"Find What Warmth You Can": Queer Sexualities in *Buffy* Season Eight through Ten Comic Books

Lewis Call

[1] While *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s seven televised seasons featured some important queer representations, the three seasons of *Buffy* comics are far queerer. Dark Horse Comics began publishing Season Eight in 2007; Season Eleven began in 2017. About a year before Season Eight began, Joss Whedon said, "I think all of sexuality is a spectrum, and to say that there's the one thing and the other is to oversimplify" (Lavery and Burkhead 140). This queer concept of sexuality refuses binary identity categories based on gender of object choice (Sedgwick 8). "Queer" includes gay, lesbian, bisexual, and pansexual sexualities, as well as asexuality. It also includes queer straight sexualities that actively oppose heteronormativity, e.g. BDSM, fetish, and inter-generational (Thomas 31; Rubin 281). With Michael Warner, I think of queer as a term that names a generalized "resistance to regimes of the normal" (16). Queer sexualities explicitly resist normative cultural and political regimes,

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and those regimes recognize such sexualities as threatening. Following Warner, I argue that the ultimate political goal of anti-normative sexualities is to create a queer planet. Such a planet would be defined by the absence of any concept of the normal. On a queer planet, no sexuality (indeed, no mode of being) could claim the privilege that heteronormative culture routinely grants to non-queer sexualities. Instead of the hierarchy of sexualities that characterizes our heteronormative world, a queer planet would embody a radical erotic pluralism. In this article, I will argue that the comic book Buffyverse contains a blueprint for such a queer planet, and that *Buffy* comics provide some thoughts about how we might begin the long journey from our world towards this queer world.

[2] As David Kociemba and Mary Ellen Iatropoulos have argued, "the shift to the comics medium freed the [*Buffy*] story from the more restrictive sexuality representation regime of network television" (38). The main lesbian relationship on the *Buffy* TV show was Willow/Tara. Their relationship was desexualized (Cochran 54), which rendered much of their lesbian identity invisible (Jowett 50). The relationship ultimately descended into the "Dead-Evil Lesbian Cliché" (Wilts 41): Tara died, Willow became evil. In the comics, however, Willow pursues a highly sexualized relationship with the sorceress Aluwyn; neither dies or becomes evil. On the show, Andrew embodied the stereotype of the closeted gay man who defensively performs homophobia (Pender 122). The comics provide much more positive representations of gay men, including Andrew (who comes out of the closet), and a new character called Billy the Vampire Slayer. Like the show, the comics explore the dynamics of dominance/submission (DS) relationships, i.e. relationships that eroticize the consensual exchange of power between partners. Also like the show, the comics focus on female-dominant relationships, in which erotic power flows mainly to the female partner or partners. In Season Ten, for example, Buffy resumes her DS relationship with Spike. This relationship is clearly queer: as Allison McCracken argues, female-dominant straight sex of the kind that Buffy has with Spike is not heteronormative (127). Xander and Dawn share a similarly queer female-dominant relationship. Meanwhile, Giles is transformed into an

adolescent boy, which allows the comics to explore a queer inter-generational sexuality.

[3] Although they are more inclusive than those of the television show, the comics' queer representations are limited in several important respects. While the comics queer sexuality in significant ways, they do less to queer gender. Almost all of the Slayers are strongly coded as feminine; they are firmly on the femme side of the femme/butch spectrum. This includes the two out lesbian Slayers we see, Kennedy and Satsu. The butch aesthetic has historically been an important part of real-world all-women military corps such as the U.S. Women's Army Corps (WAC) of World War II (Bérubé 55-57). Yet Buffy's paramilitary Slayer army rejects the butch trappings of the modern armed forces as incompatible with their femme aesthetic. The only significant butch character in Seasons Eight and Nine is the rogue Slayer Simone, whose punk aesthetic includes multiple piercings, close-cropped purple hair with a tuft in the middle, and a fondness for Army surplus clothing. Simone rejects the femme Slayer corps; predictably, she winds up both evil and dead, leaving us with no positive representations of butch and a generally impoverished representation of gender. This limits the comics' queer potential since, as Judith Butler argues, butch and femme have the important queer effect of revealing the "utterly constructed status" of heterosexual gender conventions (*Gender Trouble* 41). Thankfully, the comics begin to address this limitation in Season Ten by introducing the more sympathetic and realistic butch character Lake Stevens.

[4] The comics also erase asexuality, bisexuality, and polyamory. Every major character embodies some sort of sexuality. The comics celebrate a wide range of queer sexualities, but in doing so they assume and imply that everyone has some kind of sexual desire. This renders asexuality invisible. Bisexuality is also absent from the Buffyverse. Buffy has a brief but passionate sexual relationship with Satsu. Buffy's other partners are male, yet bisexuality is never presented as a possible sexuality for her (just as it was never considered on the show, when Willow's desire for Oz and Xander gave way to her newfound desire for Tara). Thus the comics reproduce the erasure of bisexuality which, as Steven Angelides has shown, characterizes the major discourses of sexuality from 19th century sexology to 1970s gay liberation (193).

Finally, the comics privilege monogamy over polyamory. All of the major sexual relationships are presented as monogamous (or at least aspirationally so). However, the comics do explore the important possibility that non-sexual DS relationships may develop in conjunction with established monogamous sexual relationships. For example, while Xander remains sexually monogamous with Dawn, he maintains a non-sexual homoerotic DS relationship with Dracula.

[5] In the end, the few types of queer representations that are missing from the Buffyverse are the exceptions that prove the rule: they remind us that although the Buffyverse may not yet be what Alexander Doty would call perfectly queer, it is a great deal queerer than our own world, and it shows us a path towards the queer. Lesbianism, gay male sex, DS, fetishism, and other forms of queer sex are common in *Buffy* comics. This article will show that these comics provide fanciful, sympathetic and inspirational representations of diverse queer sexualities. I will argue that, by providing positive portrayals of queer human, superhuman, and inhuman sexualities, *Buffy* comics promote a radically inclusive and pluralist sexual culture. I will demonstrate that, rather than simply tolerating queer sexualities, these comics embrace the queer, endorse it, and present it as an ethically viable option to their generally queer-friendly audience. The fundamental message of the comics is articulated, ironically, by Dracula: in the Buffyverse as in the world of its readers, ethical beings should find what warmth they can ("Wolves at the Gate" 8.15), by pursuing whatever kinds of consensual sexual relationships they desire.

"The Demon Lover with the Snake Body": Willow's Submissive Lesbian Sexuality

[6] Willow's most important sexual relationship in the comics is with the demon sorceress Aluwyn, who has the upper body of a human woman and the lower body of a rattlesnake. Again, the comics avoid butch representations. Aluwyn has a very feminine look: she has large breasts, long flowing hair that sometimes covers but never conceals those breasts, and curvy hips. She also has a phallus. Aluwyn's phallus is like any phallus in that it is manifestly not a penis, but rather a signifier.

Any phallus signifies power; in the Lacanian model, the phallus signifies the awesome power of signification itself (Lacan 579). But since Aluwyn's phallus is the tail of a deadly venomous snake, it provides a particularly strong signification of power. This is in keeping with Aluwyn's character; she is presented as an extremely powerful sorceress. Willow finds Aluwyn's power deeply attractive, even irresistible. (Willow has always found power seductive, sometimes with apocalyptic results.) Like all magic, Aluwyn's power is a form of thought that can alter the world. This power is a phallus in the original Lacanian sense: Logos "wedded to the advent of desire" (Lacan 581).

[7] The desire in this case is Willow's. *Buffy* artists emphasize this by featuring Aluwyn's rattlesnake tail in intimate proximity to Willow's naked body (e.g. "Time of Your Life" 8.18). Willow is very submissive in these scenes, which is unusual for her. This tells us what kind of relationship she wants with Aluwyn: Willow wants Aluwyn to wield power over her, and she wants to submit to that power. When Willow asks why she should not look into the time rift, Aluwyn replies simply "because I ask" (8.18). Willow kneels, naked, bows her head submissively and says "of course. Thank you." Aluwyn's wish is Willow's command.

[8] The Buffyverse is magic-free for most of Season Nine; when magic returns, Willow resumes her position as one of earth's most powerful witches. "We're more equal now. . .and I *like* that," says Aluwyn ("Love Dares You" 10.11). "I thought you would, too." But Aluwyn has misjudged Willow's desire. Two issues later, Willow breaks up with her (again, Aluwyn's rattletail is prominent, "Love Dares You" 10.13). "So what if I don't give you all you need?" Aluwyn protests. "Get it elsewhere. I don't expect monogamy from you." In tears, Willow says "I expect it from myself. That's the problem." It is unclear what motivates Willow's commitment to monogamy. Willow breaks up with Kennedy at the end of Season Eight and starts dating Lake late in Season Ten (10.22); she has no other partners when she breaks up with Aluwyn, and so would not need to negotiate with anyone else. Yet when Willow's one and only partner suggests that they could solve their problems by exploring polyamory, Willow immediately rejects the idea. Here Willow represents a kind of default monogamy. But the comics offer a subtle

critique of this mononormativity. When Willow rejects the very desirable Aluwyn for the sake of a monogamy that no one actually seems to want, this decision appears nonsensical. The reader is left to surmise that a mononormative culture has denied Willow a real chance at happiness.

[9] Of course, in order to take that chance, Willow and Aluwyn would have to reconfigure their power dynamic, for Willow's restored magic power seems to be incompatible with the submissive desire that she feels for Aluwyn. For Willow, sexual power is directly tied to magic power. She was generally dominant with Kennedy; when she lost her magic, she broke up with Kennedy pre-emptively, on the theory that Kennedy would not want a powerless Willow ("Last Gleaming" 8.40). She broke up with Aluwyn when she regained her magic. Perhaps Willow thought that she was now too powerful to be submissive, and could not imagine another way to be with Aluwyn. But Willow's failure of imagination was probably not an insurmountable obstacle. The Buffyverse is full of dominant women who are capable of switching to the submissive role (including Buffy herself). Aluwyn desires Willow no matter how dramatically the power dynamic between them fluctuates. The fact that Aluwyn likes the equality that she and Willow briefly share at the end of their relationship suggests that Aluwyn is receptive to switching. Willow could have learned from Aluwyn about the diverse range of power relations available to a queer couple, and the equally diverse satisfactions those relations can bring. While the comics do not explore these possible configurations of lesbian sexuality, they do represent diverse configurations of gay male sexuality.

"Proud Gay Man": The Gay Male Sexualities of Billy and Andrew

[10] The comics represent gay male sexuality by telling Andrew's coming out story (discussed below), and by telling the origin story of Billy the Vampire Slayer, a character that Jane Espenson and Drew Greenberg introduce halfway through Season Nine. Billy's would-be lover Devon suggests that Billy would make a great Slayer. But as Billy notes, Slayers are "always, always girls" ("Billy the Vampire Slayer" 9.14). Devon does not see this as a problem, however. He tells Billy "I think you can punch like a girl and run like a girl" (9.14). "I'm taking that as a

compliment," Billy decides. "I meant it as one," Devon replies. Here Billy and Devon recognize that although the Slayers embody several traits that are typically coded as masculine (athleticism, martial prowess, etc.), they do so in a uniquely feminine way. On television, Buffy pioneered a feminine fighting style with roots in the 1970s women's self-defense and 1990s date rape awareness cultures (Karras para. 17). This femme fighting style fit perfectly with Buffy's third wave "girlie" feminism. Other Slayers followed Buffy's lead; by Season Eight, the Slayers had developed a feminine martial style that emphasizes gracefulness, protection, and defense. To the extent that Billy performs a feminine Slayer persona by fighting "like a girl," he embodies male femininity. Judith (now Jack) Halberstam acknowledges this phenomenon of male femininity (28), which is the complementary counterpart of female masculinity: femininity is not exclusive to female bodies, any more than masculinity is exclusive to male ones. As Billy explores his sexuality with Devon, he simultaneously develops a gay masculinity.

[11] Billy's complex gender identity represents a serious challenge to hegemonic masculinity, the privileged form of masculinity that holds a dominant position in Western culture. In the 1980s, R. W. Connell theorized that hegemonic masculinity was based on the subordination of women and gay men (Connell 186). However, Connell's original model has been criticized as an oversimplication. Demetrakis Demetriou distinguishes between external hegemony (of men over women) and internal hegemony (of straight men over gay men) (341). Demetriou argues that a "masculine hegemonic bloc" maintains hegemony by incorporating some elements of the subordinate gay culture, e.g. gay fashion (349, 352-353). Connell himself has endorsed some aspects of this critique. In 2005, Connell acknowledged that hegemony may operate by incorporating the masculinities of stigmatized sexualities into its gender order, and that such incorporation can coexist with oppression (Connell and Messerschmidt 848). Meanwhile, Yeung et al. have shown that it is quite possible for gay men to resist internal hegemony while simultaneously reproducing external hegemony (9). More recently, Tony Coles has shown that although gay masculinities occupy a subordinate position within the general field of masculinity, the field of gay

masculinity can itself be subdivided into subordinate and dominant gay masculinities; the latter may include features such as excellence in sports, sexual aggressiveness, and independence (32, 39).

[12] Devon offers to negotiate his relationship with Billy: "we can talk about what we mean to each other" ("Billy the Vampire Slayer" 9.15). "Wow. Being gay really is different," Billy concludes. Here Billy resists internal hegemony by suggesting that his emotionally honest gay masculinity is different from (and, he implies, superior to) a hegemonic straight masculinity which is presumed to be characterized by emotional detachment (Bird 125-127). At the same time, Billy does not promote external hegemony. Quite the contrary: the clumsy, uncoordinated Billy gets bullied by straight boys far more athletic than he is. Billy is insecure and uncertain about his physical abilities; here, his gender identity is subordinate to the graceful femininity of the Slayers.

[13] Over the course of his origin story, Billy's gay masculinity moves from subordinate to dominant. As he makes this important transition, Billy avoids reproducing external hegemony by continuing to embrace the feminine gracefulness of the Slayers. In a quarter-page panel, Billy kisses Devon, to give his newfound lover the "inspiration" to "dust some zompires" (9.15). Here Billy exhibits the sexual aggressiveness associated with a dominant gay masculinity. After kissing Devon, Billy shows a sudden grace and strength. He is now an effective fighter; he dusts four zompires in quick succession. So Billy has also gained the athletic prowess characteristic of a dominant gay masculinity. Of course, Billy runs the risk of reinscribing the hierarchy of gay masculinities as he moves from the bottom of that hierarchy to the top. But the comics foreclose this danger by immediately summoning Buffy to deliver a powerful call for unity among all gay masculinities, and indeed all queer positions. Because Buffy is the chief representative of the feminine Slayerhood to which Billy aspires, her speech also precludes the possibility that Billy's new masculinity might inadvertently reproduce external hegemony. As Billy hugs his rescued grandmother, Buffy speaks in voice-over: "The right way to fight back. . ." The wordless panel that follows shows Devon and Billy, clearly in love, foreheads touching, fingers intertwined. Standing in front of the Golden Gate Bridge in the next panel, Buffy concludes: ". . .is to remember you are not fighting

alone, even when it seems you are." The message is clear: Billy will draw the strength he needs to be a Slayer from his relationship with Devon, and from the gay masculinity that this relationship facilitates.

[14] Billy's origin story concludes with an explicit statement of the comics' queer politics. "This city," says Billy [San Francisco]. "It's like a beacon for people like us. You [Devon] and me. People who thought we'd never find a place to belong." Billy and Devon find such a place here, in the epicenter of America's queer culture. Greenberg and artist Karl Moline dedicate a full page to the story's final panel, in which Buffy says ". . .you belong" as she leads Billy into battle. Buffy accepts Billy as a Slayer, initially "more in an 'inspired by' kinda way" ("New Rules" 10.2). But Billy receives visions from the primal Slayer. Giles concludes that "the essence of the Slayers has clearly accepted him as an ally" (10.2). Billy simultaneously embodies a dominant gay masculinity and a male femininity, both of which are clearly compatible with the feminine ideal of Slayerhood. Billy's alliance with the Slayers represents one possible answer to Jane Ward's question about the range of potential relationships between gay men and women: "which gay men, under what circumstances, are forming political alliances or intimate friendships with women [?]" (173).

[15] The comics' other main representation of a gay man is Andrew, who finally comes out almost halfway through Season Ten. Andrew's friend Julie tries to play matchmaker between Andrew and a gay man named Clive ("Love Dares You" 10.11). Looking deeply uncomfortable, Andrew says "he's very . . . male." Thinking she has misunderstood Andrew's sexuality, Julie offers herself to Andrew, but he refuses, saying "these shoes aren't really made for that kind of walking." Julie pushes him to acknowledge that he is attracted to Clive. Andrew claims that he doesn't "really give romance much thought." Julie refuses to give up. "When you close your eyes and picture yourself kissing someone, who is it? What are they like?" In a tight close-up on Andrew's face as he looks longingly at the object of his secret desire, Andrew finally admits "Clive. I picture myself kissing someone like Clive. I think . . . Julie, I think I'm gay." Julie congratulates him for doing "something awesome," but Andrew tries to retreat back into the closet, claiming that he can't be gay because he "would've known before now."

[16] Andrew takes a potion that makes him into a hypermasculine caricature, with exaggerated muscles and superhuman strength ("Love Dares You" 10.12). He and Clive work with the Scoobies to defeat a monster. Clive is overjoyed: "You saved our lives. I--I don't know how to--" Andrew sweeps Clive into his arms and finishes the sentence: "thank me? I have an idea." With that, Andrew dips Clive down and leans in to kiss him. Clive finds this "welcome, but surprising": he wasn't sure Andrew liked guys. Suddenly Andrew loses his hypermasculine physique. Clive explains that this is because "whatever the potion empowered you to accomplish, you did it. Beating the monster, I guess." The monster is a flesh golem, a hideous creature that appears to be composed of many deformed, intermingled bodies. It could well represent Andrew's fear of mingling bodies, i.e. his internalized homophobia. But Andrew has defeated this monster of self-hatred. This is his real accomplishment, for it allows him to express and act upon his queer desire for the first time in his life.

[17] Buffy tries (too hard) to be supportive. "We are all totally cool with you being gay, we've known *forever*, and it's fine. It's great!" Buffy insists ("Love Dares You" 10.13). Andrew is not convinced: "how is it great if you knew all this time, and I didn't?" Andrew has been living in the most tragic kind of closet: the kind that others can see into, but the inhabitant cannot see out of (Pender 129). Luckily, Andrew's oversupportive but well-meaning friends give him what he needs (but cannot ask for), by dragging him out of that closet. Buffy glares down at Andrew: "I say you deserve a shot at happiness, *so take it*!" Andrew replies submissively, "yes, Mistress." Playing with Buffy, a dominant queer straight woman, helps Andrew embrace a gay identity. A mere four issues later, Andrew proclaims himself a "proud gay man" ("Old Demons" 10.17). For Andrew, the hardest part of coming out was coming out to himself. Now that he has done that, his gay sexuality is quickly made into a regular part of the Scoobies' queer sexual culture. Andrew submits to Buffy as part of his articulation of a gay identity, but the comics do not suggest that male submission is limited to gay men; they also present submission as a viable option for a queer straight character like Xander.

"You Can't *Force* Someone to Care About You": Xander's Queer Submission

[18] In Season Eight, Xander resumes his homoerotic DS relationship with Dracula. Xander takes on the role of the consenting submissive as he negotiates the terms of the relationship, which mainly involve getting Dracula to stop calling him "manservant" (Call 110). Xander returns to Dracula in Season Ten, assuring the Scoobies that "we parted with a new understanding. As equals" ("New Rules" 10.2). His bravado, however, hides the insecurity of a submissive who is not sure of his power. "Will someone come with me?" he asks quietly, in small print. The Scoobies send Dawn. Dracula greets Xander in his usual dominant manner: "Hello, peasant." Much of Dracula's dominance is linguistic; he uses little physical discipline. Dracula explains that he "found 'manservant' perfectly adequate," but Xander objected. Dracula is an ethical dominant: he has accepted the limits that he and Xander negotiated at their last encounter. Now he plays around those limits, as dominants do. But Xander is learning that he has power in this relationship, as submissives do. Xander is assertive as he stares down Dracula and declares that "*the worm has turned!*" In a small, silent close-up, Dracula gazes down at Xander with a knowing look. And Xander finishes where he always does: ". . .Master." But this time Xander is in the foreground, facing the reader, in a panel that bleeds to the edges of the page.[1] And while he does gaze downward, his gaze is directed at his clenched fist. He is clearly moving towards independence. Until he gets there, the Scoobies take comfort in the knowledge that Dracula shows the chief characteristic of an ethical dominant: he cares for the safety and wellbeing of his submissive. Buffy consoles Dawn: "You know Dracula would never hurt Xander, right?" ("New Rules" 10.4).

[19] Touched by Xander's loyalty, Dracula releases Xander from his servitude, but quickly rethinks this liberation ("New Rules" 10.5). "I could just mesmerize you again," Dracula observes. "But you won't," Xander replies. "You can't *force* someone to care about you." Looking at Dawn (who has lost the romantic and sexual feelings she once had for Xander) but talking to Dracula, Xander says "it doesn't mean anything if it's fake." Xander has grasped the essence of the DS relationship, the

thing that gives the submissive power: the Master needs the slave's willing submission, not their mindless obedience. In a full-width side-shot, Xander and Dracula part, shaking hands, finally, as true equals. "I . . . will miss you, manser—*Xander*." "Me too, Master—buddy." Dracula and Xander are finally ready to move beyond the language of mastery and slavery, and the dialectic of dependence it creates. The two meet again in the last issue of Season Ten. Dracula still honors Xander's limits, though old habits die hard. "It is . . . good to see you, manser--Xander" ("Own It" 10.30).

[20] Dracula even admires Xander's renewed straight queer relationship with Dawn. "I am pleased you and your child bride appear happy." Here Dracula reminds us that people tend to read Dawn and Xander's relationship as inter-generational (as Buffy does, "Turbulence" 8.31). It is unlikely that Xander is more than seven years older than Dawn. But Dawn looks young, and as Xander notes, he has known her since she was little (8.31). In any case, Xander denies the "bride" part but not the "child" part (10.30). Dawn gazes adoringly at Xander, and confirms that "we *are* happy."

[21] They are happy largely because Xander has transferred his submission from Dracula to Dawn. This process begins in Season Eight, when Dawn is transformed into a giant and then a centaur: Xander fetishizes Dawn's increasingly inhuman forms, and the power that she derives from them (Call 108-109). Late in Season Ten, Xander and Dawn are trapped in a demon dimension in which Dawn has Goddesslike powers ("In Pieces on the Ground" 10.25). Xander is clearly attracted to the newly superpowerful Dawn; his attraction takes the form of a submissive Goddess-worship. Dawn takes on the role of Xander's protector, ensuring that their new dynamic will be strongly female-dominant. There is a common trope in fantasy art: the "Conan Pose," which features a helpless woman clinging to the leg of an armed, muscular male warrior. *Buffy* artist Rebekah Isaacs parodies this pose by switching the gender configuration that is normally featured in such images ("Own It" 10.28). Dawn, armed with a crossbow and her Goddesslike powers, stands confidently atop a pile of demon bodies. Xander clings helplessly to her leg, his clothes in tatters, and asks his Goddess to spirit them away. Xander's Goddess-worship gives Dawn

the confidence she needs to answer his prayers and bring them both safely home. Xander and Dawn show that a young dominant woman might avoid some of the inequities of power that a relationship with an older man could cause. Meanwhile, the comics explore the issues that an older woman might face in a relationship with a (physically much) younger man, through the relationship between Giles and Olivia.

"Appearance Means Nothing": The Adolescent Sexuality of Rupert Giles

[22] In Season Ten, Giles returns from the dead, but he returns as his adolescent self. This allows the comics to experiment further with inter-generational desire. Young master Giles visits his old flame Olivia ("Love Dares You" 10.11). He tries to lean in for a kiss; Olivia pulls back, horrified. "Rupert, you're a *child*!" Giles counters that he has the mind and memories of the mature man she knew. "*Your body is twelve!*" she retorts, and accuses Giles of regarding her as a pedophile. Olivia's concerns are legitimate. As Gayle Rubin observes, laws prohibiting sex between adults and minors are "especially ferocious"; adults convicted of such sex acts face severe sentences in most U.S. states (290). When Willow offers to cast a one-time spell that will restore Giles to adulthood for just one day, he jumps at the offer--but only after confirming Olivia's availability ("Freaky Giles Day" 10.19). When Giles arrives at Olivia's hotel, he is still quite young, but old enough: "barely legal," Olivia says.

[23] Interestingly, Olivia's inhibitions vanish the moment that Giles' body reaches the legal age of consent. This suggests that Olivia's initial rejection of adolescent Giles was mainly motivated by a very reasonable fear of the *legal* consequences of having sex with a minor. But the law is only interested in *physical* age; if Giles' body has reached the age of consent, Olivia is quite willing to have inter-generational sex with him. This is remarkable, since as Rubin notes, inter-generational sex stands at the very bottom of the hierarchy of sexual practices; those who practice such sex are among "the most despised sexual castes" (279). While Olivia respects (or at least fears) legal sanctions against pedophilia, she clearly rejects arbitrary cultural prohibitions against sex between consenting adults of dramatically different physical ages. Olivia embraces a queer inter-generational sexuality that occupies the furthest reaches of

what Rubin calls the Outer Limits of stigmatized sexuality (281-282). Like every sympathetic character in the Buffyverse, Olivia ends up promoting a radically inclusive and pluralist queer sexual culture.

[24] The faerie queen invites Giles into the realm of the fae, where "appearance means nothing" and all beings are judged by their character alone ("In Pieces on the Ground" 10.23). An inset panel shows Giles' face, shyly hopeful for the first time since his transformation. "I'd be delighted." Giles understands the irony that lies at the heart of the Buffyverse's system of sexual ethics: "it will require being around *nonhumans* for me to finally feel like a human being again." In the Buffyverse, ethical beings recognize, accept and celebrate human desire for the nonhuman, and nonhuman desire for the human. Ethical sexuality in *Buffy*'s world is defined by rejection of regimes of the normal, and embrace of queer sexualities. Buffy is always the character most at risk of being perceived as homophobic (as Kennedy does, 8.16). This is because Buffy tends to react awkwardly when people come out of the closet, as she did when Willow came out to her in Season Four, and when Andrew came out in Season Ten. Once again, when presented with an unfamiliar queer sexuality, Buffy reacts badly. Here she performs a fear of inter-generational sex. She confesses that "the idea of underage Giles and some *Dark Crystal*-looking chick sucking face creeps" her out ("In Pieces on the Ground" 10.24). Spike, who is not human himself and understands nonhuman sex better than Buffy, tries to reassure her. "If it makes you feel better, the fae don't snog the way we do. They connect on a spiritual level. Like a *mind meld*, from what I gather." Clearly this is what Giles needs: a kind of erotic encounter where the nature of his mind is of paramount importance, and his physical age and appearance are irrelevant. This is a powerful critique of taboos against inter-generational relationships, for it suggests an erotic world in which physical age simply does not matter at all. While the relative age of sexual partners may not matter much in the Buffyverse, gender clearly does matter, as Buffy's relationship with Satsu reveals.

"Save Goodbye for Tomorrow": Buffy's Queer Relationship with Satsu

[25] The most controversial queer relationship in the comics is Buffy's same-sex relationship with Satsu. Hélène Frohard-Dourlent argues that because Buffy has sex with a woman yet continues to live a primarily straight lifestyle, her "heteroflexibility" runs the risk of reifying heteronormative standards (31). Lisa Gomez finds Buffy's liaison with Satsu "completely out of character" (22), arguing that this is not an accurate representation of Buffy, a character whom Gomez identifies as "straight" (25). I am arguing, however, that Buffy's sexuality is too complex to be captured by the unmodified label "straight."

[26] Satsu is a lesbian Slayer who both desires and loves Buffy. Buffy is queer enough to reciprocate the desire, telling Satsu: "you're hot, you have great taste, you're a hell of a Slayer and you smell good" ("A Beautiful Sunset" 8.11). By admiring Satsu's personal aesthetic and expressing professional respect for her, Buffy implies that her feelings for Satsu might exceed sexual desire. The trouble, as always, is identity. "But you're not gay," Satsu observes. "Not so you'd notice," Buffy confirms. As Frohard-Dourlent notes, Buffy is basically heterosexual, not in love with Satsu, and Satsu's commander, so Buffy gets to determine the limits of the relationship: here the heterosexual partner's agency dominates (35-36). Buffy cannot represent lesbian sexuality. *Contra* Lewis Call (114), she also cannot represent bisexuality, which is never considered as a possible explanation for Buffy's obvious attraction to Satsu (Frohard-Dourlent 42). Buffy's sexuality is, nonetheless, queer. Frohard-Dourlent observes quite rightly that "there is little evidence that Buffy identifies with *any* sexual orientation" (42). This explains why it is so hard to label Buffy's sexual identity: she does not really have one, at least not one based on gender of object choice. Buffy is not lesbian, nor is she particularly straight, though at various times she exhibits desires and behaviors associated with both of those identities. She "is" bisexual, but only in the sense that bisexuality represents "the structural Other to sexual identity itself" (Angelides 193): bi is Buffy's anti-identity. If Buffy has a specific sexual identity, it is that of the dominant woman (who sometimes submits).

[27] Buffy and Satsu have sex in "Wolves at the Gate," issue 8.12. A full-page, full-bleed panel by Georges Jeanty shows Buffy and Satsu, clearly naked under a clinging bedsheet, clothes and underwear strewn everywhere. As an out lesbian, Satsu understands the inevitability of the identity issue (as does queer theory, Angelides 162). "I know you didn't just . . . turn gay all of a sudden. . ." Satsu says. Wide-eyed and anxious, Buffy asks "*How* do you know that? Did I do something wrong?" Satsu assures her that she "didn't do anything wrong." "But I didn't do enough things!" Buffy wails. "You did more things than me!" Here Buffy expresses the anxieties of a neophyte who has just had her first same-sex encounter with a much more experienced partner. Buffy may not be gay, but she clearly aspires to be good at lesbian sex. As Frohard-Dourlent argues, this gives Satsu the power to evaluate the quality of Buffy's sexual performance (38); here Satsu actually has more agency than Buffy.

[28] Buffy has a queer fear of homophobia. She asks Satsu not to tell anyone about their liaison. A tight close-up on Buffy's face shows that she is trying to be reassuring as she says "it's not that I'm ashamed or anything." Buffy *wants* to be good at lesbian sex, but she fears being *known as* a woman who has sex with women. Incredibly, even a woman as powerful as Buffy, living in a largely homophilic culture, fears becoming the target of homophobia. But the Buffyverse is far queerer than its namesake realizes. If there is any form of prejudice that Buffy should fear, it is heterophobia. Heterophobia is not to be confused or equated with homophobia. Homophobia is a powerful and dangerous form of prejudice that the privileged heterosexual culture deploys against vulnerable sexual minorities. Homophobia has at its disposal enormous amounts of cultural and institutional power. Heterophobia, on the other hand, is a much rarer and less powerful type of prejudice. It develops in some gay and lesbian communities, often out of a desire to preserve the identities of those communities, which could be threatened by the inclusion of individuals who do not share these identities.

[29] The strongest community of identity in the Buffyverse is the lesbian community; understandably, the comics' lesbian characters quickly and forcefully reject Buffy's liaison with Satsu, before that liaison has a chance to blur the identity of their community. Willow calls Buffy's

night with Satsu "an ill-conceived one-night stand" ("Wolves at the Gate" 8.13). Kennedy goes further, explicitly denying Buffy entry into the lesbian community (which Buffy did not ask for), and foreclosing any potential sexual relationship between Buffy and Willow (which Buffy never even imagined). "Hey, grubby paws off, lez-faux," Kennedy seethes ("Time of Your Life" 8.16). "I love that you're in your experimental phase—'cause I really kinda thought you were a 'phobe—but you put the moves on Red and I'll kill you like a chicken." This blast of jealous lesbian identity politics leaves Buffy even less articulate than usual: "Hamnoo?" Of course, a queer planet like the Buffyverse is not committed to any particular sexual identity. But it is committed to queerness in general. So the heterophobia directed against Buffy amounts to a broader questioning of her queer credentials. Buffy's female-dominant straight sexuality does not *look* queer (although I am arguing that it is); her friends therefore read her as straight, and so challenge her right to gain even provisional or limited entry into the realm of the queer. The ambiguity surrounding Buffy's sexuality and its relationship to other sexualities sparks a fear of a *less* queer planet.

[30] *Contra* Willow, Buffy/Satsu is not just a one-night stand; *contra* Kennedy, it is not the experimentation of a straight woman. Buffy and Satsu negotiate a second sexual encounter, in an emotional two-page spread drawn by Georges Jeanty and gorgeously lit by colorist Michelle Madsen in a palette of light yellows and oranges ("Wolves at the Gate" 8.15). Satsu sits on the bed; Buffy kneels beside her. Again, this grants Satsu power and agency. Usually dominant, Buffy is willing to be submissive here, which equalizes the power dynamic between her and Satsu. In a close-up on Satsu's smiling face, she describes their previous encounter as "one of the best nights of my life." Buffy's close-up is even tighter, her smile even bigger; she says "mine too." Buffy wonders what they should do now, and lets Satsu take the lead. A very tight close-up shows the two Slayers face-to-face, almost kissing. "I suppose we could always save goodbye for tomorrow. . ." Satsu suggests. The next page features a full-width panel of actual "on screen" lesbian sex: Satsu's naked body is atop Buffy's, and the two are kissing passionately. A voice-over from Dracula sanctions this queer sex: "Find what warmth you can for now. . ." Dracula confirms that Buffy/Satsu has a definite

place in the pluralist sexual culture of the Buffyverse. The message of this scene is that queer sex can provide the same warmth and comfort as any other kind of sex.

[31] Season Eight's least queer issue is "Swell" (8.22), written by Steven S. DeKnight. DeKnight has Buffy send Kennedy to "run a performance review" on Satsu. Satsu understands the problematic politics of the situation: "Buffy sends the *other lesbian slayer* to check up on me." Her comment underscores the drastic underrepresentation of lesbians in the Slayer army. If there are thousands of Slayers in that army, there should at the very least be dozens of lesbian Slayers. Indeed, if history is any guide, there should probably be even more. The Slayers live and work in a highly homosocial environment that is structurally similar to the all-women military units of World War II, e.g. the WACs and WAVES. During World War II, lesbians joined up precisely because they found the homosocial environment very attractive (Bérubé 28-30). Slayers are called, but joining Buffy's army is a choice; presumably some lesbian Slayers would make that choice, at least in part, because they want to live in this all-woman society. During World War II, the women's military corps tolerated high levels of physical affection among women, and many women soldiers took advantage of the opportunities for same-sex liaisons (Bérubé 42-44). While *Buffy* comics rarely show explicit lesbian sex, the Slayers are frequently shown enjoying the kind of casual physical intimacy that characterizes women's military corps, and readers can reasonably imagine that "off screen" lesbian sex is not uncommon. Under the circumstances, it is hard to believe that there are only two lesbians in the Slayer army.

[32] Kennedy works hard to attach a straight identity to Buffy, just as she did when she first learned that Buffy had sex with Satsu. Kennedy tells Satsu "you're not the only fool to ever wrinkle the sheets with a straight girl." Kennedy reduces sexuality to the drastically oversimplified gay/straight binary that Whedon rejects: "Time to towel off and face the hetero. You, gay. Buffy, not." Indeed, Buffy is not gay. Nor is she bi or straight, if these terms are meant to refer to stable identities. As her relationships with Angel and Spike reveal, she is a dominant queer straight woman.

"The Slayer Ain't No One's": Buffy's Female Dominance

[33] Buffy's female-dominant human/vampire relationships confirm that if she is straight, she is a queer straight. Buffy briefly resumes her sexual relationship with Angel towards the end of Season Eight. Their "multiple page, fully visible oral and penetrative" sex scene is unusually explicit (Kociemba and Iatropoulos 39), which allows readers to see clearly that Buffy remains strongly dominant throughout the scene ("Twilight" 8.34). The focus is consistently on Buffy's power and pleasure. She begins by ordering Angel to "lose the coat." Buffy uses her newfound power of flight to levitate slightly so that Angel can easily perform oral sex on her. The only words in a vivid two-page spread feature Buffy using the comics form's unique capacity for discreet profanity to give Angel another order (this time to keep having sex with her): "do not f%#$ing stop." A tight close-up on Buffy's face shows that she is enjoying her dominance as she gives Angel a third order: "do it again." Angel duly complies; this time the sex occurs in low earth orbit, and is apparently so good that it brings about the creation of a new universe.

[34] In Season Ten, Buffy renews her female-dominant relationship with Spike. This relationship is much more long-term than her liaison with Angel; it continues throughout Season Ten and remains ongoing in Season Eleven. The last page of issue 10.11 ("Love Dares You") shows a dominant Buffy initiating a kiss with Spike. In the first panel she puts her hand on his shoulder. In the second, she closes her eyes, leans in, and pulls Spike towards her by the lapel of his coat. The final half-page panel bleeds to the edges. Standing in a graveyard, the two lovers kiss.

[35] As in Season Six, this kiss is followed almost immediately by rough Slayer/vampire sex, which strongly evokes Buffy and Spike's very first sex scene in "Smashed" (6.9, time stamp 39:45). Spike kisses Buffy passionately as he slams open the door to the apartment he shares with Xander ("Love Dares You" 10.12). Buffy kicks the door closed and slams Spike against the wall so hard that the impact sends Xander's action figures tumbling off their shelf. Although Buffy and Spike do not destroy the building as they did in "Smashed," they definitely move it.

The relationship is presented as a more mature version of the one they shared in Season Six. Buffy tells Willow that Spike "*does* make me happy. He really cares about me. I like who I am when I'm with him. I like who we are together."

[36] Spike is now fully comfortable in his submissive role. When Dawn tells Spike that Buffy is his girlfriend now, Rebekah Isaacs draws a close-up of a contemplative Spike who replies "the Slayer ain't no one's, little bit. If she was. . . wouldn't be her" ("Old Demons" 10.16). Spike understands that he cannot possess Buffy, though she may well be able to possess him. The characters do not comment on it, but Spike wears a small lock on a chain around his neck. This is featured prominently in a scene where Buffy considers, and rejects, the idea of breaking up with Spike ("Own It" 10.28). In the Anglo-American DS subculture, Spike's lock and chain would be known as a collar, and it would signify that he is the submissive partner in a committed, long-term DS relationship. Spike is exactly what he wants to be, what he sang about being in "Once More With Feeling" (6.7, 00:21:20): Buffy's willing slave. This is how Season Ten ends. "The curtains close on a kiss, God knows" (6.7, 00:48:50). This one firmly establishes Buffy's dominance. Buffy is smartly dressed in a skirt and jacket; she is about to dominate the initial session of the newly constituted magic council ("Own It" 10.30). With a single finger under Spike's chin, she turns his head towards hers and kisses him deeply, while Willow watches joyfully, happy that her friend has finally found the queer sexuality that is right for her.

Conclusion: An Almost Perfectly Queer Planet

[37] This is the *Buffy* comics' blueprint for a queer planet. The comic book Buffyverse promotes a system of sexual ethics that celebrates all consensual queer sexualities. This queer-positive narrative authorizes various sorts of queer readers to take pride in their sexualities. However, the comics do not offer uncritical representations of these sexualities; instead, they provide realistic appraisals of them. This allows the comics to do what the Buffyverse has always done well: offer realistic representations of queer sexualities and present these sexualities to the audience as viable ways of living and loving. Although many

Buffyverse characters are inhuman or superhuman, all of the sexual *relationships* in the Buffyverse are recognizably and realistically human. This means that the queer sexualities depicted in the *Buffy* comics are available not only to the comics' characters, but also to their readers.

[38] The comics invite readers to enjoy the kind of lesbian DS sexuality that Willow shares with Aluwyn, while simultaneously encouraging readers to be more flexible about the configuration of power relations and more open-minded about polyamory than Willow is. The comics finally offer a more positive and nuanced representation of butch through the figure of Lake Stevens, a woman whom Willow briefly dates in Season Ten. Lake wears her hair short, wears masculine business suits (sometimes with neckties, e.g. "In Pieces on the Ground" 10.22), and pursues a career that is typically coded as masculine (military intelligence). Naturally Willow does not always see eye to eye with this demon-fighting government agent (remember The Initiative!), but Lake is presented as an ethical, sympathetic, and realistic character, unlike the butch caricature Simone. In the later seasons, the comics thus begin to queer gender as well as sexuality.

[39] Billy's origin story encourages gay men to cultivate a form of gay masculinity that is dominant but not hegemonic, a masculinity that is fully compatible with other gay masculinities and with the powerful femininity that the Slayers embody. The comics punish Andrew for his internalized homophobia (or more accurately, they allow him to punish himself); when Andrew finally finds the courage to come out, the narrative rewards him with the prospect of happiness. This encourages closeted gay men in the audience to consider following in Andrew's footsteps.

[40] Xander shows straight male readers the potential pleasures that submission can bring, and encourages such readers to explore submission with men as well as with women. Meanwhile, Buffy models the pleasure and power of female dominance for straight women readers. The persistence of patriarchy ensures that many women in the audience would not consider dominance as a sexuality for themselves—until Buffy shows them this possibility. The story of Giles invites readers of all genders to remain open to the possibility of inter-generational

relationships between people of dramatically different ages, while respecting Western culture's strong prohibition against pedophilia.

[41] These queer representations are undoubtedly enough to make *Buffy* one of the most sexually pluralist mainstream comics on the market, yet the comics go even further in their promotion of a queer world. *Buffy* comics reveal the queerness of straight culture (Doty xv). The comics invite straight readers to challenge heteronormativity, and to develop the "affiliation with anti-homophobic politics" that Butler has identified as a key component of the queer straight position (*Bodies That Matter* 230). This is a crucial step in the creation of a queer planet. The comics reject the fear of the queer, giving narrative priority to Andrew when Buffy reacts badly to his coming out, and to Spike when Buffy reacts badly to Giles' relationship with the fairy queen. The only phobia which the comics appear to tolerate is the lesbian characters' fear of Buffy/Satsu. But it is important to historicize this fear. Out lesbian characters reject Buffy/Satsu as a threat to the identity politics that were such an important part of late twentieth century LGBT culture. But the larger message of the comics is that in the early twenty-first century, identity politics is giving way to a politics of the queer. Buffy herself stands as a symbol of this new queer politics, for she remains radically uncommitted to any sexual identity based on gender of object choice, while her commitment to a female-dominant identity is tempered by her willingness to switch to submission. Buffy's flexible sexuality represents a challenge to the very concept of fixed, stable sexual identities. Her queer sexuality allows Buffy to accomplish something truly impressive: it transforms the universe that bears her name into an inspirational model of an almost perfectly queer world. Along with the other queer sexualities that are native to the Buffyverse, Buffy's sexuality encourages readers to think about how we might move from our world towards hers. This is perhaps the *Buffy* comics' most important contribution to the theory, practice and culture of the queer.

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Notes

[1]Comic book pages are usually laid out in rows or "tiers" of multiple panels. Most panels are contained within straight-line frames. *Buffy* comics usually use this conventional "gridded" page layout technique (Stanley 253). An artist can emphasize a particular image by dedicating an entire tier to a single panel that spans the width of the page, or by using an unframed panel that extends or "bleeds" to the edges of the page.