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**THE ROLE OF DISABILITY IN
BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER**

by

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

The social construction of disability posits that media play an important role in the construction of disability. Few studies have systematically examined the role of disability in film or television. Engaging in a multiple perspective analysis, this dissertation examined the role of disability in the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Data were analyzed with a content analysis, a thematic analysis, and an ideological rhetorical criticism. Disability was found to be used as a tool of character, plot, and atmosphere development. The data also suggested that negative assumptions of disability, often reinforcing of stereotypes, were readily apparent in the series and identifiable via multiple methods of analysis. The results also confirmed that analyzing artifacts using unique configurations of methods can result in new and more nuanced insights into the role of disability in popular culture.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The role of disability in films has been identified as problematic and reinforcing of stereotypes (e.g. Crutchfield, 1997; Nelson, 1994; Ralph & Haller, 2009; Signorielli, 1989). Disability has been an oft-occurring theme, both subtle and blatant, in horror films throughout the history of cinema (Olney, 2006; Smith, 2012). It is my opinion that disability plays a role in most, if not all, horror films. Despite its frequent presence in the horror genre, reaching all the way back to the early days of cinema (Norden, 1994), disability is often overlooked as a theme in films (Longmore, 2001).

Many famous film monsters (a term I will define in the operational definitions section) display some characteristics associated with disability that are often stereotypical and not necessarily realistic (Bogdan, Biklen, Shapiro, & Spelkoman, 1982). The positive correlation between the presence of disability and villainy in a character is prevalent in film (Longmore, 2001). For example, Pinhead in *Hellraiser* (1987), Freddy Krueger in *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) and *Frankenstein's* (1931) monster all have visible facial scarring. Norman Bates is revealed to be his film's titular *Psycho* in the final minutes of his film (1960). If a character has a hook for a hand, as the killer fisherman in *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997) does, it is likely that he will be revealed to be a monster or villain of some sort. *Candyman* (1992), a film about the symbolic nature of monsters, is focused on the horrors of socioeconomic deprivation and the need for a boogeyman scapegoat to absorb responsibility for the violence in a poor community. *Candyman's* roots are in critical theory and the sociology of poverty, yet the filmmakers replaced the villain's hand with a hook, thus linking villainy with disability. This

phenomenon has been well established in academic literature (e.g. Bogdan et al., 1982; Harnett, 2000; Hyler, Gabbard, & Schneider, 1991; Thurer, 1980), as I will explore in greater detail in chapter two.

First, I will explore the extent to which the social construction of disability literature provides a foundation for my assumption that the disability-themed content of film, both obvious and subtle, is worthy of analysis. I will then discuss some major themes of horror art theories. Finally, I will seek to articulate what horror art theories might say about disability, when analyzed from the social construction of disability perspective. For this dissertation, I have analyzed the role that disability played in the television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer (BtVS)* (1997-2003) (see Appendix B for a brief description of the series), created by Joss Whedon. Social construction of disability and horror art theoretical perspectives guided my methodology and analysis for this research.

Why *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*?

The television series *BtVS* embraced multiple film and television genres, and continues to be widely respected in those genre communities. It incorporated horror, drama, comedy, and fantasy into its storytelling. In my opinion, the show was a horror series at its core. My contention is supported by awards and award nominations it has received, such as the Bram Stoker Award for horror writing (2000, Best Screenplay nomination for Joss Whedon) and the Best Television Series award from the International Horror Guild (won, 1999; nominated, 2000, 2001, 2003). The theme of heroics in a horrific world was one of the central themes throughout the show's seven-year run. I have selected *BtVS* for this research because it has a reputation of being a complex, layered show that researchers have found to be worth analyzing (e.g. Pateman, 2006;

South, 2003; Wilcox, 2005). As quoted by Larbalestier (2003) from an online forum (no longer available), *BtVS*'s creator, Joss Whedon wrote that:

Buffy is made by a bunch of writers who think very, very hard about what they are doing...We take the show very seriously...when somebody says there is a philosophy behind 'Buffy' that is the truth. When they say there is symbolism and meaning in what we're doing, that's true too (p. 77).

BtVS has maintained a strong presence in current popular culture even though it has been off the air or over a decade. In a 2010 list of the "100 Greatest Characters of the Last 20 Years," *Entertainment Weekly* magazine named *BtVS*'s titular Buffy Summers as the third greatest fictional character of the last two decades, just after Homer Simpson and Harry Potter (Entertainment Weekly Staff, 2010). In a description of television writers, Paskin (2012) included a declaration of "whether *The Wire* or *The Sopranos* or *Buffy* is best" as an example of a critic's function. At the 2012 San Diego Comic-Con a crowd of 2,500 fans gathered with actors, editors, illustrators, and writers from the show and comic books to celebrate the 20th anniversary of *BtVS* (Stevenson, 2012), which first appeared as a feature film in 1992. *BtVS* is currently available, in its entirety, on the television-streaming site hulu.com, netflix.com (instant online streaming video), on DVD, and it continues to play in reruns on numerous cable networks. The prevalence of the show in many of today's most popular television venues and the continued references in pop culture writing suggest that there continues to be an audience for and interest in this program.

BtVS is not only successful as a cult television series, it is also a topic of interest within academic circles. Over the past decade *BtVS* has had a strong presence in college,

university, and other academic settings. In 2004 a *BtVS* conference took place in Nashville, Tennessee, and it was the largest scholarly conference ever devoted to a single television show, with 180 papers presented from a variety of academic disciplines (Wilcox, 2005). Two faculty members at Smith College report that they have offered classes that prominently feature *BtVS* (A. Jones, personal communication, February 23, 2012; A. Keller, personal communication, February 26, 2012). According to Geraldine Bloustein, a faculty member at the University of South Australia, several faculty members in the Management, Philosophy, and Communications departments of that university use *BtVS* in their courses and a social work professor at the University of New South Wales uses an episode of *BtVS* in her unit on bereavement, death, and dying (personal communication, February 22, 2012). As of 2006, at Brunel University in London students can earn a Master's degree in Cult Film and Television while taking courses on *BtVS* (Brunel University, 2006). According to several university course directories, the University of Washington, Portland State University, the University of California at San Diego, and Wartburg College have offered entire courses on *BtVS*. As recently as the spring semesters of 2012 a course named "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" was offered at DePaul University (DePaul, 2012) and in the spring of 2014 a course called "The Church & Popular Culture" was advertised with the line "What do 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer,' Lady Gaga and Jesus have in common?" (Depaul, 2014). Based on first person reports from university students and instructor posts in online discussions (Catherine, 2007; Christine, 2004; Heather, 2008; Kociemba, 2007), classes entirely devoted to *BtVS* have been offered at a number of colleges and universities, including

Middle Tennessee State University, Emerson College, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and Massachusetts College of Art.

BtVS has been the subject of a number of dissertations over the past decade. These dissertations covered topics such as television as a performance text (Byers, 2000), smart teen girls on television (Conaway, 2007), storytelling (Hulst, 2007), fan fiction (Parrish, 2007), and feminism on the small screen (Murphy, 2002). Of the 274 American doctoral dissertation summaries found in the ProQuest dissertation database that have explicit references to *BtVS* (list retrieved on February 2, 2012), eight are entirely focused on Buffy and 35 devote at least one chapter to the show or one of the show's characters (including Carrington, 2009; Cochran, 2009; Nichols, 2010; Wright, 2009). Despite its prevalence in current popular and academic culture, references to themes of disability are notably missing throughout dissertations, college course descriptions, and academic writings on the show.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze a popular and beloved horror television series through the lens of the social construction of disability. As I will discuss in the literature review, there is very little formal research that explores disability in film, and I therefore hope to bring the topic to readers' attention in a way that is methodologically rigorous and engaging. I also hope to describe a new configuration of existing methods of analysis that might provide a new way to analyze the disability themed content in film.

Question to be Addressed

The purpose of this dissertation is to answer the question, "what is the role of disability in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*?"

Underlying Assumptions and Researcher Stance

There are disagreements in the literature about the impact film has on the audience's perceptions of people with disabilities (e.g. Elliot & Byrd, 1983; Sadlick & Penta, 1975; Safran 2000; Sancho-Aldridge & Gunter, 1994). The topics of cinematic representations of disability themes and audience effect are subject to complicated issues of context, interpretation, and generalizability and I believe a consensus will never be reached on the subjects. Based on my understanding of the theoretical and research literature and my own experiences with the impact films have had on my perceptions of disability, I believe that the content of films does have an impact on audiences and, therefore, is worthy of analysis and discussion. I agree with Haller's (1998) statement that "media act as mechanisms in the social construction of people with disabilities" (p. 90).

Growing up, I had a close relationship with my grandfather who used a wheelchair since my father's early childhood (and passed away when I was in the fourth grade). I had a distant adult cousin with a profound intellectual disability whom I saw every few years during summer road trips as a child. Other than these two drastically different people, I had little to no exposure to people with disabilities in my early life. This was partially due to the segregated education structures of my elementary, middle, and high schools. I spent one summer working in a respite home for people of all ages with disabilities as my undergraduate practicum in 2000. This was my first extensive contact with people with intellectual disability. In the past decade and a half I have spent a lot of time living and working with children and adults with a wide variety of disabilities. Living with a group of adults with disabilities in the Scottish highlands and

working as a teaching assistant in a segregated special education classroom focused on behavior control rather than education (and feeling extremely uncomfortable with this environment) are two experiences that brought the topic of disability to the forefront of my interests. A combination of spending time with many people with disabilities and exploring theories of disability during my graduate coursework has helped me to develop a passion for the topic of the social construction of disability.

Two classes I have taken that have had a profound impact on the way I see the symbolic nature of disability and the world are Special Education 511: *The Social Construction of Disability*, and Communication and Journalism 538: *Rhetorical Criticism*, at the University of New Mexico. These courses played a major role in forming my awareness of the ways constructed meanings shape how we interact with each other and our surroundings. I feel that this awareness is essential when advocating for and with people with disabilities. I believe that analyzing the social construction of disability within films, as well as looking at how films contribute to the social construction of disability beyond the world of cinema, is an important advocacy tool. I also feel that a disintegration of the concept of *normal* and a rejection of the assumption that differing from the *norm* is inherently bad is essential for people, communities, and society to be truly humane.

My love for and interest in films drove me to pay particular attention to the relationship films have to the social construction of disability. I come to this research as someone who feels strongly that films have played a generally negative role in the social construction of disability, but not uniformly so. I feel that films are too complex to label

as playing a *good* or *bad* role in the social construction of disability. Instead, I feel that films and their relationships with disability are worthy of attention and analysis.

In the following section of operational definitions, I will define the term *monster*. As I will discuss in the section on the social construction of disability, my personal belief is that the *abnormal form* themes of supposed *monsterhood* are negative perceptions of disability. I will only use terms such as normal or monster when referring to the presented perspective of a film, or in a discussion of the terms themselves, as it is my belief that the term *abnormal* is a false construction and a major player in the social construction of disability and the oppression of people with disabilities.

Operational Definitions

I will use many subjective terms throughout this paper. *Hero*, *villain*, and *monster* are a few terms that hold different meanings for everyone. In this section, for the purpose of clarity and precision within this paper, I will provide a definition for ambiguous terms.

Disability: Through out this dissertation I use the term disability to refer to physical, intellectual, and learning disabilities, as well as mental illness. For the purpose of this paper I will rely on the definition from the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) when referencing disability as a whole. The ADA defines an individual with a disability as follows:

A person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history of such and impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009, p.1).

When describing occurrences of disability in *BtVS* and other films I recognize that I am attempting to apply definitions developed for real people in a film context with supernatural characters and phenomena. I also recognize stereotypical depictions are often indicators of disability within fictional works. Therefore, I will operationally define disability within film as such:

- *Intellectual disability*: Intellectual disability is “a disability characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior, which covers many everyday social and practical skills” (AAIDD, 2014). Within this research I will refer to stereotypical and unrealistic depictions of people with intellectual disabilities as being indications of disability. I will identify depictions of intellectual disability when a character is shown to have limited social and practical skills and these limitations are explicitly described, within the show, as being due to their intellectual capabilities. Due to the supernatural nature of the show, I will also identify a character as having an intellectual disability if they experience a temporary, dramatic decrease in their cognitive functions, as demonstrated by their behaviors or verbal skills.
- *Learning disability*: I will identify a character as having a learning disability if they, other characters, or the filmmakers explicitly describe or show that they are having difficulty processing written information. I will not use this term if a character makes a general reference to difficulties in school.

- *Mental illness*: The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI, 2014) defines mental illness as “a medical condition that disrupts a persons’ thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others and daily functioning” (p.1). I will record a character as having a mental illness if a character is explicitly described, within the film, as having mental illness (regardless of behavior or characterization), or if they display behavior, or others display behaviors toward them, that are very strongly, stereotypically, associated with disability in films. To appear in my records as having a mental illness, a character will have had to wear a straightjacket, reside in a psychiatric hospital, be described as having mental illness by themselves or other characters (e.g. “The loneliness, the constant exile. She has gone mad.”), or have some similarly explicit indication of mental illness (e.g. repetitive hand washing, as suggestive of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder).
- *Physical disability*: Within this research, I describe a character as having a physical disability if they are portrayed as having limitations based on physical functioning. In the case of injury, I do not consider the injury itself to be a disability. Instead, if an injury or illness results in limitations on that character’s functioning or mobility, I will then record that a character experiences a physical disability.

Film: Throughout this paper, I will use the term *film* as a general to refer to both film (cinema) and television, as the two are interchangeable within this research. Unless I am referencing a non-American film as an example or subject of other research, I will use

this term to refer to American works specifically. I will occasionally use the term *television* when it is appropriate for flow or clarity.

Hero: In this paper, I define a *hero* as a character who is shown to have a desire to help or protect primarily non-villainous others. This character must take observable or measurable actions to attempt to achieve this. Outcome of action is not important to this definition. If this character knowingly helps or protects villains (see definition below), they are villainous, not heroic.

Horror: I will use the term horror when referring to a phenomenon in horror art that occurs when one is drawn to something or someone that frightens them. An attraction to a perceived threat or a blurring of attraction and revulsion is a simplified definition of the term. While pure fear will likely elicit a response of fight or flight, horror may cause one to stop and stare, frozen in their steps, unable to fully process the source of threat. I will define and discuss this term further in the literature review.

Horror art: Horror art refers to a work (e.g. film, literature, or visual art) created with a particular interest in creating a sense of horror for the audience.

Monster: For the purpose of this dissertation, I will define a *monster* as a character that is perceived to be a threat to a protagonist (either directly or indirectly), and of a physically abnormal structure. When using this term, I always keep in mind how the film defines the term normal. Outside of this dissertation I might refer to Grover the Muppet as a monster, but within this dissertation, as he is not considered to be a threat by characters within his world, Grover does not fit my definition of a monster.

Villain: A villain is a character who is presented as having a conscious desire (not just an instinctual drive) to frighten, threaten, harm, kill, or transform (against his or her

will) another character. A villain must take some sort of observable or recordable action to accomplish these goals. The outcomes of these actions are not important.

Theoretical Framework

In chapter two I will describe and discuss two theoretical perspectives; the social construction of disability and horror art theories. I will describe the elements from a range of horror theories that I will use as the framework for horror art in this dissertation, specifically, as there are many unique theoretical approaches to horror scholarship. I will then synthesize the two perspectives and describe what these theories might jointly predict about the role of disability in horror films.

Importance of the Study

As I will elaborate on in the literature review, there are many excellent theoretical writings on topics of disability and film (e.g. Biklen & Bogdan, 1977; Bogdan & Knoll, 1995; Carson, 1995) as well as works that give attention to disability and horror (e.g. Bogdan et al., 1982; Hyler et al., 1991; Longmore, 2001; Zola, 1985). Despite the thought-provoking writings on disability and film, there has been little systematic research in the area of social construction of disability and, especially, this construction within horror films. While there are formal studies of disability in film and television, most measured little more than occurrence of disability in film (e.g. Byrd, 1989; Byrd & Elliot, 1985; Byrd & Elliot, 1988; Byrd & Pipes, 1981; Donaldson, 1981; Lawson & Fouts, 2004; Safran, 1998) and only a few explored deeper content themes related to the social construction of disability (e.g. Black & Pretes, 2007; Safran, 2001). Stereotypes of disability, the use of disability as shorthand for evil or fractured humanity, and other themes congruent with the social construction of disability have been explored in theory

pieces (e.g. Bogdan et al., 1982; Carson, 1995; Crutchfield, 1997; Darke, 1998). Some scholars have discussed the role of disability in horror art (e.g. Bogdan et al., 1982; Norden, 1994; Olney, 2006), but there has been very little research on this topic (*but see* Smith, 2012) on this topic.

The existing literature often focuses on stereotypes of disability that almost always exist in films that touch on disability in some way (e.g. Biklen & Bogdan, 1977; Longmore, 2001; Mallett, 2009). Black and Pretes (2007) systematically explored themes in films featuring characters shown to have disabilities, but to my knowledge there is only one large-scale, formal study of disability in horror films, in Angela Smith's 2002 dissertation (published as a book in 2012) "*Hideous progeny*": *Eugenics, disability, and classic horror cinema*, a thematic analysis of eugenic themes in horror films of the 1930s.

The social construction of disability is a dynamic area of research and theory, but with much room for further research and discussion. I aim to contribute a rigorous study to the social construction of disability in film literature. I engaged in a multiple perspective analysis (Green & Harker, 1988), as I will describe in chapter three of this proposal. I explored, both broadly and narrowly, the presence of disability and disability themes in *BtVS*. I performed content and thematic analyses on the entire series and an ideological rhetorical criticism on a few scenes, selected based on the results of the thematic analysis.

Scope and Delimitations of the Study

In this study I looked at what role disability played in *BtVS*. I explored every episode of the television series, 144 episodes, totaling 108 hours of film. I did not include the original *BtVS* film or any additional comic books or television series that are spin-offs

or continuations of the *BtVS* story, such as *Angel* (television series, 1999-2004), *Joss Whedon's Fray* (comic book, 2001-2003), or the eighth through tenth seasons of *BtVS* (currently being produced in comic book form). Aside from a look at the research and literature that covers disability in a variety of forms, such as literature and visual art, I did not explore the role of disability in the arts beyond film. In the literature review in chapter two I discuss disability in a variety of film genres, including horror, however this research was limited to *BtVS*.

I analyzed the show *BtVS* and I did not look beyond the borders of the show itself. Aside from recording episode titles, writers, and directors, I did not include data gathered from sources outside of the artifact itself in this analysis of the show. As such, due to the constraints of this study, I will not present these findings as generalizable, as I explored the themes within a very specific body of work. Within this research, however, I hoped to uncover and identify themes that would be applicable to analyses and considerations of other cinematic works, as well as demonstrate a new configuration of methods that is appropriate for analyzing film beyond *BtVS*.

I am also not concerned, within this particular research, with audience effect. I did not attempt to measure or describe the impact that horror films, or *BtVS* itself, has on their audiences. I believe that films impact the dominant American culture but it was not my intent in this dissertation to examine the type and extent of this posited impact on the audience.

Summary

Understanding the messages conveyed about disability through film can give essential insights into our broader perceptions of disability in the dominant western

culture (e.g. Darke, 1998; Elliot & Bird, 1984a; Farnall & Smith, 1999; Garcia Silberman, 1993). The social construction of disability literature also suggests that these perceptions have impacts on the lives of all members of society, regardless of identification as having or not having a disability (Albrecht & Levy, 1981; Bogdan & Taylor, 1989; Norden, 1994; Strong, 2008). For these reasons, I believe that it is academically worthwhile to study the role disability played in a cult television show about a cheerleader who regularly saved the world.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this chapter I explore the literature related to my theoretical framework, informed by the social construction of disability perspective and horror art theories. First I describe the social construction of disability literature and related works on the topics of film and media. I then present an overview of the existing research on the subject of disability and the media, primarily television and film. I extend this discussion to other forms of media, such as newspapers, comic books, and literature when appropriate. I then present my perspective on horror art theories. There are many individual perspectives on horror art and in this chapter I synthesize some common elements from several major theorists and articulate the horror art perspective I engaged with for this research. I then discuss what a synthesis of the social construction of disability perspective and horror art theories might predict about the role disability plays in horror films. This will be the foundation for this research methodology, as well as for the discussion in chapter five of the implications of the results.

The Social Construction of Disability

Various frameworks within which disability can be placed have emerged over the past century. These paradigms range from the medical model, whose proponents attempt to foster a strict adherence to the idea of the normative mind and body and a focus of the negativity of any deviation from the norm (as described by Brown, 1995; Mercer, 1992; Poplin 1988), to social constructionism, a paradigm that places disability within context, outside of the individual body (Jones, 1996; Manion & Bersani, 1987; Martin & Sugarman, 1997). Social construction of disability advocates demand knowledge of context for any discussion of the experience of people with disabilities and throw out the

notion of a normal mind or body (Corker, 1999).

The symbolic nature of our world is an increasingly popular alternative to the medical paradigm of disability (Ferguson, 1987). Proponents of the social construction of disability perspective describe disability as a socially constructed phenomenon that arises from the interactions of people who are identified as people with disabilities with their environments (e.g. Jones, 1996; Molloy & Vasil, 2002). When one views disability as a social construction, the analytic frame shifts from a primary focus on the individual's characteristics to the recognition of the importance of the interaction of the individual and society (Jones, 1996).

Advocates of the social construction of disability perspective specify that analyses of disability must expand to include people with and without disabilities (Jones, 1996). Disability is always interactional (Bogdan & Knoll, 1995). According to this theoretical framework people with and without disabilities participate in the social construction of disability, but they do not do so on an equal basis (Rosenblum & Travis, 2006). The attitudes of people without disabilities and the institutional manifestations of these attitudes, even more than biological characteristics of disabilities, can turn characteristics into handicaps (Jones, 1996). People who do not identify as having a disability often impose their concepts of what constitutes a disability on those who are identified as *disabled* (Rosenblum & Travis, 2006). The social construction of disability perspective assumes that biological factors cannot be meaningfully understood outside of the broader context of the disability, including relationships, institutions, and other situations that define and shape the meaning of disability (Jones, 1996).

The field of social construction of disability is also concerned with the role

language plays in the creation, shaping, and maintenance of disability (Zola, 1985). Supposedly neutral medical language such as *polio victims*, *wheelchair bound*, and *sufferers of heart disease* associate negative words with “imperfect” bodies (Zola, 1985). As Ferguson (1987) observed, tomorrow’s playground insults are foretold by today’s professional diagnoses. The words *idiot* and *moron* come to mind. Naming categories of people is where the construction of difference begins (Rosenblum & Travis, 2006).

The social construction of disability perspective does not deny that there are biological factors or functional limitations that can be appropriately associated with disabilities (Jones, 1996). To understand disability as a social construction is to celebrate individual difference, including physical and cognitive differences, while directing attention toward social change and the transformation of oppressive structures (Jones, 1996). Social constructionism does not assign blame to individuals with or without disabilities, but calls for everyone to help create a society where all are uniquely valued and included (Crow, 1992).

The social construction of disability is a complex paradigm. Architectural structures, educational policies, language, and the media are just a few of the countless social elements that can be examined through a social construction of disability lens. While the representation of disability in the media is only a piece of the bigger picture, it is an area that demands attention (Zola, 1985).

The social construction of disability and film. The social construction of disability perspective asserts that cinematic stories and characters influence the perceptions and opinions of viewers (Safran, 1998), both with and without disabilities (Black & Pretes, 2007). Movies may offer people a way to explore the unfamiliar in a

safe environment (Black & Pretes, 2007). For those with limited contact with people with disabilities, film, regardless of its accuracy, serves as a major information source on the nature of disabilities (Safran, 1998). For many, it is possible that television and film are their primary or only exposure to disability (Hoeksema & Smit, 2001). Although film is an artistic expression, viewers retain images that can directly influence their opinions of people with disabilities (Safran, 1998). Mass media provides the public with models of disability that are often uncritically accepted as reflective of reality by their frequency and visibility (Byrd & Elliot, 1988). Byrd and Elliot stated that portrayals of disabling conditions in the mass media are often inaccurate and demeaning.

Stereotypes. The links between disability and countless stereotypes are constantly reinforced in the media (Longmore, 1987). Biklen and Bogdan (1977) developed a list of ten stereotypes of disability; *pitiable and pathetic, the object of violence, sinister and/or evil, merely atmosphere, supercrip* (possessing specific skills or powers), *laughable, their own worst enemy, a burden, asexual, and incapable of fully participating in everyday life.* According to the authors, these stereotypes can be found in all forms of media ranging from classic literature to promotional posters for charities. If one assumed the stereotypes were truthful, one would “know” that people with intellectual disability are incompetent, irrational, unreliable, and dangerous (Bogdan & Knoll, 1995).

Despite the decades-long gap between the articulation of these stereotypes and today, they continue to be rampant in depictions of people with disabilities, both fictional and non-fictional (Harnett, 2000). In the years since Biklen and Bogdan’s 1977 publication, new stereotypes of people with disabilities have appeared in the literature. These stereotypes, clearly emerging from the ten identified by Biklen and Bogdan,

include two described by Hyler et al. (1991); the *homicidal maniac*, a subset of the sinister and evil stereotype, and the *narcissistic parasite*, which falls under the theme of the burden stereotype.

In his influential piece on stereotypes of disability, originally published in 1985, Longmore (2001) discussed the powerful associations between disability and criminality or evil in film. Villains often have handicaps and, out of resentment or bitterness, seek to destroy those without disabilities (Longmore, 2001). Longmore noted that this is the opposite of historical events, where those without disabilities have often attempted to destroy or eradicate people with disabilities:

As with popular portrayals of other minorities, the unacknowledged hostile fantasies of the stigmatizers are transferred to the stigmatized. The non-disabled audience is allowed to disown its fears and biases by 'blaming the victims,' making them responsible for their own ostracism and destruction (Longmore, 2001, pp. 67-68).

Disability stereotype: Sinister and evil. Disability is often used as a metaphor for menace in the media (Zola, 1985). Bogdan et al. (1982) suggested that, based on portrayals in movies, television, newspapers, and comics, we might infer that most dangerous people are scarred, maimed, ugly, deformed, and have physical disabilities or mental illnesses. In film and literature, disability is often associated with criminality and evil (Longmore, 2001). Bogdan et al. (1982) stated that by linking physical and mental difference with murder, terror, and violence, the media creates and perpetuates prejudices. The authors suggested that these prejudices result in the fear of people with disabilities and, ultimately, the exclusion of people with disabilities from society.

There are countless examples of this stereotype in stories and film, including the villains in *Rumpelstiltskin*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *The Sting* (1973), *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), and many James Bond films (Biklen & Bogdan, 1977). In *Peter Pan*, a hook hand represented evil and the queen in *Snow White* turned into a wart-nosed hunchback in order to conduct her villainous deeds (Bogdan et al., 1982). Appearances are often distorted to accentuate evil personality dimensions (Biklen & Bogdan, 1977). Disney's *The Lion King* (1994) not only gave the main villain a scar on his face to remind the audience that he was bad, he was even named after his disfigurement. Scar's face and name are as obvious a handicappist shorthand for evil as they come.

Michael Myers, the killer in *Halloween* (1978), is an example of a film monster who was placed squarely in the medical model of disability as he reinforced the sinister and evil stereotype. Zinoman (2011) described the creation of Michael Myers thusly:

Carpenter came up with this character [Michael Myers] at least in part to save money. You didn't need a great screenwriter to waste time figuring out motivation or a talented actor to work on the performance. Practically speaking, Myers was easy ... by emptying out all the details from the character, Carpenter solved the Monster Problem (pp. 182-183).

Everything that the audience knew about Michael Myers, beyond witnessing his murderous actions, came from the psychiatrist who spent time with Myers as a six-year-old after he killed his older sister. Doctor Loomis described Myers as having "no conscience, no understanding ... I spent eight years trying to reach him and then another seven trying to keep him locked up." Giving a doctor with a years-old memory of his diagnostic analysis of a murderous child nearly complete control over the audience's

understanding of Myers's motivation is placing his characterization right in the hands of the classic medical model of disability as it is described by Brown (1995) and Mercer (1992).

Disability stereotype: Pitiable and pathetic. In a seminal critique of mental institutions, Wolfensberger (1969) described the stereotype of people with disabilities as objects of pity. The author criticized the lack of growth that is possible for people when they are treated like eternal children who will never develop or mature. Robey, Beckley, and Kirschner's (2006) research demonstrated that the infantilization of people with disabilities is a stereotype that is alive and well. Their study measured the attitudes and language use of 30 staff people who worked with people with disabilities. The researchers found that the people they surveyed tended to associate disability-related words with words associated with children or child-like features.

Film characters such as Mary's brother, Warren, in *There's Something About Mary* (1998), Sue Sylvester's sister, Jean, in the television series *Glee* (2009 – 2015), and Dopey in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) were grown-ups with intellectual disability who were treated as if they were young children. Based on these characters' relationships to the leads in their respective stories, it is logical to conclude that filmmakers sometimes see siblings with disabilities as a way to communicate something about the lead characters. It did not make sense, narratively, for Mary and Sue to have children. It appears that the filmmakers chose to reveal that they were capable of nurture and love by giving them pitiable and pathetic adult siblings to treat like small children.

Analyzing stereotype use. It should be noted that not all stereotypes of disability are purely negative in content. Aspects of the supercrip stereotype, the rebellious free

spirit, and the enlightened one might be somewhat positive, but Gartner (1982) pointed out that whether the stereotypes are positive or negative, the individual's self is lost when seen through a lens of stereotype. Whether a metaphor is positive or negative, when the media perpetuates stereotypes and symbols, it links people with disabilities with specific traits (Longmore, 1987). These are associations that are made that should not, realistically, ever be applied to an individual just because they happen to have a disability (Hyler et al., 1991).

In a discussion of the layered roles disability plays in *South Park*, Mallett (2009) made the point that the use of stereotypes cannot be analyzed from a purely good versus bad position. Simply noting the use of stereotypes is not enough for thoughtful analyses (Mallett, 2009). Mallett argued that text analysis needs to go much further than just identifying the presence of stereotypes. Instead, a deeper analysis of the use of stereotypes allows for a much more complex analysis of a text (Mallett, 2009). The use of a stereotype as a critique of those who buy into it might perpetuate the stereotype on one level, but it can also inspire a more interesting and layered discussion that goes into the grey areas of art analysis and discourse (Mallett, 2009).

Past research on the social construction of disability and the media. There is a small body of research literature in the area of media and disabilities. The subjective nature of the field has resulted in a wide range of studies, few of which have much overlap in method or focus. Researchers concerned with media and disability have utilized numerous methodologies, ranging from heavily quantitative to fully qualitative. Knoll (1987) developed 83 categories for assessing photographs of people with disabilities. Haller (1998) assessed news media coverage of disability activism. Goggin

and Newell (2003) discussed Internet accessibility and the social construction of disability. In this section, I will describe some existing studies that relate to themes of social constructionism specifically in film, television, and literature.

Research sub-theme: Content analyses. Byrd, perhaps the most prolific researcher in the area of broad analyses of disability in the media, has been involved in numerous studies, often working with Elliot (e.g. Byrd, 1979a; Byrd, 1979b; Byrd, 1989; Byrd & Elliot, 1985; Byrd & Elliot, 1988; Byrd & Pipes, 1981; Elliot & Byrd, 1984a; Elliot & Byrd, 1984b). Many of Byrd's and Elliot's studies involve analyzing summaries of every film released in a multi-year (two to eleven) period and looking for occurrence of disability and audience and critical reactions (e.g. Byrd, 1989; Byrd & Elliot, 1985; Byrd & Elliot, 1988; Byrd & Pipes, 1981). The most obvious recurring pattern found in these studies is that unspecified mental illness represent the majority of disabilities that are portrayed in films. Byrd's findings demonstrate that disability is a topic that appears in many film synopses, but the depth of data ends there.

A few studies have looked at disability and film content for more than measures of occurrence. Donaldson (1981) analyzed a random sample of primetime television programs in 1979 to examine the visibility and images of characters portrayed as having disabilities. This study found that people with disabilities are generally not highly visible and are as likely to appear in negative roles as positive.

Safran (1998) analyzed every Academy Award winning film (for Best Picture, Best Actor, or Best Actress) that portrayed a major character with a disability or had strong disability themes. Safran found that none of the 25 analyzed films include representations of people with learning disabilities (rather than people with intellectual

disability, physical disabilities, or mental illness). Safran suggested that the presence of a learning disability may not easily provide the eye-catching imagery and dramatic plots that can generate audiences, but its absence from the wide screen also results in a lack of public exposure.

Lawson and Fouts (2004) coded every feature length Disney cartoon (34 in all) for occurrence of references to mental illness. The researchers found that 85% of Disney films contain verbal reference to mental illness, using words such as *crazy* and *insane*. The terms were found to almost always serve as an insult.

Several studies categorized specific disabilities that occurred when performing a broad survey of film content. Different researchers found the following characteristics to be the most frequent representations of people with disabilities: victimized (Byrd, 1989); having a mental illness (Byrd, 1989; Byrd & Elliot, 1985; Safran, 1998; Safran, 2001); blind (if the disability is not psychiatric) (Byrd & Elliot, 1988); having a substance abuse problem (Byrd, 1989); and not institutionalized (Byrd, 1989). Other dominating features that Byrd (1989) described included being middle class, unemployed, and having a negative outcome by the end of the film.

In a wide-ranging content analysis, Riley (2005) examined media at great depth, exploring disability in magazines, television, film, memoirs, advertising, and other media venues. The author harshly critiqued media participants from Barbara Walters to website administrators. Riley also provided examples, such as Sesame Street's casting director's deliberate increase in cast members with disabilities and the BBC's initiative to increase the presence of people with disabilities on television, of how media makers can be proactive about improving the often-harmful relationship between media and disability.

Farnall and Lyons (2012) conducted a content analysis of the presence of people with disability in 1671 prime time television advertisements. The researchers found that 1.7% of the advertisements had a character portrayed as having a disability. These findings, while seemingly low, did represent a 200% increase over 1999 totals (as reported in Farnall & Smith, 1999).

Research sub-theme: Thematic analyses. Several researchers analyzed the disability content in films and literature and took their analysis to a deeper level than the previously mentioned works. Long before the theoretical framework of the social construction of disability was articulated in the literature, Langworthy (1930) analyzed 311 works of literary fiction by authors who were not blind, and which featured at least one character who was blind. Langworthy found that in these written works the characters who were blind almost always fell into one of four categories: “the idealized and abnormally good; the repugnant and abnormally bad; the extremely clever; and the normal and well-described” (p. 272-273). Langworthy found that the stereotype of the idealized character occurred the most often. The author also noted that none of these writers had vision difficulties, so their writings communicated their beliefs about what people with blindness should be and do from an outsider’s perspective. Langworthy pointed out that the vast number of titles in this analysis indicates a strong interest on the part of writers and audiences for works that include characters with blindness, while not necessarily showing a concern for first person accounts or experiences.

Weinberg and Santana (1978) analyzed forty D.C. and Marvel comic books and found that physical differences from the norm were associated with villainous characters a large percentage of the time. For example, they found that 75% of characters with limb

deformities were villains, as were 71% of the characters with head distortions. The researchers found that while some characters with obvious disabilities were occasionally presented as good, they were never neutral (Weinberg & Santana, 1978).

In an exploration of 385 prime time television programs, airing over the course of one month, Wahl and Roth (1982), along with 85 volunteer research assistants, found that 110 of the programs had “some relevance to mental illness” (p. 602). Seventy-five programs involved minor references to mental illness and 35 had characters with mental illness (Wahl & Roth, 1982). The researchers found that almost 75% of the characters with mental illness had no family connections. Wahl and Roth also found that the people with mental illness tended to be male, menacing, aggressive, dangerous, and unpredictable.

Safran (2001) wrote an in-depth analysis of the depiction of disability in the six Academy Award winning films (between the 1930s and the mid-1990s) that dealt with war and disability. Safran found that a majority of the films featured characters with mental illness. Almost 17% of the total of the three major awards since 1927 have been for films with major disability themes (Safran, 2001).

Black and Pretes (2007) analyzed 18 films that had a main character with a physical disability. The researchers looked for themes of overall personality, community integration, and interpersonal relationships of the characters with disabilities. This study analyzed each film in terms of Biklen and Bogdan’s (1977) ten stereotypes of disabilities. Black and Pretes found that the most common stereotype was that of the maladjusted person with a disability, someone who was his or her own worst enemy. The least common stereotypes present in these films were pitiable/pathetic and sinister/evil (Black

& Pretes, 2007). This study also found that people with disabilities tended to be integrated into community life, but they were very rarely integrated in employment or education situations. The authors concluded that filmmakers have made progress in dispelling some stereotypes (dangerous monster, pitiable victim), but continue to perpetuate some stereotypical images of people with disabilities (asexual, unable to be educated or employed, self-destructive).

Summary of the film and disability research literature. The social construction of disability and film is an intersection of theory and media that is so subjective it does not lend itself to heavily quantitative research methods. While data can be gleaned from film summaries or audience survey responses, concretely generalizable data would be an elusive goal of research in this area. What the research literature does suggest, however, is that there are many approaches one can take when analyzing disability in the media. While the picture will never be conclusive or complete, there is a lot of room in the literature for studies to contribute new perspectives and research methodologies to the conversation.

Horror art

In the following section I will articulate my second theoretical perspective: horror art theory. There is no unified theory of horror art, so my theoretical perspective is an amalgamation of multiple theories in horror art and film studies. My intention for this discussion of horror art is to provide guidance for my analysis of the role of disability in my chosen representative artifact of horror art, *BtVS*.

Origin of the term *horror*. In a discussion of horror art theory, Twitchell (1985) suggested that what frightens us usually involves the invasion of the abnormal into our

normal world. The author notes that *horror* refers to a specific effect of fright. Horror causes us to pause momentarily, frozen between fight and flight (Twitchell, 1985). The Latin word *horrere* means “to bristle” and it describes the way our nape hair stands on end in moments when we shiver in excitement (Twitchell, 1985). Twitchell noted that the word *horripilation* is still used in zoology to describe goose bumps. Up until the nineteenth century horror was used to refer to the sudden tremors experienced with plummeting body temperatures as one’s fever broke (Twitchell, 1985). Sailors eventually used the term horror to describe the foam at the top of a wave in a rough sea (Twitchell, 1985) momentarily still, frozen between the wave’s swell and break.

Horror versus fear. Twitchell (1985) distinguished between fright and horror by stating that fright is based in reality, while dreams are at the root of horror. Fright involves concrete and sudden threats to one’s bodily safety (Lazarus, 1991). Lazarus explained that we respond to our own fright by taking immediate and spontaneous actions to reduce the threat and preserve ourselves. This generally involves running away or hiding from danger, or it might cause some to take actions to fight the source of danger (Lazarus, 1991). In an experiment exploring fear responses in chimpanzees, test animals were shown various objects (such as disembodied human heads and baby chimpanzee cadavers) and their responses tended toward avoidance and panic (Hebb, 1946). According to Hebb, these responses were associated with fright, not horror.

When a sense of anxiety is added to fright, one begins to approach the experience of real horror (Lazarus, 1991). While fear elicits a sort of spontaneous fight or flight response to avoid death or injury, the core theme of anxiety is that of an uncertain threat (Lazarus, 1991). When assessing a threat, a lack of clarity notably elicits different

reactions. A fearful person, aware of the presence of zombies in their world, might scream and run the moment a zombie bursts out of its grave, fully aware that their brains will be eaten if they do not escape. A horrified person, unaware that zombies really do exist, might freeze and stare at the monster, paralyzed and shocked, unable to comprehend that this is the unfortunate fate of their beloved grandmother.

In a discussion of the experience of real life horror, Solomon (2003) presented the collapse of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 as an example of a horrific experience shared by many witnesses. Solomon suggested that people inside the towers experienced the collapse of the buildings with a sense of fear (running as fast as one can to escape death) while those who watched on TV or from a safe distance in Manhattan were likely frozen and riveted in a state of horror.

A brief history of horror films. Horror films often reflect the trends and anxieties of their times (Waller, 1987). Viewing and analyzing horror films is best done with knowledge of current life at the time of the film, as well as historical themes in horror films (Waller, 1987). German Expressionist filmmakers of the 1920s used cinematic horror as a way to process anxieties of a post-World War I Germany (Kracauer, 1947). In the 1930s very little bloodshed was seen onscreen in horror movies (Mudnorf & Mudnorf, 2003; Sapolsky & Molitor, 1996). Horror films of the early 1940s dealt with themes of psychological horror, such as suppressed monsters. These monsters often signified the popularity of Freudian psychology during that decade (Mudnorf & Mudnorf, 2003).

Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) raised the bar for graphic violence and bloodshed and initiated the continuing trend of increasing gore and on-screen violence

(Mudnorf & Mudnorf, 2003). *Psycho* greatly influenced the shape the genre would take in the 1970s and 1980s as it legitimized violence and gore in film (Waller, 1987; Sapolsky & Molitor, 1996). Increases in the quality of film special effects allowed for even more gruesome images (Sapolsky & Molitor, 1996).

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s horror films retained their commercial viability and were often novel and topical (Waller, 1987). According to some film scholars, the modern era of the American horror film began in 1968, the year of George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* and Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* (Waller, 1987). Themes of *Night of the Living Dead* included the failure of the nuclear family and flaws in the government and media (Waller, 1987). *Rosemary's Baby* dealt with themes of female "madness," conspiratorial evil, and sexual repression, as well as the evil in the mundane and a woman's desire for independence (Waller, 1987), themes that would have been particularly relevant to women of the late sixties.

Some recent successes in the genre indicate a broad interpretation of the term horror. The hugely profitable *Paranormal Activity* franchise (2007) was made on a low budget with almost no violence. *Drag Me to Hell* (2009) featured comedic, non-gory violence amidst its genuinely scary threats. The HBO horror series *True Blood* (2008 - present) occasionally showers its sets with blood and guts, washing away any memory of horrific subtlety. Supposed horror films such as *Sharknado* (2014) and *Piranha 3DD* (2012) ("Piranha 3 double-D") eschew the subtle to a point where they are far more campy than horrific.

Modern scholarly definitions of *horror art*. Horror scholars have produced a body of literature of succinct, though not homogenous, descriptions of the genre.

Categorizing novels, films, plays, and paintings as *horror art* requires different criteria, but the cross-art, cross-media genre takes its name from the emotion it elicits, according to Carroll's summary of the generic rules (1990). Twitchell (1985) summed up horror art as not simply a genre, strictly speaking, but rather "a collection of motifs in a usually predictable sequence that gives us a specific physiological effect – the shivers" (p. 8). Affect elicitation is not necessarily consistent within many genres (with the notable exception of humor), and this is one feature of horror art that makes it distinct from other types of art.

Urbano's (1998) analysis of modern horror films and its effects is based in Freud's theory of anxiety. Creators of art horror, Urbano asserted, use some combination of four strategies to produce the effect of horror. The representation of the uncanny, the monster, violent physical assault, and "all hell breaking loose" are the essential elements of Urbano's Freudian horror.

Pinedo (1997), taking a postmodern feminist position, suggested there are several necessary elements to contemporary, postmodern works of horror (with a specific interest in film), including lack of narrative closure, a controlled and enjoyable experience, and a nihilistic universe that lacks rationality. One of Pinedo's essential elements of horror is boundary violation where the lines that divide good and evil, as well as normal and abnormal, are blurred.

Wood (2003) described the basic formula for the horror film as "normality is threatened by the monster" (p. 71). Wood's definition of normal, in this context, was conformity to the dominant social norms. Wood suggested that this definition of horror is

broad and can encompass a heterogeneous mix of movies, as the monster can be anything from a vampire to a devil-possessed child to an amorphous mass of goo.

Reoccurring theme in horror art: Categorical blurring. There are many reoccurring themes in horror art, including the eye, suppression, repression, and the threat of transformation through mere observation. One of the most prominent themes, and the one that shows up in almost every horror theoretician's works, is that of blurred categories and boundary violation. It is my opinion that this recurring feature in horror films may be the strongest link between horror theories and the social construction of disability.

Horror defines and redefines, clarifies and obscures the relationship between the human and the monstrous, the normal and the aberrant, the sane and the mad, the natural and the supernatural, the conscious and the unconscious, the daydream and the nightmare, the civilized and the primitive – slippery categories and tenuous oppositions indeed, but the very oppositions and categories that are so essential to our sense of life. (Waller, 1987, p. 12)

The unease that is precipitated by the blurring of categorical divisions is a major contributor to the experience of the horror art audience. These categories include human/non-human, male/female, good/evil, living/dead, as well as distinctions between humans and specific creatures (or between two non-human animals or creatures). Many monsters, such as ghosts, zombies, vampires, and mummies, do not fall cleanly on one side of the dead/alive categorical break (Carroll, 1990). The breaking down of said categories is often the core theme of horror art (Carroll, 1990; Pinedo, 1997).

Countless horror monsters and protagonists reveal by the end of the film that good

and evil are not always mutually exclusive. Many of the more thoughtful horror films blur the lines between good and evil as the monsters are shown in the occasional empathetic light and the heroes can reveal themselves to be less than angelic. Films such as *The Devil's Rejects* (2005) and *The Last House on the Left* (1972) both feature revenges on the "monsters" that make the audience rethink their original siding with the "good guys." Identification with the monster is a common theme in horror films and horror film theory (Zillman & Gibson, 1996). Uncertainty about one's hatred of a monster can be much more horrific than feeling an unadulterated contempt for a terrifying beast that is kept at an impersonal distance.

Horror art mixes categories to create monsters and these combinations can take the form of either fusion or fission figures (Pinedo, 1997). Fusion figures are made up of contradictory elements in the same body or identity (Carroll, 1990). Examples include the monster in *Frankenstein* (1931) (part living, part dead), the scientist in *The Fly* (1958) (part human, part fly), or the girl in *The Exorcist* (1973) (part human, part demon). Fission figures combine categorically different elements in one body, connected over time (Carroll, 1990). Examples of fission can be found in various werewolf films where a human and a wolf share the same body but do not inhabit the body at the same time. R. L. Stevenson's main characters from the novella *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) are another example of two figures that asynchronously inhabit the same body.

The blurring of human/non-human or interspecies boundaries is often the source of horrific tension in film. The first transformation scene in *An American Werewolf in London* (1981) dealt with the horror of categorical melding. A brief moment of fusion

bridges the gap between human and wolf. David sprouted hair, claws, and jagged teeth as he warped into a werewolf. Throughout the scene he looked utterly horrified and confused. Looking at his own rapidly deforming body that was becoming less and less human, David reacted along with the audience to the blurring of the lines that could generally be relied upon to make humans and wolves entirely distinct. Our bodies might be capable of excessive hairiness, but at a certain point an inhuman amount of hair, sprouting from a person's body, pushes the boundary between human and animal beyond a point of pure humanness. As David became a werewolf, his limbs grew and distorted. If he had morphed into a wolf in a split second, jumping from a human body to that of an animal, categories would be blurred, but the transformation would be surprising, confusing and, potentially, fear-inducing. David's agonizing transition, however, emphasized the horror of the experience as he stared intensely at his hands and limbs, slowly losing their humanness and morphing into those of a grotesque wolf-like creature.

Disability and the Normative Body

To connect the theoretical perspectives of horror art and the social construction of disability, I will explore the topic of disability and the normative body. Our culture tends to impose a dichotomy on bodies: the good and the bad (Davis, 1997). Bodies can be too short, too tall, too fat, too thin, too hairy, and too bald. We even label certain body parts as good or bad (Davis, 1997). Hair, face, eyes, lips, hands are good, while sexual organs, excretory organs, and underarms are generally bad (Davis, 1997). When extending the dichotomy to interpersonal comparisons, judging some bodies as good and some as bad requires an assumption that there is an ideal, normative body and any deviation from the norm is undesirable. Rosenblum and Travis (2006) write that dichotomization promotes

the images of a mythical “other” who is not at all like “us.” If we assume there is such thing as a right body, the exclusion of those with physical differences is a natural result (Rosenblum & Travis, 2006).

There is a general assumption that the normative body is that of an able-bodied adult, despite the fact that no one will ever be more than temporarily able-bodied (Breckenridge & Vogler, 2001). Snyder and Mitchell (2001) write about medicine’s advent of the normative body. This refers to the perfectly able body emerging as standard against which biological and cognitive variations are measured (Snyder & Mitchell, 2001). According to the authors, the “normal” body provides the baseline for determinations of desirability and human value. The normative body is a medicinal invention, a sterile idea of the body based on statistical averages and labeling biological difference as deviant (Snyder & Mitchell, 2001). According to Snyder and Mitchell, our bodies have been molded into generic vessels that carry public beliefs that serve to stigmatize anything outside of the “norm.” In recent decades, body and disability theorists have begun to take issue with the established approaches to material bodies, arguing that to treat the body as a discrete object that can be rehabilitated or cured by modern medicine is to decontextualize it from the world (Snyder & Mitchell, 2001).

Synthesis of the Social Construction of Disability and Horror Theory Perspectives

Looking at various horror theorists’ writings through the lens of the social construction of disability suggests that disability might play a predictable role in the creation of a sense of horror in horror films. According to Longmore (1987), the subtext of many horror films is a fear and loathing of people with disabilities. Early horror films incorporate the techniques and effects of the fear produced in circus freak tents (Bogdan

et al., 1982). *Freaks* (1932) featured a cast of real employees of the Barnum and Bailey's sideshow attractions, some with intellectual or physical disabilities (Bogdan et al., 1982). Lon Chaney, known for his ability to distort his body, became famous for playing physically deformed, morally depraved monsters (Bogdan et al., 1982). Horror often plays off of assumed fears of disability and disfigurement, and it often plays off of the association that Davis (1997) described between terms like *disability* and *grotesque*. This association can only exist in relation to a socially constructed idea of "normal" (Davis, 1997).

Themes of disability and physical differences are on display in the production of the science fiction horror film, *Alien* (1979). The film's screenwriter, Dan O'Bannon, used his own painful digestive experiences with Crohn's disease as an inspiration for the iconic scene where an alien burst out of a man's chest (Zinoman, 2011). Additionally, one of the early influences on the design of the film's titular alien was that of an oversized, deformed baby (Zinoman, 2011). These are just two of the seemingly unlimited examples of films using concrete, supernatural manifestations of disease and deformity in the construction of horror.

Conclusion

After an exploration of the existing writings on the social construction of disability in film, I feel that there is a distinct hole in the literature when considering studies that focus on disability's role in modern horror films. There are many theory pieces that explore themes of stereotypes and mention the role of disability in horror, but it is rarely the focus. There is a small body of rigorous research on the topic of social construction of disability in film. Smith's 2002 dissertation (published in book form in

2012), which explored the relationship between eugenics and horror films from the 1930s, is the only formal research that is closely related to the study I conducted. This dissertation, a methodologically rigorous look at a representative work of modern horror, is a multidisciplinary contribution to the literature on the social construction of disability in film, with a focus on horror art.

Chapter Three: Methods

Research Design

In this study I examined the role disability played in the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. I used multiple analytical methods, including content analysis, thematic analysis, and ideological rhetorical criticism to explore the series. In this chapter I will describe the methodology I developed and employed for this research.

I engaged in a multiple perspective analysis, as described by Green and Harker (1988). They presented a variety of ways one might approach research from multiple perspectives, such as including multiple researchers, theoretical frameworks, or methodologies within one study. As I stated in chapters one and two of this dissertation, my position as a researcher is that perspective and context are essential considerations when interpreting any artifact or phenomenon in our symbol-rich world. Therefore, I felt analyzing the roles disability may have played in *BtVS* using a variety of methods is an appropriate approach for a study emerging from a social construction of disability perspective. In the following chapters I will refer to the three analytical approaches as *Level One* (content analysis), *Level Two* (thematic analysis) and *Level Three* (ideological rhetorical criticism), to be described in detail in the sections to come.

I used Filemaker Pro (version 11.0v4) for Levels One and Two of this analysis. Filemaker Pro is a database software program that allows users to create multiple records that relate to one another through consistent fields for data entry. Filemaker Pro allows for modifications that will affect the fields in every record. Adding additional fields to or editing existing fields of one episode record automatically updates the format of every other record. Every field within a record allows for a variety of forms of data, such as the

forced selection between defined options (for example, *yes* or *no*), lists of items with checkboxes to select, or unlimited text. By building a database with one record for every episode of *BtVS*, I was able to enter unique information for each episode within each field, and then compare the information found within specific fields across records. Throughout this data collection, as I developed the dynamic database, I was able to add new fields that appeared on the record for every episode.

I used a set of *BtVS* DVDs to view the program throughout this study. On several occasions, as I reviewed the database, I watched scenes of *BtVS* streaming online on Netflix (<http://movies.netflix.com/WiHome>) when I needed to clarify details in the data. I gathered basic information about every episode of *BtVS* from the DVD box and menu, such as episode titles and episode number. I then used three episodes for the purpose of initial development of needed data fields and I prepared a Filemaker Pro record for each episode, modifying the database template as necessary. I then watched the entire series, recording disability-themed content in detail, as I will describe below. I used this data for the Level One analysis.

For the Level Two analysis, using the information I gathered in Level One, I performed a thematic analysis on the data for the entire series. I took some of the more compelling themes that surfaced during Level Two and selected four episode segments to analyze in Level Three via ideological rhetorical criticism (which I will describe in detail later in this chapter). Table 1 shows a simple outline of the methods that I will elaborate on in the sections below.

Table One

Three Levels of Analysis

Level	Material to be analyzed	Data	Type of analysis	Scope and depth
One	Complete series: DVD menu, every episode	Basic demographics: Writers, directors, character appearances, disability occurrence	Content analysis	Broad and shallow
Two	Complete series: every episode	Disability content	Thematic analysis	Broad and deep
Three	Four episode segments	Disability content	Ideological rhetorical criticism	Narrow and deep

Description of Methodology

Level one: Content analysis of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. I began with a content analysis of the series by doing a broad survey of basic information for every episode. For the purpose of this study, this analysis was broad and shallow, akin to past content analyses of disability in film (e.g. Byrd & Pipes, 1981; Byrd & Elliot, 1988; Byrd, 1989). My intention for this level of analysis was to organize and develop the database, record basic information about the series, analyze basic demographic information about the series, and enter Levels Two and Three of this study fully prepared to engage more deeply with the material.

Level one: Database design. For Level One of data collection I created a database on Filemaker Pro 11.0v4 software made up of one record for every episode of *BtVS*. Before watching any of the series, I created 144 identical records with empty fields for basic information about every episode, such as episode name, number, season, original airdate, writer, director, major character appearances, and a brief episode synopsis.

Appendix A shows representative screen shots of pages from the Filemaker Pro episode records.

Level one: Exemplar episodes. I selected three episodes of *BtVS* to use as examples as I developed a list of additional categories and fields within the database. I chose episodes that I recalled had strong disability content based on my memories of watching the show years ago. I was mindful to build fields that would capture subtle content and disability themes that went beyond the obvious, visible, and physical, as I was not only interested in obvious depictions of characters with disabilities.

As I watched these episodes closely with the research question in mind, I developed fields for data collection that provided me with a concise way to record detailed information for the content and thematic analyses. I organized these fields within a series of tabs in each record. I developed a layout that was logical (to me), based on my experience watching the example episodes. As I watched these three episodes, I revisited and revised the data fields and coding view format so that they would be increasingly compatible with a variety of episodes.

The first tab of the Filemaker Pro coding screen, “Level 1” included fields for the basic descriptive details of the episodes as well as characters with disabilities. The next tab, “General EP notes,” had fields for dialogue and general observations relating to disability. The subsequent tabs, “D1: Level 2” – “D5: Level 2,” had fields for data related to each character with a disability. Within these tabs, along with fields for specific thematic content, I added fields for information about plot, dialogue, setting, characters, music, wardrobe, make-up, or any other elements that might be of interest during data collection. I had undefined fields on each tab for additional relevant observations. I aimed

to record data with consistent and precise language that would make patterns and themes easier to identify across episodes. By designing initial data collection tools as I viewed over two hours of *BtVS*, I hoped to increase the trustworthiness of these methods. I recognize the inherently subjective nature of this research, but I sought to find a way to integrate quantitative data into this qualitative analysis in order to analyze *BtVS* in a unique, rigorous manner.

Level one: Data collection. After I conducted the three-episode preliminary analysis and database development, I began the data collection phase of the Level One analysis. I viewed the series *BtVS* in its entirety. This amounted to 144 episodes, totaling approximately 108 hours of film. As I viewed each episode for the Level One analysis, the corresponding Filemaker record was displayed on a laptop computer, seated to the side of a desktop computer on which I viewed the episodes. I completed a Level One data entry for each record as the episode progressed. I also kept a research journal on my desk to record any ideas, thoughts, and questions that occurred throughout the coding process. However, as the database fields were sufficient to capture my thoughts and realizations throughout my data collection, I did not end up using the research journal.

In the fields I developed in Level One, there was room to record my observations of details in every scene involving disability. The way I labeled and categorized these fields emerged in the preliminary analysis. As I described earlier, I developed fields to record information related to many elements of each episode, such as costumes, make-up, and sound design, that stood out as being potentially of interest for broader exploration on themes of disability. I also had a field available for any observations that did not fit into any of the prescribed categories. The Filemaker Pro software allowed me to add new

fields to every episode's record, so I was prepared to add new fields that I had not created during the exemplar episodes. In the end, I did add some new items to checklists within some fields, such as *blindness* to the list of possible disabilities a character might experience upon its first occurrence, but I did not add new fields after my initial development of this database.

Level one: Data analysis. Using the information I gathered from viewing every episode of *BtVS*, I performed a content analysis on the series. Every episode had a unique Filemaker record. I recorded appearances of major and minor recurring characters in every episode. I recorded disability themed language and occurrences of characters with disabilities. This provided me with a demographic framework of the series within which I placed the thematic explorations in Levels Two and Three. Level One allowed me to gather basic information so I could focus on deeper explorations of themes in the subsequent analyses.

Level two: Thematic analysis of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. In Level Two of this study, I coded every episode of *BtVS* and then identified and developed the themes that I found in the data. In this phase of analysis I looked at details that I considered to be related to disability from every episode in the series. I then performed a thematic analysis. I followed the structure of thematic analysis as outlined in *The Qualitative Report* journal (Aronson, 1994), as described below. Finally, I used these records to identify appropriate show segments for the deeper analyses, Level Three, based on the themes that emerged in the analysis.

Level two: Data analysis. As I established in the literature review, the existing research on disability in film is limited and there are many studies that reported only the

occurrence of disability in film (e.g. Byrd, 1989; Byrd & Elliot, 1988; Byrd & Pipes, 1981). Many of these studies were not based on a viewing of the films themselves, but a review of brief film synopses. In this dissertation I did not seek to add to the literature that shallowly analyzed a vast pool of media objects. Instead, I took a broad approach to the initial analysis of *BtVS* (Level One) so as to pinpoint themes of particular interest related to disability which I followed with progressively narrower and deeper analyses in Levels Two and Three. In Level Two I performed a thematic analysis on all 144 episodes of the series by coding my notes on every episode and identifying and developing themes and patterns related to disability.

As I reviewed the data on the disability content in every episode of *BtVS*, I looked for patterns and themes of interest that surfaced in the database. Using the *find* function in FileMaker Pro and reading through my notes and database, I began to identify recurring themes throughout the series. I spent much of this phase of data analysis reading through the database repeatedly, rather than conducting automatic counts within the database. The data, while somewhat uniform in content and form across episodes, included enough subjective observations and data that I did not rely on any automatic assessment or count functions in Filemaker Pro.

The identified themes evolved from reviews of the data with my research question, “what is the role of disability in *BtVS*?” in mind. Through repeated readings of the database, I identified and refined the thematic categories. As I explored the data through the lens of my research question, my aim was to identify and articulate several major themes that each served to connect a notable subsection of my observations. I worked and reworked the identified themes until I found a relatively short list of themes

that were compatible with the most important or salient content of the recorded observations and notes. I will discuss these themes in great detail in chapters four and five, and they also served to directly inform the artifact selections for Level Three of this study, the ideological rhetorical criticism.

I retroactively added items for identified themes and sub-themes at the top of the list of disabilities in the field for characters with disabilities (see Appendix A). One of the sub-themes did not emerge until later in the analysis so it was not included. I identified which themes applied to each character based on the database. I did not use these additional data points to produce any final counts or conclusions but, rather, I used this as a way to narrow searches in the database when considering particular themes or patterns. I used shorthand to make the terms easily searchable.

Level three: Ideological rhetorical criticism of selected scenes from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Based on the themes that emerged from the analysis in Level Two and the records for each episode, I identified four episode segments that I felt contained material that would provide fascinating content to explore in the Level Three analysis. I performed ideological criticisms as described in *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice* (Foss, 2009) on these four artifacts.

According to Foss (2009), an ideological analysis is the appropriate method of rhetorical criticism when the researcher is interested in looking beyond the surface of an artifact to discover the “beliefs, values, and assumptions [the artifact] suggests” (p. 209). “Ideological criticism gives [the researcher] the opportunity to focus [their] analysis on a particular subject of interest” (p. 215) such as “race, class, sexual orientation, religion, and ability, for example” (p. 215 - 216). *BtVS* has attracted scholarship in areas such as

feminist studies (e.g. Conaway, 2007; Mayer, 2006; Wells, 2007), critical theory (e.g. Byers, 2000), queer theory (e.g. Kachgal, 2008), and other ideological interests (e.g. Burkhead, 2010; Nichols, 2010). I am interested in a focus on the social construction of disability and, considering the wealth of themes of *BtVS*, an ideological rhetorical criticism was therefore fitting for this research.

Briefly, the four steps of an ideological criticism are (1) selecting an artifact, (2) analyzing the artifact, (3) formulating a research question, and (4) writing the final essay (Foss, 2009). Within the structure of this dissertation, I present the steps of artifact-analysis in the following section on methodology. I provide a detailed account of the collected data in chapter four, and I complete the criticism's final step, the "final essay" (analysis), in chapter five.

Level three: Selection of scenes. As Foss (2009) explained, the selection of an artifact for a rhetorical criticism occurs when the critic encounters an item, work, or body of work that generates intrigue, unease, amazement, or raises questions. Following this guideline, a close review of the disability content throughout the series, gathered in Level One of the data collection, with the themes that emerged in the Level Two analysis, provided me information to make a selection of segments of *BtVS* for further exploration. To engage in rhetorical criticism did not require an identification of the "correct" segments of *BtVS* for analysis. Any episodes that stir up fascination or interest are appropriate for a rhetorical analysis (Foss, 2009) and Levels One and Two of the data collection and analysis provided me with information to identify episodes that had content I found fascinating and worthy of further analysis. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) described in their overview of naturalistic inquiry, a purposive rather than random,

sampling increases the range of data. Unusual or deviant themes are not missed with a purposive sampling, as they can be when the sampling is random (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This approach is fitting for an exploration of a complex and long-running television series that had the potential to take this research in a wide range of thematic directions.

I reviewed the database and eliminated all episodes that had little or no data relating to disability. I continued to review the records from Level One, eliminating the episodes with the least amount of intriguing disability content according to my notes, until I selected four episode segments that had a comparably strong disability themed content related to the themes that emerged during the thematic analysis of Level Two. I performed an ideological criticism on the selected segments of *BtVS*. I followed a prescribed method of analysis as described by Foss (2009). Although I adapted the presentation of the four-step process slightly to fit this dissertation's format, I followed Foss' (2009) methodology, which is geared toward stand-alone analysis, with precision.

Level three: Data collection. Within step two of an ideological criticism, analyzing the artifact, Foss (2009) broke the exploration of an artifact down into four parts: "identifying the presented elements of the artifact; identifying the suggested elements linked to the presented elements; formulating an ideology; and identifying the functions served by the ideology" (p. 214). I conducted an ideological criticism on each of the four episode segments, one at a time, following the prescribed methods for each one.

Part one: Identifying the presented elements. First, I identified the basic, observable features of the segment (Foss, 2009). I did this briefly in Level Two of the

data collection, but this data collection was much more detailed. I watched through the segments closely, several times each, and recorded every visible or audible feature I felt might be tied to the ideological theme of the social construction of disability. This included costume, make-up and prosthetics, special effects, lighting, sound, music, spoken words, utterances, physical characteristics, performance style, movement, and anything else that caught my eyes, ears, or interest. As Foss noted, performing an ideological criticism allows the critic to focus the exploration of an artifact on the subject of interest, so it is methodologically sound in this context for me to intentionally analyze the scenes with a focus on disability. As opposed to the occasionally broad observations of Levels One and Two, in this phase of this analysis, I was very detailed as I recorded my observations. I wrote each element on an index card, cut in fourths, using small handwriting to conserve paper.

Level three: Data analysis.

Part two: Identifying suggested elements. For this step of the ideological criticism, I articulated one or more ideas, allusions, themes, or concepts that each of the presented elements suggested (Foss, 2009). I wrote the *suggested elements* on the back of each corresponding index card. Broad concepts, such as helplessness or strength, and concrete references, such as clothing indicating specific cultures or statuses, for example, were all appropriate here (Foss, 2009).

Part three: Formulating an ideology. In this stage of the criticism, I grouped the suggested elements into categories and organized them into a coherent framework (Foss, 2009). At this point I did not look at the presented elements of *BtVS* at all; my focus was entirely on the suggested elements. I divided the index cards into broad thematic

categories with the goal of finding two to five categories that most of the items would fall into. This process involved repeated categorizing and recategorizing of the suggested elements. I identified from the chosen segments of *BtVS*. I will describe the distillation of themes from this analysis in chapter four.

Part four: Identifying the functions served by the ideology. I will discuss the ideologies I identified in the selected scenes and the importance or meaning behind those ideologies in chapter five. I will discuss how these relate to my findings in my Levels One and Two analyses. I will then explore what these ideologies might mean in the world beyond *BtVS*.

Chapter Four: Results

The purpose of this research was to explore the role of disability in the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. In this chapter I first define terms specific to *BtVS* that I found necessary to include in the data description and analysis. I then devote the rest of this chapter to a description of the results of the three levels of analysis: Level One (content analysis), Level Two (thematic analysis), and Level Three (ideological rhetorical criticism). Level One provides a broad and shallow review of the entire series' disability content. Level Two is a broad and deep look at the disability themes in the series. Level Three is narrow in focus and deep in detailed analysis of four scenes that represent the themes in unique ways. In chapter five I discuss the meaning and importance of these findings.

In chapters four and five, when referencing a specific episode, I represent it as *[Episode Title]* ([Season]#[Episode]#) on its first use and *[Episode Title]* for each subsequent incident. For example, *Welcome to the Hellmouth* (S1E1) would represent the series' inaugural episode. Appendix B contains a description of the series *BtVS* to provide additional context for readers unfamiliar with the show so the following results and discussion can be followed without a viewing of *BtVS*.

Terms Specific to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

In this exploration of the content and themes of *BtVS* I use several terms specific to the series. *Buffyverse* refers to the universe of *BtVS* and that of the spin-off television series, *Angel* (1999-2004). This term also refers to the world of the comic books that continue the *BtVS* story. *Big Bad* is shorthand for a major villain with a long story arc who serves as Buffy's primary adversary for at least a full season of the series. *The*

Scoobies, inspired by Scooby-Doo and his mystery-solving friends, is a term that refers to the core group that works with Buffy to defend the world against demons and other dangerous forces. While the Scoobies' membership changed over the course of the series, the major players are Giles, Xander, Willow, Anya, Tara, Dawn, and Spike.

Level One Results: Demographics

For the first level of analysis, I performed a demographic survey of *BtVS*. This data was intended for analysis and organization as I pursued various avenues of data exploration. I recorded basic details of each episode, including name, episode writers, plot synopsis, and character appearances. I recorded the presence of characters with disabilities or mental illness. I recorded every occurrence of disability-themed language along with its context. In this section I will describe the data that relates to character appearances, disability-themed word use, types of disability that characters experienced, and rates at which specific characters experienced disability.

Character appearances. I recorded the appearance of 46 formally identified characters throughout the series. I chose these characters based on their total number of appearances by episode according to the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com) before doing my own count, which was not always consistent with imdb.com, and I recorded the occurrence of those who appeared in the most episodes. Two characters, Buffy Summers and Xander Harris, appeared in all 144 episodes. Chao-Ahn, the least frequently recurring named character in the database, appeared in seven episodes. Upon reviewing the database, I determined that 21 characters, including the most-occurring characters, the seven seasons' Big Bads, and several others who were significant plot participants, necessitated a description for readers of this dissertation who are not familiar

with the series. Appendix C has a description of each of these 21 characters, divided into heroes and villains, as well as the actors' names and number of episodes in which they appear. When I use the term *major characters* throughout this paper, I will be referring to these 21 most-occurring characters. I will refer to the rest of the characters in the database count, as well as those who only briefly appeared in the series, as *minor characters*.

Disability-themed word use. I recorded disability-themed language used throughout *BtVS*, along with dialog or plot context for clarity. This language included words that explicitly reference disability and mental illness such as *crazy*, *psycho*, *dumb*, *stupid*, and *lame* and comments that referred to disability or mental illness as a feature of a character. For example, in *Graduation Day, Part One* (S3E21), Buffy contrasted herself with Faith:

Giles: "Faith has you all at a disadvantage, Buffy."

Buffy: "Because I'm not crazy or because I don't kill people?"

Giles: "Both, actually."

And in *Same Time, Same Place* (S7E3), disability-themed language is also used to describe a character:

Anya: "Spike's insane in the basement."

Willow: "Spike's what in the whatment?"

Anya: "Insane, base."

I also recorded instances of language referencing disability in a manner that did not explicitly refer to a character with a disability. For example in *The Dark Age* (S2E8) Buffy said, "Now I have to blow my entire allowance to get this stupid tattoo removed."

Characters in *BtVS* frequently used vocabulary with disability etymologies. The vast majority of the episodes (88.1%) included at least three occurrences of disability-themed vocabulary (often many more), and only one episode did not include any disability-themed vocabulary. The notable exception to this was the relative lack of the word *retarded* in any variation, which was only uttered four times in the series.

The words *lame* and *cripple*, which reference physical disabilities, were used in 29 and 3 episodes, respectively. *Lame* was generally used metaphorically, for example “Well, that was the lamest comeback of our times,” and “Halloween is so lame.” The term was only used once to refer to impaired walking ability. In its three occurrences, *cripple* was used once literally, when Balthazar declared “it’s been 100 years since my enemy crippled me,” in *Bad Girls* (S3E14), and twice metaphorically, as when Jonathan said, “The burden of being beautiful and athletic, that’s a crippler,” in *Earshot* (S3E18). Words that reference mental illness, *crazy*, *insane*, and *psycho*, were used in 91, 32, and 17 episodes respectively, sometimes referring to someone’s perceived mental illness, “You’re making her sound like some psychopath,” and sometimes not, “I’d be insanely happy.” The terms *idiot*, *stupid*, and *retard(ed)*, terms that indicate intellectual disability, were used in 36, 74, and 4 episodes respectively both literally, “I’m not an idiot,” and not, “stupid pen.”

Words related to sensory differences, *blind*, *deaf*, and *dumb*, were used in 20, 4, and 29 episodes respectively. *Blind* referred to actual blindness twice, and 18 times as a metaphor in phrases like “blind luck” or “blind panic.” The term *deaf* was always used to refer to hearing loss, as in “I’m not deaf,” and “I think I’ve gone deaf.” *Dumb* was used once to refer to speaking, “he’d have to be deaf, dumb, and blind.” In every other

occurrence, dumb implied lack of intelligence, immaturity, or inconsequentiality, such as “dumb jock,” “I lost my Emily Dickenson [book]. It’s dumb, but I like her around, like a security blanket,” and “I was too wrapped up in my own dumb life to notice.”

The analysis of disability-themed word use revealed that the writers of *BtVS* used language in way that sounded similar to the use of disability-themed language in the real world. The occasional use of disability language to describe actual disability, and the frequent use of disability language as metaphor, appears to be an accurate representation of the language of the time of the series, 1997-2003. This revealed an assumption that disability language can be useful to indicate disability, “I think I’ve gone deaf!” in *BtVS*. However, it appears to be most commonly used as a way to emphasize that something is vaguely bad, negative, or seen as lowly, as in “what a stupid game” or “this is a dumb world.” This implies that terms based in disability are, perhaps, a quick and easy way for the characters to comment on the negative value of a person or situation without needing to demonstrate a clear link to the specific disability they referenced.

The exception to this is the infrequent use of variations of the term *retarded*. The word retarded in any form (*retard*, *retarded*, *retardation*) appeared only four times in the series. In these cases, the context I recorded for each disability-themed word was useful for further analysis of the precise use of the term. Of the four instances of some form of the word retarded, one came from a single-episode character who was presented as a despicable bully, Jack O’Toole, in *The Zeppo* (S3E13). The second character to use the word retarded was Warren, the villain of season six, in *Life Serial* (S6E5), during an argument with his friends about the James Bond film, *Moonraker*. Warren referred to the transformation of a gondola into a hovercraft as “retarded.” Xander referred to the nerdy

would-be villains Jonathan and Andrew as “social retards” in *Grave* (S6E22). In *Touched* (S7E20), Faith, the conflicted and often villainous Slayer, admitted that feeling like Mayor Wilkins was a father figure “sounds retarded.” To summarize, the four characters who used the word retard or retarded were a bully, a major villain, a protagonist, and a somewhat villainous Slayer. Compared to the frequency of other disability language in show, the relative lack of use of the term retarded puts a bit more weight on the specific uses. That three out of four of the characters who used the term were villainous indicates that there is an association between the use of this word and the negativity of a character. It then appears like this was a tool of character construction and development, a theme that I will discuss in Level Two.

Monster demographics. I recorded every unique monster in the series, even briefly, and their physical and personality characteristics. My intention for this data was to uncover disability themed tendencies in the creature design and characterization of monsters in *BtVS*. I recorded information such as skin color, texture, number of limbs, and whether or not the creatures were verbal. I noted whether the creatures were perceived as attractive or ugly by the characters on the show (as indicated by dialogue), whether the characters were initially considered to be good, bad, or neutral, and if they were ultimately revealed to be good, bad, or neutral. Some monsters with indications of disability included a group of demons with no mouths and a spell-casting man with a scar over his milky, blinded eye.

I found no notable patterns within these data indicating a strong connection between disability and monsterhood in *BtVS*. An exact count of monsters was not possible, as some appeared in large groups. However, I did find that well under a quarter

of the monsters in *BtVS* displayed any observable indications of disability. This was lower than I predicted, based the patterns of disability occurrence that can be found in major film monsters (Bogdan et al., 1982).

Types of disabilities represented in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and occurrence rates. A wide variety of disabilities were represented in *BtVS*, yet at occurrences that did not mirror the real world. The types of disabilities represented in *BtVS* included physical deformities, mental illnesses, muteness, and blindness. The rates of occurrence for different disabilities are noteworthy. Some were over-represented (for example, muteness) and some were underrepresented (Deafness). Mental illness was the most commonly occurring disability in *BtVS*. Overall, the occurrence of disability was much higher than a realistic representation of occurrence would be.

Disability occurred in 84 out of 144 episodes of *BtVS* (58.33% of the total episodes). Forty-four episodes (30.56%) featured a single character with a disability. Twenty-four episodes (16.67%) had two characters with disabilities. Seven episodes (4.86%) had three characters with disabilities, and six episodes (4.17%) included four to thirteen characters with disabilities. Three episodes (2.08%) had ambiguous numbers of people, well beyond a dozen, with implied disabilities. Getting a complete count of disability occurrence was difficult, as there were several episodes where this would be impossible. In *Hush* (S4E10), every single resident of Sunnydale was mute, but an actual character count was neither possible nor necessary. Throughout season five Glory's minions, whom she transformed by sticking her fingers in their brains and sucking out much of their mental abilities and energy, increased in number to a point where Glory had crowds of followers. I recorded Glory's minions as having mental illness, as they

were initially shown to be residing in the psychiatric ward of the Sunnydale hospital. Not including the crowds of characters with implied disabilities in the episodes *Hush*, *The Weight of the World* (S5E21), and *The Gift* (S5E22), there were 82 unique occurrences of characters having a disability (or disabilities) throughout *BtVS*. Some of these characters experienced disability for one episode; some of their disabilities lasted for multiple episodes (or permanently). When broken up into distinct episode counts of disability (meaning, when I counted disabilities that lasted more than one episode one time per episode), there were at least 169 occurrences of characters experiencing disability in *BtVS*.

I recorded occurrences of physical deformity experienced by five characters over the course of 11 episodes. Eight characters (in four episodes) had an intellectual disability. Seven characters experienced restrictive mobility limitations in twelve episodes. Physical frailty was a limiting factor for 11 characters over 16 episodes. Mental illness, not including Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), occurred in 28 characters in 45 episodes. This did not include the Gentlemen's multiple henchmen in *Hush* and countless numbers of Glory's minions, who were presented as having mental illness (the henchmen wore straightjackets, Glory's minions were shown to be the growing population of patients in the psychiatric hospital throughout the season). I recorded indications of characters having OCD separately than other mental illness due to its distinct presentation in *BtVS*. OCD occurred in three characters over 13 total episodes. I also recorded incidents of missing or replaced body parts (one character in one episode), and facial disfigurements (six characters in four episodes).

Sensory impairment or loss occurred much less frequently. Blindness occurred in seven characters in five episodes and muteness in two character occurrences in two episodes, plus the entire population of Sunnydale in *Hush*. It is worth noting that there were no incidents of Deafness in the series. The only acknowledgement of Deafness in *BtVS* occurred in *Hush* when Buffy and Willow wake up, confused by their lack of voice, and Willow mouthed to Buffy, "I think I've gone deaf," but it was never experienced by any characters.

Disability experiences by character. Some noteworthy patterns emerged when looking at how characters experienced disabilities in *BtVS*. Almost every major character and many minor characters experienced disability at some point during the series. A character's role as a hero or villain acted as a strong indicator of whether the disability was permanent or temporary. Heroes tended to have temporary disabilities, villains' disabilities tended to be permanent. Additionally, Buffy's many experiences of disability decrease in frequency over the course of the series to a notable extent.

Of the 21 main characters (described in Appendix C), 19 experienced disability at some point in the series. This appears to be a much higher rate than in real life, suggesting that the makers of *BtVS* did not use disability as a way to establish a sense of reality but, instead, as a tool of character development. In my Level Two analysis I will discuss how disability was used to develop characters in *BtVS*. The only major characters who did not explicitly experience disability were the First Evil, Oz, and Warren Meers. The First Evil was a powerful shape-shifting force of evil that was framed as the most epic threat of the entire series and was not a corporeal character that I recorded in the database. I did not record Oz, the werewolf, as having a disability, but his exit from

Sunnydale and the series was entirely due to his fear of his inability to control his occasional transformation into his werewolf form, which one could argue was a sort of supernatural representation of a mental illness. While he did not appear in the database due to the restrictions I placed on my observations of mental illness (that there must be a clear reference, either through a concrete visual indicator or through dialogue), Warren Meers was, arguably, presented as increasingly sociopathic throughout his appearances in the series.

Major characters were portrayed as experiencing some sort of disability for both single episode story arcs as well as multiple episode storylines 34 times throughout the series. The Master, Drusilla, Spike (on three separate occasions), Mayor Wilkins, Adam, and Glory, all Big Bads (Spike began the series as a Big Bad and ended as a hero), each experienced disabilities that lasted longer than one episode. Tara, Giles, and Xander are the three major protagonists who experienced a disability for more than one episode. Buffy only experienced disabilities that lasted one episode or less. Drusilla, Mayor Wilkins, Adam, Glory/Ben, and Xander all experienced permanent, irreversible disabilities. Every major character experienced disability at some point (except for the First Evil, Oz, and Warren) for at least one episode. As far as permanence, of the experiences of disability in major characters, 26 were temporary, often reversed or eliminated in one episode or over the course of a season (as is the case with Spike in seasons two, four, and seven).

Six major characters experienced permanent disabilities. Drusilla, Mayor Wilkins, Adam, and Glory, all Big Bads, were portrayed as having disabilities throughout their presence in the show. For example, Mayor Wilkins exhibited stereotypical behaviors

associated with OCD in almost every scene he appeared in. Two major protagonists, Xander and Joyce, experienced a disability that occurred late in their presence on the show and lasted until their final episode. Joyce has an unidentified natural brain disease that eventually killed her in the middle of season five, and Xander experienced a permanent eye injury four episodes before the end of the series.

Of the countless minor characters throughout the series (those not included in the list of 21 characters in Appendix C), 36 were presented as having some sort of disability or mental illness. This did not include the dozens of Glory's minions who were shown to have mental illness (as indicated by their residence in a psychiatric hospital) and the multiple henchmen in *Hush* who wore broken straightjackets. Glory's minions appeared throughout the series in increasing numbers, demonstrating a season-long increase in Sunnydale residents who had been brain-sucked, but the rest of the minor characters with disabilities were not represented for arcs longer than one episode. Seven of these characters had disabilities that were temporary, lasting only one episode due to supernatural and reversible causes. Nineteen of these minor characters had implied permanent disabilities or mental illnesses. Ten of the distinct characters who had their brains sucked by Glory, as well as the masses of minions at the end of season five, likely had temporary disabilities, as Tara's similar brain suck was revealed to be reversible. In my Level Two analysis I will explore the themes that arose from the patterns in this first level of analysis.

A clear pattern emerged through an examination of Buffy's twelve experiences with disabilities. In the first half of the series (episodes 1 – 72), Buffy experienced disability once every 8 episodes (12.5%). In the second half of the series (episodes 73 –

144), Buffy experienced disability once every 24 episodes (4.2%). Breaking the series down into 36-episode quarters, Buffy had disabilities in 8.3%, 16.7%, 5.6%, and 2.8% of the episodes, respectively. *Normal Again*, which took place near the end of the second to last season (season six) and included the only incident of disability in the fourth quarter of the series, was the final episode where Buffy experienced any sort of disability. Buffy finished out the final 27 episodes of the show without experiencing any more disabilities or mental illnesses. This pattern does not reflect the real world, where people's experiences of disabilities would be unlikely to measurably decrease over their late teens and early twenties, as they do for Buffy. This clearly indicates that disability played roles in *BtVS* well beyond representing a realistic portrayal of disability, as I examine in the next section of Level Two results.

Level Two Results: Thematic Analysis

I identified three thematic lenses through which to look at the role of disability in *BtVS*: character development, plot development, and atmosphere development. These three themes are fundamentally linked by their relationship to time. In broad terms, character development often indicates long-term changes over days, months, years, or lifelong developments. Plot developments, while also tied to long-term story progression, generally are the most notable in the database over the shorter term (minutes, hours, and days). Atmospheric development refers to the feeling in the present moment, the gut feelings of both the audience and the *BtVS* characters.

I found these themes related directly to the Level One analysis. The rates at which specific characters experienced different disabilities throughout the series indicated these themes early on in this analysis. That heroic characters and villainous characters

experienced different sorts of disabilities at notably different rates indicated that there might be links between disability and goodness or evilness. In this section I will first describe the role of disability as in the establishment and development of characters in *BtVS*. Next, I will describe the use of disability as a mechanism for plot development. Finally, I will describe the use of disability in *BtVS* as a tool of developing atmosphere.

Theme one: Character development. For the purposes of this thematic analysis, I broke down the theme of character development into three sub-themes: character establishment, individual character development, and indirect character development. *Character establishment* refers to a character's introduction. This sub-theme emerged from a recognition that some characters were developed immediately upon their introduction at least partially through a disability and this did not quite fit my initial definition of character development over the course of a character's story. This sub-theme still resides in the realm of long-term character development, as it played a part in the audience's and other *BtVS* characters' understanding of that character.

Individual character development indicates either a change in the audience's and, perhaps, the characters within the show's perception of a character or the addition of a new layer or dimension to our understanding of the character. For major characters, the introduction of disability often played a role in individual character development over the course of many years. For minor characters, often making only one-episode appearances, disability might have furthered their characterization over the course of a single episode.

The third sub-theme, *indirect character development*, refers to character development that was the result of disability in another character. This might come through interactions someone had with someone with a disability that impacts the

character within the show. Indirect character development could also occur when the audiences' understanding of a character was changed or enhanced by watching as they interacted with someone with a disability.

Sub-theme one: Character establishment. In *BtVS*, disability was often used as a tool of character establishment for villains and the occasional minor or background character, but it was never used to establish the character of a hero. There was a dramatic difference in disability-based character establishment depending on a character's role as a protagonist, antagonist, or as a minor or background character. Disability was a mechanism of character establishment in a total of 22 episodes (15.28%), for many dozens of characters. The Big Bads from the first five seasons (The Master, Drusilla, Mayor Wilkins, Adam, and Glory) were established in their first episode as having some sort of implied disability that was important to their characterization. Some of these (The Master, Drusilla, and Glory) were at least partially motivated by their desire to eliminate or manage their disabilities and the others (Mayor Wilkins and Adam) are shown to be a bit more complicated or potentially interesting because of their disabilities. While there is much to explore in the role of disability as a tool of character establishment for almost every one of the major villains, it was never used to establish one of the main heroes. Below I will describe some of the major villains who were implied to have a disability immediately upon their introduction. These will serve as examples of the finding that disability was a tool of character establishment for the Big Bads of *BtVS*.

The Big Bads. The first major villain of *BtVS*, The Master, was partially established as a character through his disability. The Master, an ancient vampire, was presented as being newly physically compromised and weak, desperate to regain his

strength so he could walk among the humans and bring on a demon apocalypse. His main motivation was world domination, but his perceived barrier was his drained power and weakness. Because of his temporarily depleted power, The Master had to rely on his henchmen and followers to take the first steps toward regaining power.

Season two is rich with disability, as the two major villains, the duo of Spike and Drusilla, provided opportunities to explore both mental illness and physical disability. I will describe Spike's physical disability during his multi-episode use of a wheelchair in the section on individual character development, but here I will describe how disability was a major component of Drusilla's character establishment. Much like The Master, Drusilla was introduced as having a debilitating physical frailty that forced her to rely on others to accomplish the first steps toward her eventual goal of demonic world domination. Her physical frailty was established in her first episode, *School Hard* (S2E3) when Spike told her "You shouldn't be walking around, you're weak," and, later, "[Sunnydale] is the place for us. The Hellmouth will restore us." Far more important than her physical frailty, however, was the clear indication that she had a mental illness from the first moment she is introduced. As Drusilla, the actress Juliet Landau often stared off into nowhere when she spoke, and she grabbed her head when her character was having visions of Buffy. This, along with her costuming and setting (a long white dress and a bedroom decorated with white lace and porcelain dolls with red scarves tied around their mouths), all contributed to an atmosphere that reflected a combination of childhood (Landau was in her mid-thirties at the time of this role) and institutionalism. From her introduction, Drusilla's physical disability and mental illness were at the forefront of her characterization. Even though Drusilla was temporarily physically frail, the series

established that she was respected and feared among the vampire community, with a reputation for being particularly volatile with her violence, due to her mental illness. From her first moments in the series, Drusilla reinforces the stereotypical association between mental illness and violence, as described by Bogdan et al. (1982).

Mayor Wilkins, the Big Bad of season three, displayed stereotypical traits associated with OCD from the moment his character was introduced in *BtVS*. The first shot of Mayor Wilkins was a shot of him drying his hands on a paper towel. Most adults dry their hands many times a day, but rarely would it be used as the first action we see someone taking in their introduction in a television series. In the same scene, his assistant handed him a piece of paper and Mayor Wilkins smelled it. In his introduction scene, in *Homecoming* (S3E5), the Mayor had this exchange with his assistant:

Mayor Wilkins: “Would you show me your hands? Your hands. I think they could be cleaner.”

Assistant: “Of course, sir. I mean, I washed them.”

Mayor Wilkins: “After every meal, and under your fingernails. Dirt gets trapped there. And mayonnaise. My dear mother said, ‘cleanliness is next to godliness,’ and I believed her. She never caught a cold!”

Later in the same episode, a scene’s opening shot was of Mayor Wilkins using a lint roller on his chair. The scene closed with him offering a moist towelette to his colleagues. Details like this, as well as Mayor Wilkins’ apparent dedication to organizing his physical space meticulously (he was shown carefully arranging items on his desk) are in almost every scene, though they were never directly mentioned within the show. A connection between his meticulous over-attention to cleanliness and organization and his

desire to bring on the demon apocalypse (the primary motivation of many villains in the Buffyverse) is never made explicit. His implied mental illness was never named, but it was suggested in almost all of his appearances in the series. Mayor Wilkins was very clean, organized, and polite, to a point of immediate discomfort for both the audience and some of those who come in contact with him in the show. The references to OCD were strong throughout his tenure on the show. They were used as a device of character establishment immediately upon his introduction in the series and served to support Bogdan et al.'s (1991) notion that mental illness is often used in film to indicate that a character is a threatening monster. In the above dialogue, Mayor Wilkins referenced his mother in a way that revealed an inappropriately strong attachment to her. This indication of an eternal childhood recalled Shakespeare's (1999b) description of the stereotype of people with disabilities as infantile and Biklen and Bogdan's (1977) identified stereotype of people with disabilities as burdens who need to be cared for by "normal" people.

Adam, season four's Big Bad, was a Frankenstein's monster-like creature who, built as a weapon by the hidden government program, *The Initiative*, was created from human, machine, and demon parts. Adam was introduced, briefly, in the final moments of *The I in Team* (S4E13), and disability played a major role in his character establishment. One minute and fifteen seconds before the closing credits, Professor Maggie Walsh, the head of The Initiative, was shown talking to a previously unseen, unconscious creature, Adam. Adam, lying on an operating table, had a head that was partially human, partially bumpy and green, with a metal plate on the side. He had stitches, pieces of metal, and different skin colors and textures throughout this body. He had spikes on one of his arms and one red eye. Professor Walsh delivered a monologue about how Adam would help

her eliminate Buffy, who was suspicious of The Initiative's motivations. After a minute of this visual introduction to Adam, Professor Walsh was stabbed through the chest from behind and it was revealed that Adam has gained consciousness and killed her before saying "Mommy." Adam was eventually shown to have many characteristics similar to Frankenstein's monster. This essential core of his character was established, clearly, just by showing that he had physical deformities and differences that were reminiscent of Frankenstein's monster. Adam reinforced the notion that visible physical deformities might indicate evilness, similar to the connections Weinberg and Santana (1978) found in Marvel comics, where limb deformities and head distortions were strongly associated with evil characters. Adam, a towering character with a deep voice, referred to his creator as "Mommy" in his first moments, clearly demonstrating the child-like stereotype that is often associated with disability (Shakespeare, 1999b).

The character Glory was a god from a hell dimension, banished to earth in the form of a human until she could find the key back to her world, a key that would unleash hell on earth. Glory's character was established using indications of mental illness immediately upon her introduction. In her first appearance, Glory was shown desperately pleading with a monk for "the key." She got increasingly agitated and started talking faster, in confusing nonsensical phrases. Glory inserted her fingers into her guard's head, there was a burst of bright light, and she sighed, calm again, saying, "That is so much better." Throughout her season, Glory continued to do this to people, rendering them with much-diminished mental abilities, in order to keep her own implied mental illness under control. In the case of Glory, disability was used, immediately, to establish that she was capable of dramatic, irrational, and destructive or murderous actions at least partially due

to her mental illness, much like the stereotypical homicidal maniacs described by Hyler et al. (1991).

Minor characters. Disability was used as a tool to establish 13 distinct minor characters. In addition to these minor characters, many characters that could be categorized as various villains' minions were also established somewhat as having a disability. Four *Bringers* (the minions of the First Evil) were blind, mute, and had large scars over their eyes. In *Hush* the villains had multiple henchmen who wore broken straightjackets. Throughout season six Glory sucked power from people's brains, leaving them in a state that got them committed to Sunnydale's psychiatric hospital.

Some examples of minor characters who were at least partially character-established through their implied disabilities are a doctor, Rodney Munson, and a bus passenger who appeared to have schizophrenia. In *Nightmares* (S1E10), the residents of Sunnydale were being tormented by their personal nightmares. Xander was chased by a homicidal clown, Willow starred in a play she was not prepared for, and in a hospital scene our protagonists ran into a doctor whose hands were frozen and unusable. He stumbled off into the background saying, "My hands." This was the audience's only glimpse of this character, and the only information about the doctor within the episode is that his worst nightmare would be to lose the use of his hands. Aside from assumptions a viewer might have made about this man's character due to his career choice, knowing that his worst nightmare was to have limited functions in his hands provided more insight into his character than just revealing his profession.

Rodney Munson was a classmate of Buffy, Xander, and Willow, and the show briefly introduced him in the episode *Inca Mummy Girl* (S2E4). Xander spotted Rodney

scraping something off of a museum display and described him as “god’s gift to the bell curve. What he lacks in smarts he makes up in lack of smarts!” Rodney tried to steal a plate from a mummy display, broke it, and was killed by the newly awoken mummy. The audience was not told anything about Rodney beyond that he had the reputation of being less intelligent than his classmates. Rodney embodies Biklen and Bogdan’s (1977) stereotypes of people with disabilities as pathetic and laughable, unable to make it through a school fieldtrip without a failed attempt at petty theft that resulted in disaster.

In *Helpless* (S3E12), Zachary Kralig was another example of a minor character who was at least partially established by an indication that he had a mental illness. Giles and the Watchers Council (the governing institution of the Slayer and her supervisor or *Watcher*) depleted Buffy of her physical strength and tested her by locking her in a house with an abnormally threatening vampire, Zachary Kralig, who was first shown locked into a coffin, wearing a straightjacket. To establish the enhanced threat Kralig provided, Giles described him as follows, “As a mortal he murdered, tortured, more than a dozen women before he was committed to an asylum for the criminally insane.” Once again, Hyler et al.’s (1991) stereotype of the homicidal maniac is reinforced.

A unique incident of mental illness as notable element of character establishment took place in the episode *Never Kill a Boy on the First Date* (S1E5). In this episode The Master was awaiting the *Anointed One*, who would arrive on a bus and help The Master regain power. The cameras panned over the bus passengers and landed on a man who was talking to himself, exhibiting behaviors that are often associated with schizophrenia in film and television (agitated, speaking to himself, repeatedly muttering things that could be interpreted as paranoid and delusional). I will explore the specific ways this man was

presented in my Level Three analysis, as the entire composition of the scene hinted at his mental illness and, perhaps, evilness. At the end of the episode it was revealed that this character was a *red herring* (an intentionally misleading clue for the audience), as nobody who witnessed his behaviors within the show was aware of the arrival of the Anointed One. One of the man's fellow bus passengers, a cherubic little boy, was eventually revealed to be the evil creature. With so many examples of the homicidal maniac stereotype (Hyer et al., 1991) later in the series, this early episode plays on the audience's assumptions based on stereotypical patterns in film. This demonstrated that the series did not always rely on common stereotypes for a predictable result. The "homicidal maniac" might turn out to not be homicidal. However, this was the only occurrence of a red herring in a series that often played with this stereotype of disabilities and audience expectations. Ultimately, this reinforced the notion that early indications of mental illness are there to tell the audience something essential about the character's probable evilness.

Sub-theme two: Individual character development. Disability was also frequently used as a mechanism of individual character development in *BtVS*. At times, a character's development took the form of incidents or revelations that added a new layer or dimension to what was known about a them This gave the audience new insight into the character's personality or actions. It also might have involved an experience that, it was implied, contributed to a lasting change in a character. For the purpose of this study, I am assuming that a character who experienced a traumatic, dramatic, or memorable event was undergoing some level of individual character development, as one essential feature of *BtVS* was the exploration of how experiences shape who the characters were

and who they became. In the discussion of the use of disability in individual character development, I will explore the frequency of this use, patterns within the numbers, as well as particular incidents that served as examples of this theme.

Disability played a role in individual character development in 47 episodes (32.64%). Six minor characters were developed and almost every major character, including heroes and villains, was developed using disability at least once. Cordelia, Giles, Anya, Xander, Joyce, Riley, Tara, and Willow all experienced some individual character development through disability, sometimes over multiple episodes (1, 5, 2, 4, 1, 2, 3, and 3 distinct disabilities, respectively). While disability was a device of individual character development for almost all of the major characters, Buffy and Spike were the characters who were developed most notably through disability.

Buffy. Buffy experienced disability in a character developing way in 12 episodes, with a notable decrease in occurrence rate as the series progressed. Throughout the series, Buffy experienced intellectual and physical disabilities and mental illness. These disabilities were predominantly supernatural and were always resolved within one episode. These experiences all had lasting impacts on her character, both in giving the audience more information about Buffy, as well as influencing or changing Buffy's character over the course of the series.

Buffy was introduced in the series as a seemingly invincible superhero. After only two episodes of this relative comfort, a witch cursed Buffy (and others) in *Witch* (S1E3) in order to take out the competition for the Sunnydale High cheerleading tryouts. The curse first inhibited Buffy's intellectual capabilities, and then it impacted her physical abilities to a point of leaving her fully paralyzed. While the spell was released and Buffy

regained her strength, this was the first major indication in the series that Buffy, while immeasurably powerful in both strength and intellect, could be vulnerable to seemingly small forces, such as a witch's spell. Buffy's temporary physical and intellectual disabilities demonstrated to the audience that she had vulnerabilities to the wide ranging and unpredictable supernatural forces and actions others could direct her way.

An episode that further explored Buffy's vulnerabilities through temporary disabilities was *Helpless*, the episode in which Buffy was tested by the Watchers Council by having her physical strength depleted as she battled Zachary Kralig, the powerful vampire described earlier in the section on character establishment. Buffy's temporary disability, having only the strength of a typical human, propelled her individual character development in two ways. First, this episode introduced an important new element into the bigger mythology of the series, in her dissolving relationship with the Watchers Council. In this episode, the Council's test caused Buffy to lose faith in them and even Giles, her beloved Watcher, who administered the spell that took away her strength. This profoundly impacted her view of her place in the world and her role as the Slayer. Feeling that she was deceived and manipulated by those she trusted instilled a new sense of cynicism and suspicion in Buffy that turned out to be permanent in the series. Secondly, it showed a leap in her ability to outwit her opponents rather than just falling back on her physical prowess. By overcoming a physical disability, Buffy developed something of a savant splinter skill (as described by Treffert, 2009) in her increased intellectual skills that allowed her to outsmart Kralig. Ultimately, Buffy's heroism was deepened and developed as she "triumphed" over this disability. This presented disability as an obstacle to overcome on the path to greatness.

In the final episode of the series that involved Buffy's experiences of disability, *Normal Again*, a demon's poison threw Buffy into a state of jumping back and forth between two realities; one in Sunnydale and one in a psychiatric ward. Near the end of the episode, Buffy chose to (attempt to) kill her friends as a way to permanently land in a nightmarish, restrictive psychiatric hospital, rather than her difficult life in Sunnydale. Her Sunnydale friends (in the "real world") were able to avoid her murder attempts and give her an antidote, breaking her out of her split-reality state. This brought a new level of melancholy into the increasingly melancholic series, however, as Buffy and her friends then knew that she might have chosen a life in the psychiatric ward, free of her responsibilities and community. This is the one incident of disability in *BtVS* that indicates an element of choice between having and not having a disability. The more obvious physical disabilities and intellectual disabilities were generally obstacles to conquer. In *Normal Again*, mental illness was optional.

Buffy tended to experience more physical disabilities early in the series and more mental illnesses later in the series. At the beginning of the series, it appeared to be more important for the show to establish, via disability, that while Buffy is a superhero with seemingly unlimited strength, she could still be physically vulnerable. As the series progressed, however, the main characters became more developed and complicated and the disability-based individual character development had to come from more places than just physical limitations. This indicates an assumption that mental illness is deeper, more intense, and more complex than a physical limitation.

Spike. Spike experienced disability on a level that was uniquely high for a character in the series. Spike experienced disability-based individual character

development four distinct times in a total of 19 episodes, often having a disability over a long arc of many episodes. Spike was introduced in season two as an abnormally violent and powerful vampire and by the end of season seven he was a central hero who sacrificed his life out of his love for Buffy and his community of protagonists. Much of his character trajectory was the result of his disabilities.

After a major injury in the middle of season two, Spike used a wheelchair for seven episodes. Near the end of that season, Spike formed an alliance with Buffy in order to defeat Angel and Drusilla. This connection sparked a series-long progression of character complications for both Spike and Buffy. In season four through episode 14 of season seven, Spike had a brain chip, implanted by the Initiative, that caused him excruciating, debilitating pain if he ever attempted violence toward humans, which led to him spending increased time with the Scoobies and growing to like them despite his best efforts. While his brain chip remained in place for three seasons, I ceased to record it when Spike discovered that he could be violent toward demons and other non-humans, giving him a renewed ability to exercise his natural drive toward violence. By the time Spike got his brain chip removed in *First Date* (S7E14), he already had his soul returned (by choice), had a romantic relationship with Buffy, and had become a conflicted but essential member of the Scoobies. At the end of season six, Spike went on a quest to regain his soul. For the first six episodes of season seven, Spike recovered from the return of his conscience and guilt in the boiler room of Sunnydale High, in a state of psychosis. The series' increasingly empathetic portrayal of Spike, heavily impacted by his experiences with disabilities, was rooted in the horror movie trope of audience

identification with the monster (see Zillman & Gibson, 1996). In these cases, disability was used to demonstrate that Spike was worthy of sympathy.

Spike's experiences with individual character development through disability also related to the recurring horror art theme of blurred categories (see Carroll, 1990; Pinedo, 1997). Spike's season two experience of using a wheelchair was the catalyst for his initial alliance with Buffy and, eventually, his transition from villain to hero. His debilitating brain chip in season four then forced Spike to spend time with the Scoobies. This led to Spike building relationships with his enemies despite his best efforts. The blurring of categories was apparent, as Spike struggled in horror as he sensed his identity as a purely evil vampire being compromised by an intrusive desire to be good. None of this would have happened without his wheelchair or brain chip.

It is notable that Spike's first major disability was physical, the second was a combination of psychiatric and physical, and the third was purely psychiatric. This parallels the pattern of Buffy's disabilities, as they progressed from physical to mental over the course of the series. This, again, indicated that the makers of *BtVS* found that mental illnesses were more complicated and interesting disabilities than physical disabilities.

Other major characters. Many other characters experienced individual character-developing temporary disabilities or mental illnesses. As I noted earlier, almost every major character was developed using disability at least one time, often well more than once. Cordelia, who first played the simple role of the popular cheerleader tormenter of Buffy, Xander, and Willow, was first deepened in her characterization in *Witch* when she was temporarily blinded. From this point on she became an important and increasingly

deep character in *BtVS* and its spin-off television series, *Angel*. Cordelia's transition from being a snobby antagonist to an increasingly integral member of the Scoobies began in this episode, when her experience with disability showed that she did not have the unlimited power (within the limited context of Sunnydale High) that she tried to project. As with Spike, the makers of the series demonstrated that disability could be a tool to elicit a sense of sympathy for the amusing but initially unlikable Cordelia.

Sub-theme three: Indirect character development. A third sub-theme I identified is that disability contributed to the development of characters in *BtVS* (with or without disabilities) due to their association with others with disabilities. As I described earlier, this might be a character who changes due to their experiences related to someone else's disability. It might also occur when the audiences' understanding of a character deepens as the audience sees them interact with a character with a disability.

Spike and Drusilla were introduced when Drusilla had mental illness (permanently) and physical frailty (temporarily). Spike's relationship with Drusilla was both romantic and that of a caretaker. He treated her as a physically and emotionally fragile child and a romantic partner, until she regained her physical strength in *What's My Line, Part 2* (S2E10). Spike's treatment of Drusilla was a significant piece of his character development. In this case, Drusilla's mental illness provided Spike with an opportunity to demonstrate to the audience that no matter how ruthless and evil he may have been, he also had the capacity for love and care toward another being, especially one who is vulnerable or damaged as a result of disability. This was reminiscent of *There's Something About Mary* and *Glee*, the examples from chapter two of characters who were shown to be good through their relationships with their siblings with

disabilities. This suggests that to love or care for someone with a disability, someone who is vulnerable, is purer than “regular” love. Drusilla’s disability provided the makers of *BtVS* to give the audience the first opportunity to connect with Spike through a glimmer of humanity. This use of disability relates directly to the horror movie trope of audience identification with the monster (see Zillman & Gibson, 1996).

Angel became temporarily evil due to a curse for the second half of season two (I will refer to him as *Evil Angel* for clarity). Evil Angel was presented as being one of the most powerful, dangerous, and sinister vampires of all time. His cruel treatment of Spike, which was greatly focused on Spike’s use of a wheelchair, was at the center of the character development of Evil Angel. Evil Angel tormented Spike and made increasingly cruel jokes and comments about Spike’s physical limitations. Early taunts such as “as long as scum like you is walking ... well, rolling in the streets” from *Innocence* (S2E14) developed into increasingly cruel mocking, “What with you being special needs boy, I figure I should stick close to home” in *I Only Have Eyes for You* (S2E19), as Evil Angel groped Drusilla. In this case, Evil Angel’s mockery of disability was used to demonstrate that his evilness far surpassed the typical evil in the series.

Evil Angel mocked Spike’s wheelchair use with increasing viciousness and implied that Spike was no longer a viable romantic interest for Drusilla, his long-time love. Biklen and Bogdan’s (1977) stereotype of people with disabilities as being nonsexual was used here as a part of the characterization of Evil Angel through Spike. It was not suggested that Spike had become nonsexual, as he continued to have a romantic and sexual relationship with Drusilla. Instead, Evil Angel’s suggestion that this stereotype was true was a tool for showing that Evil Angel was a true villain. Within the

show, there was no direct suggestion that Drusilla was no longer attracted to Spike, so the implied emasculation via disability was almost entirely channeled through the representation of Evil Angel as a villain.

To contrast Spike's and Evil Angel's indirect character development, Spike's treatment of people with disabilities was an early hint that even though he was a wholly evil villain, he had a depth of emotion that was unusual for vampires in the Buffyverse. Evil Angel's cruel treatment of people with disabilities was an easy way for the show to establish that Evil Angel was significantly more sinister than the typical vampire. Ultimately, their treatment of people with disabilities established the placement of both Spike and Evil Angel on the extreme ends of the typically limited spectrum of vampire empathy and kindness. This indicated that it was not treatment of *normal* people that mattered (both Spike and Evil Angel murder many people), it was the treatment of this other, special category of people that was the true litmus test of evil and reveals underlying moral character.

Theme two: Plot development. Disability and mental illness played a role in plot developments in a significant number of episodes of *BtVS*. The Level One analysis revealed that characters' experiences with disability contributed to plot developments in a total of 55 episodes, more than a third of the series' 144 total episodes (38.19%). Twelve major characters had a disability at some point that impacted the plot. In the episode *Hush* the entire population of Sunnydale was temporarily mute, and in *Tabula Rasa* (S6E8) every main character experienced amnesia. Fifteen minor characters' implied disabilities, both permanent and temporary, contributed to plot development, as well as Glory's countless minions who were doing her bidding by the end of season six.

Plot developments involved both long-term changes and brief moments of impact, but for the purpose of this research, I considered tools of plot development to be circumstances, incidents, or any detail that either propelled the story forward or moved things in a new direction. While plot developments happened on a large scale, with major changes or incidents that could be better recognized by looking at multiple episodes or entire seasons of the series, the data collection limited me to looking at characters and events episode by episode. Because of this, I looked at plot developments that were recognizable within single episodes. I did not watch each episode without context, so the data regarding plot development came from a place of understanding of context and a familiarity with previous episodes. I had seen the series several times before this research, so my interpretation of plot developments cannot exist without an acknowledgement that I knew where the major plot lines would eventually lead. Here I describe both plot developments within single episodes and incidents within a single episode that contributed to the development of longer-term plots.

Disability generally impacted the plots of *BtVS* when the show implied that a character's motivations or behaviors were impacted by their disability or mental illness. They might be motivated to eliminate or "fix" their disability, as in the case of The Master and Drusilla (in seasons one and two), who were both seeking to regain their strength and physical abilities. Glory's mental illness, which required her to suck the brainpower out of a succession of people in order to remain functional, was a major plot element throughout season five.

Disability also impacted plot in *BtVS* when it introduced unique challenges or strengths that would not exist without the presence of disability. In *Earshot*, Buffy was

able to overhear the thoughts of others. This eventually led her to lose her ability to filter the cacophony of voices and she became increasingly diminished in both physical and mental functions. While this temporary mental illness nearly killed Buffy, it also allowed her to briefly pick out the thoughts of someone at Sunnydale High who was making plans to “kill them all.” In this moment, her temporary mental illness allowed her to eventually save the life of Jonathan, who, it turns out, has severe depression that influenced the plot, as well. This recalls the stereotype of the supercrip (Biklen & Bogdan, 1977), a savant-like character whose disability is also a source of super human power.

Some examples of these disability-driven plot developments include *Witch*, where a witch cast a spell on several cheerleaders, including a life-threatening curse on Buffy, in order to make it through cheerleading tryouts. Another example is Marcie in *Out of Mind*, *Out of Sight*. Marcie, an invisible girl who was tormenting Sunnydale High students, was revealed to have “gone mad” and turned invisible due to being ignored. Her escalating violence was the major threat of this episode, as she attempted to injure and even murder the students of Sunnydale. It was suggested that she was shy and meek before going “mad.” In *Lie to Me* (S2E7), Ford, an old friend of Buffy’s who was visiting Sunnydale, was obsessed with vampires and also provided an example of a disability-driven plot. He attempted to turn Buffy over to the vampires of Sunnydale, in exchange for immortality by being turned into a vampire. Buffy eventually figured out that Ford has terminal cancer, thus establishing a basis in disability for his motivations and the plot of this episode.

Plots in *BtVS* were often influenced by Buffy’s experiences of disability in particular. Twelve episodes used Buffy’s experiences with disability as a plot device. One

episode that relied on Buffy's disability as a means of plot development is *Living Conditions* (S4E2). In *Living Conditions*, Buffy's college roommate, Kathy, who was portrayed as having OCD, caused Buffy so much anxiety that Buffy began to behave in ways that are stereotypically associated with OCD, as well. Buffy became so fixated on Kathy's annoying behaviors she eventually came close to murdering Kathy. As Willow described to Giles, "I just talked to Buffy and I think she's feeling a little insane. No, not bitchy crazy. More like homicidal maniac crazy." Kathy turned out to be a demon, and once she returned to her own demon dimension, Buffy returned to her original state. So, in the end, Buffy's feelings of violence were justified and attributed to a temporary mental illness, and the same disability, OCD, was an indication of Kathy's demonic nature.

Another episode that placed significant plot weight on Buffy's disability was *The Weight of the World*. After realizing that Glory was so powerful she would be unbeatable and she would kill Dawn while bringing about a demon apocalypse, Buffy went into a catatonic state, too traumatized to handle her assumed failure to protect her sister's life. The Scoobies had to proceed with apocalypse avoidance without Buffy's guidance, which they were accustomed to relying on. In this incident, Buffy's experience of disability negatively impacted the heroes, as they had to carry on without her assistance and also care for her while preparing for battle with Glory. In this episode, Buffy's role within the group demonstrated two of Biklen and Bogdan's (1977) stereotypes. First, that Buffy was unable to fully participate in everyday life (and, in the world of *BtVS*, everyday life often involved saving the world). Secondly, due to her disability, Buffy reinforced the stereotype of the person with a disability as a burden.

Spike's recurring disabilities impacted the plot of 18 episodes, including the seven episodes in season two when he used a wheelchair. These plots were often impacted by Spike's inability to participate in Drusilla and Angel's outings of destruction as Angel purposely excluded Spike, demonstrating another example of Biklen and Bogdan's stereotype of diminished participation for people with disabilities. In season four and beyond, Spike's debilitating brain chip impacted his interactions with Buffy and the Scoobies as he was unable to hurt them. This disability has a major impact on the plots of *BtVS* in incidents such as in *The Initiative* (S4E7), when Spike attempted to kill Willow but, instead, collapsed on the ground in pain.

Theme three: Atmosphere development. Disability functioned as tool of atmosphere development in *BtVS*. Atmospheric development concerns the mood of both the audience and the characters in a given scene. The atmosphere might have a significant impact that goes well beyond the moment. For example, experiencing a traumatic event that has an intensely horrific atmosphere might have a large impact on someone, well beyond the moment. In this research, those changes showed up in my exploration of character or plot development. In the data fields, I was only concerned with the atmosphere of a moment or a scene when I categorized an incident of disability as being a tool of atmospheric development. The data related to this sub-theme referenced moments where the distinct atmosphere of a scene is notably related to disability in any way.

Posters on the Sunnydale High walls. The atmosphere of Sunnydale High, that of a seemingly typical Californian high school, was somewhat enhanced and developed by the presence of posters on the hallway walls. There were eight discernable disability-themed posters on the wall of Sunnydale High over the course of 13 episodes. These

included a photo of a man with a burned face, “Not everyone who drives drunk dies” in *Reptile Boy* (S2E5), an image of a wheelchair with the text, “IF 4TH HOUR ENGLISH SEEMS ENDLESS, TRY SITTING HERE FOR FIFTY YEARS. Don’t drive drunk. Don’t ride with a drunk” in *Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered* (S2E16), and a photo of a person with one leg and crutches, “One for the road” in both *School Hard* and *Faith, Hope & Trick* (S3E3). These posters were never commented upon and the audience was never visually directed to see them, so they blended into the background of the scenes. They were nearly indistinguishable among the sea of typical high school posters, including promotional banners for school dances and upcoming pep rallies. The anti-disability messages of these posters contributed to two distinct and seemingly contradictory elements of the atmosphere of Sunnydale High. First, they contributed to the atmosphere of a typical, fictional high school. Secondly, they contributed to an atmosphere of fear that the Sunnydale High administrators apparently felt the need to create in order to scare the students away from bad behavior (specifically, drunk driving). This fear was entirely rooted in the assumption that breaking the rules should be avoided out of fear of disability.

Disability as a tool of atmosphere development. Disability associated with particular characters was used as a device of atmospheric development in 38 episodes (26.38%). This association surfaced in both heroes and villains, but in markedly different ways. Some examples of major characters experiencing disability in a way that contributed to atmosphere development were Drusilla, Mayor Wilkins, Buffy, and Willow.

Drusilla's mental illness contributed to the atmosphere in 15 episodes. Juliet Landau's performance, which I described in the discussion of her character establishment, was arguably the most atmosphere-influencing performance of the series. Drusilla's scenes had a noticeably creepy and disturbing feeling, and it was directly related to how Landau and the episode makers chose to portray Drusilla's mental illness. I will discuss a scene featuring Drusilla and Spike in my Level Three analysis. I will look at how lighting, set design, costuming, performances, and sound design all related to her mental illness and the general atmosphere of Drusilla's scenes in *BtVS*.

Mayor Wilkins' implied OCD influenced the atmosphere in 11 episodes. As the show revealed more about Mayor Wilkins and his apocalyptic aspirations, the audience was made increasingly aware of the violent and destructive actions he had taken in the past and was willing to inflict on Sunnydale. His capacity for evil actions became increasingly apparent throughout season three. The disconnect between his diabolical secret actions and his obsessive need for detailed order for himself and everyone around him was unsettling and it contributes significantly to the atmosphere of his scenes. His rigid behavior seemed increasingly threatening as his ruthlessness was developed.

The link between disability and atmosphere was not only present with villainous characters in *BtVS*. Two examples of heroes' experiences with disability contributing to the atmosphere of *BtVS* were when Buffy and Willow each experienced debilitating physical frailty or paralysis in *Killed by Death* and *Same Time, Same Place*, respectively. In *Killed by Death* (S2E18), Buffy was almost completely depleted of physical strength when she caught a severe virus (which was natural, not supernatural). The truly scary hospital scenes, in which a demon killed children, were greatly influenced by Buffy's

helplessness. Whereas the show often communicated a sense of confidence in Buffy's ability to physically dominate in fights, in this episode there was an unsettling sense that Buffy (and the audience) would witness horrific acts without being able to do anything.

Willow's temporary disability contributed to atmosphere development in a particularly horrific way in *Same Time, Same Place*. In this scene, in my opinion the most disturbing one in the entire series, Willow was fully paralyzed and forced to watch as a goblin began to eat her flesh. Her temporary disability served to force the role of the observer onto her in ways that recall Carroll's (1990) and Clover's (1992) descriptions of the role of the witness in horror art. Carroll described how characters within a horror film respond to a monster, "they freeze in a moment of recoil, transfixed, sometimes paralyzed" (p. 22). Willow was forced to watch as the goblin consumed her flesh and her eyes were frozen open so she was unable to look away. As Clover (1992) noted in an essay on the role of eyes and watching in horror films, there is a recurring theme of eyes watching horror (horror movies, horrific acts) within horror films. *BtVS* used disability as a tool to recreate a common horror motif. In this case, disability did not serve as a metaphoric threat but, rather, a literal one. Willow could not move, Willow could not look away, and she had to, then, lay motionless and witness her own consumption. This recalled other horror films, such as Dario Argento's *Opera* (1987) in which the killer pinned the main character's eyes open and forced her to witness a brutal murder.

Three distinct minor characters and countless minor characters with disabilities that appeared in sets or groups were notable for contributing to the show's atmosphere. In the episodes *Nightmares*, an apparition of a young boy, hospitalized and in a coma, appeared around town, speaking of the *Ugly Man*. The Ugly Man turned out to be the

monstrous manifestation of the boy's nightmares. He had a log-like stump for a hand, a scarred, possibly burned, face, and a milky eyeball on the scarred side of his face.

In *Helpless*, Buffy was locked into a house with Zachary Kralig, a powerful vampire. Kralig was said to have been a murderous "psychopath" before he became a vampire, and his character's psychopathology was a major factor in the atmosphere of the episode. Kralig was introduced as he was restrained in a coffin, wearing a straightjacket. Jeff Kober, the actor who portrayed Kralig, gave a particularly creepy performance and played to Hyler et al.'s (1991) stereotype of the homicidal maniac. In *Bad Girls*, the atmosphere-influencing demon of the week was Balthazar, a morbidly obese creature who, according to his own words, was "crippled" 100 years ago by his enemy, Mayor Wilkins. In *Bad Girls*, Balthazar was immobile and relied on his followers to continuously ladle water over his massive body.

It was much more common in *BtVS* for a group of similar characters with disabilities to influence the atmosphere of a scene. In *Amends* (S3E10), there was a trio of *Bringers*, or *Harbingers of Death*, that were the high priests of the First Evil. The First Evil returned as the Big Bad of season seven and a bringer made another atmosphere-influencing appearance in *Touched*. The Bringers had deep, raw Xs cut over each eye socket where they appeared to have gouged out their eyes, resulting in full blindness. The Bringer in season seven had also cut out his own tongue so he could not be forced to betray his master if captured. The Gentlemen, the villains of the disability-heavy episode *Hush*, had henchmen in loose straightjackets that accompanied them and helped them capture victims for their heart harvesting.

Throughout season five an increasing number of background and minor characters in Sunnydale were hospitalized in the psychiatric ward, as Glory plunged her fingers into their heads and sucked out most of their mental abilities and left them with few abilities beyond basic motor skills. By the end of the season, there was a large crowd of Glory's minions, helping to build her a tower for her world-domination acquisition ritual. The presence of these minions was subtle and unexplained at the beginning of the episodes (they appeared in the hospital without explanation), but over the course of the season, the heroes and the audience learned that Glory was causing the massive increase in psychiatric ward residents. Their presence was a constant, growing indication that Glory's power was spreading and she was becoming an increasing threat. Glory's minions recalled Biklen and Bogdan's (1977) stereotype of people with disabilities as atmosphere, as they increasingly filled the backgrounds of scenes throughout the season.

Level Three Results: Ideological Rhetorical Criticism

For the third level of this analysis of *BtVS* I performed an ideological rhetorical criticism, as described by Foss (2009) and outlined in chapter three of this dissertation. My intention for this level of analysis was not to uncover and declare any "truths" about *BtVS*. Instead, this level of analysis served as an opportunity to explore a few choice moments in order to see how a focus on the ideology of selected, thematically relevant scenes relates to the broader themes and patterns of the series that relate to disability.

I proposed an analysis of three to five episode segments and, based on the results of my thematic analysis, I selected four scenes for this rhetorical criticism. In the following sections, I will describe how I selected these particular scenes. I will then describe my first phases of analysis for each scene, one by one. I will then discuss the

unifying ideological themes that I found during my analysis. In chapter five I will discuss the implications of these findings.

Scene selection. With the disability themes I identified in my thematic analysis (character, plot, and atmosphere development) in mind, I explored my database to find episodes that might have interesting representations of said themes for this analysis. I recalled scenes and episodes that stood out in my memory as being particularly intriguing, as suggested by Foss (2009). I read through my notes on particular characters with disabilities and found observations, commentary, and data regarding plot and dialogue that pointed to episodes that would relate to the Level Two themes in interesting ways. I selected four scenes to analyze for my Level Three analyses. In the dialogue and plot data fields I recorded the time of my observations to the minute, so I was able to locate specific scenes within the series based on my database. These scenes, which I will describe in detail in the following subsections, provided content related to my themes of character establishment (scenes one and two), character development (scenes three and four), indirect character development (scenes two and three), plot development (scenes two, three, and four), and atmosphere development (scenes two and four). While scene one only relates to one theme, I chose it because it subverted the general pattern in *BtVS* of disability or mental illness as a mechanism for establishing the character of villains.

Brief recap of methodology. I watched each scene several times and recorded each observable element I found to be related to my interest in disability on a slip of paper. This included dialogue, set design, lighting, blocking, props, and anything else that stood out to me. I then considered each observable element and wrote down one or more suggested elements, on the back of the note cards. This caused me to step my analysis

away from the concrete details of the scene and look at the meanings behind the isolated pieces of the scene. I then cut up the cards so I could manipulate each suggested element individually. I arranged the suggested elements into unifying thematic categories for each scene. I chose these particular scenes because they encompassed the themes that emerged from my Level Two analysis in ways that I found intriguing, but the themes that emerged from this analysis were fundamentally different than when looking at broader patterns in storytelling and character creation.

Scene one: *Never Kill a Boy on the First Date*. I selected this scene (S1E5, 11:12 – 11:44 and 12:39 – 13:30) for my Level Three analysis because it involved disability as a mechanism for character establishment in a way that stood out from the general thematic patterns of *BtVS*. While disability was generally used as a tool for character establishment with villains in *BtVS*, this scene played off of the audience assumptions of mental illness that were firmly rooted in the next six seasons of the series.

In this episode The Master and The Scoobies anticipated the arrival of the Anointed One, who would help The Master regain his strength and take over the world. Through editing and cuts, the episode makers implied that a man on a bus, who demonstrated stereotypical behaviors associated with mental illness, was the Anointed One. This was achieved by simple narrative tricks, such as cutting from Giles describing the prophecy of the Anointed One's arrival, and then cutting to a shot of the man on the bus. The scene I analyzed is the entirety of the man's presence on the show prior to him being turned into a vampire and then killed at the end of the episode. In his two brief scenes, which I treated as one scene for the purpose of this analysis, the man seemed agitated and, when interacting with others, his responses were not appropriate for the

conversation. For example, his response to a boy telling him about a plane ride was “the pale horse emerged with death as its rider.” Overall, this scene established this man as an assumed threat and, as it turned out, it gave the audience a quick introduction to the true Anointed One, one of the man’s bus companions. Buffy and the Scoobies, like the audience, were tricked into believing this man was the Anointed One.

The man in *Never Kill a Boy on the First Date* was one of the characters that stood out the most in my Level Two analysis, as his implied disability was used as a tool of misdirection. The filmmakers played on stereotypes and predictable uses of characters with mental illness in popular culture in a way that was not necessarily compatible with role of disability throughout the rest of the series. For this reason, this scene was a fitting choice for a deeper analysis.

Observed elements, suggested elements, and themes. The first step of an ideological rhetorical criticism is to watch the scene closely with one’s thematic interests in mind (in this case, my research question) and record every single observable detail. Some of the observable elements I recorded were the red lights on the upper front of the bus, the cold blue moonlight that illuminated the bus’s interior, and lines from the man’s monologue that were reminiscent of a stereotypical southern street preacher. I recorded lines such as “the pale horse emerged with death as its rider, you will be judged, you will be judged,” and “are you willing to stand with the righteous?” I recorded details of the musical score (monotonous with both deep and shrill tones), his denim jacket, and the cuts on his eyebrow and knuckles.

I then wrote each of the observable elements on a piece of paper (with no description of context) and, on the back of each paper, I wrote my interpretation of what

the observable elements suggested. Some of my suggested elements were cleanliness and sterility (for the blue moonlight), hospitalization, emergency, and warning (the ambulance-like red lights on the bus), masculinity (the man's deep, gravelly voice), and violence and aggression (the man's various injuries).

Finally, I organized nearly all of the suggested elements in this scene into the two categories of *violence* and *institutionalism*. At the end of this section on my Level Three results, I will synthesize these categories with those I identified in the other three scenes I analyzed. In chapter five I will explore the meaning behind these themes.

Scene two: School Hard. I selected scene two (S2E3, 19:21 – 21:06) based on my database and my thematic analysis. This scene contained examples of *BtVS*'s use of disability as a mechanism of character establishment, indirect character development, plot development, and atmosphere development. This scene is a memorable scene for Drusilla, the character in the series who is arguably most closely and openly associated with physical disability and mental illness within the show.

This episode introduced the character of Drusilla and the scene I analyzed is Drusilla's second scene, her first extended sequence in the series. This scene took place in Drusilla's bedroom in Spike and Drusilla's lair, under a Catholic church. In this scene, Drusilla and Spike spoke of her physical frailty and established that they had come to the Hellmouth for her to restore her strength.

Observed elements, suggested elements, and themes. In my list of observed elements I recorded set and costume design, sound design, lighting, and notes on Juliet Landau and James Marsters' performances as Drusilla and Spike. Some of these elements were the television set to static, porcelain dolls, cloth tied over the dolls' mouths,

Drusilla's white lace dress, broken up lighting on Drusilla's bed, black lace on an illuminated lamp shade, a kidnapped girl tied up in the corner, and wrought iron.

The suggested elements I recorded based on the observed elements included chaos (broken light patterns throughout the scene and the television static), Catholicism (Drusilla's white lace dress and the candles on the walls), childhood (the dolls and Drusilla's high, breathy voice), and violence (the animalistic roar Drusilla makes when attacking her captive and the cloth tied over her dolls' mouths). The three thematic categories I organized my suggested elements into were *chaos*, *infantalization*, and *institutionalism*.

Scene three: I Only Have Eyes for You. I selected scene three (S2E19, 23:35 – 25:11) because it represented themes of character development, indirect character development, and plot development in intriguing ways. This scene prominently featured Spike, a major character with a physical disability. Spike's interactions with his companions, Evil Angel and Drusilla, stood out in my Level Two analysis.

At this point in the series, Spike was using a wheelchair after a church collapsed on him and Drusilla. Evil Angel planned to usurp Spike's role as Sunnydale's primary villain and Drusilla's love interest. This scene featured the three characters in the garden of their new home, plotting against Buffy. I selected this scene specifically because of the interactions between Angel and Spike. This scene is the most obvious scene of indirect character establishment in the series, as Angel's treatment of Spike served to establish Angel as truly evil, and it also marked the beginning of a six-season progression of Spike from Big Bad to hero. I also chose this segment because, upon looking at my data of the blocking, props, and set of the scene, I saw that there were some notable details that I had

not explored in my thematic analysis, but that would be fitting for an ideological criticism.

Observed elements, suggested elements, and themes. In the first step of the analysis for this scene I recorded the observable elements, such as dim lighting, dead leaves on the ground, and blooming jasmine. I found that the blocking in this scene was particularly suited for this sort of analysis. I noted details of a shot of Angel and Drusilla, centrally framed in a full-body shot, with Spike sitting to the far right, shown from the chest up. I recorded Spike's slouched posture and the extreme close-up on Spike as Angel flirted with Drusilla.

The suggested elements I articulated, based on the isolated observable details of the scene, included death (the dead leaves, a crumbling wicker chair in the background, Spike's black clothing), isolation (the blocking of the three characters, often separating Spike from the pair of Angel and Drusilla), and weakness (Spike slouching as he rests his head on his hand). The two major categories that emerged from the suggested elements were *infantilization* and *isolation*.

Scene four: Normal Again. I selected scene four (S6E17, 2:37 – 2:57) as an example of *BtVS* using disability for character, plot, and atmosphere development in ways that stood out to me during my data collection as well as my Level Two analysis. In this episode, due to a supernatural poison, Buffy jumped back and forth between the reality of the series and an alternate reality where her life in Sunnydale was a delusion as she resided in a psychiatric hospital. In the alternative reality of the psychiatric hospital, Buffy's mother was alive, her parents were still together, and her life as a vampire slayer in Sunnydale was her delusion. At this point in the series, the show was very dark and life

was increasingly difficult for Buffy. Near the end of the episode, her parents and a psychiatrist convinced her that her life in Sunnydale was a dismal fantasy. They convinced her to kill off her friends in her Sunnydale life so she could free herself of it entirely and emerge fully into her life in the psychiatric ward. The darkness of the series increased immensely this season. I selected the first, brief scene where Buffy first found herself in the psychiatric hospital.

The scene served, primarily, to establish this setting, which was a significant set piece throughout the episode. Buffy got stabbed by a demon and instantly found herself receiving an injection from hospital orderlies. Buffy struggled as the camera panned away, revealing the psychiatric ward of a hospital. I selected this scene as it was an essential moment in the character development of Buffy, and the atmosphere of the hospital was significant in this particularly anxious episode.

Observed elements, suggested elements, and themes. Some of the observations I recorded for the list of observable elements were wardrobe (all white and pale grey on Buffy, the staff, and the other hospital patients) and the particular shadows and lighting in Buffy's hospital room. I recorded that the only spoken words in the scene were indistinct words over the intercom. I recorded details of Sarah Michelle Gellar's performance (a confused panic), as well as that of some patients (one, in particular, shuffled with his head hanging down).

The list of implied elements that I developed from the observable elements included childhood (most of the patients' wardrobes were reminiscent of children's pajamas, one patient was shoeless), and restrictive violence (unwanted injections, leather restraint straps on a bed, and Buffy's attempt to fight off the orderlies). A syringe, white

walls, white furniture, and white clothing on almost everyone suggested themes of sterility. I organized the suggested elements into the categories *institutionalism*, *violence*, and *infantilization*.

Synthesis of themes. As I performed my separate analyses of the suggested elements and themes of each scene, it became clear that the ideological themes of the scenes were consistent across episodes. I will describe the themes of the four scenes in this section, and I will discuss the specific implications of these themes in chapter five. The themes were: institutionalism and violence (scene one); chaos, infantilization, and institutionalism (scene two); isolation and infantilization (scene three); and institutionalism, violence, and infantilization (scene four).

Scenes one, two, and four all suggested themes of institutionalism. This was literal in scene four, which took place in an institution, but the underlying theme was also found in scenes one and two, which took place on a bus and in a vampire lair. The second common theme, violence, appeared in my analysis of scenes one and four, and I consider the chaos of scene two to be one of violence (which, in the case of Drusilla, is specifically chaotic, in a way that I will discuss in my chapter five analysis of the meaning behind these themes), as well. The third theme, infantilization, appeared in scenes two, three, and four. I will also discuss the implications of the theme of isolation, which I only formally identified in scene three.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications

The social construction of disability perspective posits that art and the media make symbolic use of disability in a way that creates and impacts disability (Biklen & Bogdan, 1977; Black & Pretes, 2007). Social construction of disability theorists also note that disability stereotypes, disability-themed language use, and the presence of disability and disability themes in pop culture are worth exploring, as they play a crucial and often negative role in the social construction of disability (e.g. Biklen & Bogdan, 1977). They are not merely meaningless elements of the art we consume (Bogdan et al., 1982). By processing this art, we construct our understanding of disability and, as a result, we construct our reality. In my opinion, this is a convincing theoretical basis for the argument that art must be explored, thoughtfully analyzed, and discussed in order to begin to truly appreciate the impact it has on disability, both in concept and as it affects people's lives. By developing an increased awareness of the social construction of disability through art, we can appreciate the obvious and subtle ways the art we experience contributes to our constructed world. For this dissertation, I wanted to find a new way to examine and analyze the disability content and themes in film. I used a unique configuration of existing methods, developed within the social construction of disability framework.

Past Literature and Research

The subjective nature of film has resulted in an understandable tendency for film scholarship to favor narrative critiques and qualitative studies. Quantitative studies exist, but do not go much further than tallying occurrence of disability in film. Byrd is involved in the majority of the quantitative studies I found (e.g. Byrd, 1979a; Byrd, 1989; Byrd &

Elliot, 1988). Byrd's research dates back to the seventies and eighties and provides only a shallow reading of the presence of disability in film, although innovative for that time. His broad surveys of movie summaries provide some numbers on the existence of disabilities in the summaries of films but methodologically do not extend much further beyond that. While it is helpful to have these counts for the purpose of noting that disability did exist in the films of the 1970s and 1980s, there is room for more in-depth looks at the media, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

These quantitative studies, which arguably lack in the depth of qualitative explorations of film, do provide a research-based foundation for deeper exploration. By demonstrating that a vast majority (85%) of Disney animated feature films included language related to mental illness used as an insult, Lawson and Fouts (2004), contributed a quantitative study to the literature that complemented the position of theoretical writers, such as Higgins (1992) who argued that disability language in film is worthy of attention. Similarly, while Byrd's surveys of movie summaries may not have provided deep insights into the nature of disability in film, they did give researchers and scholars a body of work on which to expand. The inherent limitations of quantitative research in the area of the social construction of disability and film still allow those studies give empirical credibility to the foundation of more qualitative works of analysis.

There are very few formal research studies in the area of disability and film. Black and Pretes (2007), Safran (2001), and Smith (2012) published some of the few studies that used formal methodologies of analysis when looking at disability in films. The limited formal research on the role of disability in horror films is even more notable. Smith's (2012) look at the role of eugenics in the horror cinema of the 1930s may be the

only published study that exclusively focused on horror and disability. Much of the formal writing on horror and disability is found as a sub-theme or sub-section in works that explore multiple genres or broader themes of disability (e.g. Hyler et. al, 1991; Norden, 1994).

Methodological Framework

In order to explore the role of disability in the television series *BtVS*, I watched every episode of the seven season long series. I recorded all of the information I found pertinent to my research question into a database using Filemaker Pro. I conducted three levels of analysis: a content analysis, a thematic analysis, and an ideological rhetorical criticism.

I approached this research from the position that it is essential to consider perspective and context when analyzing film in our symbol-rich world. The purpose of this dissertation was to explore an important piece of popular culture, *BtVS*, bringing new methods and a new focus to a much-analyzed piece of work. An additional intention for this research was to develop a new way to analyze text for the role disability might play in film.

As I developed the methodology for this research, I looked for a new way to analyze text for content and themes related to disability, taking advantage of available database software. I took cues from existing quantitative studies (e.g. Lawson & Fouts, 2004) and qualitative studies (e.g. Black & Pretes, 2007), and looked for a new combination of these methods based on Green and Harker's (1988) multiple perspectives analysis, such as that used in de Valenzuela (1998). Performing a multiple perspective analysis using Filemaker Pro, as described by de Valenzuela, allowed me to examine

disability in *BtVS* from multiple angles in a systematic manner. This design allowed me to look at *BtVS* through a qualitative lens, while incorporating quantitative data for pattern identification, resulting in a rigorous analysis. The existing literature offers no examples of film analysis that had been conducted using a configuration of methods similar to the one I used for this dissertation. By incorporating a detailed database into a multiple perspective analysis (Green & Harker, 1988), I was able to systematically analyze *BtVS* in a way that it, and other television and film, has not yet been analyzed.

After gathering and analyzing data on *BtVS*, I have concluded that this methodology provided me with more than enough information to thoroughly analyze and uncover themes and patterns that might not be apparent through other lenses. While this design is inherently naturalistic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the database provides a systematic structure that allows for a transparency of analysis and precise recording of rich contextual details. As such, this detailed database allows for comparison of data and discussion. The detailed fields of the database, as well as the flexibility of the observations that can be recorded throughout, will allow for the analysis of multiple pieces of media ranging from a series of related films to a single scene from a television episode, most anything with characters and narrative, without losing the qualitative aspect of the observations and analysis. This design might also have application to other research outside of film analysis.

Analysis of Findings

The major findings, as detailed in chapter four, revealed that *BtVS* contained many instances of disability throughout the series in notable patterns that warrant identification and discussion. In Level One of data collection I identified noteworthy

patterns in the occurrence of disability, as well as in the use of disability-themed language. In the thematic analysis of *BtVS*, Level Two analysis, I concluded that disability played the role of a mechanism of character, plot, and atmosphere development in the series. These themes of disability manifested themselves in a wide variety of ways in the series and in this chapter I will recall the results of chapter four and explore the meaning and implications of these findings. In my Level Three analysis I found that associations between disability and violence, institutionalism, infantilization, and isolation ran through select scenes that represented the themes of Level Two.

Level One: Demographics. My first level of analysis was a content analysis. In my database, I recorded basic demographics for each episode of *BtVS*, such as episode titles, character appearances, and occurrences of any content that related to disability. In this section I will discuss my interpretations of the findings in this level of data collection.

Disability-themed word use. As detailed in chapter four, I found that characters in *BtVS* regularly use words that stem from disability, such as *stupid*, *lame*, and *crazy*. As in real life, these words were often used casually and not as direct references to mental illness or physical and intellectual disabilities. For example, the word *lame* was used in 29 episodes, and only once did it refer to someone who had diminished function in their leg due to illness or injury. Similarly, the term *stupid* was used in 32 episodes. It occasionally referred to a character's intelligence, but it was also used as a casual indication of negativity (e.g. Buffy referring to "stupid little mini pizzas" in *Ted* (S2E11) and to war as "needless, stupid death" in *The End of Days* (S7E21)). These uses, again, reflect the common language usage during time this show was made and serve to create a

sense of connection to the world outside of the Buffyverse. This language provided a sense of reality in this paranormal television show. The disability-themed language still sounds realistic, more than a decade after the end of the show, indicating that the prevalence of this language has not measurably changed in recent years.

Beyond contributing to the show's sense of realism, casual disability-themed word use in *BtVS* contributes to the negative construction of disability by employing words that originated as references to disabilities as non-specific, negative terms. *Lame*, *stupid*, and *dumb* are a few examples of terminology that characters on *BtVS* often used to mean nothing more than bad or a vague indication of negativity. In this way, *BtVS* reflected society's negative valuation of disability and, one could argue, reinforced it.

One instance of disability language that suggests a thoughtfulness on the part of the makers of *BtVS* is the one occasion where the term *lame* is used in reference to impaired mobility, as Buffy commented on Xander's pirate costume by saying, "You know, if you had a real peg leg you wouldn't just have a lame costume, you'd be lame, which is completely different," in *All the Way* (S6E6). This was a brief but telling glimpse into the writer's (Steve DeKnight) and Buffy's understanding of the relationship between the stereotypical metaphoric use of the word *lame* and the true definition of the term. In one line, DeKnight has the lead character point out to her friend (and, by proxy, the audience) that there can be a direct relationship between disability-themed vocabulary and vague negativity. It should be noted that within the same episode, the terms *stupid*, *idiot*, *mental*, *loony toons*, *spaz* (related to cerebral palsy and other neurological disorders), and *geek* (which likely comes from the 16th century Germanic term *geck*, meaning a "simpleton") are all used, some more than once, and most of them are not used

with an acknowledgement of their true roots. While some of these terms have lost their connection to the source materials for many casual users, the fact that the writer of this episode made a point to acknowledge the etymology of one of his casually used disability-based terms is notable. The writer may have not considered that lame is not the only one of these terms that indicates disability. He may also have considered etymology but simply not been concerned with any terms beyond lame. No matter what his motivation was, calling attention to the origin of the term lame served two purposes. First, it served as a rare reminder to the audience that this commonly used term does have a literal, often unacknowledged meaning. Secondly, it indicated that while that particular instance of word use was worth a brief note, disability language is still acceptable. Despite these casual uses of vocabulary that serve to reinforce the popularity of disability language to indicate negativity, giving the term attention, even just once in the series, does, however, represent an acknowledgement of disability language at a higher level that is not common.

The notable exception in the pantheon of disability language in *BtVS* is the virtual lack of use of the word *retarded*. That this word was only used four times throughout the series stands out in comparison to many other terms used throughout the series. That three out of the four uses of the word retarded came from characters who were presented as being villainous on some level, and it was only used casually by a protagonist one time in the seven year run of the series, is significant. This relative lack of use suggests a possible sensitivity to the negative stigma surrounding this term. Whatever the motivation may have been for the avoidance of the term retarded, and despite the lack of restraint in

other, less openly stigmatized disability language, the show is to be commended for generally avoiding the term and not further contributing to its popular use.

As Higgins (1992) noted, language is one of the ways that people with and without disabilities create abilities and disabilities. An intentional avoidance of particularly harmful words, then, is a step worth taking. Through language we present images of people with disabilities, and these images serve to maintain the disabilities we have constructed (Higgins, 1992). As Bogdan and Knoll (1995) described in their commentary on terms such as *crazy*, *dumb*, *moron*, and *stupid idiot* in children's media and comic strips, this vocabulary use teaches children that everyday terms for describing specific groups of people are also powerful curse words. It also links intelligence and mental health to value. Therefore, *BtVS*'s regular uses of disability-themed language to communicate nothing more than vague, simplified negativity, only serves to add to the longevity of the negative social construction of disability. At the same time, the occasional glimpses of awareness, such as the clearly negative character associations for those few instances of the term retarded, as well as the brief acknowledgement that lame has a true meaning (and it is not, in fact, synonymous with *bad*) do show that *BtVS* did not merely use disability-language in an entirely thoughtless manner.

That terms like stupid and dumb were often used as a simple way to imply negativity is a simple concept, but one that is surprisingly camouflaged in modern western culture. I know from my own experiences with disability language awareness that the moment my professor in my Social Construction of Disability course pointed out this pattern, it became obvious. As happens when you learn to identify an unfamiliar model of car and suddenly you realize that you have always been surrounded by many

cars of this model, an awareness of abelist language makes it instantly clear that such usage has been in nearly every conversation all along. I also know from experience that it does not take a lot to significantly alter one's language. The moment I was aware of the negative implications of much abelist language, my usage of specific words and phrases dropped dramatically and very shortly was almost entirely extinguished. One recent, influential incident that indicates that a new awareness of handicappist language can have a real impact is that of popular sex advice columnist, Dan Savage. In 2009 a reader criticized him for his regular and casual use of the word retarded. Savage (2009) published this complaint and promised to not use the term any more. This short moment of awareness and criticism noticeably altered one person's language usage, and has since had an impact on the language of Savage and his audience (as indicated by the letters he receives), and has called widespread attention to the harmful use of the word retarded.

BtVS is an artifact that will never be altered. As with any television or film, it reflects the societal context within which it was created, just as society reflects back, impacted by its works of art. However, the context that *BtVS* exists in will continue to change. *BtVS* will always represent disability themed language that was true to the years of 1997-2003. The way this is reflected in society, however, will change with our language. That *BtVS* contains many examples of casual use of abelist language may someday stand out to more than just those with specific interest in the social construction of disability. If an awareness of abelist language becomes widespread and language use begins to change, the contrast of *BtVS*'s language use to a current reality could serve as an encouraging reminder of how language, disability awareness, and assumptions about

disability have changed. If language does not move away from casual use of abelist terms, *BtVS* will continue to reflect and reinforce current language.

Monster demographics. The tendency for fictional monsters to have disabilities has been demonstrated by researchers and theorists (e.g. Bogdan et al., 1982; Carson, 1995; Crutchfield, 1997; & Darke, 1998). The monsters in *BtVS* demonstrated traits typically associated with disabilities at rates much lower than I expected, based on the literature. Far fewer than a quarter of the monsters in the series had implied disabilities, which stood in stark contrast to the rates and patterns of disability experienced by major characters in the series. While negative stereotypes and patterns related to disabilities in horror films were generally reinforced in the major characters of *BtVS*, the demographics of the monsters who had brief, relatively minor appearances, were generally not reliant primarily on disability as a tool to indicate evil.

Types of disabilities represented in BtVS and occurrence rates. *BtVS* does not have a reputation as a show with a particular focus on characters with disabilities yet, as I described in detail in chapter four, the occurrence of disability was frequent in *BtVS*. More than half of the episodes of *BtVS* featured at least one occurrence of disability, and three episodes featured dozens of characters with implied disability. The rate of disability occurrence in *BtVS* did not appear to mirror the rates of occurrence in the real world. The episode *Hush* featured mass muteness in Sunnydale when thousands of people experienced a temporary disability. *The Weight of the World* and *The Gift* both featured many dozens of characters with suggested mental illness. Those episodes of mass disability aside, there were 82 unique incidences of disability throughout the series, often experienced by major characters. Whatever the portrayal of disability may have implied

about the themes of disability in *BtVS* (something I will explore in the following sections of this chapter), the massive presence of disability in the series is arguably meaningful within the show.

Looking at the occurrence of specific disabilities in *BtVS* reveals some interesting anomalies worthy of discussion. Learning disabilities were represented in one episode, when Giles experienced a supernatural version of dyslexia in *Nightmares*. This was reasonable for dramatic purposes, as someone having difficulty reading or comprehending printed words is not necessarily the most engaging thing to watch in a work of horror fiction. The rate of dyslexia in *BtVS* was far lower than the rate of mental illness, which was experienced at comparably high rates throughout the series. It might make sense dramatically, but it is a skewed presentation of realistic occurrence of learning disabilities and mental illness.

The occurrence rates of muteness, blindness, and deafness reveal an intriguing disparity in the presence of the disabilities in *BtVS*. Thousands of characters, the entire population of Sunnydale in *Hush*, experienced muteness, as did two characters in two other episodes. Seven characters experienced blindness in the series. There was not a single occurrence of deafness in *BtVS*. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's report (2010) on disability rates in Americans ages 16 – 64, 2% experienced hearing difficulties, as compared to 1.7% with visual impairments and no statistics given for people with speaking or verbal limitations. If the show presented a realistic representation of people with these disabilities, there would have been a few Deaf characters and a few characters with blindness. That *BtVS* did not represent deafness at all, while characters experienced blindness and muteness at high rates, is misrepresentative of the naturally occurring rates

of these ability variations in the real world. So, disability seems to occur for a reason, not just because it is the way things are. The show makers used blindness, muteness, mental illness, and a variety of physical disabilities in many ways, and one would think that deafness would have appeared in the series in a similar manner. The lack of deafness indicated that some disabilities were, perhaps, not as threatening or visible as others. In *Hush*, when Willow found that she could not hear Buffy speaking (before Willow realized that her voice was also gone), she mouthed, “I think I’ve gone deaf,” so deafness does exist in the Buffyverse. Perhaps it was just a coincidence that the show makers never turned to deafness when creating stories that involved disability. Whatever the reasons might have been, the lack of deafness was notable in the Buffyverse, where characters experienced other disabilities on a regular basis. In a series that was filled with disability anxiety, this is perhaps a good thing; to not contribute to the construction of stigma surrounding deafness. However, by never showing deafness to exist, the series also constructed a separation and compartmentalization of Deaf people, who existed (as Willow indicated), but never in the vicinity of the stories of *BtVS*.

The occurrence of mental illness was prevalent in *BtVS* at a rate far above that of real life. Mental illness, OCD, and a supernatural version of split-personality disorder (Glory and a minor character, Ben, were revealed to have a shared body) occurred in 32 characters in many dozens of episodes. If I had been more flexible in the count of occurrence of mental illness, counting characters that were behaving in ways that were stereotypically sociopathic or psychopathic without the characters within the show declaring the existence of mental illness, the count would have been higher. I will explore the implications behind the specific roles and uses of mental illness in *BtVS* in later

sections of this chapter. I feel it is reasonable to infer, merely based on occurrence rates, that *BtVS* included mental illness as a tool of storytelling at a rate far higher than a realistic representation would present. This gave the impression that the show makers saw mental illness as an appealing and essential tool of entertainment or storytelling and not necessarily as a representation of real people's realistic experiences.

Disability experiences by character. As detailed in chapter four, a major finding of my exploration of the occurrence of disability in *BtVS* is that almost every major character experienced disability at some point over the course of the show. Heroes tended to have temporary disabilities, while villains tended to have permanent disabilities. This is significant in that it demonstrated a relationship, in the Buffyverse, between the permanence of disability and good or evil.

Of the six major characters that experienced a permanent disability throughout their tenure on the show, Drusilla, Mayor Wilkins, Adam, and Glory were all Big Bads. Ben, who was revealed to have a supernatural version of split-personality disorder, is the only significant (though minor) character with a permanent disability, start to finish, who was not a Big Bad, and his disability was that he was sharing a body with a Big Bad in the style of a fission figures of horror art (Pinedo, 1997). Joyce and Xander both acquired permanent disabilities near the end of their time on the show (Joyce through illness, Xander through injury). The implications are unambiguous. In the world of *BtVS* a permanent disability that existed before one appeared in the series guaranteed that someone was a Big Bad or had an evil side.

When looking at patterns in the occurrence of temporary disabilities, the protagonists experienced disability at high rates. Oz was the only major protagonist

whom I did not record as having experienced a disability at any point in the series, but this might have just been a flaw in my database design, as he regularly locked himself in a cell so as to not injure others when he lost control of his lupine side, mimicking a restrictive institution as an acceptable method of behavior control. Looking just at occurrence of temporary disabilities, in relation to the occurrence of permanent disabilities, it is clear that disability in *BtVS* tended to be a temporary occurrence for heroes and permanent for villains. Even without context, this suggests some profound messages about disability. Based on these trends, the series communicated that permanent disabilities tend to occur in evil characters, or that disability suggests evil. The connection between their disability and their villainy was not articulated within the series, but the correlation is obvious. Temporary disabilities were experienced by most everybody, included the series' beloved heroes. This suggests that temporary disabilities are either neutral, in that they occurred in both protagonists and antagonists, or they are a narrative tool, which I will explore later in this chapter. The implication, then, may be that the ability to overcome disability is a sign of heroism or inherent goodness in most cases. While this is never stated outright, it is implied by the patterns of the series and this serves to reinforce Biklen and Bogdan's (1977) identified stereotype that people with disabilities are their own worst enemies, unable to defeat or overcome their disability. Bad things (i.e. disabilities) happen to both good and bad people, but they only stick around for those who are truly evil.

An additional significant implication of this divide between permanent and temporary disabilities is that *BtVS* established unrealistic patterns of permanence of disabilities. While in real life there are both permanent and temporary disabilities, they

are not comparable to those in this series. Many of the temporary disabilities in *BtVS* were caused by supernatural forces and were quickly resolved, often within one episode. Characters experienced muteness, blindness, various mental illnesses, and paralysis briefly, only to return to their original abilities by the end of the episode, via supernatural remedies, often instantly.

BtVS occasionally had characters experience temporary disability in a way that accurately represented the real world. Spike used a wheelchair for the second half of season two after his legs were injured. He eventually regained the use of his legs after a realistic recovery time. Several characters experienced comas due to injury and recovered with the help of standard medical care. As in any dramatic fictional television series, I suspect that the occurrence of comas was more common than in real life, as it is a common dramatic tool. The occasional appearance of natural disability, which is sometimes temporary, and the acknowledgement that recovery can take time, was a reminder that the makers of *BtVS* were aware that their typical supernatural disabilities were fundamentally different than what would be realistic.

Buffy's frequent experiences with disabilities throughout the series offer unrealistic representations of disability both in frequency and in distribution. The premise of the series was that Buffy was a seemingly typical teenager who happened to be the superhuman Chosen One. In conjunction with her role of the defender of the world, her primary identity to those who did not know her well was that of a seemingly typical high school and college student. It is highly unlikely that Buffy would have experienced disability so frequently. It is also unlikely that experiences of disability would be frequent during high school and drastically decrease over the first years of college, as they did for

Buffy. These patterns of occurrence imply that disability plays a narrative tool, as I will explore in my discussion of my Level Two analysis.

Level two: Thematic analysis. For this level of analysis, I did a thematic analysis of the data coded in my database, looking for ways to categorize my findings into cohesive themes. I found three general themes in which to categorize the various ways disability was used throughout the series of *BtVS*: character development, plot development, and atmosphere development. In the following sections, I will discuss what I see as the significance of each of these roles of disability in *BtVS*.

Theme one: Character development. The first theme I identified when I examined the various ways disability was used by the makers of *BtVS* was that of character development. I found that this theme could be divided into three sub-themes: character establishment, character development, and indirect character development. Each of these themes has unique implications when considering the social construction of disability.

Sub-theme one: character establishment. One major finding of the thematic analysis was that disability served as a tool of character establishment in *BtVS*. When looking at major characters, disability was only used as a tool of character establishment for the major villains, the Big Bads. In the cases of minor characters who were at least partially character-established using disability, most were villains with a few notable exceptions.

In chapter four I described the disabilities and mental illnesses present at the introduction of the characters of The Master, Drusilla, Mayor Wilkins, Adam, and Glory. This leaves only three Big Bads who were not introduced via disability: Spike, who

experienced many disabilities throughout the series, though none in the form of character-establishing; Warren Meers, the murderous nerd of season six, whom the show arguably presented as being sociopathic; and the First Evil, who was not so much a character as a sinister, threatening, and generally incorporeal being. That the vast majority of the major villainous characters were established as having some sort of disability or psychiatric difference stands out in this analysis. Physical and mental differences from the presumed norm in the areas of physical limitations (The Master), physical deformities (Adam), and mental illnesses (Drusilla, Mayor Wilkins, and Glory) covered a wide range of disabilities, and serve to remind us that Biklen and Bogdan's (1977) disability stereotype continue to be heavily represented decades after it was identified. That those with disabilities were sinister or evil was reinforced on a large scale in *BtVS*. The lack of major heroes who were established using disability indicates that disability and mental illness plays a role of establishing major villains, minor villains, the occasional minor positive or neutral character, and as a red herring, in the case of the man on the bus who appeared to have schizophrenia, but never to establish a major hero.

According to the patterns of the major characters of *BtVS*, people whose first impression includes an indication of their disability are likely to be villainous or bad. *BtVS* associated permanent disabilities with evilness in a way that has already been documented in the social construction of disability literature (e.g. Bogdan et al., 1982; Carson, 1995; Darke, 1998). Almost all of the major characters, protagonist, antagonist, and everyone in between, were heavily developed in this series, as character development is a hallmark of the show. Using disability as a tool of character establishment in the

villains rather than in a random mix of both protagonists and antagonists indicates an obvious association between disability and evilness.

Minor characters. Nine out of the 13 minor characters who were somewhat established using disability or mental illness were a villain in their episode. When looking at minor characters in *BtVS*, there was a bit more flexibility and a disability-influenced introduction did not guarantee that a character turned out to be a villain. The doctor with paralyzed hands in *Nightmares*, for example, was not a villain. All we know about him is that he had serious anxieties about a physical disability that would make it difficult or, perhaps, impossible for him to perform his job. However, this was a negative commentary on disability, even if it is drastically different than associating disability with evil. In this case, the prospect of disability appeared to negate the doctor's perceived self-value in the world. In this episode, different characters' nightmares ranged from Willow's stage fright to Xander's fear of clowns, but the doctor's ultimate nightmare was not being able to perform his job. For the doctor, a physical disability would damage his value in and contributions to the world. Xander's and Willow's nightmares reflected traumatic memories and performance anxiety, respectively, while the doctor's reflected a fear of not being able to help others, of not being of worth or value. This particular occurrence of disability, as demonstrated in the doctor's character establishment, is that a physical disability can reasonably be one's ultimate nightmare.

One unique use of disability as a tool of character establishment occurred in the episode *Never Kill a Boy on the First Date*, which I described in chapter four. In this episode, the audience was led to believe that a man with behaviors that stereotypically indicate schizophrenia on a bus was the evil Anointed One that The Master was

anticipating. It turned out that he was a red herring and the evil bus passenger was actually a cherubic young boy. This incidence of mental illness as a tool of character establishment is worthy of discussion, as it reveals an acute awareness on the part of the makers of the episode and a series of assumptions audiences make about people with mental illness in works of fiction. With the reveal of the true villain of the episode came an implied critique of the negative uses of mental illness in film. This was unexpected in the context of the series as a whole, as the series so often used mental illness in negative ways. This highlighted how disability was often used as a symbol for evil in the major characters within the series, but with a meta-commentary revealing self-awareness. While using mental illness as a means of tricking the audience into thinking a character was evil did reinforce stereotypes, it also showed that the makers of that episode *BtVS* had an awareness of typical usage of such stereotypes. In this early episode, the fifth of the series, the makers of *BtVS* demonstrated some variety to their use of disability as a tool of character creation.

Sub-theme two: Individual character development. Another major finding of the thematic analysis is that disability was frequently used as a tool of individual character development in *BtVS*. When considering the role of disability in character development in *BtVS* the major characters come to the forefront of this thematic analysis. There are notable distinctions between the heroes' and villains' experiences with disability.

Six minor characters were developed by disability and almost every one of the 20 major characters (21 including the non-corporeal First Evil) described in Appendix C was developed via disability. The relatively small number of disability-developed minor characters was reasonable, as those were often short term characters who were not often

around long enough to warrant notable development. The major characters were present in many episodes and were obviously prone to many tools of character development, including disability. The only major characters not developed by disability were the non-corporeal First Evil, Oz, and Warren. It could be argued that Warren displayed indications of sociopathy and Oz displayed signs of a supernatural version of mental illness. As I mentioned earlier, Oz and Warren may have shown up in the data as having had disabilities if I had only slightly redefined my rules for recording occurrences of disability.

When considering the major character development via disability, the implications are huge. Every major character was developed with disability, so the assertion that disability is powerful tool of character development is difficult to deny. Nearly a third of the episodes (47 episodes) used disability as a tool of character development but even more important is the role it played in the specific character's lives. Nearly every major character was developed using disability, often temporary. The two most notable cases of disability as character development were with Buffy and Spike, who were two of the most complicated and beloved characters in the series. Both Buffy's and Spike's characters were heavily developed through their experiences with temporary disabilities.

The major protagonists did not have permanent disabilities, yet they all experienced disability in ways that were significant in their character development. Disability was reliably experienced by the major characters, and reliably temporary. That disability was treated as a significant experience that was also reversible, always with an inherent recovery in the future, says something about disability that is not at all reflective

of the “real world.” Temporary disability or brief disability (in the case of Xander, who had adjusted to his missing eye by the end of the series) was certainly not the only way the characters were developed in *BtVS*, but disability seemed to be something the makers of the series found to be a helpful tool throughout the series. In the context of this discussion, it does not matter if this was the series creators’ conscious intention or not. The patterns are clear upon focused inquiry. The role of disability as a mechanism for character development has several major implications for the world beyond *BtVS*.

The experience of disability in the real world is certainly a factor in character development, but in a way that is profoundly different than that of the *BtVS* characters who, one could say, dabble in disability now and then with no consequences beyond character development and plot implications. There are temporary disabilities in the world outside of television and many people experience disabilities and mental illness in non-permanent ways. The disabilities that were experienced temporarily in *BtVS* such as muteness, blindness, profound yet brief mental illnesses, were often experiences that would very rarely exist in the real world as a quickly resolved experience. This not only presents an unrealistic portrayal of the permanent nature of many disabilities, but it also treats them as experiences that are essential to the strengthening of one’s character. By showing that disability was an experience that was likely temporary and served to strengthen or better a good, “normal” person’s character, *BtVS* presented disability in an entirely unrealistic manner. This use of disability neglects to acknowledge that disability is an experience that 9.9% of Americans experience in any given year (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), not including those in the military, prison, or in nursing homes. This is not a brief experience that comes and goes, leaving nothing but a better version of one’s self.

Disability is an eventual, standard occurrence in most people's lives. Thanks to the socially constructed barriers that can come with impairments, it is likely to be a part of life that makes things more difficult.

Sub-theme three: Indirect character development. The final sub-theme that emerged from the thematic analysis of *BtVS* is that disability was used as a tool of indirect character development. Characters were not merely developed via their own disabilities in *BtVS*. They were also developed by their relationship to others with disabilities. The most notable incidences of this occurred in the villainous love triangle of Spike, Drusilla, and Evil Angel.

Spike and Drusilla's relationship, in the early episodes before Drusilla regained her physical strength, was one of Spike as caregiver and Drusilla as a weak child. Their relationship exemplified Wolfensberger's (1969) description of the treatment of institutionalized people as childlike, and the infantilizing attitudes Robey et al. (2006) described in their analysis of people who worked with people with disabilities. This also reinforced Biklen and Bogdan's (1977) stereotype of people with disabilities as burdens. These authors posited that the media creates and perpetuates this stereotype by suggesting that people with disabilities need to be cared for by people without disabilities. This widely held, socially constructed presumption and generalization only serves to disempower people with disabilities.

That *BtVS*, a show with so much disability content and so much character development, would occasionally have character development linked to other characters' disabilities is logical. Spike's love and affection for Drusilla, which was deeply influenced by his apparent desire to be her caretaker, was an important indicator to the

audience that he had emotions that were more complex than the series originally established as possible for vampires in general. It is worth noting that Spike and Drusilla were shown to have been in a long-term relationship that began well before her period of physical frailty. When Drusilla was at her strongest, Spike became the subservient one. Spike's seemingly condescending treatment of Drusilla, then, does not indicate that their relationship, and his character-developing ability to love and care for another being, was rooted in his role as caretaker. It does, however, suggest that when disability is introduced into a relationship, it can impact the hierarchical dynamic between the participants. This implies that, at least in Spike and Drusilla's relationship, physical strength is a reasonable determiner of who is in charge. A change in relative physical strength might then change the power dynamic, which suggests that greater physical ability is the true source or indicator of power. Again, this assumption reinforces a socially constructed hierarchy of abilities that diminishes and disempowers people with disabilities' abilities.

Another element of characterization through others' disabilities occurred in season two when Evil Angel tormented Spike, directing much of his condescension toward Spike's use of a wheelchair. It served to increase the audience's sympathy for Spike, demonstrating the horror film theme of identifying with the monster (Zillman & Gibson, 1996). It also served to demonstrate the true depths of Evil Angel's villainy. The series established Evil Angel as the most sinister character in the series, and his mockery of Spike was a tool of this characterization. Evil Angel's treatment of Spike, his mockery of Spike's disability, reinforced the idea that it is not okay to make fun of people with disabilities. This is certainly not a bad position to take and it must be noted that Evil

Angel was cruel and vicious to everyone in the series. His treatment of Spike, however, stood out as being particularly despicable. There was an implication that cruelty toward people with disabilities is different and somehow worse than cruelty toward people in general.

In the real, non fictional world, the way that someone treats a person who has a disability, the way someone speaks of disability, or whether or not they choose to illegally park in “handicapped parking” will, most likely, impact the way people see someone’s character. However, to assume that the way one treats a person with a disability should be subject to a different set of rules than how one treats someone without a disability only serves to differentiate and segregate people based on ability. To treat people as if they fall into one of two categories, the “able-bodied” and “disabled,” rather than just to treat all people as unique individuals, implies that there is something inherently different and unifying about people with disabilities. Making any sort of generalization is dehumanizing (Gartner, 1982).

Character development synthesis. These and other examples all point to the use of the disability as a tool of character development. I would not argue that *BtVS* made lazy and predictable uses of disability as tools of character development. One of the fundamental features of the series is character development, so it could be argued that nearly everything within the series played a part in this theme. The clothes the characters wore, the sets, the particular vocabulary of each character, the performance choices the actors made, the plots, and beyond were all a part of character development. If disability was not used as a part of character development in a series like this, it might be because it was never represented within the show. In my opinion, having no representations of

disability would be far less interesting than having complex and sometimes problematic representations of disability that can inspire analysis and discussion. Nonetheless, the roles that disability played in character development in *BtVS* repeatedly reinforced the common notion in film that disability carries with it some indication of or influence on a character's inherent goodness, evilness, or value.

Theme two: Plot development. As I described in chapter four, disability was used as tool of plot development in more than a third of the episodes of *BtVS*. Most of these plots were heavily driven by disability, rather than just enhanced or lightly influenced. The high frequency of disability as a mechanism of plot development suggests that the makers of *BtVS* saw disability as a valuable catalyst for change or story development in the episodes they produced.

Disability was almost always presented in *BtVS* plots as a source of threat that the heroes had to overcome in order to thwart death and destruction. In *BtVS*, disability was often a challenge to overcome and learn from. The social construction of disability literature suggests that disabilities present challenges that are primarily due to socially constructed restrictions and limitations (e.g. Ferguson, 1987; Jones, 1996; Manion & Bersani, 1987; & Sleeter, 1986). From this perspective, then, the impacts that disabilities had on the plots of *BtVS* were not due to the inherent threat of disability but, instead, the threat of contexts that were incompatible with physical or mental variation. This was not acknowledged in the series, however, and disability often appeared to be a seen as a temporary challenge that made things more difficult for the heroes.

Looking at the inherent nature of disability beyond the constructed limitations, disability will impact the storylines of real life, but in ways that are not necessarily

negative. The birth of a Deaf child to hearing parents, for example, will likely inspire a new parent to learn American Sign Language and form a connection with the Deaf community. A permanent back injury might necessitate some changes in one's relationship to their physical space and activities. In real life, accommodations and changes and unexpected story redirections or change can be good or bad. In the world of *BtVS*, the message is that disability impacts plot in ways that are negative, threatening, and, one hopes, temporary, reinforcing a negative construction of disability.

Theme three: Atmosphere development. *BtVS* used disability for atmosphere in a variety of ways. Before beginning my data collection and analysis, I predicted, based on my theoretical frameworks, that if disability played any role in *BtVS*, it might primarily appear as mechanism of atmosphere development and as a source of categorical blurring (see Carroll, 1990; Pinedo, 1997). I was surprised, then, to find that when it did play a role in atmosphere development, disability surfaced in a wider range of ways than just building on a horrific atmosphere, and the topic of categorical blurring did not specifically appear in my database.

Posters on the Sunnydale High walls. While I will mostly focus on atmosphere in *BtVS* related to characters with disabilities, it is worth noting disability-themed set dressing that influences atmosphere. There was a common theme of disability in the posters decorating the walls of Sunnydale High. The characters never acknowledged the posters on the wall, but the posters played a notable role in creating the atmosphere of a typical American high school, enhancing the irony of Sunnydale High's physical situation, directly on top of the mouth of Hell. The posters, described in chapter four, relied on scare tactics to discourage students from drinking and driving. Fear of burnt

faces, wheelchairs, missing legs, and crutches are used in posters throughout the seasons that partially take place at Sunnydale High. I do not know if these posters were stock prop posters from the time of the series, or if they were created specifically for the series. Either way, they came across in the series as realistic posters that might fill a typical high school, and their catchy slogans, along with the disability imagery, relied on a fear of disability as a way to scare students into avoiding drunk driving. The atmosphere created by these posters, however, did not come across as scary, anxiety-filled, or repressive. Instead, they blended in seamlessly with the sunny atmosphere of Sunnydale High, a seemingly typical California school. That these dramatic images of disability as threat contributed to a school atmosphere in a way that did not particularly stand out says a lot about disability's constructed role in the society of a fictional high school. This reinforces the clichéd cinematic assertions that disability can be a punishment for sin (Strong, 2008) or even a punishment worse than death (Whittington-Walsh, 2002).

Disability as a tool of atmosphere development. As described in chapter four, many characters with disabilities influenced the atmosphere in *BtVS*. This included major villains, such as Drusilla and Mayor Wilkins, as well as Buffy, Willow, and various minor characters. In this section, I will discuss the implications of select incidents as described in chapter three, as well as general implications.

Everything surrounding Drusilla was consistently disturbing and horrific, and it generally revolved around her mental illness. Drusilla's behavior, her collection of porcelain dolls, and her anachronistic wardrobe that often recalled childhood, reinforcing the stereotypical notion that people with disabilities are childlike (e.g. Clare, 2001; Robey et. al, 2006; Shakespeare, 1999b). Drusilla's mental illness added an element of

unpredictability and violence (as described by Byrne, 2000; Gerber, 1994; Whittington-Walsh, 2002). Drusilla's menace was enhanced by her mental illness, as the literature predicted it would (e.g. Bogdan & Knoll, 1995; Longmore, 2001; Zola, 1985). These stereotypical assumptions about mental illness are typical and untrue. Assuming that people with mental illness are menacing or violent only reinforces widespread but statistically unsupported assumptions. As I discussed earlier, these assumptions lead to dehumanizing and cruel treatment of people with mental illness.

A notable occurrence of disability-influenced atmosphere on a large scale involved the First Evil's priests, the Bringers. The Bringers had cut their eyes out and, in the case of one, had cut out his own tongue. The scars over the Bringers' empty eye sockets and the implied self-mutilation added a significant element of horror to their scenes, recalling Clover's discussion of the vulnerable roles of eyes in horror films (1992). The link between body horror, as described by Olney (2006), and the perceived experiences of people who have had disabling and severe injuries, can cause a visceral association between the grotesque side of horror art and disabilities that were acquired through injury. There is no unifying experience of people who have had severe injuries. In reality, every individual who has been severely injured in a way that resulted in a disability has the right to frame it however they would like, be it a slapstick anecdote, a terrifying tale of horror, or a story too boring to retell. However, the horrific atmosphere created by the Bringers was likely enhanced by the typical horror audience's fear of disability and disfigurement, as described by Longmore (1987). This assumed that there is something inherently grotesque about disability and people with disabilities but, as Davis (1997) described, any notion of grotesque as it relates to "normal" is entirely

constructed. That the Bringers mutilated themselves as a public and visible gesture to demonstrate their commitment to the First Evil suggests that even they could appreciate that society would interpret their disability through a filter of horror art.

In the episode *Hush*, arguably the most horrific episode of the series, the Gentlemen's henchmen wore straightjackets for no apparent reason other than to add to the sense of horror in the episode. The straightjacket arm straps were broken, allowing their arms to move freely. The image of a broken straightjacket implies both mental illness and violence, reinforcing the recurring stereotype of the homicidal manic (Hyer et al., 1991), much like Zachary Kralig, the straightjacket-wearing vampire in *Helpless*. These henchmen were present for nothing more than to support the Gentlemen in their murderous pursuits. Perhaps the henchmen caused anxieties based on a fear of people with mental illness. They also might elicit fear of institutionalism and the horrific treatment of people with mental illness, both historic and continuing today as the legacy of abusive institutions dies but is far from being eliminated. Ultimately, they serve merely as tools of horror, demonstrating that institutionalized men in straightjackets are a violent threat who merit restraints. They also reinforce Biklen and Bogdan's (1977) stereotype of people with disabilities as atmosphere. The henchmen did not speak and only occasionally participated in the action of the episode, but their presence greatly influenced the atmosphere of horror.

Ultimately, *BtVS* used disability as a mechanism for developing horrific atmospheres in numerous ways that are in line with the social construction of disability and horror literature. The implied link between disability and violence reinforces the stereotypical assumption in media that mental illness is linked with violence or

criminality (Longmore, 2001). The use of disability as a method to make characters more vulnerable in scenes of horror, such as Buffy's and Willow's of weakness and paralysis as they witnessed horrific situations, strengthened the association between victimhood and disability, which Barnes and Mercer (1997) declare to be problematic. Reinforcing the stereotype that people with disabilities are victims, or that they are pitiable and pathetic, serves to distinguish people perceived as having disabilities from those who are not. This places those without perceived disabilities above those with, in terms of assumed power and ability to care for oneself. It suggests that people with disabilities are burdens (to those around them and society) and require help, while those without disabilities are the source of support and strength. It reinforces the socially constructed notion that people with and without disabilities are in two different categories, therefore othering people with disabilities.

Level three: Ideological rhetorical criticism. When considering the categories of suggested elements, there is ideological consistency throughout scenes I analyzed. Themes of violence, institutionalism, infantilization, were found in two to three scenes each, and isolation was a theme in one scene. When performing an ideological criticism, one does not stop after identifying the underlying themes. The next step is to explore what the show was communicating around these themes (Foss, 2009).

Ideological theme one: Violence and chaos. The first identified theme (occurring in three of the four scenes) was that of violence and chaos. Two scenes reinforced the notion that people with mental illness are violent and one reinforced the idea that people with disabilities are victims of violence. Scene one featured the man on the bus with implied schizophrenia. This scene played on audience assumptions that this man was a

villain. It relied on and somewhat reinforced the audience assumption that a character in a film with schizophrenia will likely turn out to be a threat. In scene two, one of her first appearances in the series, Drusilla was shown to be an abnormally violent vampire. Drusilla's mental illness was always at the forefront of her characterization.

The violence in scene three, when Buffy found herself in a psychiatric hospital, was quite different from the violence of the previous scenes. This violence was inflicted on Buffy by the orderlies, and it provided a rare instance of Buffy being overpowered. This scene stands out in the series, as Buffy was often involved in violent conflict, but in this case her adversaries were hospital workers, who were not a typical threatening demographic in *BtVS*.

Of the four analyzed scenes, the theme of violence appeared in the three that featured characters with mental illness rather than physical disabilities. Through set design, lighting, performances, costumes, props, and more, *BtVS* communicated a deep ideological association between mental illness and physical violence. These themes of violence, while quite different from each other, suggested a deeper relationship between disability and violence, be it inflicted by or on the person with a mental illness. This perpetuates the notion that people with mental illness are likely violent or the victims of violence. As Walsh et al. (2003) demonstrated, people with mental illness are much more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators. The patterns in *BtVS*, within this ideological criticism as well as the Levels One and Two analyses, demonstrate the opposite. Depicting a strong correlation between mental illness and violence serves to reinforce stereotypes (as described by Bogdan et al., 1982; Hyler et al., 1991; Longmore,

2001; & Zola, 1985). As Bogdan et al. stated, these stereotypes perpetuate prejudice that, ultimately, leads to fear and societal exclusion of people with disabilities.

Ideological theme two: Institutionalism. While the theme of institutionalism was obvious in the hospital scene in *Normal Again*, it occurred in three out of the four analyzed scenes. Each of these scenes featured characters with mental illness rather than physical disabilities. There was no indication that the makers of *BtVS* were trying to communicate that people with mental illness should be institutionalized. It did show, however, that the makers strongly associated characters with mental illness with design choices that can be associated with psychiatric hospitals. This implies that filmmakers found lighting, costumes, props, and sound design to be valuable tools for creating characters with mental illness. This might just be an example of filmmakers both critiquing and taking advantage, narratively, of the historical assumption that people with mental illness would be best served in institutions. This provided a quick shorthand for communicating that someone had a mental illness, even if the show demonstrated an anti-institution position in the more thematically obvious scenes, such as the scene from *Normal Again*. When this stereotype is employed on a subtle level that does not elicit conversation or thought or clear critique, the association between mental illness and institutionalization may be perpetuated and the stigma of mental illness may be furthered. I am not criticizing subtle messages and themes in film, as that is where much of the joy of going to a film lies. In the case of this analysis, however, there did seem to be an association between mental illness and institutionalism that was used as a tool to show that someone had mental illness, rather than as a tool of social commentary. These patterns are worthy of conversation and consideration on the part of audiences and

filmmakers. Film tropes rooted in increasingly outdated views of disability might very well serve to maintain the medical model's problematization of disability.

Whatever the motivation of the filmmakers may have been, the association between mental illness and institutionalization perpetuated an image of people with mental illness in restrictive hospital environments, even as the institutional model has changed dramatically since the 19th century (Lang, 2001). Approximately 26.2% of Americans aged 18 and older experience a diagnosable mental illness in a given year (NIMH, 2013). Institutionalization is not the typical experience of a person with mental illness, yet *BtVS* often used deep hints of institutionalism to indicate mental illness. If the institutionalization of people with mental illness would be taken to its logical (though unrealistic) conclusion, a quarter of Americans would be institutionalized in any given year.

Ideological themes three and four: Infantilization and Isolation. The theme of the infantilization of people with disabilities came out of three of the four scene analyses. The infantilization of Drusilla (both through her costume and the setting, as well as Spike's treatment of her) contributed to her characterization as well as Spike's in the thematic analysis. In the case of Spike, his infantilization was framed as a demonstration of Evil Angel's extreme cruelty.

It was not merely Drusilla, in her white lace gowns and her bedroom, telling her doll that she would get "no cakes today," who was shown to be childlike. Clues are buried in scenes surrounding the strong and tough Spike, including his posture and the details of the garden set. Buffy's scene in the psychiatric hospital, along with many anonymous patients in a hospital, was filled with costume, intercom voiceover, and prop

choices that referenced the theme of infantilization. The series makes use the stereotype articulated by Wolfensberger (1969) and planted suggestions of infantilization throughout the scenes I analyzed in ways that were not necessarily apparent during my content and thematic analysis.

The ideological theme of the infantilization of people with disabilities is consistent with the writing of Clare (2001) on harmful stereotypes of people with disabilities. Clare argued that people with disabilities must not be seen as childlike, forced to live in back rooms and nursing homes. Wolfensberger (1969) wrote about the infantilization of people with disabilities and, decades later, it is still a theme that is deeply embedded in the scenes I analyzed. Much like with the theme of institutionalization, the logical conclusion of the infantilization of people with disabilities is the wrong-headed assumption that people with disabilities need to be confined to a restrictive institutional setting and treated as ill or poorly behaved children.

Ideological theme four: Isolation. Biklen and Bogdan's (1977) stereotype of people with disabilities as incapable of fully participating in everyday life was strong in the scene four theme of isolation. Spike's interactions with Evil Angel and Drusilla in *I Only Have Eyes for You*, the blocking, the framing of the characters within the frame, and the set design all contributed to a sense of isolation for Spike because of his physical disability. Spike was unable to participate fully in his, Drusilla's, and Evil Angel's plans to kill Buffy due to his mobility limitations, and this theme was buried in the implications of the scene's design and details. As I discussed in my section on indirect character development, the isolation that Evil Angel gleefully imposed on Spike was more of a tool of Evil Angel's character development than Spike's. Evil Angel seemed to be taking

advantage of Biklen and Bogdan's stereotype in this scene, declaring that Spike could not participate due to his use of a wheelchair. The ideology demonstrated in this scene was not that people with disabilities should be isolated but, rather, that disability can lead to helplessness and a forced isolation, whether or not it is just.

Ideological criticism summary and conclusion. This ideological criticism revealed that many of the stereotypical themes from the social construction of disability literature (e.g. Biklen & Bogdan, 1977; Hyler et al., 1991) are buried within the details of the series, based on four particular scenes. I am not arguing, however, that *BtVS* is responsible for creating or intentionally perpetuating these stereotypes. I am also not suggesting that the makers of *BtVS* support or agree with these stereotypes. Instead, I believe that the results of my rhetorical criticism suggest that *BtVS* is an example of society and popular culture reflecting each other and influencing each other in a way that is not possible to separate and assign responsibility. The makers of the series must communicate with the audience using familiar language, metaphors, and associations. The stereotypes that people with disabilities are violent, institutionalized, childlike, or isolated provide filmmakers with very obvious symbols to use in their work. What language can filmmakers use other than that of their society? In the next section on implications and recommendations, I will discuss the value of filmmakers moving the language and symbols related to disability into new territory, undermining and perhaps diminishing the presence and power of marginalizing stereotypes of people with disabilities.

Implications. In this section I will describe my perceived implications for this research in several areas. First, I will describe what I see as the implications of these

findings on the makers of *BtVS*. Next, I will look at implications for filmmakers. I will describe my understanding of the implications of this research on the existing social construction of disability literature. Finally, I will discuss the implications of this research for society.

Implications for makers of Buffy the Vampire Slayer. *BtVS* is a thematically deep series that has a reputation for displaying awareness and concern in areas of feminism, queerness, community, and death, among many, as I described in chapter one. Within the series there were several indications that the series' makers were occasionally thoughtful and aware of issues of disability. The series makers, however, often used disabilities in ways that are negative or stereotypical, such as the strong correlation between permanent disabilities and villainy. While the show has concluded, the series continues on in comic book form. If the comic book writers and artists would, perhaps, consider the historical use of disability in *BtVS* and intentionally break or contradict existing patterns, it could add a fascinating new layer to the series. It would deepen the creativity of the storytelling and by not relying on old patterns and tropes, it could contribute a positive piece to the ever-evolving social construction of disability in popular culture.

Implications for filmmakers and audiences. Longmore (2001) noted that the two striking facts that emerge when analyzing images of people with disability in film are that, first, disability is quite prevalent in cinema and, secondly, that audiences often overlook the prevalence of disability and the presence of characters with disability. Upon the completion of my data collection, analysis, and discussion, I realized that I identified every single one of Biklen and Bogdan's (1977) ten stereotypes of people with

disabilities in *BtVS*. I did not structure my research around a hunt for stereotypes, but all of them surfaced naturally in the analysis and discussion. That these stereotypes, identified decades ago, are still so easy to find in popular culture indicates that a heightened awareness of these patterns is in order.

Filmmakers and audiences can take meaningful steps toward creating an increasingly healthy role for disability in the media. Rather than films contributing to the limitations of disability, films can be a tool of the construction of difference and variety as a healthy, welcome part of society. Merely increasing filmmaker and audience awareness of and interest in the role of disability in the works they engage with, both as creators and viewers, would have a profound effect on disability in film.

While it is not realistic to suggest retroactive alterations to an existing piece of filmmaking, asking filmmakers to adopt a new level of awareness, thoughtfulness, and concern for the role their works play in the social construction of disability is a reasonable aspiration. Communicating the important role film plays in the construction of disability to the right audience could have an impact. Entering a conversation about how pop culture impacts lives in a profound way, and identifying the easy stereotypes and patterns that arise in shows that likely do not intend to have any disability message, is a realistic starting point. As Higgins (1992) notes, “we make disability, even when our intentions have nothing to do with disability” (p. 7). As a conduit for portrayals of disability, the media is in the position to influence, positively or negatively, the cultural stereotypes that frequently characterize people with disabilities (Byrd & Pipes, 1981).

Audiences can have a profound impact on the role of disability in film.

Filmmakers do not exist in a bubble, unaffected by the conversations surrounding their

work. Audiences can influence the media by being increasingly discerning and thoughtful about the entertainment they consume and their responses to the role of disability in films. This research suggests that themes of disability may appear in many works without the filmmaker's awareness or intentionality. By engaging filmmakers in thoughtful, critical conversation about their works, audiences have power. Even if the filmmakers do not communicate directly with their audience, critical responses and public conversations create accountability for the artist. By rewarding increasingly realistic and thoughtful themes and representations of disability in film, and by holding filmmakers accountable for negative patterns of disability in their work, audiences have power. Ticket sales as well as public conversations about works are powerful. Audiences can also choose to openly reject stereotypical depictions of people with disabilities and themes of disability in film.

Films with blatantly ableist themes might spark important conversations, but less obvious works, such as *BtVS* should also be a part of the conversation. A heightened awareness and consideration of issues of disability in film, both blatant and subtle, might lead filmmakers to make simple decisions with a strong impact in the films they produce. When introducing new characters, some villains and some heroes, it would be easy to avoid assigning disability in predictable ways. Some villains can have disabilities, but those disabilities should show up in heroes and neutral characters at comparable rates. Experiences of incidental disability, disability that occurs at a realistic rate and is not associated with good or evil or any stereotypes but just exist as a part of the real human experience, would communicate a profoundly different message about disability than *BtVS* and other works of fiction; that villains, heroes, and everybody in between might

experience disability at some point in their life. This would be an essential step in alleviating stigma and, with that, the socially constructed, disabling elements of physical and mental differences from the supposed norm might begin to change for the better.

The way we portray people with disabilities in the media and popular culture contributes to the separation of people with disabilities from those without (Higgins, 1992). It is up to all filmmakers and audiences, with and without disabilities, to participate in changing the role of media in the construction of disability for the better. People with and without disabilities are responsible for creating disability (Higgins, 1992). As Higgins asserted, disability is the product of a world that we have constructed without thought. Filmmakers' and audiences' heightened (or even basic) awareness of disability issues would be the first step to inserting some thought into the contributions that films will always make to the social construction of disability. Farnall and Lyons (2012) did find a 200% increase in the number of people with disabilities (or, at least, characters with disabilities) in prime time television commercials since 1999, so there does seem to be some movement toward increased disability presence in the media. However, this analysis suggests there is still much room for improvement.

Implications for research. Black and Pretes (2007) found that films featuring characters with disabilities have moved away from the stereotypes of people with disabilities as dangerous monsters or pitiable victims. In my research, however, I found that those were two of the strongest stereotypes of disability in *BtVS*. These diverging findings reflect on the differences of genres. Black and Pretes selected their movies by searching through multiple database using keywords such as *disability*, *physical disability*, and *film*. This was appropriate for their research interests, and it resulted in an

analysis of films that were primarily dramas including *My Left Foot* (1989), *Theory of Flight* (1998), and *Million Dollar Baby* (2004). Safran's (2001) analysis of Academy Award winning films with characters with disabilities is another example of research that analyzed dramas with obvious disabilities. These works are worth continuing to study, as they have a strong influence on film's contributions to the social construction of disability. When describing the topic of this dissertation to people who have seen the series, the most common response, by far, was "oh, is there a disabled person in *BtVS*?" I hope that my research will contribute to the broader conversation and will serve to encourage future studies to focus on work that does not necessarily have a reputation for having disability content.

Implications for society. Ultimately, my interest in the themes of disability in film, while inspired by my love for the medium, is rooted in the impact film has on the lives of real people. Film has entertainment value, aesthetic value, and it can inspire thought and conversation centering on an infinite number of topics, themes, and aesthetic and technical issues. When considering the social construction of disability perspective, it becomes clear that film impacts lives in meaningful ways. Assuming that film matters, and based on research, theory, and academic writing on the social construction of disability I believe that it does, my above sections on implications for filmmakers then, logically, applies to society, as well. Intentional or unintentional, obvious or subtle, the ideas conveyed in film play a role in the social construction of disability.

I fully agree with Langworthy's (1930) statement from nearly a century ago, "works of fiction reflect the attitudes of the general public" (p. 271), and I feel that this statement will always be true with some qualifiers. There is always room for artists to be

subversive and to produce work that goes against the status quo, but those works also reflect on the common attitudes of the public, just from a different perspective. There is no way to quantify the impact film has on society or society has on film in a way that is reliable or generalizable, but an acknowledgement on the part of filmmakers and film audiences that the relationship between film and society is an important one, and an increasingly thoughtful approach to including themes of difference and disability in film, would likely have a positive impact on society and the social construction of disability.

If films and televisions had an increasingly positive impact on the social construction of disability, and if public attitudes had a positive impact on the themes of disability in film, the lives of people with disabilities could be dramatically impacted. If the stigma of disability were to diminish as filmmakers increasingly tried to thoughtfully incorporate disability into their works in ways that decreases stigma and stereotypes, many disabling limitations on physical and mental differences might diminish. Consider a world where people were not trained through repetition in popular culture, from childhood, to associate disability with evil or as a convenient and highly fictionalized tool for character development. If film were to consistently communicate, blatantly and subtly, that disability is a natural part of the human experience, perhaps the constructed stigma of disability would begin to be extinguished.

Limitations of this research

The task of analyzing disabilities in a work of fiction is one that is not easily operationalized. Because this research is inherently qualitative, other researchers would likely have categorized the data differently. While I tried to be as concrete as possible in the process I followed for the data collection and analysis, I recognize that another

researcher might identify different patterns. Identifying or labeling disability in film is not a hard science, especially factoring in “observations” of mental illness, which can be presented in ambiguous ways. I recognize the subjectivity in developing coding categories and how I recorded information. If I had changed my definitions, my data would have changed. Black and Pretes (2007) intentionally focused on films with characters with physical disabilities for this reason. I did not want to make assumptions when identifying disability, but my own history with popular culture and disability had to have influenced some of the data. It is highly likely that I would have some variety in the data collection if I were to repeat the study. I do not feel that this renders my findings without value. One of the foundational positions of this dissertation is that disability is not a tangible, measurable occurrence. For future research, it would be worthwhile to have multiple researchers collect data using the same database and then compare the results. Differences, both subtle and dramatic, could be examined and the data collection methods could be refined in order to elicit data with more inter-researcher reliability.

Another limitation of this research is inherent in the design of the database and data collection methods. Because of the episode-by-episode nature of the records, my analysis was biased toward shorter-term plots and themes and away from a broader view of the series. The themes I identified were based on patterns I found in episode-specific observations. It is possible that different themes would arise by recording observations of entire seasons, for example. I viewed the episodes with an awareness of the broader context of the series, but my data did not necessarily reflect broader plots and themes that might be obvious when collecting data from larger segments of the series.

Future Directions for Research, Recommendations

Social construction of disability theorists and researchers (e.g. Ferguson, 1987; Jones, 1996; Manion & Bersani, 1987; Sleeter, 1986) assert that attention must be paid to the society-created context that creates disabilities in individuals (or groups of individuals) whose specific physical, intellectual, or mental are not inherently flawed but, instead, are not fully compatible with their flawed or restrictive environment. The literature on the social construction of disability in popular culture argues that the role of disability in film has an impact (often negative) on the construction of disability (e.g. Biklen & Bogdan, 1977; Bogdan et al, 1982; Longmore, 2001). As my analysis of *BtVS* demonstrated, disability can have a strong presence in a television show without being given much attention or acknowledgement either within the series or in the public perception of the show. Therefore, a thoughtful awareness of the role of disability in popular culture is essential for recognizing and reforming the role of television and film in the social construction of disability, perhaps especially in those films where disability is not an obvious issue or theme.

I found in the literature (e.g. Mallett, 2009) and through this analysis that identifying the role of disability in an artifact of popular culture is not straightforward or simple. Declaring that Scar in *The Lion King* (1994) is an example of filmmakers using disability as a shorthand for evil is valuable in that it is an easy introduction to the idea of stereotypical uses of disability in film, but it is only a pinpointed glimpse into the complex and nuanced role that disability might specifically play in *The Lion King*. Perhaps an increase in the research that explores the role of disability in film will bring the discussion further into the mainstream in areas of film studies, social construction of disability, and disability studies in general. Future research that might add to the existing

body of work of popular cultural analyses, including Knoll's (1987) exploration of photographs of people with disabilities and Safran's (2001) analyses of Academy Award-winning films dealing with disability and warfare, could make for an increasingly convincing triangulation of common themes that might run throughout seemingly unrelated pieces of work in a variety of mediums.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I am not suggesting that works of popular culture should be dismissed or avoided when they make use of disability in ways that contribute to the negative social construction of disability. *BtVS* is a complicated television series that I continue to have a great respect and love for after performing this exploration of the role of disability. In fact, my intensely close viewing and analysis of the series only deepened my appreciation of the complexity and high quality of the series. While a focused and systematic analysis revealed negative assumptions about disability in *BtVS*, this does not mean that the show should be avoided or that it is deserving of a diminished reputation. However, I do feel that Joss Whedon and other filmmakers must be held accountable for the messages they convey regarding disability, even if disability is far from their interest as they create a work.

As Hoeksema and Smit (2001) noted, to dismiss a film because of inaccuracies is to also deny their teaching and learning value. *BtVS*, a well-respected show that has inspired a great amount of academic exploration, might be a perfect entry point for popular culture critics with a new interest in the role disability might play in film. Exploring what this show says about disability, even if it is not often positive, is a way to

enter into a thoughtful discussion and critique of a carefully crafted series and pop culture as a whole.

Appendix A

Database screenshots

Level 1	Gen EP notes	D1: Level 2	D2: Level 2	D3: Level 2	D4: Level 2	D5: Level 2	Identity/Horror	Guest characters (superhuman/nonhuman)	
Season	Season premier	Character appearance						Character w/ (implied) disabilities 1	
1	<input type="radio"/> yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Buffy Summers	<input type="checkbox"/> Ben					Cordelia	
Episode number	Season finale	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Xander Harris	<input type="checkbox"/> Graham Miller					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Charrydev <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility limitation <input type="checkbox"/> Muteness <input type="checkbox"/> Head trauma <input type="checkbox"/> Charryest <input type="checkbox"/> Psychiatric <input type="checkbox"/> Physical frailty <input type="checkbox"/> OCD <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Plotty <input type="checkbox"/> Missing body part <input type="checkbox"/> Coma <input type="checkbox"/> Split persona <input type="checkbox"/> Atty <input type="checkbox"/> Facial disfigurement <input type="checkbox"/> Dyslexia (ish) <input type="checkbox"/> Depression <input type="checkbox"/> Physical deformity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Blindness <input type="checkbox"/> Amnesia <input type="checkbox"/> Debilitating b <input type="checkbox"/> Intellectual <input type="checkbox"/> Deafness <input type="checkbox"/> Cancer <input type="checkbox"/> Illness	
3	<input type="radio"/> yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Willow Rosenberg	<input type="checkbox"/> Forrest Gates					Character w/ (implied) disability 2	
Episode name		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rupert Giles	<input type="checkbox"/> Wesley Wyndam-P					2nd cheerleader	
Witch		<input type="checkbox"/> Spike	<input type="checkbox"/> Adam					<input type="checkbox"/> Charrydev <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility limitation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Muteness <input type="checkbox"/> Head trauma <input type="checkbox"/> Charryest <input type="checkbox"/> Psychiatric <input type="checkbox"/> Physical frailty <input type="checkbox"/> OCD <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Plotty <input type="checkbox"/> Missing body part <input type="checkbox"/> Coma <input type="checkbox"/> Split persona <input type="checkbox"/> Atty <input type="checkbox"/> Facial disfigurement <input type="checkbox"/> Dyslexia (ish) <input type="checkbox"/> Depression <input type="checkbox"/> Physical deformity <input type="checkbox"/> Blindness <input type="checkbox"/> Amnesia <input type="checkbox"/> Debilitating b <input type="checkbox"/> Intellectual <input type="checkbox"/> Deafness <input type="checkbox"/> Cancer <input type="checkbox"/> Illness	
Writers		<input type="checkbox"/> Anya	<input type="checkbox"/> Professor Maggie V					Character w/ (implied) disability 3	
Diana Reslon		<input type="checkbox"/> Dawn Summers	<input type="checkbox"/> The Master					Buffy	
Director		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Joyce Summers	<input type="checkbox"/> Clem					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Charrydev <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mobility limitation <input type="checkbox"/> Muteness <input type="checkbox"/> Head trauma <input type="checkbox"/> Charryest <input type="checkbox"/> Psychiatric <input type="checkbox"/> Physical frailty <input type="checkbox"/> OCD <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Plotty <input type="checkbox"/> Missing body part <input type="checkbox"/> Coma <input type="checkbox"/> Split persona <input type="checkbox"/> Atty <input type="checkbox"/> Facial disfigurement <input type="checkbox"/> Dyslexia (ish) <input type="checkbox"/> Depression <input type="checkbox"/> Physical deformity <input type="checkbox"/> Blindness <input type="checkbox"/> Amnesia <input type="checkbox"/> Debilitating b <input type="checkbox"/> Intellectual <input type="checkbox"/> Deafness <input type="checkbox"/> Cancer <input type="checkbox"/> Illness	
Stephen Cragg		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cordelia Chase	<input type="checkbox"/> Halfrek					Character w/ (implied) disability 4	
Original Air Date		<input type="checkbox"/> Angel	<input type="checkbox"/> Caleb					Type of disability 4	
8/17/1997		<input type="checkbox"/> Tara Maclay	<input type="checkbox"/> Daria						
		<input type="checkbox"/> Oz	<input type="checkbox"/> Ethan Rayne						
		<input type="checkbox"/> Riley Finn	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Amy Madison						
		<input type="checkbox"/> Jonathan Levinson	<input type="checkbox"/> Jenny Calendar						
		<input type="checkbox"/> Andrew Wells	<input type="checkbox"/> Principal Flutie						
		<input type="checkbox"/> Faith	<input type="checkbox"/> Willie the Snitch						
		<input type="checkbox"/> Principal Snyder	<input type="checkbox"/> Kendra						
		<input type="checkbox"/> Drusilla	<input type="checkbox"/> Amanda						
		<input type="checkbox"/> Warren Meers	<input type="checkbox"/> Ubervamp						
		<input type="checkbox"/> Harmony Kendall	<input type="checkbox"/> Kennedy						
		<input type="checkbox"/> Mayor Richard Wilkins	<input type="checkbox"/> Roma						
		<input type="checkbox"/> Principal Robin Wood	<input type="checkbox"/> Vi						
		<input type="checkbox"/> Glory	<input type="checkbox"/> Chao-Ahn						
Brief episode synopsis		A witch manipulates the cheerleading tryouts.							

Level 1	Gen EP notes	D1: Level 2	D2: Level 2	D3: Level 2	D4: Level 2	D5: Le
Disability dialogue	0 Willow to Xander on SAT scores: A 740 verbal? I'm pathetic, illiterate. I'm Cletus the Slack-Jawed Yokle! Xander: That's right, and the fact that your 740 verbal closely resembles my combined scores in no way compromises your position as the village idiot. 2 Cordelia, on Buffy's high SAT score) Get out of sunnydale? That's a good thing. What kind of moron would ever want to come back here? [Cut to Spike's return!!!] 7 Buffy to Giles on mother's reaction to SAT scores: She started with all this crazy talk about me going to college. 10 Spike ~ talking at Angel (Angel can't hear): We were happy. You brainwashed her. 11 Spike, in Magic Shoppe, to clerk: I need a curse (a curse?) A curse. Something nasty. Boils. I wanna give him boils. All over his face, you know, dripping puss. Let's really go for the gusto. Clerk: I'm hearing a lot of negative energy and I bet... Spike: Leprosy! Alright. A spell that makes his parts fall of. That sounds proper. Clerk: We don't carry lerosy. 17 Xander to Willow, finding out she's doing a de-lust spell for the two of them: Are you					
Gen observations	Reaction stuff in this episode to Drusilla, via spike. Analysis ~ maybe Angel says NOTHING about disability other than during Angelus time. Look into it.					

APPENDIX B

General premise of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

BtVS takes place in Sunnydale, California, which sits on top of the mouth of Hell. There is a heavy concentration of demonic activity at the Hellmouth, of which the general population is mostly unaware. Buffy Summers is the latest in the ancient line of vampire slayers, a series of girls who are chosen to defend the world from demons and vampires. The series opens when Buffy relocates to Sunnydale and befriends Xander, Willow, and her new Watcher (supervisor), Giles. Over the course of the show new characters join this core group, but the initial four remain as the main characters throughout the series.

The series occasionally follows a ‘monster of the week’ formula, especially in the early seasons. Each week a new monster or threat appears and Buffy and her friends save the world once again. Larger threats come in the form of Big Bads, villains who provide season-long foes. There is a joke about the number of near apocalypses at the end of season five when Buffy dies (to be brought back to life in the following season) and we see her gravestone engraved with, ‘SHE SAVED THE WORLD - A LOT.’ Arguably, the core of the show is the theme of what might happen to characters, both Buffy and those close to her, who spend seven years (and beyond, in the continuing comic book) saving the world.

APPENDIX C

Heroes

- ***Buffy Summers* (Sarah Michelle Gellar, 144 episodes, Seasons 1-7)**

Buffy Summers, the show's titular vampire slayer, has super human intelligence, strength, healing abilities, and reflexes. She is the *Chosen One*, tasked with protecting the world from vampires and demons. Over the course of the series, Buffy transforms from an effervescent teenager to a young woman hardened by the pressure of years of massive responsibilities.

- ***Xander Harris* (Nicholas Brendon, 144 episodes, Seasons 1-7)**

Xander Harris, one of Buffy's best friends, is the goofy and awkward comic relief of the series. He is seen as the 'heart' of the protagonists.

- ***Willow Rosenberg* (Alyson Hannigan, 143 episodes, Seasons 1-7)**

Willow Rosenberg, the third in the main trio of protagonists, begins the series as a highly intelligent but meek computer nerd. Over the course of the series, she masters witchcraft and becomes one of the most powerful characters on the show.

- ***Rupert Giles* (Anthony Stuart Head, 123 episodes, Seasons 1-7)**

Rupert Giles is Buffy's 'Watcher' (supervisor). Giles serves as an authority figure to the central teenagers, and his pseudo-parental role decreases as Buffy, Willow, and Xander grow up over the seven years of the series.

- ***Spike* (James Marsters, 96 episodes, Seasons 2-7)**

Spike, a particularly powerful vampire is introduced in season two as a Big Bad. Throughout the series he transitions into a hero and sacrifices himself to save the world in the final episode.

- ***Anya* (Emma Caulfield, 82 episodes, Seasons 3-7)**

Anya is an ancient demon who was banished from a demon realm to a life as a human. She is introduced to the series as a temporary villain but she quickly becomes a member of the main protagonists.

- ***Dawn Summers* (Michelle Trachtenberg, 65 episodes, Seasons 5-7)**

Dawn Summers is Buffy's teenage younger sister who, due to complex plot points, does not exist in the series until the beginning of season five. She generally plays the role of an annoying, needy, self-centered teenager.

- ***Joyce Summers* (Kristine Sutherland, 60 episodes, Seasons 1-5, brief appearances in seasons 6 and 7)**

Joyce is Dawn and Buffy's mother. She does not know about Buffy's secret life as a vampire slayer until late in her run in the series. She dies of a natural illness in season five.

- ***Cordelia Chase* (Charisma Carpenter, 54 episodes, Seasons 1-3)**

Cordelia Chase is a major character in season one through three who goes on to be one of the leads in the *BtVS* spin-off, *Angel*. Cordelia is a popular cheerleader who is increasingly involved with Buffy, Willow, and Xander.

- ***Angel* (David Boreanaz, 56 episodes, Seasons 1-3, brief appearances in seasons 4, 5, and 7)**

Angel is a once-evil vampire, cursed with a soul and consciousness and romantically involved with Buffy. He is temporarily evil in the second half of season two, joining forces with Spike and Drusilla. He eventually leaves Sunnydale and returns once every year or two to check in on the Sunnydale crew.

- ***Tara Maclay* (Amber Benson, 47 episodes, Seasons 4, 5, and 6)**

Tara Maclay is a witch who is romantically involved with Willow for several seasons before an aspiring villain, Warren Meers, murders her.

- ***Oz* (Seth Green, 39 episodes, Seasons 2-4)**

Oz is a werewolf who is romantically involved with Willow through high school.

- ***Riley Finn* (Marc Blucas, 31 episodes, Seasons 4-5, brief appearance in season 6)**

Riley Finn is romantically involved with Buffy for two seasons during college. He is a soldier in a secret government organization devoted to eliminating the world's demon presence.

- ***Faith* (Eliza Dushku, 20 episodes, Seasons 3-4 and 7)**

During Buffy's brief death in season one, Faith is anointed as a second slayer. Faith is a volatile character and always has an antagonistic relationship with the show's protagonists, occasionally acting as a villain.

Villains

- ***The Master* (Mark Metcalf, 8 episodes, Season 1, brief appearances in seasons 3 and 7)**

The Master is the main villain of season one, an ancient vampire intent on bringing about the apocalypse.

- ***Drusilla* (Juliet Landau, 16 episodes, Season 2, brief appearances in seasons 5 and 7)**

Drusilla, a powerful vampire, is the major villain of season two.

- ***Mayor Richard Wilkins* (Harry Groener, 14 episodes, Season 3, brief appearances in seasons 4 and 7)**

Mayor Wilkins is the mayor of Sunnydale and the major villain of season three. Human in appearance, he is actually a demon, intent on unleashing the demon realm on earth in order to achieve immortality.

- ***Adam* (George Hertzberg, 9 episodes, season 4, brief appearance in season 7)**

Adam, a Frankenstein's monster-like character, is the result government experiment, pieced together from humans, demons, and machines. Adam is the primary weapon of the secret government agency that serves as the Big Bad of season four.

- ***Glory/Glorificus* (Clare Kramer, 13 episodes, season 5, brief appearance in season 7)**

Glory, the main villain of season five, is a god from a hell dimension, banished to earth and trying to return home.

- ***Warren Meers* (Adam Busch, 15 episodes, season 6. brief appearances in seasons 5 and 7)**

Warren, the major villain of season six, is the head of a trio of nerds that attempts to become the world's first true comic book style super villains.

- ***The First Evil* (no specific actor, ambiguous number of appearances, season 7, referenced in season 3)**

The First Evil, the major villain of season seven, can take the form of any dead person. As the name implies, The First Evil is the ultimate evil power and Buffy's biggest foe.

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