

## **“Why Do I Let Spike Do Those Things to Me?”: Seduction Fantasy, Attempted Rape, and Moral Culpability**

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Spike’s attempt to rape Buffy in “Seeing Red” (6019) raises particularly challenging issues. Prior to this episode, Buffy and Spike engage in a violent, sexual relationship. Their behavior reflects the sexually passive female and sexually aggressive male stereotype, and many fans responded positively to its seduction narrative (Heineken 2004). At the same time, although Buffy says at the end of “Dead Things,” he does things to her, Buffy is not passive: She lets him do them. She chooses to engage in dominance games and rough sex with Spike, often initiating sexual contact, even if with remorse and self-loathing each morning after. Buffy’s struggle with her sexual desire and choices led many fans to regard Spike as the victim and Buffy as the abuser in their relationship (Symonds 2003 and 2004). So, when Spike attempts to rape Buffy in “Seeing Red,” many fans were outraged at what appeared to them to be a discontinuity with the emerging story. Although Buffy is regularly the target of violence, including sexual violence, this incident was different. The line distinguishing aggressor from victim is blurred throughout their relationship, leading many fans to excuse Spike’s behavior and blame Buffy for her own victimization (Fowler 2006). Assuming that Joss Whedon’s remark (“Don’t give people what they want, give them what they need”) is applicable here, what lessons do *BtVS* viewers need to learn from this narrative? Is it simply a warning to young women on the dangerous consequences of indulging in the seduction fantasy and playing at dominance games?

Although there is much evidence supporting this interpretation, I argue that a more nuanced, and feminist, subtext can be garnered from the storyline.