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## Analysis of the Progression of the Representation of Female Protagonists in the Sci-Fi/Fantasy TV Shows *Orphan Black* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: Girl Power, Appropriated “Masculinity” in Conjunction with Femininity, Empowered Sexuality, and the Heterosexual Script

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# Analysis of the Progression of the Representation of Female Protagonists in the Sci-Fi/Fantasy TV Shows *Orphan Black* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: Girl Power, Appropriated “Masculinity” in Conjunction with Femininity, Empowered Sexuality, and the Heterosexual Script

By Dakota Becker

Buffy Summers goes from urban Los Angeles to Sunnydale, California after she is expelled from her previous high school on the grounds of an assortment of Slayer-related incidents. Chosen as the Slayer, Buffy is fated to fight against the forces of darkness, although this responsibility is not always conducive to leading the life of an average teenage girl. Upon moving to Sunnydale, Buffy quickly learns that Sunnydale High School sits directly above a “Hellmouth,” a hub for demon activity. Specifically, the entrance to the Hellmouth is located directly beneath the Sunnydale High School library, home to a curious collection of occult literature and Rupert Giles, the librarian, who Buffy soon discovers is her Watcher. Buffy befriends Xander Harris, a dorky boy who is often teased for his sense of style and lack of stereotypically masculine qualities, and Willow Rosenberg, a shy and awkward computer geek who spurs Buffy to accept her duties as the Slayer. Cordelia, the typical soap bitch of Sunnydale High School, often finds herself entangled with the “Scooby Gang’s” affairs, as the trio are aptly labeled (Jowett 30).

The premise of *Orphan Black*, in contrast, is formulated when Sarah Manning, the series’ unlikely protagonist, discovers she is the product of a government-sanctioned human cloning experiment. A foster child without any known blood-related siblings, Sarah is jolted when she witnesses the mysterious and sudden death of Beth Childs, a woman who bears a striking resemblance to herself. Desperate for cash, Sarah steals Beth’s identity only to discover that Beth is a police detective on suspension with a boyfriend who is more than he seems. Furthermore, after confronting clones Alison Hendrix, a suburban housewife with a peculiar personality, and Cosima Niehaus, a scientist who flaunts an alternative style, it becomes clear to Sarah that she has landed on the inside of a twisted operation. The clones must protect themselves and each other as they work to identify the person who has begun to assassinate them and gain insight into their origin.

The science fiction and fantasy genres are heavily permeated by issues such as homophobia, racism, and misogyny. The fight for the representation of respectable female leading characters equipped with a strong sense of individuality is ongoing and it is questionable whether this controversy has realized any significant progress in the past fifteen years. A decade ago, Buffy reigned as a popular culture icon and a widely identifiable representation of the “Girl Power” movement. Buffy’s merits as a feminist series remain arduously debated but nonetheless Buffy continues to contribute to the ongoing dialogue regarding the representation of women in broadcast television and the science fiction and fantasy genres specifically. According to Sarah Hughes in an article written for *The Guardian* titled “*Orphan Black*: A Worthy Heir to Buffy’s Crown,” subversive shows such as *Orphan Black*, an ongoing series at the outset of its third season, have been thrust into the spotlight of contemporary culture as worthy of inheriting Buffy’s crown. In an article published for *Vanity Fair*’s website titled “Why Is *Orphan Black* Still Fighting a War Buffy Should Have Won Over 10 Years Ago?,” Joanna Robinson generates a connection between the series. Robinson objectively examines the acclaim that has encompassed *Orphan Black* and questions whether the acclaim is appropriate or whether *Orphan Black* is being applauded for tackling a controversy that supposedly should

have been resolved in Buffy's time.

In "From Sex to Sexuality: Exposing the Heterosexual Script on Primetime Network Television," Kim et al. claim that by integrating scripting theory with feminist theory, an assessment of the "Heterosexual Script" reveals the overwhelming representation of "scripted and gendered content" in twenty-five primetime television series:

Whereas adults may recognize the importance of censoring, restricting, or mediating children's exposure to overtly sexual content, they may not detect or may perceive as benign children's viewing of content that is saturated with the Heterosexual Script. Although current federal advisories warn parents about the presence of sexual language or sexual behavior in television programs, no such warning system exists for scripted or gendered sexual content ... Indeed, it is because the Heterosexual Script is so invisible and perceived to be so natural and normal that its potential impact on adolescents' sexual decision-making is so formidable. (156)

This scripted and gendered content poses a threat to the development of suitable role models for impressionable adolescent and teenaged boys and girls. This paper of *Buffy* and *Orphan Black* seeks to explore the prevalence of such scripted and gendered content for the purpose of acknowledging whether the representation of progressive female protagonists has significantly increased in the past decade despite the precedence of such content. In addition to the Heterosexual Script as examined by Kim et al., the representation of Girl Power, the appropriation of "masculinity" in conjunction with femininity, and empowered sexuality are critical to discuss.

*Oh where, oh where has the Girl Power gone?*

Although Girl Power, as a post-feminist movement, does invite the possibility of feminist potential, its representations are often sufficiently lacking in scope and diversity. Aspects of Girl Power, such as collectivity and the power to overcome differences unmistakably embody feminist values and as a result have historically been subject to media backlash. The qualities Girl Power encourage in adolescent girls generally lead to an illusion of independence but ultimately do not bring about change.

The progressive female hero is a relatively contemporary phenomenon. In "Dangerous Demons: Fan Responses to Girls' Power, Girls' Bodies, Girls' Beauty in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*," Sharon Ross contends that a critical aspect of the media shift regarding the "acceptability and desirability of female heroes in non-stereotypical roles is the cultural value of what has been termed 'Girl Power,' a motif that emerges in discussions of feminism, youth, and popular culture" (83). In "Getting Even: Feminist Agency and Postfeminist Containment in Girl Power Narratives," Caryn Murphy describes the Girl Power motif as an "articulation of the strength and authority of young women" (99). Additionally, Ross states that Girl Power promotes young women banding together to bring about change (86).

To Ross, the Girl Power motif is an aspect of *Buffy* which strengthens the series' characters and encourages collective decision making. Ross' approach to Girl Power places a strong emphasis on togetherness instead of a focus on the implications of Girl Power for characters individually. This approach echoes the attitude of collectivity that arguably defines the feminist ideology. This aspect of Girl Power is represented in *Orphan Black*, the clones banding together to fight against the Prolethians and the Dyad Institute, both patriarchal threats. Thus, a definitive allegiance exists in both *Buffy* and *Orphan Black*; in *Orphan Black*, this allegiance is the "Clone Club," and in *Buffy* this allegiance is the "Scooby Gang," "The Scoobies," or the "Slayerettes." Both of these groups establish the collectivity and strength of female protagonists and symbolize Girl Power. Characters such as Anya in *Buffy* and Helena and Rachel in *Orphan*

Black fit more ambiguously into this construct, highlighting the expansive definition of collectivity and what it means to be a girl with power.

Controlled by Christian extremist Thomas, Helena, Sarah's devoutly religious maternal sister, is brought into frame in "Variation Under Nature" (1003) as a rogue clone assassinating her "copies" from what she perceives to be a moral high ground. Thomas convinces Helena that she holds the original genome of the clones, painting the rest of the clones as her unholy duplicates. Helena remains a threat to the clones for the entirety of the first season. However, Helena bonds with Sarah in "Governed as It Were by Chance" (2004) after Helena rescues her from Daniel Rosen, Rachel's bodyguard and monitor, who threatens to maim Sarah in retaliation for escaping his clutches. In "Ipsa Scientia Potestas Est" (2005) Helena grudgingly accepts Felix as a "sestra" (sister) before agreeing to help Sarah track down Ethan Duncan, Rachel's thought-to-be-deceased childhood guardian, and a wealth of information regarding the clones' biology. Initially a threat, Helena becomes an ally to the clones, especially Sarah, by fighting for instead of against her sisters. Helena undoubtedly has strength, but the characterization of this capability changes drastically from the first season to the second season as the perception of Helena's abilities shift from a negative light to a positive light.

Rachel exists outside of the Clone Club allegiance in the grasp of the patriarchal Dyad Institute, representing an antagonist to the Clone Club. For this betrayal, Rachel is severely injured in "By Means which Have Never Yet Been Tried" (2010) after she concocts a plan to forcefully imprison Sarah and perform an oophorectomy to remove one of Sarah's ovaries for research purposes. In the episode "The Weight of This Combination" (3001), the Dyad physicians divulge that Rachel sustained the permanent loss of her left eye and damage to her frontal cortex due to the device Cosima used to immobilize Rachel and help Sarah escape. Rachel's betrayal of her sisters is shown in a negative light since she is consequently cast as a villain and justly punished for her actions.

Lorna Jowett, however, critiques the theoretical benefits of Girl Power as a postfeminist movement. In *Sex and the Slayer: A Gender Studies Primer for the Buffy Fan*, Jowett argues that "[Girl Power] seems to be a contradictory notion: it can be 'more positive' for younger women, yet it is based on an 'illusion' of freedom" (19). Murphy refers to this as the "underlying thematic paradox of contemporary girls' popular culture" (99). Murphy, expanding on Jowett's criticism, contends that girls' media simultaneously perpetuates conformity and messages of the importance of young girls' individuality (99).

Ross specifically refers to *Buffy* as a show that exemplifies Girl Power, particularly in its finale. Ross posits that the series' emphasis on females sharing power in its conclusion reiterates the capabilities of collectively organized heroism (97). Murphy speaks to the ways in which backlash representations of Girl Power rebel against Ross's argument that collectivity is empowering, "[focusing] on two major types of statements of the backlash against second wave feminism: discussions in the media of how girls are better than equal and film depictions of young women's collective empowerment as a threat that needs to be repressed or controlled" (101-102). Murphy explains that "backlash films depict Girl Power, but emphasize that although female friendships are potent, they are also laden with treachery and deceit, and ultimately harmful" (109-110). According to Murphy, media scholar Karen Hollinger, in Hollinger's typology of the genre, employs the phrase "manipulative female friendship [films]" to further describe the genre (116-117).

*Buffy's* "Girl Power" results in her unhappiness on numerous occasions and in this way the depiction of *Buffy* as the Slayer holds the possibility of being construed as a backlash representation of Girl Power. Buffy's power as the Slayer constantly puts her in peril and threatens her friendships and her relationships. Buffy's duty as the Slayer breeds discontent between

Buffy and Faith, who is also a Slayer, when Faith accidentally kills a civilian and refuses to divulge her mistake to her Watcher. Faith falls into a dangerous downward spiral and eventually Buffy goes against everything she believes in and sets out to get rid of Faith permanently after Faith betrays Buffy to assist the Mayor with his apocalyptic plans. Additionally, it is essentially Buffy's role as the Slayer that leads to the accidental death of Tara, Willow's girlfriend. Tara's death causes Willow to plunge into a dark-magicks-fueled rage which threatens to destroy the world, straining her relationship with Buffy and the rest of the "Scooby Gang."

Consequently, as long as Buffy is the Slayer, Buffy will not be able to achieve lasting happiness. Ultimately, Buffy's Slayer duties lead to an almost fatal drowning in "Prophecy Girl" (1012) and her demise in "The Gift" (5022).

*Orphan Black* rebels against the negative construction of Girl Power presented by backlash films. *Orphan Black* emphasizes the strength of the clones collectively. The clones heavily lean on each other and obstacles in the clones' friendship are conveyed as strictly negative. In particular, Sarah Manning begins the series as a rougher version of the character she eventually becomes. Sarah's life is a mess and she is fighting to regain custody of her daughter when first introduced in the pilot episode, having just escaped her abusive ex-boyfriend, Victor. Sarah returns to Toronto with the plan to earn cash by dealing a large bag of cocaine she stole from Victor and using the money to kidnap her daughter Kira from Siobhan, Sarah's foster mother and Kira's legal guardian. By the end of the second season, Sarah has become a reliable, determined, and sovereign version of herself with a strong sense of what is right and what is wrong. This transformation is brought on and propagated by Sarah's connection to her sister clones, emphasizing the healing and empowering effects of the agency and collectivity of women.

Girl Power places an emphasis on femininity. In defense of Buffy's femininity, Ross states that although Buffy's body conforms to homogenized standards, the series focuses on Buffy's strength as a hero instead of her strength as a beautiful hero (87). In "Buffy's Voice: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* Popular Music Soundtrack and Contemporary Feminism," Kathryn Hill echoes this sentiment. Hill argues that Buffy is able to embrace her femininity fully because for Buffy, "femininity" is about self-empowerment" (5). Ross further maintains that the series works to "deglamorize female frailty and female dependence on males" (88). According to Ross, Buffy sends the message that "to be a Girl with Power, one has to 'be' more than beauty" (88). In "'Bite Me': Buffy and the Penetration of the Gendered Warrior-Hero," Sara Buttsworth declares that "Buffy is both like and not like 'other girls,'" decidedly stating that "the social conventions of mainstream femininity, which have so often been used to argue that women cannot be warriors, are often precisely what make Buffy such an effective soldier in her speculative world" (185).

Hill, however, does criticize aspects of Buffy which contradict Buffy's role as a Girl Power icon, particularly the way in which it is "undermined by the feminine melodramatic narrative of [Buffy]" (3). Furthermore, Hill addresses Joss Whedon as Buffy's visionary. Hill questions how in Whedon's "[acknowledgement of] the backlash culture and postfeminist limitations of television he saw no contradiction in his superhero being a beautiful young woman and an empowered female" (4). Drawing a definitive connection between femininity and Girl Power, Ross posits that "in terms of Girl Power, then, the female bodies on Buffy serve as a rhetorical site—the center for discussions of femininity, beauty, physical strength, and inner strength of character" (96).

### *Masculine or Feminism?*

Inside of a culture that views heroic power as a typically masculine quality, contemporary representations of female protagonists are burdened with the task of "appropriating"



constructed qualities of masculinity while retaining a sense of well-balanced femininity. A precarious balance exists between the characteristics of masculinity and femininity and character complexity as a whole. The question also exists of whether the heroic power of a female protagonist is significant or superficial.

In the article “She Hits Like A Man, but She Kisses Like A Girl: TV Heroines, Femininity, Violence, and Intimacy,” Kerry Fine maintains that the boundaries of gender are socially constructed and enforced through gendered performances (155). Therefore, Fine argues that “because genders tend to be inscribed in polar and dualistic terms, gender performances that violate the discrete boundaries of the binary interrupt the performance and expose its constructed nature” (155). Jowett discusses how Buffy violates the boundaries of gender. Jowett posits that Buffy is a character who is “marked by excess in contradictory ways,” simultaneously embodying traits of the hyperfeminine and wielding strength and heroism (23). Jowett describes Buffy’s manipulation of typical conventions as self-conscious and contends that “even Buffy’s name is indicative of her femininity, and its inclusion in the show’s title underlines its irony” (23). Jowett claims that “excessive gender coding points to Buffy’s playful postmodern elements and also highlights the constructed nature of gender representation” (23).

Excessive gender coding fails to strengthen representations of female protagonists. Instead, excessive gender coding serves to emphasize a gendered balancing act. Jowett’s description of Buffy’s gender coding as “playful” undermines the importance of gender representation and the complexity of gender coding. If Buffy is attempting to convey irony by creating a female protagonist who simultaneously kicks butt and is hyperfeminine, does that not serve to strengthen gender constructions? By making Buffy exceptional, Buffy markets the simultaneous outward expression of masculinity and femininity as anomalous. Progressive representations of gender in broadcast television highlight the complexity of the gender spectrum and its range of possibilities. Buffy has the tendency to showcase typically masculine or typically feminine characteristics at any given time. Indeed, Buffy’s gender expression is marked by polarity. Sarah, as the leading female protagonist of *Orphan Black*, exhibits gender coding that reads as less stark and thus holds a greater sense of believability.

Fine calls attention to the constraints of utilizing the dual gender model to assess the merits of tough and heroic female protagonists because of “its inability to escape the concepts of femaleness and maleness” (165). Furthermore, Fine posits that the application of the dual gender model only serves to reinforce the gender binary and that the dual gender model fails to accommodate women who appropriate traditional masculine gender markers (165). Buttsworth asserts that Buffy overcomes obstacles and refuses to be tied down by the conventions which compose the identity of the typical gendered warrior (185). Buttsworth states that “warrior tradition constructs a coherent masculinity, including impenetrable male bodies, as the key to warrior identity, and renders ‘slay-gal’ not only paradoxical but, arguably, impossible” (185). Fine interprets Buttsworth’s consideration of Buffy’s identity. Fine contends that “positioning female characters as powerful heroic protectors is a usurpation of power that was once exclusively male and reveals the socially constructed nature of masculine heroism” (171).

*Orphan Black*’s Sarah Manning can be described as an outlaw hero. Plagued by a difficult childhood and disputes with the law, Sarah presents as a girl who is rough around the edges. Sarah struggles with stability and the responsibility of mothering her eight-year-old daughter. After discovering her origins as a clone and enduring a period of disbelief and declination, she joins up with her sister clones to fight against the Dyad Institute and the moneyed interests that fund its research. Sarah and the other clones typically do not institute instrumental aggression, but Sarah does occasionally use instrumental aggression to protect herself, clones Cosima and Alison, Felix, and especially Kira, her eight-year-old daughter. After Helena

kidnaps Kira and indirectly causes Kira to get hit by a car in “Entangled Bank” (1008), Sarah goes after Helena with a gun. Helena corners Sarah, disarms her, and threatens to kill her, but ultimately lets her go. Gasping on the ground, Sarah scrambles for her gun and aims it at Helena’s heart. Helena holds her ground, believing Sarah will not shoot her for the same reason that Helena showed Sarah mercy—because of the connection they share as biological twins. Sarah transcends the traditional masculinity of heroic power while maintaining her feminine characteristics. Sarah’s strong maternal instinct is often what drives her aggression.

In the essay “*Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Next Generation of Television*” in *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century*, Byers insists that “in order to assess a text’s feminist potential, we must ask what ‘female identities are being made available’ through a particular text” (177). In terms of *Buffy*, Byers offers an answer which complements the questions raised previously by articulating that “in the *Buffy* world, competence, strength, and independence are precisely what is being offered to women, not just breasts, abs, and lip gloss” (178). Jowett, conversely, offers doubt regarding *Buffy*’s ability to escape masculinization. Jowett asserts that “drawing on patriarchal archetypes and myths means that recent female heroes often adopt ‘masculine’ behavior and values” (20). In Jowett’s reading of the text, “*Buffy* cannot entirely escape the masculinization of the female action hero or the exceptionalism of the female protagonist” (21). Buttsworth maintains that “*Buffy* is both like and not like ‘other girls’” (185).

Buttsworth approaches the conventions of *Buffy*’s mainstream femininity, a trait which is often painted as the antithesis of the warrior figure, as “precisely what make[s] *Buffy* such an effective soldier in her speculative world” (185). Byers joins Buttsworth in dissecting *Buffy*’s presentation of feminine qualities. According to Byers, “[*Buffy*’s] feminist impulse says that women should be able to protect themselves and their loved ones, to be respected for their intellectual and physical capabilities, to insist on their right to emotional and bodily integrity, and to desire to be nurtured as well as to nurture” (172).

*Buffy* does primarily play the role of protector—she protects her friends and family on a daily basis and in the grand scheme of the *Buffyverse*, *Buffy* protects the world from apocalyptic destruction. This scheme is broken by characters including Spike and Angel, Faith, and eventually Willow, but the overarching theme of *Buffy* is that the Slayer is fated to fight against darkness. It is arguable that every *Buffyverse* character is capable of protecting themselves to some extent, but it is almost always *Buffy* who delivers the vanquishing blow. In the series finale, *Buffy* distributes the power of the Slayer to potentials all across the world, but the protector/protected dynamic is still in play, just on a larger scale.

In contrast, *Orphan Black* offers a different dynamic of power. Sarah Manning, the show’s protagonist, is an outlaw hero whose strength comes from her versatility and her ability to think quickly. It is Alison, the suburban housewife, who is adept at shooting a gun and who has access to a weapons dealer. Helena, the initial antagonist of *Orphan Black*, is the most dangerous of the clones, a trained assassin who will not hesitate to gouge out a foe’s eyes with her bare hands. Helena is a contradiction because she is the most primal of the clones she poses the greatest threat, and yet simultaneously is capable of great empathy, especially towards children. Jowett recognizes that although “[*Buffy*] tries to offer its young female characters postfeminist identities that break down gender boundaries and hybridize rendered characteristics to produce new versions of power and heroism,” negotiating identities oftentimes brings to light contradictions that complicate the process (43).

#### *Fifty Shades of Empowered Sexuality*

Standards of empowered female sexuality are vast. Some theorists argue that a rift

exists between the perception of empowerment and empowerment which has substance and results in tangible gains, while others insist that adhering to standards of empowerment which result from a heteronormative culture only serve to strengthen that culture of self-objectification. It is questionable whether feminists have the authority to judge the validity of feelings of sexual empowerment, especially in adolescent girls. However, it is clear that empowered sexuality is not an “all-or-nothing” controversy and it must be measured in various degrees and dimensions.

The question of how to define empowerment is fairly controversial among theorists, yet is essential to judging the feminist merits of a television series. In “What Is Sexual Empowerment? A Multidimensional and Process-Oriented Approach to Adolescent Girls’ Sexual Empowerment,” Zoe Peterson explains a key aspect of the controversy, stating that theorists typically disagree about objectivity versus subjectivity in the case of what constitutes empowered sexuality (308). According to Peterson, “internal psychological power is sometimes referred to as power-to, and external power and control over resources is sometimes referred to as power-over” (308). To an extent, Buffy maintains both internal psychological power and external power and control over resources. Buffy is psychologically empowered because she refuses to consistently answer to a figure of authority. Giles, as Buffy’s predominant father figure, offers input for Buffy’s thoughts, but ultimately does not direct her decision-making.

Buffy does experience a period of psychological disempowerment after she is brought back to life by Willow in “Bargaining, Part One” (6001). The trauma of being “rescued” by the “Scooby Gang” from a dimension which Buffy describes to Spike as “heaven” in “After Life” (6003) and waking up in the grave in which she was buried significantly affects Buffy for the rest of the sixth season. Buffy describes living after the fact as “hard and bright and violent” in comparison. Buffy seeks relief for her psychological distress. After Buffy is hit with an invisibility ray in “Gone” (6011), she embraces the freedom and escape that consequently result from the incident. Buffy becomes reliant on Giles, who departs from Sunnydale to prompt Buffy to stand on her own again. Buffy also becomes reliant on Spike, a past foe who has begrudgingly transformed into an ally to the “Scooby Gang,” to ease her disillusionment.

Buffy, in a sense, is psychologically empowered by her relationship with Spike. Buffy takes what she wants from Spike sexually. However, this power is negated by the reasons which Buffy uses to justify her affair with Spike. Buffy uses Spike to try and reconcile her own feelings of dismay and self-hatred. Upon revealing the affair in “Dead Things” (6013) to Tara, who accepts and attempts to help Buffy justify the relationship, Buffy begs Tara not to forgive her. Aside from this case of psychological disempowerment, Buffy is ambiguously empowered at best in terms of her sexuality. Buffy undoubtedly markets a strong sexuality, but it is questionable whether this sense of empowerment is upheld by Buffy. Although Buffy is unafraid to express her sexuality and her desires, she often finds herself ruled by the intensity of her feelings and relationships and the powerlessness that accompanies them. Angel, Buffy’s first and most serious boyfriend, ultimately terminates his relationship with Buffy in the episode “The Prom” (3020) after expressing doubts which Buffy was helpless to refute. Conversely, Riley placed the majority of the blame for his and Buffy’s lackluster relationship on Buffy before presenting her with an ultimatum and exiting the series in “Into the Woods” (5010). Riley’s ultimatum was additionally endorsed by Xander, who attempted to intervene on Riley’s behalf to convince Buffy to beg Riley not to go.

Buffy exercises limited external power, especially in the first, second, and third seasons of Buffy, when Buffy must answer to a higher power known as the Watcher’s Council. Buffy eventually sheds the Watcher’s Council’s ownership in “Graduation Day, Part One” (3021) and moves into her college and adult years, when Buffy experiences a greater sense of external



empowerment.

In *Orphan Black*, the clones are, by design, given the illusion of psychological and external empowerment, but unknowingly have always had relationships with “monitors” who are accountable to the higher powers of the Dyad Institute. The series begins with Sarah Manning, an outlaw who inadvertently escaped constant monitoring along with her long-lost biological twin sister, Helena. Immediately, Sarah is recognized as recreant. She witnesses the suicide of Beth Childs, Sarah’s first interaction with a clone, but nonetheless does not hesitate to steal Beth’s identity. Sarah does not have a strong sense of morality when she is first introduced and it is only when she accepts a responsibility to her sister clones that we begin to perceive Sarah as empowered. Additionally, Sarah is quick to use her sexual self-confidence to her advantage in her impersonation of Beth. In “Instinct” (1002), Sarah uses intercourse to ward off the suspicions of Beth’s boyfriend and monitor, Paul Dierden. Although Sarah managed to escape constant monitoring because of the actions her birth mother employed to distance Sarah and Helena from the Dyad Institute, the mistake of stealing Beth’s identity is what places her in the spotlight.

The clones’ overarching struggle throughout the series is the struggle to be autonomous and exist outside of the grasp of the manipulative forces which desire to exploit the clones for nefarious purposes. In “Endless Forms Most Beautiful” (1010), Cosima, a scientist completing her PhD in experimental evolutionary developmental biology at the University of Minnesota, and Sarah regain power by rejecting the Dyad Institute’s proposition, which involves granting the Dyad Institute access to the clones’ biology in exchange for bodily freedom. Upon decoding a sequence of the clones’ genome, however, Cosima discovers that the proposition is a scam and, in actuality, a copyright is coded into the clones’ genome. Alison accepts the proposition, relinquishing the last of her independence to the Dyad Institute, but ultimately rebels alongside her sisters. Later, Alison buries Aldous Leekie after Alison’s husband accidentally shoots and kills Doctor Leekie in “Knowledge of Causes, and Secret Motion of Things” (2007). Alison devises a plan to bury the body underneath the concrete in the couple’s garage, essentially placing Doctor Leekie beneath her and domesticating his presence in her household.

Sharon Lamb expands on the dialogue Peterson presents of subjective versus objective empowerment in the article “Feminist Ideals for a Healthy Female Adolescent Sexuality: A Critique.” Lamb articulates that “the question is whether feeling empowered and being empowered are the same thing and whether empowerment is merely a feeling or should be connected to power and autonomy in other spheres” (301). Lamb argues that “feeling emboldened sexually is not the same as [being] empowered,” expanding on this thought by stating that empowerment was first configured as a way to broaden girls’ options beyond relying on sexuality as a path to power (301). Peterson challenges this argument by arguing that there is not a single definition of empowered sexuality for adolescent girls (312). Peterson instead proposes “that one solution to this problem is to acknowledge multiple dimensions and degrees of empowered sexuality” (312).

Ambiguous empowerment is a common occurrence on *Buffy*. *Buffy*’s characters begin the series as adolescents and the audience is able to witness each character’s gains in sexual empowerment and instances of disempowerment. Anya, an ex-vengeance demon with a poor understanding of acceptable social behaviors, dialogically contributes to instances of explicit reference to sexuality. In “Hush” (4010), Anya argues with Xander about the relationship they have begun to develop. Whilst Xander dismisses Anya’s concerns, Anya is forthright with her thoughts. Upon walking into Giles’s house, Anya loudly berates Xander, accusing him of only caring about “lots of orgasms” to Giles’s and Xander’s dismay. Throughout the series, Anya

continues to contribute unambiguous sexual quips, which are typically met with half-hearted, awkward responses.

In *Orphan Black*, ambiguous empowerment is much less prevalent, at least partially as a result of the age range of the series' characters. The clones and other prominent characters generally range from their late twenties to early thirties. It is viable that *Orphan Black's* explicit, empowered sexualities may not necessarily be a result of the progression of feminist values in *Orphan Black* in comparison to *Buffy*, but illustrates Peterson's suggestion that empowerment is a lifelong journey.

According to A. Susan Owen in the article "Vampires, Postmodernity, and Postfeminism," *Buffy's* physicality clashes with the dynamics of power, sexual or otherwise, depicted by the series. Owen contends that "*Buffy's* body is a site of considerable struggle in the narrative. She is recognizably coded as slim, youthful, fit, and stylish; her body is a billboard for American commodity culture" (25). Peterson further expands on the role culture plays in shaping perceptions of empowerment. Peterson declares that visions of empowered sexuality are inevitably influenced by "cultural messages and media depictions" although "empowered sexuality may look slightly different for different adolescent girls" (309). Jowett, in contrast to Owen, seeks to defend *Buffy's* depictions of its characters' sexualities. Jowett qualifies that although "the conventionally 'feminine' appearance of *Buffy's* 'girls' led some to dismiss it as a standard display of the female body . . . The mixture of 'feminine' soap/melodrama and 'masculine' action or horror in *Buffy* further confuses this issue" (22-23).

In "Constructing Gender Stereotypes through Social Roles in Prime-Time Television," Martha Lauzen, David Dozier, and Nora Horan decisively declare that "traditional gender stereotypes posit that men represent the ideal or norm against which women are judged," resulting in a strong linkage between a woman's self-worth and her relationships (201). Fine states that, placed in a position of disempowerment, "the female characters, as the erotic objects for the viewer, then, are traditionally positioned as sexual objects" (167). Owen criticizes the representation of *Buffy* by noting the way in which *Buffy's* power is domesticated through the diminishment of her private life by saddling her with the burden to participate in civil society (30). Lamb responds to this culture in which women and women's sexuality is represented overwhelmingly as subordinate in the media. Lamb argues that "a healthy sexuality for the adolescent female thus must combat objectification, victimization, and the stereotype of passivity" (299). Ultimately, Lamb chastises the feminist idolization of desire as key to healthy female adolescent sexuality. Lamb instead offers the conclusion that because self-sexualization is ultimately a performance, an authentic girl "looks within and gets to know her own desires, separate from the marketplace" (301). Peterson insists that "rather than expecting girls to 'achieve' the ultimate goal of sexual empowerment, it seems that sexual empowerment should be viewed as a long-term developmental process in which girls experience degrees of empowerment" (310).

Byers offers *Buffy* redemption, vouching for the series as ultimately feminist despite its flawed representations of female sexuality and empowerment. Byers contends that in contrast to the virtual televisual body, "the television text is polysemous . . . Because *Buffy* the Vampire Slayer was created by the mainstream American media, the bodies it uses to articulate its messages reflect that position. But the performance of these bodies must also be considered" (175). Kim et al. report that "scripting theory posits that sexuality is learned from culturally available 'sexual scripts' that define what counts as sex, how to recognize sexual situations, and what to do in relational and sexual encounters (Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Simon & Gagnon, 1986)" (146). Additionally, Kim et al. investigate the relationship between stereotypes perpetuated by the "Heterosexual Script" and empowerment, exclaiming that "the Heterosexual

Script compels girls/women to deny or devalue their own sexual desire, to seek to please boys/men, to 'wish and wait' to be chosen, and to trade their own sexuality as a commodity" (146). Byers reveals that "often, the images of women we see in the media overwhelm the possibility of empowerment suggested by their actions" (175). "In the case of Buffy," Byers explains, "critics have argued that a show that is so entrenched in idealized (and unrealizable) images of the female body cannot be read as feminist" (175). In response to this criticism, Byers poses the following question: "Are breasts really what keeps a show from being feminist?" (175).

Byers raises a valid question—just because a female protagonist is sexualized, does that sexualization inevitably speak to her worth as a feminist icon? The sexualization of female characters is a longstanding tradition in broadcast television. As Byers alludes, it is an aspect of the virtual televisual body separate from the televisual text. Byers states that "because Buffy the Vampire Slayer was created by the mainstream American media, the bodies it uses to articulate its messages reflect that position" (175). The sexualization of Buffy's and *Orphan Black's* characters does not necessarily reflect on the quality of the shows themselves, but instead is indicative of the culture of American television. Although shows might individually be held responsible in taking steps to modify the culture of objectification, which Buffy and *Orphan Black* arguably have as audiences widely consider them feminist, it is inconceivable that every feminist show has the power to entirely bypass cultural standards of sexualization.

Diminishing Buffy's significance as a respectable female protagonist because of how she dresses contradicts values of feminism in and of itself. Byers contends that "[Buffy's] feminist impulse says that women should be able to protect themselves and their loved ones, to be respected for their intellectual and physical capabilities, to insist on their right to emotional and bodily integrity, and to desire to be nurtured as well as to nurture" (172). This vision of girlhood and womanhood as articulated by Buffy, according to Byers, positions the series as a feminist text (172). Jowett supports Byers' claim regarding Buffy's status as a feminist text. However, Jowett agrees that the interpretation of Buffy's feminist impulse occasionally sends the viewer mixed signals. Jowett concedes that although "Buffy presents us with sexually active characters who are not punished for their behavior partly because of its postfeminist context," the series additionally grants its characters this liberated sexuality "because sexually active 'girls' are 'more interesting'" (29). In conjunction with Jowett's findings, Kim et al.'s research reveals the high number of depictions on primetime television in which female characters "willingly objectify themselves" and allow themselves to be "judged by their sexual conduct" (145).

Although Cordelia presents herself as the typical soap bitch, as Jowett argues, her behavior is calculated (30). Cordelia's dependency on the status quo may be construed as weak, but Cordelia's abrasive attitude and demeanor does not sway even in the presence of adversity. Cordelia is obviously dependent in numerous ways and this dependence is, within Buffy, presented as a distinctly feminine trait, but despite her dependence Cordelia maintains her sense of identity. Cordelia is a feminist character because of the will and constancy she exhibits. Cordelia does, in the last few episodes of the third season, loosen her grip on her social status as high school comes to a close in the Buffyverse. Cordelia simultaneously manipulates the environment of high school while secretly maintaining a high academic standard so that when graduation day arrives, she has the option to exit out of the spotlight and go on to higher education at a prestigious university.

Cordelia's manipulation of her circumstances is akin to Rachel Duncan's manipulation of her circumstances in *Orphan Black*. Rachel is viewed as the antagonistic "pro-clone" because she was raised with an awareness of her origins and has taken a position of power within the patriarchal Dyad Institute, but arguably all Rachel is doing is making the best of the difficult position in which she has been placed. Through careful planning, Rachel even succeeds in

overthrowing Aldous Leekie, the scientist who monitored and ultimately held power over her. Although Rachel is antagonistic in the series, it is worth noting the circumstances by which she became antagonistic and how this exemplifies her merit as a progressive representation of gender.

### *No Hetero(normativity)*

Although heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality are less present in serial dramas than in sitcoms, it is difficult for broadcast television series to completely escape all elements of the Heterosexual Script. Occasionally, characters and television shows will challenge its precedence by transcending the boundaries of gender and sexuality. *Buffy* and *Orphan Black* in particular are shows that work to transcend the restrictions of gender and sexuality, with characters such as Spike and Felix, respectively, defying the restrictive boundaries of typical gender norms.

Kim et al. examine instances of what they describe as the “Heterosexual Script” in twenty-five primetime television series by constructing a series of eight codes which identify elements of the Heterosexual Script (146). As a result of this study, Kim et al. confirm the damaging implications of the Heterosexual Script on adolescents. Kim et al. discover that “the Heterosexual Script entitles boys/men to prioritize their own sexual desire, to act on their sexual needs, to perceive their hormones to be ‘out of control,’ to promise power and status to women in return for sex” and perpetuates the notion that “girls/women must manage boys’/men’s sexual needs in order to gain some share of their privilege” (146).

Additionally, Lauzen, Dozier, and Horan recognize that “knowledge of an individual’s social role can profoundly influence gender stereotypes regarding that individual” (201). Specifically, Lauzen, Dozier, and Horan assert that “programs featuring characters in gender-inconsistent social roles must address how a female could occupy a work role commonly thought to be inconsistent with female capabilities” (211). Kim et al. suggest that “whereas adults may recognize the importance of censoring, restricting, or mediating children’s exposure to overtly sexual content, they may not detect or may perceive as benign children’s viewing of content that is saturated with the Heterosexual Script” (156). Further, Kim et al. contend that “it is because the Heterosexual Script is so invisible and perceived to be so natural and normal that its potential impact on adolescents’ sexual decision-making is so formidable” (156).

In the *Buffyverse*, Joyce, Buffy’s mother, and Giles, Buffy’s watcher, are the outstanding adult figures. Owen describes the ways in which Joyce and Giles set the stage for the reversal of gendered performances on Buffy, but also delves further into the implications of these reversals. According to Owen, “the feminized adult male both instructs and nurtures Buffy; [Giles’s] generational and cultural eccentricities function primarily to connect the youthful slayer to a historical past,” while conversely “the feminized adult female is well intentioned but largely ineffectual; [Joyce’s] efforts to nurture and instruct frequently are framed as misguided or naïve” (26).

Within the boundaries of the “Scooby Gang” itself, heteronormativity is abstracted to a greater degree. Jowett discusses the character of Willow specifically. Jowett asserts that Willow is exemplary “because she does not construct a conventionally feminine identity that allows her to fit in. Willow’s power and her awareness of it make her different” (37). According to Jowett, Willow blurs the lines heavily between characteristics of masculinity and femininity and thus, defies expectations for typical gendered behaviors. Jowett expands on Willow’s relationship with Giles, Buffy’s feminized adult male figure, arguing that “while [Willow] enjoys praise from Giles, Willow rarely actively tries to please him and does not need male approval. The lack of a real mentor might demonstrate Willow’s independence and agency—she is in



charge of her developing powers” (39). Owen characterizes Xander as a “feminized heterosexual male who is anxious about heteronormative masculinity” (26). Owen explains that “Xander’s character makes ironic and self-mocking commentary on the perils and challenges of masculine social scripts, giving voice to the anxieties invoked by the presence of the capable, confident super-heroine, Buffy” (26).

In particular, Owen states that “[Buffy] offers transgressive possibilities for re-imagining gendered relations and modernist American ideologies” (25). However, Owen concedes, “the series reifies mainstream commitments to heteronormative relationships, American commodity culture, and a predominantly Anglo perspective” (25). Buttsworth holds that in a culture of heteronormativity, “for masculinity to remain dominant it must appear impenetrable or risk being coded as feminized” (194). According to Buttsworth, “this rigidity of masculine identity contrasts directly with ways in which the feminine has been associated with fluidity, and this fluidity is threatening to the solid stability of the masculine warrior (Theweleit, 1987)” (194).

Byers connects this impenetrability to the identity of the hero. Byers draws on the words of Margery Hourihan, who asserts that “the hero is embodied, essentially, in the body of male youth. Heroines, [Hourihan] writes, tend to be relegated to the status of ‘honorary men’” (172-173). Byers defends Buffy’s representation of its heroes. Byers declares that “in Buffy, there is no need for the heroes to adopt male gender status, since girls do just fine as heroes in their own femininely gendered skins” (172-173). Buttsworth supports Byers’s thoughts on Buffy’s femininity, asserting that “the factor which assists [Buffy’s] invisibility . . . is also what makes her acceptable on an ongoing basis to a mainstream television audience. The conventions of femininity are necessary to the survival of the show . . . as much as they are to the survival of the Slayer” (191).

Within the universe of *Orphan Black*, Felix is presented as an object of erotic contemplation and a contrast to the rigid masculine identity. Felix’s body is often displayed as partially naked, his bare chest visible. Felix dresses provocatively, always has his act together despite excessively drinking and using drugs, and tends to have a high standard of appearance—his black hair styled, his nails manicured, his fair skin lacking body hair. These attributes of Felix’s appearance are almost all brought to focus in Amy-Chinn’s analysis of Spike, who outlines Spike’s objectification and conscientious body image. In terms of Felix’s behavior, although it is not explicitly acknowledged by any of the characters, it is suggested that Felix acts as a high-class prostitute or deals drugs to maintain his livelihood. Felix transcends gender norms typical of the heteronormative male, placing him in line with characters such as Spike whose genders are simultaneously coded as both masculine and feminine. Characters such as these pose a direct threat to the Heterosexual Script.

Although a parallel can be drawn between the characters of Felix and Spike, Felix is particularly emboldened in his deconstruction of the rigid system of gender. Dissimilar to Spike, who faces ridicule in the Buffyverse for his bizarre behavior, Felix candidly and self-consciously penetrates boundaries. Therefore, a divide does ultimately exist between Buffy and *Orphan Black* in terms of the representation of characters that skew distinct concepts of masculinity. Felix is giddy and showcases a flagrant disregard for the opinions of others and yet is upheld by characters such as Sarah, Felix’s foster sister, Alison, Cosima, and even Helena. Spike, conversely, is almost always given a hard time by the “Scooby Gang” and is an all-around persecuted character.

According to the aforementioned criteria, *Orphan Black*, which has not previously been studied academically and which is an ongoing television series, surpasses Buffy in terms of empowered sexuality and the presence of heteronormativity and the Heterosexual Script.



However, while it is clear that the representation of female protagonists have attained a greater degree of diversity in *Orphan Black*, it is difficult to identify clear guidelines by which to assess the feminist value of these characters. The Girl Power motif is present in both shows, a key aspect of its feminist potential realized with the series' emphasis on collectivity. *Orphan Black* is ultimately more progressive than *Buffy* because it has expanded the meaning of empowered sexuality, embodies the most important aspects of Girl Power, and contains characters who clearly challenge gender construction and the Heterosexual Script. Despite this, *Buffy* can still be held up alongside *Orphan Black* as an influential milestone in broadcast television and the science fiction and fantasy genres even if a sixteen-year gap exists between the series' premiere dates. This analysis is meaningful in comprehending the core issues that exist in the progression of the representation of female protagonists, particularly in the science fiction and fantasy genres in which misrepresentation is a serious problem. Understanding the areas in which broadcast television series have halted in development aids viewers and producers in working to achieve tangible gains.

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