"Life Isn't a Story:" Xander, Andrew, and Queer Disavowal in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

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[1] This paper examines male homoeroticism in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), particularly as it relates to Xander and Andrew. Much of the homoerotic subtext in *Buffy* is centred around Xander, yet *Buffy* creates a structural pattern by which Xander's homoeroticism is disavowed and denied as frequently as it is evoked. I argue that this pattern eventually leads to the introduction of Andrew, whose much more explicit homoeroticism diverts attention away from Xander's, allowing the series to emphasize Xander's heterosexuality in relation to Andrew. This relationship culminates in the episode "Storyteller" (7.16), which explicitly associates Andrew's desire with Xander, then chastises Andrew for this desire while simultaneously reinforcing Xander's heterosexuality. *Buffy* thus, after creating the homoerotic tensions that surround Xander, deals with those tensions by using Andrew's homoeroticism and its punishment as a scapegoat. In *I'm Buffy and You're History*, Patricia Pender calls for scholars to pay more attention to male homoerotic desire in *Buffy,* arguing that, while there has been a great deal of work done on *Buffy*'s gender portrayal and lesbian narratives, "the flawed and often foiled homoerotic desires of the series' ostensibly

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straight male characters call out for further attention" (119). This paper intends to respond to Pender's call, complementing current critical discussion of sexuality in *Buffy* by exploring how male homoerotic desire functions in the series.

[2] The structure by which *Buffy* disavows potential male homosexuality by insisting on the heterosexuality of its men is similar to that of queerbaiting, although *Buffy*'s structure is somewhat different. Rose Bridges describes queerbaiting as "putting in a little gay subtext, stirring up interest with queer fans, and then pulling a NO HOMO, MAN on the viewers . . . the creators are playing with LGBTQ… dollars, but don't care enough about us that they'd risk actually offending homophobes with explicit queer representation." While queerbaiting is a useful way to explain disavowal in many cases, *Buffy* functions differently, as it is invested in more complex queer politics than simply a grab at the "queer dollar." As Pender argues, "there is reason to suggest that the series is most queer when it is not directly addressing explicitly homosexual content" (121). The queer ideology of *Buffy* has been extensively examined: Cynthea Masson and Marni Stanley's discussion of camp aesthetics in the text, Allison McCracken's discussion of Angel's queered body, Marc Camron's discussion of gender identity and hybridity, and Farah Mendelsohn's discussion of Willow's queer relationship with Buffy are just a few examples of how *Buffy*'s queerness runs deeper than explicit homosexuality. Disavowal in *Buffy* happens, I argue, not because *Buffy* wants to cash in on queer viewers, but because the series produces queer ways of understanding cultural norms, but then becomes uncomfortable when these conceptual ways of understanding begin to solidify in literal potential for male homosexuality. Textual homosexuality is thus disavowed, presumably in an attempt to keep *Buffy*'s queer politics safe and appealing to heteronormative viewers.

[3] With this complexity in mind, my analysis—while discussing patterns of disavowal—intends to foreground an awareness that this disavowal of textual homosexuality is consistently accompanied by subtextual pathways for queer readings. As Lorna Jowett points out, Whedon himself, with his "bring your own subtext" motto, has a history of actively encouraging readings that explore subtext rather than just

textual "canon," making attention to the subtext of *Buffy* crucial to any analysis (13). *Buffy*'s subtextual queerness opens up routes of intervention, which have found expression outside the television series in fan fiction and comic books. Therefore, while I intend to critique the homophobia that arises from the aggressive, structural disavowal of textual male homosexuality in *Buffy*, I do so with an acknowledgement of the hope, productivity and potential for intervention that comes from *Buffy*'s subtextual queerness, the way the fans have historically developed this queerness through fan fiction, and Whedon's own open encouragement of fan responses.

The Queerness of Xander

[4] My analysis of Xander's homoeroticism in *Buffy* is informed by Eve Sedgwick's discussion of erotic triangles. Sedgwick, working with René Girard's concepts, observes that, during love triangles, "the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved" (21). Sedgwick then extends this observation to connect it to Gayle Rubin's and Claude Levi-Strauss' arguments surrounding "the use of women as… property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men" (25-26). In this context, the erotic triangles that are created when two men compete over a woman become just as much about the relationship between the men as they are about either man's relationship with the woman; often, the woman exists primarily to facilitate a relationship between men. Erotic triangles in *Buffy* are formed between Xander and all three of Buffy's main love interests: Angel, Spike, and Riley. Xander's relationships with these men are facilitated by his relationship Buffy but become more about his relationship with them than they are about Buffy.

[5] The homoerotic nature of Xander's rivalry with Angel is apparent when contrasting Xander's first encounters with both Buffy and Angel. When Xander first sees Angel, he becomes focused on Angel's body and physical attractiveness: "he's buff… he's a very attractive man" ("Teacher's Pet" 1.4, 00:07:36-45). Xander is the only one in this scene who seems interested in Angel's physical appearance,

with Willow asking indifferently, "You think he's buff?" (00:07:40). Xander's focus on Angel's body (a body which Allison McCracken reads as constantly "queered" throughout *Buffy* and *Angel)* and the time he spends discussing it contrasts his initial, nonchalant description of Buffy as simply being "pretty much a hottie" ("Welcome to the Hellmouth" 1.1, 00:05:54). In these initial descriptions, Xander seems much more interested in ruminating on Angel's attractive body than he is in describing Buffy in any detail. Of course, Xander's interest in Buffy is not facetious; when he first sees her, he is so distracted by her appearance that he falls off of his skateboard. However, while he clearly desires Buffy, the unspecified language he uses to describe her to his friends contrasts with the physicality of his description of Angel to Willow. While this scene is only a brief moment at the beginning of Xander and Angel's relationship, it already hints at their homoerotic subtext, where the triangle eventually becomes as much about their intimate rivalry as Xander actually desiring Buffy herself. This rivalry eventually leads to the conclusion of "Becoming" (2.21-22), in which Xander refuses to deliver Willow's message to Buffy that she may be able to reverse Angel's curse. Xander makes the choice to betray his friends and risk losing the trust of both Willow and Buffy, as he becomes primarily driven by his desire to have Angel killed, and this desire fueled by rivalry begins to harm his relationship with Buffy herself.

[6] Xander's interest in Angel's physicality is particularly significant in "Teacher's Pet" because the rest of the episode implies that Xander's interest in women functions as a way to impress other men. The episode begins with a scene in which a group of men discuss their sexual conquests, asking Xander "How many times you score?" (00:06:51-54). In response, Xander walks up to Willow and Buffy, responding "Blaine had the nerve to question my manliness. I'm just going to give him a visual," before walking off with them (00:07:12-15). Xander is shown using heterosexual desire as a performance for other men; his actions towards Willow and Buffy are described as an attempt to "create a visual" for Blaine, demonstrating how Xander uses heterosexual desire to impress the men who are watching; *Buffy* once again constructs an erotic triangle between Blaine, Xander, and Xander's

female friends in which the women are used primarily to facilitate relationships between men.

[7] The homoerotic subtext between Xander and Buffy's lovers becomes more explicit when she begins her relationship with Spike. In the fifth season, Xander approaches Buffy after he mistakenly thinks she is sleeping with Spike. He explains that he could understand her desire, as Spike is "strong and mysterious and sort of compact, but well-muscled" ("Intervention" 5.18, 00:32:13-17). Buffy humorously responds, "I am not having sex with Spike, but I'm starting to think you might be" (00:32:17-22). Xander's elaborate description of Spike's body—along with Buffy's identification of this description as homoerotic—mimics his first encounter with Angel, in which he focuses on the attractive body of Buffy's romantic interest. The subtextual (and sometimes textual, as in the case of Buffy's comment) suggestion of Xander's potential desire for other men is facilitated through his triangular positioning of rivalry with Buffy's romantic interests.

[8] Xander's relationship with Riley differs from his relationships with Spike and Angel, as Xander is interested in Riley as a companion, not a rival. Furthermore, unlike his bodily interest in Angel and Spike, Xander's desire for Riley happens in terms of non-bodily expressions of Riley's power, largely stemming from Xander's admiration of Riley's military career and persona. When Buffy first takes Xander to the Initiative with her, he examines the base and exclaims "Holy moly! . . . I totally get it now. Can I have sex with Riley, too?" ("Goodbye Iowa" 4.14, 00:30:25-30). Xander is visibly impressed by the Initiative and expresses sexual interest in Riley. Although this interest is framed as facetious rather than sincere, it does express the homoerotic subtext developed between the characters. Xander's fascination with Riley's involvement in the military and the homoerotic moments it facilitates function similarly to Xander's relationships with Angel and Spike. In these erotic triangles, Xander develops intimate relationships with other men, triangulated through Buffy, that lead to homoerotic "slips" in which Xander's comments take on an explicitly erotic tone.

Have I Mentioned I am Heterosexual Today?[1]

[9] Despite these moments of homoeroticism, *Buffy* produces a structural pattern where Xander's homoerotic encounters are accompanied by stern reminders of his heterosexuality. The scene where Xander jokes about sleeping with Riley is immediately followed by an attempt to kiss Buffy to hide from passing soldiers. Visually frustrated that Buffy refuses this attempt, he responds to her quip that the scientists and soldiers don't make out in the Initiative by retorting: "well maybe that's what's wrong with the world. Did you ever think about that?" ("Goodbye Iowa" 4.14, 00:31:03-09). Xander's brief foray into homoeroticism is quickly followed up by his desire to kiss Buffy and his almost childish frustration at her refusal to participate, affirming his heterosexual desire and disavowing the homosexual implications of his earlier comment. In "Intervention" (5.18), in which Xander makes his homoerotic comment about Spike's body, he is also the only other character besides Spike willing to sexualize and commodify the Buffybot later in the episode. There is a strange moment towards the end of the episode in which Xander expresses sympathy for Spike because, "his best toy gets taken away" (00:40:53-55). The other characters are noticeably concerned about Xander's engagement in the misogynist idea of the Buffybot as a "toy." Xander is aligned with the heterosexist, misogynist rhetoric of Spike and Warren, rather than the clearly uncomfortable position of the women in the scene, once again reasserting Xander's alignment with (in this case, a rather misogynistic version of) heterosexuality in an attempt to disavow the homoerotic implications of his moment earlier in the episode.

[10] While disavowing literal homosexual desire, however, these two scenes do open up oppositional readings on a figurative level. In both cases, the performative nature of Xander's heterosexual desire is emphasized. While he clearly wants to kiss Buffy in "Goodbye Iowa,", he enacts this desire by trying to act out a conventional movie scene, commenting "you know, in the movies…" (00:30:43-44). Furthermore, Xander's alignment with heterosexual mentality in "Intervention" is primarily based around language use. His heterosexual performance in the scene is rhetorical, taking the form of misogynist terms like "toy" to

refer to the Buffybot, as opposed to more deep-set convictions, as he makes it clear that his primary sympathy for Spike is based on the torture that Spike undergoes, rather than his loss of the Buffybot. While he does problematically participate in the rhetoric of misogyny, Xander does not condone other actions that accompany it, once again emphasizing the performative nature of Xander's association with heterosexuality. While *Buffy* denies an ostensibly queer reading of Xander through these scenes of disavowal, it does provide the tools for a queer subtextual reading.

[11] The pattern of disavowal extends past Xander's early-season attraction to Buffy. An oft-cited moment comes from season seven's "Beneath You" (7.2), in which Nancy asks if anyone in the Scooby Gang hasn't slept together, which results in an awkward glance between Xander and Spike (00:28:30-34). Again, however, *Buffy* distracts viewers from this brief nod to homoeroticism, as it is positioned strategically in an episode focused primarily on Xander's heterosexual romantic relationships. Xander's main plot arc in the episode is made clear from the exposition, where Xander discusses his lingering feelings for Anya and his desire to start dating again. This conflict becomes the focal point for Xander's arc as he attempts to begin a romantic relationship with Nancy but ends the episode alone with Anya. While a brief moment of homoeroticism is allowed to happen, it takes place in an episode focused mainly on Xander's romantic relationships with women, once again keeping it "safe" for heteronormative viewers as it is framed by a comfortable reminder that, despite this moment, Xander is, indeed, heterosexual.

[12] In discussing *Buffy*'s disavowal, it is worth exploring Xander's romantic relationships. Xander expresses sexual or romantic desire for every principal female character in *Buffy* except for Dawn, who is still underage by the end of the TV series[2]. He has a crush on Buffy, romances with Cordelia, Anya, and Willow, a sexual dream involving Tara in "Restless" (4.22), and even a sexual dream about Buffy's mother Joyce in the same episode; as Jowett argues, "Xander is never shown in a non-sexualized relationship with a female character" (138). His relationship with Anya is also extremely sexualized; sex is something that permeates every aspect of their relationship, up to Anya's marriage vows promising to have sex with Xander whenever she wants to, and to be his

"sex poodle" ("Hell's Bells" 6.16, 00:25:09-11). In the context of *Buffy*'s general need to remind audiences of Xander's heterosexuality, coupling him with the series' most sexualized woman and creating romance plots (requited or not) with the majority of the other characters, adds to the series' discomfort with and disavowal of his ostensible homerotic potential.

[13] Of course, while Xander's involvement with *Buffy*'s female cast serves to emphasize his heterosexuality, it also opens up queer readings. While Anya may be extremely sexualized, she is also, as Lewis Call puts it, "openly, outrageously, unapologetically kinky" (45), expressing her sexuality in non-normative ways. Also, since Anya was formerly a demon, a large part of her role in *Buffy* involves her questioning human social norms. While playing The Game of Life in "Real Me" (5.2), Anya misunderstands the rules of the game, which are based on Western cultural values, as she comments: "Crap . . . I'm burdened with a husband and several tiny pink children and more cash than I can handle" (00:23:25-29). When informed that money is a good thing, Anya replies, "I'm so pleased. Can I trade in the children for more cash?" (00:23:38-42). Because Anya needs Xander to teach her that a husband, children, and money have social value, she emphasizes that these values are constructed and learned, allowing her to disrupt myth-making surrounding capitalism, reproduction, and heteronormativity. Anya functions as a queer character; while she does not engage in literal homosexual activity, her kinky sexuality and presence as a disruptive force to heteronormative structures establishes her ideological queerness. Xander's connection with Anya as his main love interest (as well as the unconventional structure of their relationship, as their attempt at getting married fails) may be visually and assertively hetero*sexual,* but it is anything but hetero*normative*. Once again, *Buffy*'s denial of a homosexual reading of Xander does not necessarily preclude a queer one.

[14] Xander's relationship with Willow also opens up queer readings of his character. While their brief romance in Season Three serves to reinforce Xander's status as Sunnydale's preeminent heterosexual, romancing or crushing on every woman he meets, their later relationship opens up queer potentiality. In "Restless," Xander dreams about a sexualized Willow and Tara, who invite him to join them

for a threesome. Of course, by playing out the heterosexual male fantasy of threesomes with queer women, the scene does reinforce Xander's association with conventional heteronormative narratives. However, the depictions of eroticized women in Xander's dream are both notably excessive – Joyce, Willow and Tara are almost in costume, as they wear sexualized outfits that do not resemble their usual dress – and mapped onto common, almost clichéd, cultural narratives (the "friend's mom" fantasy and the "threesome with two lesbians" fantasy). It is thus easy to read them as self-conscious (almost parodic) performances of heterosexuality, rather than essentialized sexual experiences. This parodic tone is emphasized when Willow and Tara kiss for an extended period of time, and yet none of the kiss is shown on screen (despite Willow's invitation to "watch this"), as the camera focuses on Xander's face through the duration of the kiss ("Restless" 4.22, 00:19:20-24). Viewers are thus denied a titillating, voyeuristic experience, as the camera focuses on the humor of the dream (Xander's uncomfortable, yet intrigued expression) and the clichéd sexual fantasy that it plays out, rather than the eroticism of Willow and Tara's action. Performance in Xander's dream is foregrounded as well in the use of a film, *Apocalypse Now,* to frame the action, as the dream is aesthetically and thematically based around the film, making frequent references to it. The use of *Apocalypse Now* emphasizes Xander's interest in employing conventional narrative to self-consciously perform identity, similarly to his use of film convention when he attempts to kiss Buffy in "Goodbye Iowa.". While the dream plays into heteronormative narratives, the episode foregrounds the fact that they are *narratives,* and this self-reflexivity opens up queer ways of reading the dream.

[15] Xander's dream in "Restless" also aligns him with the queer sexuality of Willow and Tara. The couple appears in the back of Xander's van while he attempts to control Anya and teach her about cultural norms. They appear immediately after he says that "society has rules, and borders, and an endzone," as their giggle cuts him off in the middle of his sentence, disrupting his attempt to "civilize" Anya (00:18:44-53). The couple's presence in his dream thus stands for more than just sexualized women; it functions as a disruptive force, interrupting his normative speech. When they appear, Xander abandons

his attempt to control Anya, and he also relinquishes control of a moving vehicle to someone who is attempting to drive it by "gesturing emphatically," as the focus of the scene shifts from control and normativity to disorder and disruption (00:19:46-51). As Xander chooses to join Willow and Tara in the back, he leaves normativity behind to join the couple in their social disruption and queerness. This association of Xander with the queerness of Willow and Tara also relates to his earlier comment in Willow's dream: "sometimes I think about two women doing a spell, and then I do a spell by myself" (00:05:55—00:06:05). Since witchcraft in *Buffy* is consistently used as a metaphor for sex between women, Xander's use of the phrase "doing a spell" to refer to masturbating while fantasizing about Willow and Tara aligns his sexuality with theirs, using the series' language of lesbian sex to refer to his desire. Rather than fantasizing about sex *with* them in a heteronormative way—sleeping with two women at once in a display of heterosexual machismo—Xander's rhetorical connection with the couple could be read as suggesting that his masturbatory fantasies involve having sex *like* them, wanting to join them in the queerness of their sexuality. Thus, much like Xander's relationship with Anya, his interactions with Willow, despite reinforcing his literal heterosexuality, also draw attention to his figurative queer potential.

[16] Because there are so many opportunities to read Xander as figuratively queer, viewers are thus given the ability to produce their own counter-readings. Lorna Jowett observes that "fan fiction often presents Xander as gay" (138), and Milly Williamson produces an extended reading of fanfic about Spike and Xander (173). Esther Saxey hints at fanfic's ability to intervene in *Buffy* when she argues that "what Buffy slashers are most drawn to is not only that which is absent… but particularly that which has been thrown out of *Buffy*: themes dwelt on in the middle of episodes or plotlines which are abandoned or overcome" (199). Because of the structure of disavowal *Buffy* produces, explicit male homosexuality is one of these things that *Buffy* briefly dwells on, but then throws out; however, while textual male homosexuality is thrown out, subtextual queerness remains, providing a source of inspiration for fan fiction. The result is that, while *Buffy* occludes a gay reading of Xander, the subtextually queer readings that it opens up allow for a site of

resistance and productivity, as these readings are taken on by fans who use them to write their own response texts and fiction. While Xander's homoeroticism is denied on television, *Buffy*'s subtext provides incentive for him to be queered outside the world of the series.

Andrew, The Sexual Scapegoat

[17] *Buffy*'s attempt to disavow Xander's homoerotic moments is complicated in the seventh season with the introduction of Andrew Wells as a primary character and eventual member of the Scoobies. Andrew is what David Greven calls a "quasi-allegorical gay male character" (63), whose status as a gay man is heavily implied but never explicitly confirmed in the television series. Andrew's existence seems to respond to the subtle homoeroticism between other characters, as he is produced as a much more explicit (although still strategically ambiguous) articulation of it. His blatant homoeroticism contributes to the series' structure of disavowal, as it largely functions to draw attention away from the subtler tensions between other characters.

[18] The idea of Andrew as a scapegoat—drawing attention away from the sins of other characters by becoming a more explicit representation of these sins and taking on both blame and punishment for them—is not without precedence. Greven positions Andrew as a scapegoat figure who "suffers for the sins of the principal characters, most of whom . . . have committed grievous sins" (65). His list of characters for whose sins Andrew is punished includes Willow, Giles, Anya, Spike, and Buffy, with Xander notably missing from the list. Building on Greven's reading of Andrew as scapegoat, as well as his insistence on the homophobia of "Storyteller," where "the queer man cannot tell his story" (73), I suggest that Andrew serves as a scapegoat not just for the crimes of the others, but also for Xander's homoeroticism. The episode thus continues *Buffy*'s process of disavowal by allowing Andrew to take the blame for the series' homoeroticism instead of Xander.

[19] In "Storyteller" (7:16), Andrew's homoerotic desire is a central focus. Scenes such as Andrew ignoring a sexualized scene between Willow and Kennedy to instead admire Xander's repair job on

the window above them, sharing a bed with Jonathan, to whom he refers as "just the cutest thing" (00:11:10-15), and constantly pining after Warren's affection foreground Andrew's desire for other men. In one of the episode's most notable scenes, Andrew watches a video he has filmed of Xander and Anya, mouthing Anya's lines and pretending to be her while she says, "There's no one like you Xander. You were willing to stand up to danger when your hands had no weapons. . . . we fit together great . . . I hope you know you never left my heart" (00:21:50—00:22:15). After Andrew is finished miming Anya's words, he is visibly overwhelmed, and then rewinds the tape and starts watching it again, still mouthing Anya's lines in an emotive portrayal of Andrew's desire and longing. This scene also maps Andrew's attraction specifically onto Xander. Furthermore, it associates Andrew's desire for other men with his love for storytelling. By enacting his desire to be with Xander by performing along with a scene he has filmed, Andrew uses storytelling as wish-fulfilment and as an outlet for his homoerotic desire, where he can pretend to be with Xander within the world of the film.

[20] This metaphoric link between storytelling and same-sex longing becomes significant later in the episode when Buffy uses the concept of storytelling to chastise Andrew for his actions. To bring Andrew to tears (as only his tears can close the Seal of Danzalthar), Buffy forces him to take responsibility for the murder of Jonathan, and to "stop telling stories," as "life isn't a story" ("Storyteller"7.16, 00:38:06-10). Buffy continues to tell Andrew: "you make everything into a story so no one's responsible for anything" (00:38:14-23). If this scene is, as critics have argued, the moment where Andrew needs to learn to "take responsibility for the effects of his actions" (Pender 126) and the beginning of his transformation "from mock heroic to actual hero" (Shull & Shull 78), it is also the scene where this growth must come at the cost of his obsession with storytelling. Like Spike's message in "Once More With Feeling" (6.7) that "life's not a song… life is just this. It's living" (00:37:46-59), the lesson Andrew has to learn in this episode is that taking responsibility for his actions means learning how to stop turning everything into a story. Storytelling in *Buffy* is celebrated in some moments, such as in the conclusion of "Lie to Me" (2.7), Buffy telling Spike she loves him in "Chosen" (7.22), or Andrew lying to Xander

about Anya's death.[3] However, when storytelling or fantasy gets taken too far, or turns into escapism and delusion, it is treated as unhealthy and potentially dangerous, such as in "Once More With Feeling," "Halloween" (2.6), and "Normal Again" (6.17). While storytelling has a place in *Buffy,* it is not allowed to saturate someone's perspective without severe consequences, and Andrew's storytelling is treated, as Greven suggests, as "pathological, even sociopathic" (70). To experience redemption, Andrew must leave his fantasy-saturated understanding of the world and reposition himself in reality.[4]

[21] The episode's association between Andrew's desire for Xander and his "living in a story" suggests that his homoerotic desire is part of the larger problem of escapist fantasy that Andrew must overcome. If he acts out his desire for Xander primarily through his film, then this desire becomes part of the story-saturated worldview for which Buffy criticizes him. Greven's analysis supports my connection between Andrew's storytelling and sexuality, arguing that "Andrew's repressed homosexuality analogously corresponds to his bent relationship to narrative" (72). Furthering this association of escapist storytelling with homoeroticism, the First Evil convinces Andrew to kill Jonathan by feeding into a fantasy where they will live together "as gods," which Andrew fantasises as a campy scene where the three of them dance around in togas amidst flowers, butterflies, and a unicorn ("Storyteller," 00:27:18-26). The First combines Andrew's desire for Warren with his love for elaborate storytelling to manipulate him into murder. When Andrew expresses his regret, he reveals that he knew the First wasn't really Warren, once again associating his homoerotic desire with his susceptibility to stories: "I pretended I thought it was him, but I knew it wasn't" ("Storyteller," 00:39:39-48). Andrew's "pretending" (and the homoeroticism associated with it) in this situation goes beyond "masturbatory and waste" (Pender 144) to a denial that produces legitimate danger.

[22] Whether it takes the form of "pretending" that the First is Warren or filming Xander and pretending that he is Anya, Andrew consistently expresses his homoerotic desire using stories. While Pender suggests that *Buffy* only takes issue with Andrew's desire for Warren, not his desire for men in general, as his redemption "does not so much

require him to renounce his queer desires as to find more a worthy object for them: Xander and, ongoingly, Spike" (129), I argue instead that *Buffy*'s critique of Andrew's escapist storytelling is a critique of his homoerotic desire more largely. Because he enacts his desires for Warren and Xander using the same strategy of storytelling, I argue that his redemption scene punishes him for desiring both men. As Buffy yells at him, telling him to "shut up" and "stop telling stories," she holds him over the seal with a dagger to his throat and convinces him that she is about to kill him, until he is reduced to weeping ("Storyteller," 00:38:06-14). Through his tears, he realizes that the way he is currently feeling is likely how Jonathan felt before his death. As Greven puts it, "castrated and forced to acknowledge his secret sin, Andrew weeps at the climax of the episode . . . he suffers for the sins of the principal characters" (65), and his redemption occurs "while rivulets of tears stream down his anguished face" (71). Even after Buffy gets him to cry, and the Seal of Danzalthar closes, she drops him unceremoniously so that he falls face-first onto the seal on his hands and knees, then scurries away from the seal and pulls himself up, face still soaked in tears. Andrew's chastisement in this scene is related to the denial that he facilitates through stories; he uses this storytelling to justify and disavow responsibility for murdering Jonathan, and it is because of this love of storytelling that he was initially driven to the murderous act, as the First uses Andrew's fantasies about Warren and about "living as gods" to lead him to murder. The lesson he must take away from his punishment is, as Buffy says, to "stop telling stories," as homoerotic fantasizing—for both Xander *and* Warren—that is so bound up with his storytelling is by extension part of the "secret sin" for which he must atone. While he is, on a literal level, atoning for the murder he commits, he is figuratively forced to atone for the love of fantasies and stories that has driven him to that murder and allowed him to justify it. Because these fantasies are bound up with his homoerotic desire for the other men in the series—not just for Warren, but for Xander as well—their positioning as the root of Andrew's evil drives, and their punishment in this scene (along with the punishment of the murder they inspired) contributes to the series' use of Andrew as a scapegoat for the series' homoerotic desire.

In discussing the way that Andrew's homoerotic desire becomes associated with evil, my discussion of erotic triangles in *Buffy* becomes relevant again. It is the triangular relationship of the three men in the Trio that allows for The First to manipulate Andrew into killing Jonathan. Much like the use of women as "property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men" (Sedgwick 25-26), and the use of women as a "'conduit of a relationship' in which the true *partner* is a man" (26), Jonathan's abuse and murder becomes a tool for Andrew to pursue his erotic desire for Warren. Jonathan thus takes the exchange role in this triangle, serving as the conduit through which the other men cement their erotic bond. In this case, Andrew's triangular positioning with Warren involves the murder of the third, marginalized member, as Andrew's desire for Warren is enacted through this murder. This explicitly violent articulation of erotic triangles—where the third member is not only exchanged to cement the bond of the others, but is murdered in the process—speaks to the general way in which homoeroticism as it relates to the Trio becomes associated with violence. Pender points out that "Warren's manipulations of the Trio's homoerotics are dastardly and ultimately deadly" (124). Pender discusses several instances (including Warren's comments about Jonathan and Andrew "playing with each other") in which moments of homoeroticism within the trio are re-appropriated by Warren and turned into moments of violence, misogyny, and even homophobia (124). The Trio (and the erotic moments it produces between men) thus repeatedly turns these moments into fuel for Warren's evil plans. The Trio's moments of homoerotic desire are consistently used as fodder for evil and violence in a way that produces in Season Six the association between male homoeroticism and susceptibility to evil influences that is then enacted more explicitly in Season Seven.

[23] "Storyteller" also links the punishment of Andrew's homoerotic desire with Xander's heterosexuality. The basement scene is cross-cut with Wood and Spike in the lobby of the school, and with concurrent scenes of Xander and Anya having sex. At first glance, it seems a strange directorial choice to have the scenes at the school cross-cut with a sex scene between Xander and Anya. However, considering the way in which the scene allows for the homoerotic desire that has

been projected from Xander onto Andrew to be punished, it makes more sense that a simultaneous scene that showcases Xander's heterosexuality is presented. In linking these two scenes, the episode further establishes the link between the two characters that allows for Xander's homoerotic desire to be disavowed as it is projected onto Andrew.

[24] Xander's interactions with Andrew in general serve to emphasize Xander's masculinity and heterosexuality in contrast with Andrew's femininity and queerness. When Andrew first arrives at Buffy's house in "Never Leave Me" (7.9), Xander ties him to a chair, interrogating him harshly and causing him pain. The aggression that Xander expresses in this scene positions him as a dominant, masculine figure in contrast to the wincing, submissive Andrew. Of course, this scene clearly opens up homoerotic readings; however, continuing its pattern of disavowal, *Buffy* occludes a queer reading by including Anya in the room as a participant in the interrogation. As a visual emblem of Xander's heterosexuality, Anya allows Xander to express dominance while diffusing homoerotic tension; it is Xander and Anya who get the erotic moment, as they leave the room together and celebrate their mutual thrill over a successful interrogation. Later, when he goes to interrogate Andrew alone, their conversation is focused entirely on Anya, keeping her present whenever they are together.

[25] The pattern of Xander expressing dominance over Andrew while preventing queer readings of this dominance is continued in the next episode, "Bring on the Night" (7.10), where he calls Andrew "Sleeping Ugly" (00:01:52-53), and again in the next episode, "Showtime" (7.11), where he shows physical repulsion towards Andrew, refusing to touch his "joystick hand" while he unties him from a chair (00:15:09-14). This second line could also be read as referring to Xander's refusal to "touch on" the comment that Andrew makes about his joystick hand, thus rejecting Andrew's erotically coded language and refusing to comment on it. Xander is repeatedly aggressive towards Andrew in a way that emphasizes his dominance but also highlights physical revulsion. While this hostility eventually begins to dissipate, as the two gradually bond over their mutual love for science fiction, this earlier pattern of aggression and disgust sets Andrew up as the perfect

scapegoat to take the fall for Xander's homoeroticism. While Xander may have homoerotic moments, Andrew by comparison is substantially more homoerotic, and this comparison is emphasized through interactions that distance Xander from Andrew's queer traits and position him hierarchically "above" them.[5] Andrew thus begins to take the attention and "blame" for the series' homoeroticism, which is disavowed in Xander and transferred to him, much in the same way that Greven argues the criminality of the other characters is similarly mapped onto Andrew, who becomes a more visible consolidation of the less desirable aspects of other characters.

[26] The aggression with which Xander treats Andrew also relates to a pattern in which *Buffy*'s protagonists often engage in excessive violence against Andrew. In "Never Leave Me," Anya celebrates making him cry, and later unnecessarily beats him, despite the fact that he has already agreed to tell the truth, treating him much more roughly than the characters generally treat hostages. When he begs Buffy for help, she nonchalantly leaves and allows Anya to continue hurting him. In "Showtime," high-school-aged Dawn tells Andrew: "Buffy said if you talked enough I'm allowed to kill you" (00:21:22-26). In addition to the general aggression and disdain with which Xander treats Andrew, the protagonists delight in physically abusing him. While characters are often beaten and tortured by villains, it is strange to see this level of abuse committed by the heroes against a human, especially one who is actively trying to help them. Of course, Andrew's crimes—killing somebody whom the Scoobies have known for years, and being a member of the group that led to Tara's death and Willow's descent into evil—do explain this aggressiveness to an extent. However, the level of joy that the characters take in abusing him, as well as the amount of humor the series attempts to generate from this abuse (the examples listed above are all framed for the audience as humorous moments and jokes), are concerning considering the way that Andrew serves as a scapegoat for the other characters' homoerotic potential. Andrew's status as "punching bag" throughout the first half of Season Seven means that *Buffy*'s primary figure of repressed and disavowed homosexuality also becomes a common target for physical abuse and aggression; this abuse against

the series' effeminate, implicitly gay man is played for laughs, reproducing the homophobia expressed through Andrew's scapegoating.

[27] Of course, much like the rest of disavowal in *Buffy,* Xander's interactions with Andrew allow for subtextual queer interpretations. In "First Date" (7.14), Xander, frustrated with his recurring pattern of dating women who turn out to be demons, jokes that he wants to be gay, asking Willow to "gay [him] up" (00:37:57-58). This scene for the most part follows the general pattern of Xander's interactions with Andrew: on a textual level, Xander's request for Willow to "teach" him how to be gay really just emphasizes the fact that he is not, as his interest in homosexuality is facetious and based on bad luck with women rather than an expression of desire for men. This moment is also not unique to *Buffy,* as the trend of heterosexual characters joking about "going gay" after a bad romantic encounter is a common convention that is, if anything, a heteronormative narrative that trivializes queer experiences. This joking interest in homosexuality is then contrasted to Andrew's expression of sincere homoerotic desire; after Xander makes a joke about "mentally undressing Scott Bakula," the camera cuts to a close-up of Andrew sighing wistfully as he thinks about "Captain Archer" ("First Date," 00:38:02-06). The scene emphasizes that, while Xander may play with the idea of "going gay," Andrew, in contrast, sincerely experiences the same desires Xander jokes about (although *Buffy* still refuses to explicitly confirm Andrew's homosexuality), as Andrew once again "takes the fall" for the scene's homoerotic potential.

[28] The "gay me up" scene at the end of "First Date" does, however, open up queer subtextual readings. Xander's usual focus on self-aware performances of gender and sexuality is once again foregrounded, as his language (facetious as it is) frames homosexuality as a performance or series of codes that can be learned and reproduced. He asks Willow to "just tell [him] what to do" and he mentions that he would need "stylish new clothes," focusing on the performance-based aspects of sexual identity (00:38:02-20). Furthermore, his choice of Willow as the mentor who can "teach" him how to be gay, similar to his alignment with Willow's queerness in "Restless," does the work of associating Xander with Willow's textually homosexual desire, opening up potential readings where Xander looks to Willow as a model for

queerness, whom he desires to imitate and follow. Even during the process of scapegoating Andrew, *Buffy* still encourages fans to explore alternative readings through subtext.

[29] George A. Dunn and Brian McDonald (working with the theories of René Girard) summarize the process of scapegoating as happening when communities "load the blame for our difficulties on the back of someone whose elimination we can represent to ourselves as a solution for all of our woes" (2).[6] For this process to be complete, the series' homoeroticism cannot simply be "laid on Andrew's back"; it must also be eliminated. While Andrew's effeminacy and storytelling are still present in the *Buffy* episodes after "Storyteller," they have become notably muted, and it is suggested that he has taken Buffy's lesson to heart. While he brings a camera with him to the fight in "Storyteller," he brings a sword to the final battle in "Chosen," signifying his shift from documentarian to active participant. It is not until his return in *Angel,* however, that the "straightening" of Andrew is most prominent. Now a Watcher, Andrew has become what Ira and Anne Shull call a "suave adult" (78). Throughout the episode "Damage" (*Angel* 5.11) he is dressed in formal suits and, while his first appearance in the episode seems to maintain his effeminate *Buffy* characterization, it is revealed by the end of the episode that this familiarity is actually a hoax, as Andrew has been manipulating Angel and Spike. The final scene reveals a very different Andrew who is cold and harsh, with his parting words being: "Newsflash! Nobody in our camp trusts you anymore. Nobody. You work for Wolfram & Hart. Don't fool yourself" ("Damage" A5.11, 00:39:05-20). This professional, uncaring Andrew, who harshly informs Angel that nobody trusts him before walking away with a cool, businesslike "thank you for your help, but we've got it," indifferent to Angel's feelings, is almost a different character than the Andrew in *Buffy* (00:39:24-28). The episode begins his transition not only into "suave adult" but also into a defeminized, professionalized version of his former self.

[30] Andrew's final appearance in "The Girl in Question" (*Angel* 5.20) associates his newfound professionalism with heterosexuality. In his final television appearance, Andrew tells Spike and Angel that "people change. You guys should try it some time," before walking off

with slicked-back hair, a tuxedo, and two attractive women (00:37:49-59). Although this scene may not have reflected Whedon's intentions, as Andrew was not originally part of the episode (Jozic), it is still the way that the series depicts the culmination of Andrew's development. Andrew departs the series in a scene that suggests the trajectory of his growth has been towards this moment, where he proclaims that "people change" as he walks out the door with a sexy woman on each arm after flirting with them in Italian. Maturity becomes equated with professionalism and cold, confrontational masculinity in "Damage" and finally suave, Bond-like heterosexuality in his final appearance. The campy, homoerotic storyteller of *Buffy* is lost, and Andrew ends his time on television in a display of hegemonically masculine heterosexuality, reproducing the structure of disavowal that characterizes Xander throughout *Buffy* and denying textual male homosexual representation in its lead cast.

[31] *Buffy*'s association of professionalism with heteronormative masculinity is explored earlier in "The Replacement" (5.3). In the episode, a demon's spell splits Xander into two separate "Xanders," each representing half of his personality, creating a "confident Xander" and an "anxious Xander" (Simkin 11). Confident Xander is associated with professionalism and maturity: one of his first actions after the spell is to shower and put on a dress shirt, which is contrasted with anxious Xander's dirtiness and unprofessional attire, as anxious Xander comments, "he's too clean for one thing. And his socks are all match-ey" (00:19:55-59). He then goes to work, where he receives a promotion, and then meets with a landlord and confirms his acceptance of an apartment. This professional, confident half of Xander is also associated with heterosexuality: he successfully flirts with the female landlord of the apartment, and he reconciles with Anya about a fight that happened before the split. The unprofessional half of Xander, in contrast, forgets about Anya until halfway through the episode, an oddity that is pointed out by Willow when she comments: "you already knew he was taking over your life, and you didn't think about Anya until just now?" (00:26:51-54). While professional, grown-up Xander has orchestrated all of his plans with Anya in mind, wanting to afford the apartment because he knows she wants it, the immature Xander has forgotten about Anya

for most of the episode, and chooses to go to his platonic best friend Willow for help before even thinking about his girlfriend. Considering the queer dynamics of Xander's relationship with Willow that emerge in "Restless" and "First Date,", the choice to have his juvenilized side go to her first, while his professional side goes to Anya first, reinforces the episode's association between maturity and heterosexuality.

[32] The two halves of Xander in "The Replacement" follow almost the same structure as the two "Andrews." In both cases, the characters are split between a juvenile, feminine persona and a mature, professional persona, with the latter persona being associated with heterosexuality. *Buffy* also seems to reward the latter, rather than the former persona. Giles describes the two halves of Xander as "his strongest points and his weakest," implying that anxious Xander is a personification of Xander's "weakest" points (00:32:20-22). The same hierarchy is produced with Andrew, as Shull and Shull point out that his shift in persona is treated as the movement "from mock heroic to actual hero" (78), suggesting that "professional, straight" Andrew is also when he is at his most heroic. In these two narratives, *Buffy* seems to be privileging character development that leads men from a state of juvenile effeminacy towards a more professional, and consequently a more heteronormative, way of being in the world.

[33] This narrative of men growing out of their feminized personas as they develop is ostensibly homophobic and femmephobic, reflecting larger cultural associations between success, professionalism, and hegemonic masculinity. However, as is usual with *Buffy,* things are more complicated thematically, and it seems to trouble this narrative to some extent. While Giles positions mature Xander as containing his "strongest points," Xander also needs both halves to exist, as killing one Xander would result in the death of both. Willow explains that their "natural state is to be together," as the episode ends with them being joined (00:40:29-31). Regardless of whether one Xander is weaker than the other, both are essential parts of him, destabilizing the hierarchy that Giles proposes. Similarly, while the series seems to present mature Andrew as the final culmination of his character, there is a subtle suggestion that he has not changed quite as much as his performance suggests. The ending of "Damage," while a harsh change from Andrew's

performance at the beginning of the episode, still involves his characteristic science fiction references, as he quips, "check the view screen, Uhura" to point out his advantage over Angel, and still pronounces the word "vampire" in a comically over-articulated way (00:38:45-46; 00:38:47). Also, while the ending of "The Girl in Question" proposes that his character development has cumulated in heterosexuality, the scene is also clearly a pastiche of spy movies, with conventional spy movie music playing in the background. While the scene positions Andrew in a heteronormative performance, it is also very clearly a performance. While *Buffy* suggests that he learned how to stop living in a story, Andrew's actions still follow conventional narrative frameworks. The story he performs is now a heteronormative one, and *Buffy* seems to privilege this type of performance, but it is still self-consciously performative. While *Buffy* textually suggests that he has changed, the scene's framing as spy film pastiche implies that Andrew's earlier queer, storyteller persona is still thematically relevant, if ostensibly diminished.

[34] As with Xander's disavowed homoeroticism, the subtextual queerness of Andrew has been explored through fan fiction. While the ending of "The Girl in Question" is (justifiably) contentious amongst queer fans for the way it suggests Andrew's newfound heterosexuality, it has also inspired fan works built on oppositional readings. For example, a fan fiction by *Archive of Our Own* writer tessykins, called "The Boy in Question," re-produces the events of the scene, but provides narration from Andrew that repositions that the two women at the end of the episode as his lesbian friends. The fanfic proceeds to suggest that he plays up the heterosexual performance of the moment to give Spike and Angel "a show," leaving them "with one last image of him" as a suave, Bond-like straight man, while secretly departing to meet his boyfriend. Fan fiction of this type demonstrates how the queer subtext of *Buffy,* along with Whedon's call to "bring your own subtext," allows for the identities and experiences that get disavowed, cast out, and scapegoated in the explicit storyline of *Buffy* to re-emerge in other places. Of course, this call for fans to develop subtle aspects of *Buffy* into counter-readings does not entirely make up for the lack of explicit representation in the series itself; however, it does open up a place for possible intervention.

[35] Whedon's comic book spinoff also serves to pick up on and develop subtextual moments from the series that were not able to find full expression on television. Andrew appears as a prominent supporting character and much of his characterization in *Angel* has been undone. In seasons eight and nine of the comics, Andrew is still not explicitly gay; however, his ambiguous sexuality and effeminacy returns from his first appearance, when he is shown complaining to a group of slayers about Lando Calrissian's outfit in *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* ("The Long Way" 6). The comics undo some of the harm done to Andrew's character in *Angel* by restoring his personality from *Buffy*. In the season ten story arc "Love Dares You," published in February 2015, twelve years after the end of the television series, Andrew comes out as gay (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Love Dares You*). By explicitly confirming Andrew's homosexuality, the comics respond to the disavowal and scapegoating that happens in the series and work towards a more committed level of representation, over a decade after the end of the television series. Whether due to the change in medium from television to comic, a change in Whedon's politics, cultural differences between 2003 and 2015, or some other outlying variable, the comics respond to homophobia in the series and intervene, attempting to make amends.

Conclusion

[36] As queer and subversive as *Buffy*'s ideology can be, it is limited by its discomfort with fully accepting the explicit implications of said ideology. By disavowing the homoerotic desire of male characters, and eventually producing Andrew as a scapegoat that is punished for this desire, *Buffy* is unable to reach its full queer potential, as it does not commit to the queerness of the politics that it articulates. The series resists committing to the representation of male homosexuality as a lived experience in any of its major characters and thus disrupts its own apparent ideological goals by attempting to maintain an ostensibly heteronormative narrative. This issue, of course, does not diminish the important queer ideological work that *Buffy* does or the potential for its intertexts and afterlife to further develop this work. It also does not diminish the importance of the series' textually queer women, as *Buffy* is

much more comfortable exploring the potential of lesbian desire than it is with exploring desire between men.[7] *Buffy* remains an important cultural text for what it has accomplished, and it has undeniably produced a major impact on the possibilities (queer and otherwise) of television. However, it is important to recognize the issues that arise when a text's implicit queer politics do not extend to an explicit acknowledgement of male homosexual desire and queerness as an actual lived experience, which is unfortunately the result of Andrew's treatment as scapegoat, taking the fall for everyone else's homoeroticism then ultimately having his own homoerotic potential punished and purged.

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Notes

[1] I borrow the title for this section from the *TV Tropes* webpage of the same name.

[2] This claim is further supported by the fact that, in the later *Buffy* comics, Xander does end up in a romantic relationship with Dawn.

[3] Of course, in two of these three examples, characters still highlight the falsity of the story, with Buffy calling Giles a "Liar" and Spike acknowledging that Buffy does not really love him.

[4] Pender argues that the repetition of the "we are as gods" line after the end credits adds a level of ambiguity to this lesson (132). While I do not intend to contest this statement, I do argue that said ambiguity is, like most of Buffy's homoeroticism, on the level of subtext (and in this case extra-diegetic), while the lesson Andrew learns is diegetically and ostensibly maintained, as the episode ends with Andrew turning off his camera mid-sentence.

[5] As R.W. Connell argues, masculinity always manifests relationally, as hegemonic masculinity "is not a fixed character type… it is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern… a position always contestable" (76), so in order to establish Xander as a dominant, masculine, heterosexual figure, this position must be relational to a subordinate, feminized, homosexual man.

[6] I cite Dunn and McDonald here rather than Girard himself because they are discussing scapegoating in *Buffy,* suggesting that *Buffy* is not unfamiliar with these politics.

[7] Mendelsohn, however, suggests that *Buffy*'s representation of queer women is also not without its own problems, as her "Surpassing the Love of Vampires" discusses techniques the series uses to keep Willow's sexuality "safe."