

## Twenty years into *Buffy*

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*“Yes, it’s terribly simple. The good guys are always stalwart and true, the bad guys are easily distinguished by their pointy horns or black hats, and, uh, we always defeat them and save the day. No one ever dies, and everybody lives happily ever after.”* Giles

My involvement with *Buffy*, first as an audience member and then as a scholar, began ‘acutely’, like the sudden onset of an illness. It was intense, and marked one of the most productive writing periods of my academic career, resulting in the publication of more than a dozen single- and co-authored outputs. These spanned a period of eight years and covered such issues as the family, sexuality and moral questions, issues of concern to me as a social psychologist. Joss Whedon said in an interview that there would never be a ‘very special’ episode of *Buffy*, an episode where some particular issue of social concern was explored in the narrative, because of course the entire series was an exploration of important psycho-social matters- rich pickings for a psychologist!

So it would be almost impossible for *Buffy*’s significance for me to be diminished. However, as my academic base is social science and not popular culture, media studies or English studies, it is perhaps inevitable that I have left *Buffy* behind as a scholarly focus. Nevertheless, the show has remained a reference point for me in terms of what I regard as ‘quality TV’ and the success of this in allowing us to explore what it is to be human, contradictory, complex and imperfect. *Buffy* presented us with uneasy combinations that required us to reflect- ‘good’ people who sometimes did bad things, and ‘bad’ people who could be redeemed (or not) and even help to save the world. When I now watch a new TV show, the implicit question I ask is ‘Does it match up to *Buffy*?’, and whether my answer is ‘yes’ or ‘no’ I am always aware of making that judgement. There was also much debate on the question of whether *Buffy* could be considered a ‘feminist’ text. My own small research study in which I interviewed fans about their engagement with the show suggested that, for many young women, the character of Buffy was an important role model, convincing them that they too could be strong and effective. That has to be a Good Thing. I can’t think of any other TV show where the female lead is just that- a leader- and where the male characters are not diminished by following her.

*Buffy* and the Scoobies were like familiar and valued friends, and I miss them. Yes, I can watch them on DVD whenever I choose, but their development as interesting and complex people ceased with the end of the show, and I always feel a little sad at that.