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"Who died and made you John Wayne?": Anxious Masculinity in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

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Masculinity, Femininity, and Stereotypes

[1] In recent years, the figure of Buffy the Vampire Slayer has been subject to a good deal of critical analysis as scholars have debated her status as a feminist icon (see, for example, Owen, Daugherty, Early, Harts, Karras, Vint). However, less attention has been paid to the key male characters in the series. Lorna Jowett's essay considers masculinity in the show in binary terms, setting new masculinity ("feminised', passive, romantic, heroic, weak and human") against old masculinity ("macho, violent, sexual, villainous, strong and monstrous"), noting how Angel is "the primary example of the crisis of masculinity," being either "very good (Angel) or very bad (Angelus)" (59, 63). My own exploration will take a different approach. I begin with the familiar proposition that feminism has brought about a crisis in masculine identity in the west at the end of the twentieth century. Although the precise nature of Buffy as a feminist icon remains hotly contested, it is clear that in the so-called Buffyverse the men are obliged to reconsider and redefine their masculine identities in relation to her. To varying degrees, I will argue, the men in *BtVS* define their masculinity using two key indices – the first being Buffy herself, both as an empowered female and as a site for erotic desire, competition and control, and the second being each other. Often explicitly, always in the subtext, complex, shifting hierarchies of masculinity are in constant states of evolution.

[2] As has been noted many times before, Joss Whedon's explicitly feminist agenda in creating *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* establishes certain parameters for the representation of male and female character types, and the exploration of the relations between them. With a female at the center of the show set to invert the standard "girl in peril" scenario of the horror genre, the representation of male characters is clearly going to have to reflect that reversal. But as Whedon himself is aware, there is much more at issue than simply the inversion of genre conventions. Susan Faludi's *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the Modern Man* (1999) identifies feminism as a key element in the "undermining of patriarchy and the male paradigm of control" (quoted in Whitehead, 2002: 48), and in the larger cultural context, the representations in *BtVS* can be seen as part of a much wider phenomenon we could term "anxious masculinity." However, if the representations of men and women in *BtVS*, and the relations between them, can be taken to signify more than simply a clever parody of the horror genre, we must also understand the limitations of the Buffyverse. It is, after all, a world almost exclusively made up of middle and upper middle class North American youth of the late 1990s and early 2000s – and, what is more, predominantly white. What is more, its representations of ethnic "others," as other writers have noticed, are often problematic (Edwards, Ono). It follows, therefore, that the discussion of masculinity and female empowerment that follows will remain specific to that narrow cultural context, despite the hegemonic potential of a popular US show that has also found wide popularity on a global scale.

[3] Anya's naïve assumption that "[all] men like sports" prompts a typically wiseacre response from Xander: "Yes. Men like sports. Men watch the action movie, they eat of the beef, and enjoy to look at the bosoms" ("Graduation Day Part 1," 3021). A seemingly endless supply of jocks and frat boys are useful representatives of traditional models of masculinity in the high school/college context, from the hyper-masculine types that make life hell for the likes of Xander, to the geeks Andrew, Warren and Jonathan, with whom Xander shares more common ground than he might like to admit. While the key male characters in the show give the lie to the "sports, action movie, beef and bosoms" stereotype,

BtVS also uses these stereotypes to make particular points about the genre under deconstruction, as well as wider-ranging cultural commentary.1

"Where the Wild Things Are": Men and Beasts

[4] Stephen M. Whitehead suggests that "a key factor in men needing to control is a lack of confidence and inner security about their masculinity, maleness, sexuality," and implies that this lies at the heart of sexual violence and rape (165). Some of *BtVS*'s more ambitious experiments with monstrous metaphors explore aspects of masculinity that are cruel, aggressive and primitive, and while these episodes are not always the most successful, they do illuminate one way in which some men have met, and continue to engage with, what they perceive as the threat of feminism.

[5] The association between masculinity and animals, or more primitive human states, is made in a number of episodes. Predictably, the cynical slayer Faith believes that "every guy from . . . Manimal down to Mr. I-Love-T*he-English-Patient* has beast in him. And I don't care how sensitive they act. They're all still just in it for the chase" ("Beauty and the Beasts," 3004). This episode offers a protracted metaphor of man as beast: high school kid Pete, experimenting with a formula to make him more macho, has succeeded in transforming himself into a literal monster, the change being triggered by anger at his girlfriend Debbie. The episode sets up some nicely tuned parallels between Pete the abuser, Angel (who has just returned from a hell dimension and is in a feral state), and Oz. While Oz has no control over his werewolf state, he is a young man very much at ease with his masculinity and in a healthy and positive relationship with Willow. Pete, by contrast, is the monstrous, jealous, possessive, and violent male.2

[6] Although the episode does little more than harangue its audience, trading in subtlety and complexity for a rather too obvious message about sexual politics, it does raise some questions about Oz's identity. Oz, for the most part, conforms to the 'new man' archetype that is under constant negotiation in *BtVS*. When he forgives Willow for kissing Xander in "Amends" (3010), he is unafraid to admit his own vulnerability and need: "I miss you. Like, every second. Almost like I lost an arm, or worse, a torso. So, I think I'd be willing to . . . give it a shot." Oz and Willow have to come to terms with his werewolf identity at the end of this episode, and Willow brings some amusing sexual equality into the debate: Oz may have to lock himself up at night every full moon, but, as Willow reasons, "three days out of the month, I'm not much fun to be around either." It is interesting that both here and in "Innocence" (2014), it is Willow and not Oz who takes the initiative in sexual terms, with Oz more concerned to allow the relationship to proceed at a "wiser" pace.

[7] Unfortunately, the coherence of story and character arcs suffered when the Mutant Enemy team was faced with the sudden and unexpected departure of Seth Green (Oz) from the cast. The episode "Wild at Heart" (4006) replays the "all men are beasts" line, and although Oz's literal animal attraction to fellow musician and female werewolf Veruca is well played, it clumsily contradicts many aspects of the well-developed character that the writers (and Green) had established. Oz is insistent that he is only a wolf three nights a month, but Veruca retorts, "You're a wolf all the time and this human face is just your disguise." By the end of the episode, Oz has surrendered to the notion that "the wolf is inside me all the time" and he leaves Sunnydale. He returns for just one more episode, "New Moon Rising" (4019), where his reversion to his feral state (having apparently been cured) is triggered by the revelation that Willow is in love with Tara. Although the episode was rightly seen as groundbreaking for its depiction of the consummation of the Tara/Willow relationship, in terms of Oz's character it offers only a puzzlingly abrupt, incongruous and unsatisfactory resolution.

[8] The episode "Beer Bad" (4005) again chooses to use a sledgehammer rather than a scalpel to make its point about sexual politics. The barman Jack, sick of the patronizing attitude of many of the students who frequent his bar, has succeeded in brewing a beer that turns the students into Neanderthals. "That's the great thing about beer," he tells new barman Xander. "It makes all men the same." In part, the episode continues the narrative of Buffy's relationship with Parker Abrams, who has recently slept with and dumped her ("The Harsh Light of Day," 4003). In case the audience has failed to decode the caveman metaphor in "Beer Bad," Willow's speech to Parker draws it out for them: "I mean, you men. It's all about the sex! You find a woman, drag her to your den, do whatever's necessary just as long as you get the sex. I tell you, men haven't changed since the dawn of time." As she finishes,

the Neanderthal students break down the door with girls in tow. Again, the message is broadly comic – many of the laughs are raised by the transformation of Buffy into a Neanderthal state – but it is unsubtle in the way it explores masculinity. The potential complicating factor – Buffy is also affected, suggesting that there is more to this than a straightforward "all men are beasts" message – is not fully exploited, and is used only for an easy (but admittedly satisfying) laugh when Buffy inverts the familiar caveman caricature and knocks Parker over the head with a club.

[9] More successful is the early episode "The Pack" (1006), in which Xander and some of his classmates (including a girl) are possessed by the spirits of hyenas. The gruesome death of Principal Flutie aside, the episode is most striking for the personality change Xander undergoes, joining in the mockery of "Michelin boy" at the Bronze, and being aggressive, dismissive, and later openly hostile to Willow, humiliating her in public. Giles' remark that Xander has simply "turned into a sixteen year old boy," and that testosterone "turns all men into morons" brings the subtexts about adolescence and the cruelty of high school society very close to the surface.3 When Xander, in his wild state, confronts Buffy, his language is coarse and his attitude aggressive and possessive (anticipating the kind of language Spike will use when his relationship with Buffy develops): "I've been waiting for you to jump my bones," he tells her, as their fight begins; "We both know what you want."

[10] If men are, in essence, all beasts, then the episode "Some Assembly Required" (2002) puts another, anti-feminist paradigm under scrutiny. Once again metaphor becomes literal, with the male's desire to possess, control and anatomize the female given concrete form. Chris and Eric have taken to robbing graves and, eventually, are even prepared to kill Cordelia to create the perfect woman for Chris' brother Daryl, whom Chris has brought back from the dead. The idea of the objectification of the female body is expressed through a narrative in which women are reduced to spare parts that can be collected and fitted together to create a mate for the re-animated Daryl. Similar is the male cult in "Reptile Boy" (2005): Buffy, Cordelia and Callie are chained up by the Zeta Kappa fraternity, although they are to be used not for the pleasure of the fraternity but "for the one we serve," a reptilian creature Machida which is notably phallic-shaped and is destroyed by Buffy, armed with a correspondingly phallic sword.4

"A dateless nerd": Xander as anxious male

[11] Of all the key male characters, Xander Harris is perhaps given most reason to question his status within his peer groups, which time and again is associated explicitly with his masculinity. Xander's role as class geek in the early seasons is represented not only by his regular mockery courtesy of Cordelia, Harmony, and their gang, but also by his lowly and precarious position in the male hierarchy. Nowhere is this more obvious than in "Reptile Boy" (2005). Identified as a crasher at the frat party, he is discovered and put in women's clothing, a figure of fun, while he gamely attempts to please his frat audience. It is not long before he is thrown out, and as he stumbles past their line of cars, he mutters, "One day I'll have money. Prestige. Power. And on that day," he concludes bitterly, "they'll still have more." In Season 4, the fact that Xander is not a student means that he automatically occupies a lower position. When he takes a job as a barman, he is humiliated intellectually by a student who, associating virility with intellect, informs him that "we are the future of this country and you keep our bowl of peanuts full. We are what these girls want" ("Beer Bad," 4005). Although the actor Nicholas Brendon has looks and charm that belie the stereotype, his character in the early seasons is clearly intended to have geek-like tendencies, and while he does not fall into the same category as Jonathan, Andrew and Warren, it is clear that they share some common ground.

[12] The self-styled "Trio" is a group of anxious males who have retreated into, or never emerged from, a state of perpetual adolescence and fantasy. An early appearance by Jonathan, bullied by the swim team at the beginning of "Go Fish" (2020), sees him getting his revenge not, as Willow suggests, by "conjur[ing] up a hellbeast from the ocean's depths to wreak your vengeance" but by "pee[ing] in the pool." The paltry nature of their ambitions, in comparison with the considerable powers they have developed magically and technologically by Season 6, is very telling. "But we had so many plans. Naked women, and all . . . well, all--all the naked women!" whines Andrew ("Gone," 6011). For them, masculinity is associated with their degree of evil (interestingly, Spike uses the same "Big Bad" equation), and Warren's greater aspirations are repeatedly reined in by the other two - "We're villains!" he declares; "Not killers," Jonathan retorts ("Gone," 6011). The evil to be defeated in Season 6 is not, however, one of the monstrous, demonic villains of previous seasons, but "Just ordinary students you

went to high school with," as the doctor in "Normal Again" (6017) tells Buffy. "Just three pathetic little men . . . who like playing with toys."5

[13] Xander struggles not only within his male peer group but also in his attempt to carve out a role for himself in the Scooby Gang.6 In "The Harvest" (1002), while Willow immediately finds her place ("I want you to go on the 'Net," Giles says; "Oh, sure, I can do that," she replies), Xander is useless both as combatant and researcher ("And I, in the meantime, will help by standing around like an idiot"). In the same episode, as they prepare to go into action, he draws tellingly on a Western metaphor (the Western being "a masculine genre par excellence" [Horrocks 56]): "So, what's the plan? We saddle up, right?" He is swiftly put back in his place by Buffy ("There's no 'we', okay? I'm the Slayer, and you're not"). Xander shrugs, "I'm inadequate. That's fine. I'm less than a man."7 "Teacher's Pet" (1004) opens with a dream sequence in which Xander lives out his fantasy as a hero fighting shoulder to shoulder with Buffy.8 Not only that, he also imagines himself as a rock god who will immediately after the fight, he tells Buffy, "finish my solo and kiss you like you've never been kissed before."

[14] The theme is reprised more comprehensively in "The Zeppo" (3013). After a particularly tough battle in the teaser, Buffy suggests that in future skirmishes Xander should stay "fray-adjacent," and Giles concurs. Faith quips, "That was real manly how you shrieked and all." Xander subsequently tries to find his own reason for being on the team, the "thing" that will prove his worth as a member of the gang. His decision to acquire a car as an opening gambit is ripe for a popular psychoanalytical reading: when Xander announces that the car is his "thing," a bemused Buffy shoots back, "Is this a penis metaphor?" Although the Chevy does attract the attentions of the blonde beauty Lysette, it turns out that she is turned on specifically by the phallic symbol itself (the car), and not by the man behind the wheel.9 The episode unfolds with Xander reluctantly joining a posse of brought-back-from-the-dead stereotypical jocks on a male bonding night of high jinks - "Let's go pick up some girls, man. We'll hang out at Taco Bell, get some girls, go cruise around."

[15] As time goes by Xander learns to defer to Buffy more comfortably. However, this does not apply to everyday life situations; there is a clear demarcation between Xander's self-esteem in supernatural combat and in the school corridor. Leverenz suggests that men's real fear "is not of women but of being ashamed or humiliated in front of other men, or being dominated by stronger men."10 At the beginning of the episode "Halloween" (2006), Xander attempts to defend Buffy's honour in the face of Larry's slurs, squaring up to him and threatening to do something "damn manly." Buffy intervenes before Larry can do any damage to Xander, slamming him into the soda machine. Xander, however, is less than grateful for her help in earning him a reputation as "a sissy man." As Buffy notes, "I think I just violated the guy code big time." ("Poor Xander," sighs Willow. "Boys are so fragile.")

[16] This incident works as a set up for the way the episode unfolds, and which shows a more conventionally masculine aspect of Xander's character with his assumption of a soldier *persona*. As Ethan Rayne's spell transforms everyone into the characters represented by their Halloween costumes, Xander adopts his military identity while Buffy becomes a stereotypical eighteenth century woman, dropping into a dead faint at the first sign of danger, inverting the strong, self-possessed Buffy with which we are so familiar. Xander not only rescues the helpless Buffy from a marauding pirate version of Larry, but proceeds to beat Larry up ("It's strange," Xander tells Angel, "but beating up that pirate gave me a weird sense of closure"). Something of the military *persona* remains long after the spell has worn off. The military knowledge he retains is vital in the battle to defeat The Judge ("Innocence," 2014), and Xander again adopts a crucial role in "Graduation Day," Part 2 (3022), marshalling the troops in the showdown with the Mayor and his army. The skills do seem to fade over time, however.11 Getting ready to face the Initiative soldiers towards the end of Season 4, Xander has an array of assorted handguns ("If some commando squads are out there, fully loaded, these babies might give us the edge we'll need"), but while he struggles in vain with the chamber of a pistol, Giles opens it easily. Similarly, "This Year's Girl" (4015) finds Xander puzzling endlessly over the malfunctioning blaster the gang have requisitioned, while Riley powers it up with the flick of a single switch.

[17] Xander's lack of confidence in himself as a member of the team lingers, however, and is betrayed by his dream sequence in "Restless" (4022): when Giles declares that Spike is "like a son to me," Xander replies, uncertainly, "That's good. I was into that for a while, but . . . (*nodding towards his*

ice cream van) I got other stuff goin' on." In the same sequence, Giles and Anya speak to him in French and Xander is flummoxed, indicating that his anxieties center on his skills in research, as well as combat mode. Although Xander often fights bravely, he rarely does more than act as a diversionary punch-bag, although his resilience is worth noting.12 More characteristic is his fight with Harmony in "The Initiative" (4007), filmed in slow motion to heighten its comic, ironic effect, as the two slap, bite, and pull each other's hair. Nevertheless, the fact that Xander (and not Angel) saves Buffy in "Prophecy Girl" (1012) by administering CPR--something Angel cannot do, since, as a vampire, he has no breath--is important, and comparable with his part in saving the world from the apocalyptic rage of dark Willow at the end of Season 6.13

[18] In terms of his relationships with women, Xander is a very good example of the anxious, progressively destabilized "new man." Patricia Pender describes him as "an archetype of a new 1990s embattled masculinity, . . . struggl[ing] with the machismo stereotypes of classic narrative film" (Pender 2002: 39). As Buffy tells him, "You're not like other boys at all . . . You are totally, and completely one of the girls!" ("The Witch," 1003). For the duration of the first two seasons at least, Xander plays out the typical virgin/nerd role, preoccupied with sex, but almost always harmless in erotic terms. In "Beneath You" (7002), he sums his younger self up as "a dateless nerd." He drools over the cheerleading team; borrows books from the library about witchcraft in order to pour over the semi-nude engravings (both from "The Witch," 1003); and he angles the mirror in Buffy's room to catch a glimpse of her changing ("Never Kill a Boy on the First Date," 1005). When Ampata remarks, "You're strange," he replies, "Girls always tell me that. Right before they run away" ("Inca Mummy Girl," 2004).14 The remark is typical of Xander, and speaks volumes about his lack of success in romance, as well as his endearingly self-deprecating nature. His unrequited love for Buffy runs as a constant undercurrent in the series; his early attempts to woo her (often associated with manliness) are timorous and doomed to fail: "I gotta be a man and ask her out," he says in "The Witch" (1003), before failing miserably once more. His declaration of love in "Prophecy Girl" (1012) is typically open and vulnerable in "new man" fashion, and he is crushed when Buffy rejects him, gently but emphatically. His essential decency, however, and his distance from the stereotypical adolescent male that is evoked elsewhere in the series, is confirmed in "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered" (2016), when he chooses not to take advantage of Buffy who, under a spell, has fallen hopelessly in love with him.

[19] Before he forms more (or less) stable relationships with Cordelia and, later, the ex-vengeance demon Anya, Xander's sexual encounters place him firmly in the passive, victim role despite his best efforts to assert himself. In the early episode "Teacher's Pet" (1004), the teacher he falls for, Natalie French, turns out to be a giant praying mantis, and in "Inca Mummy Girl" (2004), he forms a relationship with Ampata, the deadly Incan princess released from her tomb. In this episode, he tries to take on a traditional protector role, reassuring Ampata that "Nobody's gonna hurt you. I won't let them." For the costume dance, he turns up in appropriately manly attire, dressing as the Clint Eastwood character The Man with No Name. Unfortunately, Ampata turns out to be as deadly as Natalie French, sucking the life out of Buffy's hapless exchange student, and then the bodyguard who is pursuing her, before, reluctantly, attempting the same on Xander. Ampata and Natalie French in "Teacher's Pet" represent particularly striking images of Barbara Creed's monstrous feminine, and of the female as sexual predator (Creed 1993). Even more vividly than the vampire's erotic bite, the image of the male being literally sucked dry by the female embodies male fantasy and nightmare in a particularly evocative way.

[20] Xander's fortunes in love take a wholly unexpected turn in the episode "Bewitched, Bothered & Bewildered" (2016) when a love spell goes awry: the target, Cordelia, remains unaffected, but every other woman around Xander falls for him, instantly and passionately. His response is to recognize that it is "time for me to act like a man – and hide." Once again, fantasy is inverted as nightmare. When Xander takes his long walk down the high school corridor, attracting adoring looks from the women and aggressive envy from the men, the effect is heightened by slow motion photography and the raunchy non-diegetic soundtrack. As the camera pans up to Xander's face, however, his expression is one of shock and fear. In "The Zeppo" (3013) Xander loses his virginity to Faith in an encounter that finds him playing the passive role familiar from his encounters with Natalie French and Ampata. Xander believes the fact that he has slept with Faith means he has a connection with her (although in "Consequences," 3015], Buffy informs him that the guys Faith has a "connection" of this kind with "are kind of a big joke

to her"). When he goes to visit Faith to talk to her, the situation quickly gets out of hand and turns into a sexual assault upon Xander ("I could make you scream . . . I could make you die"), and Xander is saved from strangling only by Angel's intervention.

[21] Xander's sexual maturation does not occur until Season 4, when his relationship with Anya blossoms. Even here, it is Anya who has taken the active role, having invited (or, rather, ordered) him to the prom (3020). Early in Season 4, Anya assumes that this means a relationship has been established: "So, I can assume a standing Friday night date and a mutual recognition as prom night as our dating anniversary?" When she 'seduces' him with the line "You're funny, and you're nicely shaped. And frankly, it's ludicrous to have these interlocking bodies and not . . . interlock. Please remove your clothing now," Xander is reminded of his previous encounter: "And the amazing thing . . . still more romantic than Faith." Nevertheless, Xander's sexual anxieties are not fully allayed, despite the outward appearance of happiness with Anya. His dream sequence in "Restless" (4022) includes Willow and Tara dressed as lipstick lesbians, inviting him to join them for a threesome while he leaves Anya at the wheel; Joyce attempting to seduce him; and going to the bathroom to find himself standing at the toilet surrounded by Initiative-style scientists observing him intently. More significantly, Xander becomes more and more nervous as he and Anya move towards marriage, and this culminates in the painful, bride abandoned at the altar episode "Hell's Bells" (6016). Perhaps the most interesting episode in this respect, however, is "The Replacement" (5003). Its plot is constructed around the magical division of Xander into two bodies - a confident *persona* and a weak *persona*. Written and directed to make the audience believe that the weak Xander is the 'real' one, we see his confident *alter ego* take over his life, "living it better than I do." The kind of behavior that we associate with Xander – prat-falling his way through his ordeals – is greatly exaggerated, and anxious Xander clings to Buffy as his salvation: when Willow tells him he has to help her figure things out, he replies: "But I never help. I get in trouble and Buffy saves me." The real crisis, however, is centred on Anya: as the weak Xander loses his grip on his own existence, he is provoked into action by the threat to his lover: "He can take anything but he can't have her. I need her." Confident Xander, meanwhile, does not hesitate in planning proactively: "It stole my face," he tells the others, as weak Xander looks on helplessly from his hiding place; "We have to find it and we have to kill it." Confident Xander takes on the role of protector and provider: the episode begins with Xander failing to arrange for Anya to have the apartment she wants, but reaches its climax when confident Xander, having secured his employment, signs a contract for the apartment and invites Anya over for a romantic house-warming celebration. It is at this point that the weak Xander breaks in, armed with a pistol, and attempts to assert his ownership over his life and, in particular Anya – a symbol of his virility.15 A scuffle results in confident Xander left holding both symbols - the girl and the pistol – until Buffy intervenes.

"Who died and made you John Wayne?" - Buffy and Riley

[22] It is interesting that the feminist icon at the heart of the show is particularly attracted to sensitive males. Although they vary considerably in physical type (from the tall, powerfully built figures of Angel, Riley and Ben to the slighter figures Scott Hope, Owen Thurman and Parker Abrams), they all tend to be less aggressively masculinised, and this includes Angel in his ensouled state and the wholesome, personable, sexually naïve Riley (who describes himself, tongue in cheek, as "a studly yet sensitive boyfriend" in "The Real Me," 5002). The obvious exception, of course, is Spike, who will be discussed in more detail presently. Owen, who catches Buffy's eye in "Never Kill a Boy . . . " (1005), is typical, noted by Willow as a reader of Emily Dickinson, "solitary, mysterious . . . sensitive, yet manly." However, appearances are more often than not deceptive. Cameron in "Go Fish" (2020) impresses Buffy with a poetic speech about the ocean at the beach party, although he soon turns out to be a swim bore with nothing else to talk about. When, abruptly, he tries to come on to Buffy, she responds by slamming his head into the steering wheel and breaking his nose. Parker Abrams, meanwhile, who uses the sad story of his father's death as a chat up line, has a one night stand with Buffy, leaving her bewildered and humiliated when he doesn't call her again, prompting Willow's indignation at "you men and your manness."16

[23] Riley is physically much more like Angel ("Have you seen his arms?" Buffy marvels to Willow in "Something Blue," 4009]; "Those are good arms to have"). Like David Boreanaz, Marc Blucas is tall and powerfully built - both of them dwarf Buffy. This clever casting panders to and at the same time subverts the standard paradigm of the vulnerable female and protective male. However, in terms of the

nature and stability of his masculine identity, Riley is much more complex than Angel. Mary Alice Money notes that he has "a bit of the aw-shucks charm of a young Jimmy Stewart or of his own namesake, Huck Finn" and describes him as "the sunny antithesis of Buffy's first great love, the always shadowed Angel" (Money 2002: 106). Iowa-born and bred, he retains much of the naivety and conservatism that is associated with the mid-West stereotype (his appearance in Willow's "Restless" dream as "cowboy guy," all wide-eyed innocence and smiles, is a witty and accurate summary of a significant aspect of his personality).17 Despite this, his political attitudes, however well meaning, are still, in Buffy's words, rather "Teutonic." When Buffy and Riley fall out over the issue of "demon bigotry," raised by Oz's return in "New Moon Rising" (4019), Riley retreats to where he feels secure, joining Forrest to hunt down the demon that attacked one of his teams. For Riley, there are no gray areas, only white and black, good and evil.

[24] Riley is very aware of his shortcomings and his inexperience in matters of the heart. In "The Initiative" (4007), he recruits Willow to help him woo Buffy, his awkwardness emphasised by the contrast with the smooth-talking Parker. He is also simultaneously more aggressively masculine than Xander (writer Douglas Petrie refers to him as a "sexist doof")18, and equally anxious. As his relationship with Buffy develops, he is willing to let Buffy lead in terms of their romance: at the end of "Something Blue" (4009), when Buffy tells him, "You really have a lot to learn about women, Riley," he replies, "You're gonna teach me." On the other hand, once their true identities are revealed to each other at the end of "Hush" (4010), anxieties and conflicts of a different kind begin to emerge. Buffy's superiority over the Initiative soldiers is established early on when she is tested by Maggie Walsh in the teaser scene of "The 'I' in Team" (4013), and she takes them apart with ease. From the episode "A New Man" onwards (4012), Riley is keen to test himself against Buffy; when they do spar in 4012, Buffy defeats Riley with ease. "Give me another . . . oh . . . week to get ready and I'll take you down," Riley tells her, but neither Buffy nor the audience are convinced. There is one unusual incident (in the "Fool for Love" teaser [5007]) when Buffy is impaled on her own stake by a rocker vamp, and is saved by Riley's intervention. "Do you think I'm a total wuss now?" she asks Riley, as he helps her home. Still, when Riley volunteers to patrol in her place, her reaction is protective, insisting that he should not patrol alone, but only with the rest of the group.

[25] From the time that they embark on a sexual relationship, there is an overt connection established between vampire-hunting violence and erotic excitement. This is most striking in "The 'I' in Team" (4013), where, in a scene perhaps indebted to Nicholas Roeg's *Don't Look Now* (1973), Buffy and Riley's fight with the Polgara demon is intercut with them undressing and making love. In "Where the Wild Things Are" (4018), Buffy and Riley take on and defeat a "vampire-demon tag team," and the adrenaline rush initiates another bout of passionate love-making. It is worth noting that Riley is unnerved by his partner's unusual "bad girl" sexual advances when Buffy's body is being inhabited by Faith in "Who Are You?" (4016): he is clearly thrown by being cast into a passive role in their love-making. As Buffy and Riley's relationship deepens, Riley has to come to terms with Buffy's superior strength. Once he is weaned off the Initiative's drug regimen, reverting to "normal" human strength, this crisis becomes even more acute, and when the relationship begins to fall apart early in Season 5, Riley turns to vampire prostitutes for satisfaction, while there are hints that Buffy has to leave Riley's bed to seek satisfaction with some covert middle of the night slayage (as in the teaser scene of "Buffy vs. Dracula," 5001). The appearance of Dracula acts as a kind of watershed. From his first appearance, Dracula triggers insecurities about masculine identity: Xander is hypnotised and reduced to a state of enslavement ("I will serve you, your excellent spookiness"), becoming, as he says himself, Dracula's "spider-eating man-bitch" and "butt monkey." Meanwhile, the discussion of the first encounter with Dracula is characterised by the women's starry-eyed recollection of a brush with greatness, Hollywood movie star style. Riley is particularly unnerved, asking Buffy about Dracula's "dark penetrating eyes," and Buffy's reply is hardly reassuring: "There was no penetration," she tells him, immediately embarrassed by her own inadvertent *double entendre*.

[26] Riley's masculinity, then, is threatened by Buffy's superior strength and resilience. As Irene Karras notes, chiefly because Buffy "could not play into the needy female role and allow him to be her caretaker or protector," the relationship collapses (Karras 2002). Riley opts to return to the emotionally safer, masculine world of his fellow soldiers - although, ironically, it is here that he meets his future wife, Sam ("As You Were," 6015).19 Sam only calls Riley by his surname, military style; we hear they

met during a firefight, and married in a military chapel; and when Buffy remarks, "he's your boss, too?" Sam laughs: "Oh, he *wishes."* If it is true, as Spike suggests, that Buffy "needs a little monster in her man" (as he tells Riley during their heart to heart in "Into the Woods," 5010], and again when he discovers the two of them in bed together ["As You Were" (6015)), then her failure to hold on to Riley is lent a sense of inevitability (unlike Oz's departure), and not to be dismissed merely as the fate of a character who never managed to find a place in the hearts of his TV audience.20

[27] Buffy is not the only female against whom Riley defines his masculinity. He is also dominated by the powerful matriarch Maggie Walsh, commander-in-chief of The Initiative. Riley's comrade Forrest refers to him joshingly as "Mama's boy" in "Pangs" (4008), and it is clear that Walsh has deep, maternal feelings for Riley, with disturbing, incestuous overtones. There is an inevitable conflict between her and Buffy over Riley, anticipated by the dream sequence at the beginning of "Hush" (4010), and reaching its climax when Walsh observes Riley and Buffy making love via a hidden camera, and subsequently tries to arrange her death ("The 'I' in Team," 4013). However, the complexities of the relationships in The Initiative run even deeper than this, as we shall see.

Can I have sex with Riley too?" – homosocialism in *BtVS*

[28] The homoerotic subtext that frequently and playfully shadows Xander makes for amusing, trainspotting viewing. As Roz Kaveney remarks, he "has, at one time or another, homosexual panic about every male in [the show]" (Kaveney 2001:10). There is a recurrent thread in the character of Larry, whom Xander inadvertently tips out of the closet.21 Xander is also deeply impressed by The Initiative in a "boys and their toys" fashion; when Buffy uses the voice print entry to the base, he coos: "I totally get it now. Can I have sex with Riley too?" The scattered references probably owe something to the close relationship between the show's fanbase and the Mutant Enemy production team (see, for example, Larbalastier, Zweerink & Gatson). The writers are well aware of the fan fiction that proliferates on the Internet and will at times indulge in some amusing games in the "fanfic" and "shipping" line. The most obvious example of this kind of camp self-aware referentiality comes in "Beneath You" (7002): when a gathering of Buffy, Spike, Xander and Anya is asked "Are there any of you who haven't slept with each other?" Xander and Spike exchange an intriguing, unreadable, but conspicuous look.22 Elsewhere, in "Beauty and the Beasts" (3004), Xander assures Willow he can handle "the Oz full monty" when left to guard Oz, who will return from his werewolf state naked: "I mean, not 'handle' handle, like 'hands to flesh' handle," he explains. In "Superstar" (4017), it is clear that both Anya and Xander are turned on by the magically enhanced Jonathan's performance with the band at the Bronze, and make a quick exit to go and have sex.

[29] However, more significant is the friendship between Riley and Forrest, where the homosocialism of the army environment shades into unarticulated homoerotic subtext.23 Riley will often retreat to The Initiative when his masculinity is threatened by Buffy. For his part, Forrest fits neatly into the paradigm bell hooks defines of the black man "eager to 'do it for daddy' . . . individuals tortured by . . . 'unrequited longing for [white] male love'" (hooks 1995:99).24 It is to Forrest that Riley first confesses he "has feelings for" Buffy ("The Initiative," 4007). Forrest attempts to head off Riley's affections: as they watch Buffy and Xander go off together, he suggests that "they're probably on their way to make crazy naked sex," adding, "I'm protecting you, buddy. I don't want to see you mooning over some freshman for the next three months." Shortly afterwards, Riley is bemused when Forrest suggests using this girl he (Riley) has "got a crush on" as bait to recapture Hostile 17 (Spike). Throughout the next few episodes, Forrest is repeatedly dismissive of Buffy, and after the test run against the Initiative team, the camera lingers on his expression of deep discontent as Riley assures her, "See? You're a hit. Everybody loves you" ("The 'I' in Team," 4013). "I've always been Riley's second in command. Instead he picks a girl," he grumbles, when out on a demon hunt (4013). As The Initiative begins to come apart ("Goodbye Iowa," 4014), envy turns into outright hostility, with Forrest convinced that Buffy is Walsh's killer. When Riley is wounded by Adam, Forrest will not let Buffy near him ("We take care of our own around here, understand?"), and when Riley attempts to leave the Initiative facility in "This Year's Girl" (4015), Forrest tries to stop him, with a direct reference to Buffy and Riley's sexual relationship: "One good conjugal visit and you're back in intensive care to stay." The same preoccupation is evident in his confrontation with Buffy in "Who are You?" (4016): "Hope you left him

alive . . . Boy's supposed to be on the mend. I don't see you letting him get much rest."

[30] The disturbing, twisted family connections at the heart of The Initiative are central to the climax of Season 4. Walsh's creation Adam is "our baby" in her conversation with Angleman. "I know you're gonna make me proud" she says to Adam before he comes to life, and moments later she says almost exactly the same to Riley ("The 'I' in Team," 4013). Adam in turn calls Walsh "Mommy" as he stabs her in a rather too obvious moment of Oedipal symbolism. Meanwhile, to the hypermasculine Adam, Riley is his brother: in an unconvincing plot device, we discover that Riley too has had a chip implanted and that he is wired up to obey Adam's commands ("Primeval," 4021).25 When Forrest is reanimated, he also insists on calling Riley "brother" (and Walsh is "mommy"). Granted greater strength and resilience in his undead state, he tells Riley he is looking forward to trying out "your girl" again. The triangle of love and jealousy is shattered when Buffy leaves Riley and Forrest to fight to the death, and finally only Riley is left standing.

"Not as toothless as you thought": Buffy, Spike and Drusilla

[31] The relationship between Spike and Drusilla is a very neat representation of the idea that gender status in *BtVS* is determined by who is in control, rather than by biological, "material" sex. Spike's oft-quoted remark that "I may be love's bitch, but at least I'm man enough to admit it" ("Lover's Walk," 3008), is usefully indicative of that gender/power equation. I do not intend to discuss Angel in depth here – although a fascinating figure in many ways, his significance as an "anxious male" is limited. Owen identifies him as "a site of perfected masculine appeal" (27) and Arwen Spicer declares that "the extreme masculinity of his gendering is also evident in his relationships with his fellow vampires" (9). However, Angel *is* important in this discussion for the role he plays in determining Spike's masculine identity. Spicer argues that "If we read this relationship [Spike/Angelus] as homosexual, it fits a dominance-submission paradigm in which Spike is coded as submissive female" (Spicer 2002:16). This is just one part of Spike's ambiguous gender position. Spicer develops an interesting argument that sees Spike "crossing the boundaries of conventional gender identifications": I will argue instead that he is another example of the anxious male, shaped in large part by his interaction with Buffy, Angel, and, to a lesser extent, Drusilla.

[32] Spike's ambiguous representation contrasts the violent and extremely dangerous vampire punk with his image as a dandy (often well groomed, snappily dressed, and with distinct echoes of his human form, the mother's boy William). His status from "The Initiative" (4007) onwards as "chipped" is also key: the implant placed in his head by The Initiative prevents him from attacking humans, and there are repeated associations between this incapacity and sexual impotence; as he says of himself, "Spike had a little trip to the vet and now he doesn't chase the other puppies anymore" ("Pangs," 4008). When he realizes in "Doomed" (4011) that he can attack demons, he goes wild (and note his use of beast imagery when describing the re-discovery of his potency): "That's right. I'm back. And I'm a bloody animal! Yeah!"

[33] In his romantic relationships, women often behave towards him in a patronising fashion: to Harmony, he is "my sweet Boo-Boo" ("Crush," 5014). To Drusilla, whom he calls "the face of [his] salvation" ("Crush"), he is "my sweet . . . my little Spike" ("School Hard," 2003). When he fails in that episode to kill the slayer, he returns to be comforted by Dru, and after he is temporarily crippled at the end of "What's My Line? Part 2" (2010), Angelus mocks him, remarking how Drusilla "bathes you, carries you around and changes you like a child" ("Passion," 2017). Angelus takes full advantage of his injured state to move in on Drusilla. He one-ups Spike's gift of a necklace with a still warm heart he found "in a quaint little shopgirl" ("Bewitched . . . ," 2016), and scornfully offers to help out: "if there's anything I can do for you . . . Any . . . responsibility I can assume while you're spinning your wheels . . . *(looks over at Drusilla)* Anything I'm not already doing, that is" ("Passion," 2017). Like The Initiative's skew(er)ed family, there is something twisted and incestuous about the Freudian triangle made by these three. On their reunion in "Innocence" (2010), Drusilla remarks, "We're family again. We'll feed. And we'll play." Angelus threatens Spike with a growl when Spike talks of him having been Buffy's "lap dog" (a slur on his masculinity), and then kisses him on the forehead. The "harder than thou" competition continues to the end of the season: in "Becoming Part 1" (2021), Angel fails to perform, unable to remove the sword from the statue of Acathla and Spike gloats with a sing-song refrain of "someone wasn't worthy" while Dru moans "This is so – disappointing." Revealingly, Spike finally forms an uneasy

alliance with Buffy to stop Angel destroying the world, chiefly because, as he admits, "I want Dru back."

[34] Spike is repeatedly cast in the role of scorned lover; the back-story of his human incarnation as William the "bloody awful poet" in 1880s London ("Fool for Love," 5007) is a stroke of genius: effete, a momma's boy ("Mother's expecting me, " he tells Drusilla shortly before she bites him), ridiculed by men and women alike, he is treated like dirt by the object of his unrequited passion, Cecily: "You're nothing to me, William," she tells him; "you're beneath me."26 It is this rejection that sends him out into the streets for his fateful encounter with Drusilla, who sires him. Dru later spurns him, abandoning him for a chaos demon as we learn in "Lover's Walk" (3008): "You stupid, worthless bitch," he despairs, "Look what you've done to me." However, the role is much more intricately and painfully played out when he is rejected by Buffy in Season 5 ("Crush," 5014) and again, even more painfully, in Season 6. Victoria Spah argues that Spike can be seen as a version of the courtly lover: "the knight/lover finds himself desperately and piteously enamored of a divinely beautiful but unobtainable woman . . . and goes forth to perform brave deeds in her honour." However, it is also important to bear in mind Spike's more conventionally masculine and aggressive forms of behavior in response to his lovers. He is convinced that the way to get Drusilla back is to "be the man I was, the man she loved. . . . I'll find her, wherever she is, tie her up, torture her until she likes me again" ("Lover's Walk," 3008). The triangle he set ups in "Crush"(5014) between himself, Dru and Buffy, drives him to distraction, and a despairing, misogynistic howl: "Why do you bitches torture me?"27

[35] The fact that Spike resorts to the robot replica the "Buffybot" for satisfaction of his unrequited love for the slayer puts him closer to the Warren of "I Was Made to Love You" (5015) than any of Buffy's other partners. The robot is clearly programmed to reaffirm his masculinity ("Oh Spike. You're the big bad . . . You're the *big* bad!"). The relationship with Buffy in Season 6, however, is deeply complex, and has much to do with games of power, submission and manipulation. When Buffy discovers that Spike has a crush on her (5014) and is asked by Joyce whether she may have inadvertently led him on, she admits that "I do beat him up a lot; for Spike, that's like third base." With hindsight, the irony is startling. The beginning of their sexual relationship is provoked by combat, the first fight they are able to have on equal terms since Spike was emasculated by The Initiative's chip – "Looks like I'm not as toothless as you thought, sweetheart," he smirks, having discovered that, since her resurrection, he can attack her without the chip kicking in ("Wrecked," 6010). After they have slept together, he talks of having "got [his] rocks back," and it is unclear whether he is talking about sex, his ability to challenge the slayer in combat, or both. For Buffy, the relationship provides only momentary satisfaction, and deep shame ("You're a thing – an evil, disgusting thing," she spits at him ["Smashed" (6009)). She relentlessly denigrates their relationship ("Last night was the most perverse, degrading experience of my life . . . You're just convenient" [6010]), but her most brutal beating down of Spike comes in "Dead Things" (6012), an episode which begins with Spike proffering handcuffs to use in their sexual games, and ends with Buffy's fierce rejection of his claims of ownership - her furious, anguished insistence that "I could never be your girl," as she pounds him into the pavement.

[36] Spike's attempted rape of Buffy in "Seeing Red" (6019) has been the subject of much debate, although the fact that it comes in the same episode as the hugely controversial death of Tara seems to have reduced its significance (an unfortunate but perhaps inevitable clash of storylines). In terms of the show's mythology, the incident is evidently meant to communicate something about Spike's monster/man duality, a reminder to the audience of Spike's true, demonic self, and a clear explanation of why Buffy cannot love Spike. Just as when he held up the handcuffs in 6012, she said she could "never" trust him, here she hisses, "Ask me again why I could never love you," after she has regained the balance of power. In terms of the current debate about masculinity, it leads us back towards the territory of conceptual episodes such as "Beauty and the Beasts" (3004) and "Wild at Heart" (4006). But whereas these episodes often feel contrived, the attempted rape scene's power to disturb is indicative of the courage and sophisticated thinking that characterises the work of the writers, directors and performers on the show. Spike returns for Season 7 newly ensouled: it seems that his intention is not as aggressive as his parting shot to Sunnydale suggested ("I'll be back. And when I do, it's all gonna change"), and when he returns Buffy finds him mentally and spiritually destroyed. Spike's quest ended (6022) with the return of his soul, for the single purpose of giving Buffy what he thinks she wants. Ironically, this is also a return to the male's need in *BtVS* to define masculinity against other males, too: Spike desires a soul not only to be the kind of "man" he believes Buffy would want him to be, but also

to match his arch-rival Angel. As *BtVS* began its final season, it continued to explore ever more sophisticated and intriguing models of masculinity.

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[1] Whitehead notes that sociological research time and again reveals the school setting to be "a conduit for dominant ideologies/discourses of gender and a vehicle for the validation of a particular form of masculinity" [Whitehead, 2002: 52).

[2] Also relevant to this debate is the figure of Ted (2011). Ted is obsessed with having complete control over an ideal nuclear family; as he short-circuits, revealing phrases spark out of him: "I don't take orders from women. Husband and wife is

radical family, as he short circuits, revealing phrases spark out of him: "I don't take orders from women … Husband and wife is forever … " His outmoded attitudes even extend as far as knocking Joyce unconscious to carry her out of the house, caveman style.

[3] Compare this remark to Jack the barman's note in "Beer Bad" (4005) that beer "makes all men the same." Compare also this from "Phases" (2015): when Giles describes the werewolf as "act[ing] on pure instinct. No conscience, predatory and aggressive," Buffy replies, "In other words, your typical male." According to Cain, werewolves "are suckers for that whole sexual heat thing." Significantly, neither of these remarks fit well with what we know of the real werewolf, Oz - at least, not in his human form.

[4] The students are offering up the women in exchange for power and prosperity. ("If he is pleased with our offerings, then our fortune shall increase"). In the coda, we learn that this is a long-established cult, with its graduates in big business, and when the story hits the papers, there are "falling profits, IRS raids . . . Ooo, and suicides in the boardroom," notes Xander, with some degree of satisfaction. Consider also the sacrifice of Nurse Greenleigh: Coach Marin shoves her into the water to be eaten by the former-swimteam-creatures ("Go Fish" [2020). He then tosses them Buffy - they may have already fed, he notes, but "boys have other needs." Marin is eventually eaten himself. It is also worth noting that the use of a woman by men in demon-summoning rituals was reprised in Season 7, "Helpless" (7004).

[5] An homoerotic subtext is clearly traceable in their relationships; see Simkin 2004 for further discussion.

[6] There are some parallels between Xander and Wesley in this respect, whom I do not discuss in this essay: Wesley works in part as a version of Giles without the older man's complexities and shady past. Englishness is associated with effeminacy ("Princess Margaret here had a little trouble keeping up," Faith remarks in "Doppelgangland" [3016), but he also has difficulty finding a role in the Scooby Gang; Buffy tells him that "If I need someone to scream like a woman I'll give you a call" ("Graduation Day," Part 2, 3022).

[7] The Western references recur elsewhere, in similar circumstances: "So we charge in, much in the style of John Wayne?" ("Doppelgangland" [3016)

[8] In the same episode, Xander throws his arms around Buffy and Willow as they enter The Bronze in order to convince a couple of his friends of his ability to score – "Blayne had the nerve to question my manliness. I'm just gonna give him a visual," he tells them.

[9] The symbolism continues when Xander is involved in a fender bender with Jack O'Toole and his big hunting knife.

[10] Whitehead is discussing Michael Kimmel's study of male sexuality (Kimmel 1994), and cites Kimmel's quotation of Leverenz (1986).

[11] But note how in "Checkpoint" (5012), when the Watchers question the worth of Xander to the team, Buffy uses a military metaphor in her response, pointing out that he has "clocked more field time than all of you combined. He's part of the unit."

[12] He bravely endures a broken wrist, and the prospect of more torture, when he refuses to choose whether Anya or Willow should die by the troll Olaf in "Triangle" (5011).

[13] For further discussion of this, and of Giles' role at the end of Season 6, see Simkin 2004.

[14] In a similar vein, he tells Buffy that "my valentines are usually met with heartfelt restraining orders," shortly before he offers Cordelia a Valentine's gift, and is promptly dumped ("Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered" [2016).

[15] In an amusing, and characteristic twist, Anya has her own ideas about what should be done with the two Xanders: "See, I can take the boys home, and . . . we can all have sex together."

[16] Spike merely mocks Buffy and her gullibility: "Did he play the sensitive lad and get you to seduce him?" ("The Harsh Light of Day," 4003).

[17] Joss Whedon notes in his DVD commentary for the episode that Cowboy Guy is "let's face it, how many of us see Riley."

[18] Douglas Petrie, DVD commentary for "The Initiative" (4007)

[19] It is probably not reading too much into the text to note Sam's gender-ambiguous name. Keith Topping refers to her as "a female clone of himself [Riley]" (Topping 2003: 130).

[20] As Joss Whedon himself acknowledged, "I wanted to see Buffy have a nice relationship with a nice guy. America doesn't want to se that. So it became instead a scenario where people though, 'She has a nice guy. She's going to walk all over him.' … He [Blucas] has a Gary Cooper quality. But Gary Cooper can't live in the Buffyverse…" (cited in Topping 2001, p.370).

[21] See "Phases" (2015) and "Earshot" (3018)

[22] Attentive viewers will recall "Intervention" (5018): when the gang believes Buffy is sleeping with Spike, Xander attempts to reassure her: "No one is judging you. It's understandable. Spike is strong and mysterious and sort of compact but well-muscled," and Buffy replies, "I am not having sex with Spike. But I'm starting to think that *you* might be."

[23] I refer here to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's distinction: see Sedgwick 1985.

[24] He also, unfortunately, has overtones of the stereotype of black male as sexual predator – see his unpleasant observations on the women in the canteen in the opening scene of "The Initiative" (4007).

[25] In his commentary for "The Initiative" (4021), David Fury confirms that there was a sense of "painting themselves into a corner" as the season headed for its climax and resolution.

[26] Buffy uses exactly the same phrase when rejecting his advances at the end of "Fool for Love" (5007).

[27] In "Crush," we see him taking out his rage on a mannequin dressed up as Buffy in similar misogynistic fashion: "you ungrateful bitch!" he roars, smashing a box of chocolates over the mannequin's head.