Lawrence B. Rosenfeld and Scarlet L. Wynns Perceived Values and Social Support in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

[1]"In a broad sense all television educates. Values, attitudes, and behaviors are part of almost all programming, from cartoons to prime time adventure shows" (Schultze, 1986, p. 25). Indeed, the mass media, such as television, are the primary way people form their attitudes and values (Smythe, 1981). The goal of this study was to assess the values and types of social support people perceive as important in *BtVS*—the values and types of social support viewers are *learning* are important.

[2]*BtVS* teaches, although it is unclear exactly what. Articles in journals, such as *Slayage* and *Studies in Contemporary Culture*, and books, such as *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in* Buffy the Vampire Slayer (Wilcox & Lavery, 2002), hint at what it is viewers of *BtVS* may learn about the contemporary world by watching the Buffyverse, but they fail to assess viewer perceptions directly to determine what it is viewers actually "see." For example, from critics' perspectives, *BtVS* teaches viewers that "female normalcy within that system [patriarchy] equals helplessness" (Barbaccia, 2001, paragraph 4), and that dreams dramatize internal attitudes, symbolically represent important interrelationships and, oracle-like, hint at events to come (Keller, 2002, p. 177). Viewers also learn about the dynamic of race relations (Edwards, 2002), and the problems manifest in mother-daughter and older woman-younger woman relationships (Williams, 2002). *BtVS* may even be useful in therapeutic sessions with adolescents in therapy (Schlozman, 2000). But, do viewers "see" what critics "see"?

[3]Values are an important place to start when assessing viewer perceptions because values serve as criteria for judgment, preference, and choice, and determine decisions in behavior—they underlay our knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes (Rokeach, 1968, 1979). Rokeach argued that 36 independent values sufficiently represent all human values, including 18 instrumental "to be" values and 18 terminal "to have" values. The 18 instrumental values are: (1) ambitious (hardworking, aspiring); (2) broadminded (open-minded); (3) capable (competent, effective); (4) cheerful (lighthearted, joyful); (5) clean (neat, tidy); (6) courageous (standing up for your beliefs); (7) forgiving (willing to pardon others); (8) helpful (working for the welfare of others); (9) honest (sincere, truthful); (10) imaginative (daring, creative); (11) independent (self-reliant, self-sufficient); (12) intellectual (intelligent, reflective); (13) logical (consistent, rational); (14) loving (affectionate, tender); (15) obedient (dutiful, respectful); (16) polite (courteous, well-mannered); (17) responsible (dependable, reliable); and (18) self-controlled (restrained, self-disciplined). The 18 terminal values are: (1) a comfortable life (a prosperous life); (2) an exciting life (a stimulating, active life); (3) a sense of accomplishment (lasting contribution); (4) a world at peace (free of war and conflict); (5) a world of beauty (beauty of nature and the arts); (6) equality (brotherhood, equal opportunity for all); (7) family security (taking care of loved ones); (8) freedom (independence, free choice); (9) happiness (contentedness); (10) inner harmony (freedom from inner conflict); (11) mature love (sexual and spiritual intimacy); (12) national security (protection from the attack); (13) pleasure (an enjoyable, leisurely life); (14) salvation (saved, eternal life); (15) self-respect (self-esteem); (16) social recognition (respect, admiration); (17) true friendship (close companionship); and (18) wisdom (a mature understanding of life).

[4]Values imply behaviors related to social support. Social support, verbal and nonverbal encouragement people give and receive in different areas in their lives (Albrecht & Adleman, 1987), is a coping resource, a social fund from which people may draw in stressful situations (Thoits, 1995). Richman, Rosenfeld, and Hardy (1993) identified eight types of social support: (1) listening support (listening without giving advice or being judgmental); (2) emotional support (providing comfort and caring and being on the support recipient's side); (3) emotional challenge support (challenging the support recipient to evaluate her or his attitudes, values, and feelings); (4) task appreciation support (acknowledging the recipient's efforts and expressing appreciation for the work he or she does); (5) task challenge support (challenging the recipient's way of thinking about a task or an activity in order to stretch, motivate, and lead the person to greater creativity, excitement, and involvement); (6) reality confirmation support (seeing things the same way the recipient does and so confirming her or his perspective of the world); (7) tangible assistance support (providing the recipient with financial assistance, products, and or gifts); and (8) personal assistance support (providing services or help, such as running an errand or driving her or him somewhere).

[5]Rokeach's values seem intrinsic to behaviors that constitute social support. For example, attaching importance to being "loving" probably means providing others with emotional support and listening support; attaching importance to being "ambitious," "honest," and "responsible," and having "wisdom" may underlay and motivate the provision of task challenge support. Since values and social support seem to go hand-in-hand, perceptions of values and social support could be utilized to provide a more complete picture of viewers' understanding of *BtVS*.

[6]The research question that guided this study was: *What values and forms of social support are perceived by viewers as important in* BtVS?

METHOD

[7]Twenty-two respondents completed a survey (some via the Web and others in a paper-and-pencil format) that consisted of several demographic questions (e.g., age and sex) and two instruments. Responses were automatically coded from the completed Web surveys into text files that were then translated into a data file. Completed paper-and-

pencil surveys were added to the data file by hand. Analysis of the data was accomplished using SPSS 11.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

[8]Respondents completed the Rokeach Value Survey (Rokeach, 1979) to indicate the extent to which they perceived each of the 18 instrumental "to be" values and 18 terminal "to have" values to be important in *BtVS*. Each instrumental value was introduced with the phrase, *It is important to be* (ambitious, broadminded, etc.), and each terminal value was introduced with the phrase, *It is important to have* (a comfortable life, an exciting life, etc.), and respondents completed a scale that ranged from 1 (never or almost never represented on the show) to 5 (always or almost always represented on the show). The Rokeach Value Survey is one of the most utilized values instrument in the literature (Hague, 1993), and it is the most utilized quantitative instrument for studying values in television. A great deal of evidence is available supporting the validity and reliability of the instrument (see, e.g., Cohen, Chase, & Stahly, 1989; Horley, 2000; Rosenfeld & Schrag, 1985; Shen & Yuan, 1999).

[9]Respondents also completed the Social Support Survey (Richman et al., 1993) to indicate the extent to which they perceived characters in *BtVS* providing each of eight types of social support. The five-point scale ranged from "Never or almost never provide this type of support" to "Always or almost always provide this type of support." As with the Rokeach instrument, there is a great deal of evidence supporting the validity and reliability of the Social Support Survey (see, e.g., Hurst, Hale, Smith, & Collins, 2000; Richman et al., 1993; Rosenfeld & Richman, 1999).

[10]Overall, the sample had a high proportion of women (73%) and Euro-Americans (64%). The respondents ranged in age from 18 to 64, with most in their middle 30s. Their level of education completed ranged from grade school to graduate school, with most being either high school or four-year college graduates.

Analysis

[11]To answer the research question, the terminal values, instrumental values, and social support means were rank-ordered from highest to lowest. For each ranking, means were compared using paired-sample *t* tests ($p < .01$), and the group of highest and lowest means were identified (i.e., means not different from each other while being different from the others).

RESULTS

[12]Table 1 presents the three rankings and means for each value and form of social support. For each ranking, the group of highest and the group of lowest means are boldfaced; values that almost were included in the group of highest instrumental values are italicized.

Table 1

Rank Ordered Means (Ascending) for BtVS *(n = 22)*

Rank	Instrumental Values	Mean	Terminal Values	Mean	Social Support Types	Mean
1	courageous	4.59	true friendship	4.41	emotional support	4.14
2	helpful	4.59	self-respect	4.23	task challenge	3.91
3	broadminded	4.32	exciting life	4.23	emotional challenge	3.91
4	*responsible*	4.27	wisdom	4.18	personal assistance	3.86
5	capable	4.23	sense of accomplishment	4.18	reality confirmation	3.73

6	ambitious	4.00	family security	4.14	listening support	3.14
7	forgiving	4.00	world at peace	3.68	task appreciation	3.05
8	independent	3.91	freedom	3.62	tangible assistance	2.41
9	imaginative	3.91	mature love	3.55		
10	self-controlled	3.77	equality	3.45		
11	loving	3.50	salvation	3.27		
12	honest	3.50	national security	3.18		
13	intelligent	3.41	inner harmony	3.18		
14	logical	3.18	happiness	3.05		
15	obedient	3.18	social recognition	3.00		
16	cheerful	3.05	pleasure	2.95		
17	polite	2.36	a world of beauty	2.68		
18	clean	2.36	a comfortable life	2.36		

[13]The analyses of the instrumental values revealed that the most important ones—not different from each other and different from the others—perceived by viewers were: It is important to be courageous, helpful, and broadminded (and possibly responsible and capable), and *not* important to be clean or polite. The analyses of the terminal values perceived by viewers were: It is important to have true friendship, self-respect, an exciting life, wisdom, a sense of accomplishment, and family security, and *not* important to have a comfortable life and a world of beauty (of nature and the arts).

[14]The analyses also revealed that five of the eight types of social support are provided by characters in *BtVS*: emotional support, task challenge support, emotional challenge support, personal assistance support, and reality confirmation. A type of support rarely provided is tangible assistance support.

DISCUSSION

[15]In 1981, Schrag, Hudson, and Bernabo published a study in which they used fantasy theme analysis to describe television shows that were part of a "humane collectivity," shows in which there was a "portrayal of humane sympathetic awareness of group and person as the basis for a meaningful and rewarding existence" (p. 3). In these shows, a viewer could see the importance of significant others, of alliance in action, and of characters gaining membership into personhood. Their humane collectivity and the values within it were later empirically validated using the Rokeach Value Survey (Rosenfeld & Schrag, 1985; Schrag & Rosenfeld, 1987). Shows in the collectivity—*M*A*S*H, Taxi, Barney Miller,* and *Lou Grant*—were perceived by viewers as depicting the values of honesty, helpfulness, cheerfulness, and true friendship, and not the values of cleanliness, social recognition, or a comfortable life.

[16]Although discussions of the humane collectivity centered around values, the bases of the humane collectivity were the behaviors portrayed on the shows, and those behaviors were arguably forms of social support. For example, alliance in action requires "members of the group to help one another attain mutual goals and fulfill mutual obligations" (Rosenfeld & Schrag, 1985), and could be indicative of task appreciation support, task challenge support, and tangible assistance support. Ultimately, all of the values important to the humane collectivity (honesty, helpfulness, cheerfulness, and true friendship) may be the same values that underlay the different forms of social support.

[17]*BtVS* has several values in common with shows in the humane collectivity: it is important to be helpful and to have true friendship, and it is unimportant to be clean or to have a comfortable life. But *BtVS* is not a throw-back to shows in the late 1970s; it is richer and, in many ways, offers viewers a world view—a Buffyverse—in which values and behaviors important for the new millennium are demonstrated. To survive now, 25 years after the humane collectivity, in addition to the importance of being helpful it also is important to be courageous and broadminded, and in addition to having true friendship it also is important to have self-respect, an exciting life, wisdom, a sense of accomplishment, and family security (whether in an immediate family, like the Summers family, or in a constructed family, such as the Scooby gang). The new millennium requires more. And the behaviors that make obvious this array of values are behaviors that provide others with the means of coping with the challenges of living everyday life or "saving the world—a lot."

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