

“There’s Nothing Wrong with You, but You Are Different”: Sadomasochism and Trauma in Season Six’s *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

Jessica Price

My proposal is to look at the BDSM undertones of *BtVS* Season 6 between Buffy and Spike as a therapeutic process for Buffy dealing with the trauma of being pulled out of Heaven and how she navigates through (and moves past) the self-imposed shame and guilt that appears from her sexual relationship.

Psychologist and Psychoanalyst Michael J. Bader suggests, through his experiences with clinical patients, “that some forms of sadomasochistic fantasy and enactment can represent a developmental and therapeutic advance,” an idea of which I aim to build my paper around (279). I will discuss the sexual relationship between Buffy and Spike in a way that is less about the existence of non-normative sexuality and more about Buffy’s hope that her return from Heaven is *why* she’s participating in this sexual relationship and the shame she feels when she realizes she can’t blame it on anything. To do any of these things I will, of course, be looking at the pre-existing essays on topics such as discussions of power exchange, representations of sexuality/kink, readings of the BDSM images, and more (Call) (Alexander) (Burr) (Amy-Chinn).

It will also be important to read Buffy and Spike’s relationship against the real violence at hand from fights to Spike’s attempted rape of Buffy in season six’s “Seeing Red” and how the show separates BDSM and violence – and if it does so successfully. This requires a reading of the gendered aspects of Buffy and Spike’s lives and how their challenges to traditional gender roles reconstructs Bader’s analysis of sadomasochism into an even more unique reading of Buffy and Spike’s relationship. Due to her destiny, Buffy is stronger than Spike and, thus, immediately challenges any form of traditional gender. Questions to consider: How does their non-sexual relationship differ from their sexual relationship? How does Spike’s chip (and his flaccidity) play into the discussion of gender and complicate the discussion of BDSM vs. Violence? And, at the root, how and why does the sadomasochistic relationship between Buffy and Spike help her cope with her return to Sunnydale after her death?

Bader, Michael J. D.M.H. (1993). “Adaptive Sadomasochism and Psychological Growth.” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues: The International Journal of Relational Perspectives*, 3(2), 279-300.