(25.7%)

	Fake outs	2	(2.9%)
Was the Attack Seen:			
	Yes	66	(94.3%)
	No	4	(5.7%)
Real/Dream/Flashback:			
	Real	61	(87.1%)
	Flash	6	(8.6%)
	Dream	3	(4.3%)

[21] Bivariate comparisons examining the sex of the vampire and the sex of their victims are exhibited in Table 3 and Table 4. Chi-Square analyses in Table 3 show statistically significant sex differences in who vampires choose to bite. The results tend to suggest a very heterosexual pattern of biting. The data clearly show that when male vampires bite, they mostly bite women. Additionally, when female vampires bite, they mostly bite men. Male vampires bite (or attempt to bite) women in nearly 77% of the cases. Whereas, when female vampires bite (or attempt to bite), they mostly bite men (67% of the time).

TABLE # 3
BIVARIATE CROSSTAB / CHI-SQUARE ANALYSES
"DOES SEX OF VAMPIRE PREDICT SEX OF VICTIM?"
All Bites and Attempted Bites: (n = 70)

		<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
When Vamps are	Males	12	(23.1%)
MALE, they bite:	Females	40	(76.9%)
When Vamps are	Males	12	(66.7%)
FEMALE, they bite:	Female	6	(33.3%)

(Chi-Square 11.276, df(1), $P \leq .001$)

TABLE # 4
BINARY LOGISTIC REGRESSION
"DOES SEX OF VAMPIRE PREDICT SEX OF VICTIM?"

ALL BITES and ATTEMPTED BITES (n=70)	<u>(B)</u>	<u>(SE)</u>	<u>EXP(B)</u>	<u>SIG.</u>	<u>Nagel r-sq</u>
When Vamp is MALE predicting Victim is FEMALE	1.897	.599	6.667	.002 **	.199
When Vamp is MALE predicting Victim is MALE:	1.897	.599	.150	.002 **	.199

*p <.05, **p <.01

[22] Table 4 shows the coefficients from two separate binary logistic regression models--all confirming a strongly heterosexual pattern of biting. Logistic regression provides the ability to predict the odds [EXP(B)] of events occurring. Based on the data, these results show a strong likelihood of predicted heterosexuality in the vampires' biting behaviors. When vampires are male, they are 6.67 times more likely to bite (or attempt to bite) a female victim than they are to bite a male. Correspondingly, male vampires are 85% less likely to bite (or attempt to bite) a male victim than a female one. As a binary (0,1 x 0,1) logistic regression model, the same odds-ratios would be present for female vampires. Female vampires are also very heterosexual in their biting patterns--being nearly seven times more likely to bite men than they are to attack women.

TABLE # 5
COMPARISON OF VAMPIRES AND THE SEX OF THEIR VICTIMS
All Bites and Attempted Bites: (n = 70)

<u>Vampire</u>	<u>Victim's Sex</u>		
	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>% Hetero</u>
Angel	4	6	60%
Darla	3	1	75%
Dracula	0	1	
Drusilla	4	1	80%
Harmony	0	1	
Justin	1	1	
Luke	1	2	
L. Gorch	0	1	
The Master	0	2	
Mr. Trick	1	1	
Sandy	1	0	
Spike	2	10	83.3%
Ubervamp	0	1	
Unk Male	3	12	80%
Unk Female	4	0	100%
Vamp Willow	0	3	
Vamp Xander	0	1	
Zack	0	2	

[23] Table 5 is a descriptive table comparing individual vampires by name with the sex of their victims. Once again the data confirms a mostly heterosexual biting preference. However, when scrutinizing the show's two dominant male vampires some interesting new developments emerge. For example, when we compare Angel and Spike's patterns of biting, one can see that while both vampires are more likely to bite women than men, Angel is much more likely to engage in homosexual biting behaviors. Although Spike is often considered the less masculine, less heterosexual, of the two vampires, the data shows that he is much more likely to engage in heterosexual biting than Angel. Meanwhile, both dominant female vampires, Darla and Drusilla, are also more likely to engage in heterosexual biting—biting men most of the time.

[24] One subplot to these analyses is the comparisons between the lesser represented vampires and their gendered biting patterns. It is interesting to note that "unknown" male and "unknown" female vampires both mostly conform to heterosexual biting norms. One might think if homosexual patterns were to be displayed, the show might use nameless and disposable characters, but that didn't happen. As for the (mostly) non-recurring named vampire characters, only Vamp Willow ("The Wish," 3009; "Doppelgöngland," 3016) demonstrates any real pattern of homosexual biting. Perhaps this is not surprising, as female homosexuality tends to be more acceptable and less hostile to the general public (Herek 2002). The show clearly didn't shy away from an extended lesbian story arc featuring the relationship between (human) Willow and Tara. Overall, though, male homosexuality, which may be considered more threatening to "ordinary" viewers, is unmistakably absent in the biting behaviors shown.

DISCUSSION

[25] Since vampires exist along a border of life and death, vacillating between human and monster, Stater (1997:1) argues that there is no real reason for a vampire to obey traditional gender roles. She says, "Social constructs such as sexuality cease to be of such importance when the possessor of that sexuality, more importantly than defying ideas of what sexuality ought to be, defies the very laws of life and death." This is interesting because even with the freedom of being "dead," "soulless," or "evil," the vampires in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* appear to mostly follow traditional gender lines and heterosexual norms—at least when it comes to their biting patterns. It is beyond the scope of this paper to debate the larger overall questions about whether or not *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* violates heterosexual gender norms. [Arwen (2002) and Alessio (2001) say it does challenge gender categorization and shatters female stereotypes; while Levine and Schneider (2003) and Owens (2003) say the show reinforces hetero-normal sexual and gender stereotypes.] Regardless, there are three specific points that I wish to briefly discuss:

[26] First: The data presented here shows the patterns of biting to reinforce a mostly traditional, heterosexual, male-dominated existence. Most vampires are male. Most vampires who engage in biting behavior are male. Most victims of vampire attacks are female. And as the bivariate analyses show, when male vampires bite, they usually bite women. And to a slightly lesser extent, when female vampires bite, they mostly bite men.

[27] Second: When we look at the data, the comparison between Angel and Spike takes on a completely new dynamic. Much of the literature represents Angel as being the more "masculine" and more "heterosexual" of the two. Spike is more often described as "gender-bending" "androgynous" and "feminine." The data, however, suggests that might not be accurate. While both vampires are more likely to engage in heterosexual biting patterns (i.e., they both bite women more than men), when compared fang-to-fang Spike is much more likely to conform to heterosexual patterns of biting than Angel. And in today's world, heterosexual activity usually equals masculinity. Perhaps Spike is simply more comfortable with his heterosexuality than Angel. Perhaps Angel is covering his latent tendencies by projecting a more outwardly macho appearance. I don't know. I do believe, though, that these findings will prompt some new debate.

[28] Third: Content analysis allows a researcher to reveal the content in a source of communication. The technique lets researchers probe into and discover content in a different way from the ordinary way of reading a book or watching a television program (Neuman 2000). The quantification of *Buffy* data, while being methodologically exact and time consuming, is not difficult to do. And, as this paper demonstrates, a statistical analysis can be successful. As the scholarly studies of *Buffy* continue, I

hope more researchers will consider utilizing quantitative methods. Statistical analyses of other behaviors, characters, themes, and strategies, would open the door to countless other unexplored research questions. Perhaps time-order studies, factor analyses, and correlations of events across seasons will all be on the horizon.

[29] It is important to remember that manifest content analysis only presents the visible, on-the-surface data. Manifest coding does not take the deeper connotations of words, phrases, actions or plot line devices into account. It is worth considering that some of the biting behaviors are, logically, plot driven and are intended to further the pragmatics of the on-going story arcs. With that in mind, this paper simply presents the visible data. Conflicting and contradictory data are open for interpretation and different inferences can be drawn. I will leave it to other *Buffy* scholars and theorists to debate the deeper symbolic meaning of the data presented here.

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