Not Another Dead Lesbian:
The Bury Your Gays Trope, Queer Grief, and *The 100*

By

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Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the accompanying thesis by Kira Deshler has been accepted in partial
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Abstract

In an era of media saturation and constant technological innovation, conversations about the content and meaning of popular media are more common than ever. In recent years, these conversations have increasingly revolved around questions of "diversity" in television and film. Viewers often bemoan the lack of diverse characters on television programs, or on the other hand, criticize programs for being "too diverse." A recent issue of media representation has complicated this simple distinction between diversity and lack thereof. Some TV fans have noted that queer women have been killed off of television programs at an alarming rate, and this phenomenon has been dubbed the "Bury Your Gays" trope by social media users. The conversation about this trope reached its apex with the death of a lesbian character on a popular show called *The 100* (2014) in 2016. Much of this project is focused on the reaction of fans to this show in particular.

My intention with this project is to investigate the social and theoretical implications of this phenomenon, and to understand how the consumption of these texts produces a particular *queer girl subjectivity* that allows these viewers to strategically navigate these fictional and real worlds. I am interested in the way a shared affect may circulate in online spaces, and how television may provide a space for queer girls to construct images of the self and build community. I have worked to answer an essential question, that is, *what shared affect does this trope produce, and how have queer girl audiences deployed this affect in order to transform discourse?* I have investigated these problems by exploring the discourse produced by and about queer girls on the social media sites Twitter and Tumblr. I have also utilized queer theory, such as the work of Sarah Ahmed, Judith Butler, and José Esteban Muñoz, in order to enrich my analysis of this discourse. Through my research I have found that queer girls have created their own unique worlds in these online spaces, and through their activism and public discourse, have begun to shift the balance of power between producers and viewers of media texts, making important connections between the fictional and "real" worlds that they hold dear.

INTRODUCTION: Queer Media & Queer Theory

> Popular culture is one of the sites where struggle for and against a culture of the powerful
> is engaged: it is also a stake to be won or lost in that struggle. It is the arena of contest
> and resistance.
> –   Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular" (239)

Lexa: You think our ways are harsh, but that's how we survive.

In the past few years, the phrase "diversity" has become a buzzword when discussing

media texts and the representations of various populations therein. In the context of television,

viewers often criticize programs for not being diverse enough, or on the other hand, for being

"too diverse" (i.e., containing too many minority characters). The recent proliferation of

discourse surrounding the representations of queer populations on television has led many critics

to contend that while the number of queer characters on television has increased, we still have "a

long way to go." However, a new phenomenon has complicated this simple distinction between

the existence or the non-existence of queer characters on television. Some TV fans have noticed

that female queer characters have been killed off of television shows at an alarming rate. This

pattern has been dubbed[1] the Bury Your Gays trope, and has sparked an (inter)national debate

about what "good" media representation means.

My intention with this project is to understand how the consumption of these texts

produces a particular *queer girl subjectivity* and the ways in which this subjectivity produces a

community of viewers that strategically navigate and re-work these texts. Of particular interest is

the way television programs may circulate a shared affect in online spaces and the type of

discourse this may produce. Previous research has shown that television provides a space where

(queer) audiences may imagine possibilities, define relations, construct images of the self, and

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[1] The phrase "Bury Your Gays" has been catalogued on TVTropes.com since at least 2010. Users on
Tumblr and Twitter have begun using the phrase with more frequency in the last two years.

build community (Driver 14). With this understanding in mind, I will endeavor to answer an essential question, that is, *what shared affect does this trope produce, and how have queer girl audiences deployed this affect in order to transform discourse?* In order to productively engage with this question I will provide a brief historical background on the ways in which queer subjects have creatively engaged with media texts in the past. As a means to further understand the Bury Your Gays trope and its consequences, I will utilize the theoretical tools of queer studies and engage with theories such as queer utopia as defined by José Esteban Muñoz, Judith Butler's conception of grief and mourning, and Sara Ahmed's work on affect and emotion. In order to center this discussion, I will focus my analysis on the post-apocalyptic teen drama *The 100* (2014), but first, a contextual and theoretical background on the topic is in order.

A Genealogy of Queer Media

It is difficult (and perhaps impossible) to pinpoint an origin to the Bury Your Gays trope. The history one may uncover will also depend on whether one is looking at gay men or gay women. For the purposes of this project, I will be primarily looking at depictions of queer women on television, as this is the context within which the trope is most often discussed today. (Another project entirely could be done with regard to depictions of queer men). Up until the last 15 years or so, (canonically) queer characters were rarely seen on television or film. In the era of early American cinema, queer characters were only portrayed through subtext as a result of the Hays Code, which was in place from 1930 to 1968. This censorship code prohibited any depictions of homosexuality and other taboo topics. Because of this, many queer women looked for representation in literature. Christopher Nealon writes about "The Ambivalence of Lesbian Pulp Fiction," a genre of fiction popular in the 1950s and 1960s. Although often these books ended tragically (either in death, institutionalization, or a "return" to heterosexuality), Nealon

writes that these texts may be understood as "survival literature" for queer women (748). If we go back further we find Radclyffe Hall's (in)famous novel *The Well of Loneliness*, first published in 1928 and often credited as the first English novel to openly discuss homosexuality. Unsurprisingly, this novel also ends tragically, with the death of the main character, Stephen Gordon. Preceding *The Well of Loneliness* is Sheridan Le Fanu's gothic vampire novella *Carmilla*, originally published in 1872, which details the seduction of young ingénue Laura by mysterious vampire Carmilla. As you can probably guess by now, the story ends with Carmilla's death. (Interestingly, the novella was adapted into a much *queerer* web series in 2014). As evidenced by this particular history, we can see a trend of lesbian tragedy in written texts preceding the institutionalization of this trope on screen.

Depictions of queer women on screen have always been fraught with anxieties about the threat to heterosexuality they purportedly pose. Ann Ciasullo describes the popularity of the "Women-In-Prison Narrative" (which she dates from the 1920s to the 1960s) and the ways in which it provides space for an exciting and titillating exploration of female homosexuality, while at the same time re-inscribing heterosexuality as the norm – quite literally "containing" queer desire. In "Cultural Representations of Lesbianism and the Lesbian Body in the 1990s," Ciasullo also explains how the lesbian body had to be coded in order to be palatable to a broadly heterosexual public. According to Ciasullo the "lesbian chic" figure of the 1990s prevailed at the expense of the butch lesbian who was/is "too dangerous, too loaded a figure to be represented" (605). Rebecca Beirne traces the figure of the "lesbian chic" to the 2000s where she claims it re-emerged on Showtime's *The L Word*. Overall, Beirne found that lesbian storylines had been systemically marginalized on television, and *The L Word* provided a space for the proliferation of clichés to emerge. Beirne finds this proliferation productive, as does Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick,

who hails the show as a space from which "the vastly livelier potential of lesbian ecology" may emerge. However, *The L Word* has been critiqued for playing into the "male gaze" and lacking nuanced representations of bisexuality. It is shows such as *The L Word* that illustrate the fissures in contemporary debates about queer representation, debates that often center on both the progress that has been made and the need for further improvement.

Many authors have effectively written about the spaces in which queerness may emerge and proliferate. In his book *Queers in American Popular Culture* (2010) Jim Elledge provides a broad overview of both contemporary and historical examples of queer culture as depicted by the media. Rachel Walker points out that Ellen's very public coming out (both as a character on her show and as Ellen Degeneres herself) enacted "a queer "crossing" or destabilizing of the boundary between the performative and the real" (2), thus placing the queer in the realm of the everyday. Ellen's coming out had implications for the queer viewer as well, especially when we consider (as the book does) identity as the intersection between the personal and the social (211). Thus, as one queer door opens, so do others. Christopher Pullen and Margaret Cooper expand this discussion of LGBT media by focusing on online spaces and new media practices in their analysis. They point to the abundance of coming-out videos on YouTube as an instance of queer internet users creatively navigating online spaces to create a new discourse of support. This idea that "the queer often operates within the nonqueer, as does the nonqueer within the queer" (156) is explicative of the complicated ways in which queer users are interpellated and engage with online environments. Their book also draws connections between the death of the gay bar/gay neighborhood and the emergence of online spaces curated by queer users. As technology and urbanization rapidly expand, so do the various spaces within which queerness may exist.

Of particular interest to many scholars including myself is the way that queer audiences interpret and engage with subtext. Michael DeAngelis investigates how gay men have created their own subcultures around particular male actors such as James Dean, Mel Gibson and Keanu Reeves, three men who only ever play ostensibly heterosexual characters in their films. He describes how these celebrities have shaped a particular gay male culture and influenced subsequent representations of queer men, thus indicating the circularity of performativity. Collier et al. provide further insight into the relationships queer audiences may have with popular culture in their article about *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Xena: Warrior Princess.* They contend that "Much of the appeal of *Xena* and *Buffy* for the lesbian audience can be attributed to the fact that the creators of *Xena* fed the subtext of the show and the creators of *Buffy* turned subtext into main text" (584). Collier et al. also propose that fans of the shows wrote fan fiction as a way to legitimize and affirm lesbian identities. In addition, participants in their study reported that the two media texts "had a positive impact on their self-perception as lesbians" (593).

Susan Driver continues in this vein of study with her book *Queer Girls and Popular Culture* (2007), from which I have drawn significant insight. Driver highlights the way media texts are incorporated into subjectivities, the way communities are formed online, and how to study a somewhat undefined group of people such as queer girls. She defines popular culture "as a process through which queer girls creatively imagine possibilities, forge connections, make meanings, and articulate relations" (14). She contends that media texts and online culture create space for queer girls to play with identity and articulate their own desires. Attentive to the importance of language, Driver uses the word queer "as a performative notion enacted by youth, focusing on contingent and varied models of signifying intersecting identifications and desires" (3). Driver pays close attention to the ways in which queer girls represent themselves and define

their identities in relation to the media texts they consume, an undertaking that is closely aligned with the goals of my own project.

In the context of the Bury Your Gays trope, it is also important to employ some data in this theoretical discussion. The popular LGBTQ website Autostraddle recently created an infographic that detailed the deaths of all the female queer characters on television. This infographic not only provided an easily digestible visual for what many TV viewers already knew, but also illustrated how rare queer women are on television overall. The data showed that there have been a total of 383 lesbian or bisexual women on television[2] and that 95 of those characters have died. In a similar vein, GLAAD puts out a report each year detailing the state of LGBTQ representations in American media. Their 2016-2017 report reveals that queer and trans representations are (slightly) on the rise, but also points to a lack of other factors such as race and (dis)ability being portrayed alongside queerness. These two reports provide important context for the televisual moment we are in while also complicating simple understandings of what "good" representation is.

Relevant Television Theory

Since the 1970s, when scholars began studying television in earnest, a wide variety of theoretical texts discussing the nature of television audiences have been produced. In 1992, Henry Jenkins published *Textual Poachers*, wherein he details the ways in which fans receive and relate to the media texts they consume, a practice he calls "poaching." He suggests that fan reception involves the following: "the ways fans draw texts close to the realm of their lived experience; the role played by rereading within fan culture; and the process by which program

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[2] This includes any television series that were/are available to American audiences via an American broadcasting station, even if it wasn't produced in the United States. (Many Canadian and British shows are broadcast in the U.S.).

information gets inserted into ongoing social interactions" (Jenkins 53). This "self-conscious interpellation" (110) complicates the notion of television viewers as mindless consumers and re-positions them as active and reactive actors in the realm of the social. Stuart Hall, in his seminal work "Encoding/decoding" (1980), offers up a similarly nuanced understanding of the relationship between the production and reception of television. He proposes three different positions a viewer may assume: the *dominant-hegemonic position*, the *negotiated code*, and the *oppositional code*. These three positions indicate varying levels of acceptance of the signified message contained in the media text. Both Jenkins and Hall indicate the potential productivity of fan receptions and complicate understandings of mass-media as simply a linear circulation loop.

Another significant contribution to the field of fan studies is Rebecca Williams' *Post-Object Fandom* (2015). In it, she outlines the ways in which fans may interact with media texts once they are no longer being produced. She contends that fan/television interactions may be understood as what Anthony Giddens has termed "pure relationships," which "continue as long as they provide two necessary rewards: the reflection of a desirable self-narrative and ontological security" (Williams 24). 'Ontological security' may be understood as the maintenance of a coherent framework or narrative of the self within an environment saturated by doubt and uncertainty. Williams suggests that television may provide this ontological security to fans, and that when a show ends this may result in a period of mourning that is characterized by destabilization and a subsequent "reiteration of discourse." In *Media Topics* Kristyn Gorton also underscores fan engagements in her discussion of the emotional interactions of television audiences. She utilizes an affective understanding of television and suggests that television programs may enact fantasy (in the psychoanalytic sense) which is not primarily an illusion but rather "a fundamental aspect of human existence" (83). Both texts highlight the rewards that

audiences may receive as a result of their engagements with media texts and the potential rupture that may occur when this emotional relationship comes to an end.

Relevant Gender & Queer Theory

The circulation of feeling, emotion, or *affect*, is an important phenomenon to be studied in the context of fan-object relations. Sara Ahmed's influential text *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) provides fruitful groundwork for understanding affect as a cultural practice that circulates not inside-out but rather from the outside in. Within this framework, emotion does not come primarily from within, but rather is influenced by external forces. Significantly, Ahmed theorizes affect in relation to queer bodies, stating that "heterosexual culture, having given up its capacity to grieve its own lost queerness, cannot grieve the loss of queer lives; it cannot admit that queer lives are lives that could be lost" (156). Thus, certain affects (or lack thereof) may stick to some bodies more than others, leading to a particular understanding of what affect is expected to be produced as a result of an orientation towards a specific object. Judith Butler takes up the political implications of this asymmetry in *Precarious Life* (2004) where she contends that there exists a "hierarchy of grief" that designates which bodies are allowed to be publicly grieved. She understands public mourning to be an extremely powerful political act (e.g. the political demonstrations of ACT UP during the AIDS crisis) and suggests that an understanding of our universal "shared precarity" may serve as a tool for coalition across difference. Both texts importantly highlight the public nature of emotion and the ways in which emotion can be both mandated and restricted.

Delving into a theory that is specific to lesbian subjectivity, Teresa De Lauretis produces a re-reading of Freud that takes into account the problems of lesbian representation and the role of fantasy in the formation of the lesbian subject. In *The Practice of Love* (1994), she contends

that there has been a suppression of public forms of fantasy that represent women's desire for other women. De Lauretis understands that within psychoanalysis, the only two explanations for perverse female desires are hysteria, which indicates a lack of subjectivity, or male identification – neither of which account for the specificity of female-female desires (32). De Lauretis underscores the fraught environment of lesbian identification and representation, indicating a need for new spaces of lesbian subjectivity and the articulation of desire. Vivienne C. Cass' "Homosexual Identity Formation" (1984) offers up an articulation of the ways in which lesbian identification may occur in her linear model. (While her model has been critiqued for being just that – too linear – her process has been widely applied). She names six stages in the formation of a homosexual identity: *Identity Confusion*, *Identity Comparison*, *Identity Tolerance*, *Identity Acceptance*, *Identity Pride*, and *Identity Synthesis*. These stages may clash with the psychoanalytical understanding of lesbian desire that De Lauretis explicates, as Cass understands identification to have more to do with synthesis than replacement. However, both authors highlight the interpersonal practice of subjectivity that may be further complicated by media consumption.

A formative text for many queer theorists is Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (1978). Foucault proposes that instead of thinking of power as primarily *repressive*, we should instead conceptualize it as inherently *productive.* "What is particular to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as *the* secret" (Foucault 35). According to Foucault, we are a society that talks about sex constantly, seemingly with no limit, while also maintaining an air of public prudishness. This is a particularly important point to consider in a decade where "family values" are given as a reason for censorship, and as such depictions of

lesbian sexuality on screen are fraught with anxiety. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner take up this contradiction in their piece "Sex in Public" (1998) where they underscore how the hegemonic public sphere has worked through "a privatization of sex and the sexualization of private personhood" (559). To disrupt this normalizing impulse, Berlant and Warner suggest the formation of "queer counterpublics," a queer "world-making project" that would expand the existing possibilities for an intimate public, and whose proliferation can never be fully realized. While perhaps their project may be understood as a form of resistance that Foucault says is always inherent to power, a queer world-making project also subversively uses the tools of proliferation that Foucault understands as one of the tenets of bio-power. Queer women have dealt with the "proliferation" of queer media in both receptive and critical ways, as a strategic navigation of the public sphere.

José Esteban Muñoz continues this discussion of queer world-making in his book *Cruising Utopia* (2009). Muñoz contends that "An antiutopian might understand himself as being critical in rejecting hope, but in the rush to denounce it, he would be missing the point that hope is spawned of a critical investment in utopia, which is nothing like naive but, instead, profoundly resistant to the stultifying temporal logic of a broken-down present" (12). He wants to argue against antirelationality and instead think of queerness as a "collectivity" that insists on the radical possibilities of the future. In his earlier work on *Disidentifications* (1999), Muñoz highlights particular pieces of queer art that he believes to be part of building this queer utopia. He defines disidentification as a strategic resistance and response to interpellation that re-formats the self within constraints as a means of survival. Muñoz proposes that melancholy be re-formatted as *queer melancholy,* that as opposed to resisting grief and letting go, would instead work through the act of taking the dead with you as you continue your crusade.

Disidentifications lay the groundwork for a queer utopia through their creative re-interpretation of normativity, a productive action that opens up space for those who have been denied a world of their own.

Lastly, in order to produce a discourse analysis as I intend to do, it is useful to gain an understanding of the field of discourse studies. Marianne Jorgensen and Louise J. Phillips, in their text on "Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method," define discourse as "a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)" (1). This definition is purposefully broad, and takes up a social constructivist view wherein language as constitutive *of* and constituted *by* social reality. They quote Foucault (1972) who contends that "[Discourse] is made up of a limited number of statements for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined" (12). They highlight the importance of not discriminating between statements, but rather "exploring patterns in and across the statements and identifying the social consequences of different discursive representations of reality" (21). Also important to such an analysis is Donna Haraway's theory of *situated knowledge,* which characterizes knowledge as partial and always "historically contingent" (202). Jorgenson and Phillips' work is particularly useful in understanding the broader picture of discourse, in addition to doing a detailed analysis of a specific phenomenon using the theories of the previously mentioned scholars.

Methods

To investigate my primary research question I have utilized relevant queer theory to engage with the texts I will be examining. Of particular relevance to my project is Sara Ahmed's work on affect, which highlights the cultural circulation of emotion and the ways in which particular affects are associated with certain bodies more than others. By *affect* I mean a particular orientation towards an object that stimulates a bodily response, and that is able to be

transmitted *between* bodies. I will explore how queer girl audiences express affect online and how the contagious nature of this affect has engendered public performances of grief. I am particularly interested in investigating expressions of grief as Butler defines it in *Precarious Life* as well as Muñoz' related concept of (queer) melancholia. I will examine not only *how* and *what* affect is expressed, but also *where* this affect travels and what one *does* with it. Is this affect being circulated privately? Publicly? What spaces might this circulation open up? Additionally, I will imbue my analysis with Muñoz' conception of queer world-making and utopia to discover the ways in which the circulation of affect may construct new communities, and perhaps even new worlds. How have queer girl audiences in online spaces disrupted discourse about queer death? Has this been utopian? Destructive? I will have in mind such questions as I do my analysis.

My project will be, first and foremost, a discourse analysis. This means I will be analyzing statements (mostly online) circulating about a particular occurrence (the death of female queer characters on television), and the patterns and diversions that arise within these statements. This analysis will take into account the constructive nature of language, wherein language is constitutive *of* and constituted *by* social reality. The discourse-producing spaces I will explore are online sharing platforms, primarily Tumblr and Twitter. Ten years ago, websites such as TelevisionWithoutPity.com were popular spaces to discuss popular television shows, but this website has since gone defunct and more undefined platforms such as Tumblr have become common spaces for discussing television and building fandom-specific communities. (The use of tags and the option for anonymity make Tumblr a fruitful site for the production of queer fandom and community). In order to locate relevant posts on these websites, I will search online archives using hashtags (such as #Clexa, #The100, #LGBTFansDeserveBetter), as well as time-specific

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searches on the archives of Tumblr. I will also search for news articles discussing the "Bury Your Gays" trope, as well as utilize the content on the queer-specific websites Autostraddle and AfterEllen and the reader-produced comments on these sites. Analyzing the content on these online platforms will allow me to explore the emergence of a particular queer discourse as well as the broader shifts this discourse may generate.

To concentrate and deepen my analysis, I will focus my exploration on a particular television show and the affect this show (and the queer death therein) has produced. The CW's post-apocalyptic teen drama *The 100* premiered in 2014, and in Season 2 the show introduced a lesbian character, Lexa. She was killed in Season 3, and though many fans were expecting this outcome, grief and outrage quickly spread online. Though queer women had been killed off of television shows previously (hence the expectation of Lexa's death), this show produced an unprecedented outpouring of emotion from fans, resulting in tangible consequences. Thousands of dollars were raised for a queer hotline, billboards were erected, *The 100* showrunner issued an open letter to fans regarding Lexa's death. The strong reaction to this television event may have been due to the purposeful appeal the show made to attract a queer girl audience, as well as the strong attachment many young queer women had to the character Lexa. I will analyze the specific (queer) fan response to this show, particularly the episode in question, season 3, episode 7. While I will reference instances of the Bury Your Gays trope in other television shows to provide context, I hope to show that the fan response to *The 100* is representative of a particular *queer relation* to media texts, as well as to underscore the remarkable nature of this incident.

CHAPTER 1: Frameworks

> The struggle to survive is not really separable from the cultural life of fantasy, and the foreclosure of fantasy—through censorship, degradation, or other means—is one strategy for providing for the social death of persons.
> – Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (28)

> **Clarke**: Maybe life should be about more than just surviving. Don't we deserve better than that?

> **Lexa**: Maybe we do.

Queer as a Performative Identification

Language is intensely complicated. That's why, to begin, I'm going to define some of the terms of my argument. As I mentioned in the previous section, I will be studying the response of queer girl audiences to the media they consume. I have chosen to use the word "queer" in my analysis for a number of reasons. First, queer is a descriptive word that may be used to disrupt the binary between lesbian (or gay) and straight. While the trope I am looking at is called Bury Your Gays, or alternatively, Dead Lesbian Syndrome, not all of the characters who may fall into this trope can be considered exclusively gay or lesbian, nor can all of the fans of these television programs.[3] In addition, the word queer is often used to include trans identities as well, an identity category that is often overlooked when studying LGBTQ+ populations. I have chosen to use the world girl to indicate that many of these viewers are young people, and because girl is often a more flexible term than woman. Queer girls may describe themselves as butch, femme, genderqueer, trans, boi, lesbian, bisexual, or gay, to name just a few labels. In addition, queer girl identities intertwine with and cannot be separated from other factors such as race class, and

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[3] There are of course fans of *The 100* who are queer men or identify as primarily masculine. These viewers are important, but because I am also interested in studying media consumption as it relates to identity I will be primarily focusing on queer girls.

(dis)ability. While these two terms are imperfect and can never include every queerly situated viewer, leaving this group unnamed erases the difference and specificity that makes the experiences of queer girls unique.

To put the matter simply, I am using the term queer because it is a word that is frequently deployed by young people online in order to define their relationship to themselves and to others. While it must not be overlooked that this term has a long history of derogatory use and is often used in academia to describe more than a personal identity choice, in this case I am using the word as it is used by the youth who relate to it. In her study of *Queer Girls and Popular Culture*, Susan Driver notes that girls used queer as a "flexible and strategic mode of identification," and that "the process of naming oneself as queer is understood as a dynamic response and rearticulation of words and meanings to convey departures from heteronormative expectations" (28). As always, language is imperfect and significations are contingent, and I deploy the phrase *queer girls* to describe a heterogeneous and undefinable population while also highlighting the distinctiveness of these positions.

Media and Identity

In order to frame my discussion of media, I am making some basic assumptions about popular culture. Within this framework, the existence as well as the power of popular media is taken as a given – I am not contesting the existence of mass media nor I am fighting for or against it, but rather acknowledging its place in society as a starting point. The question then becomes what audiences do with popular culture, and how these cultural representations are negotiated. Driver contends that denouncing media visibility simply as a normalizing and hegemonic gestures discounts "more subtle and contextualized possibilities between mass media production and queer girl consumptions" (10). I am less interested in critiquing media

representations as whole and more interested in how queer girl audiences negotiate and interact with the media they consume.

In discussing interactions between queer audiences and popular media, I am also making a connection between media consumption and identity. Identity is defined here as a socially constituted marker (or markers) of the self (or selves). The Communication Theory of Identity defines identity as a social phenomenon, wherein an individual's embodiment of an identity may change according to the social groups they are surrounded by (Elledge 211). Cass' "Homosexual Identity Formation" draws on similar concepts, describing identity formation as a process involving an initial comparison to others and an eventual integration into a broader community. Both frameworks highlight the importance of community as well as communication in constructing and maintaining an identity.

Though in recent years there have been scholarly debates about the efficacy of studying identity, I maintain that especially for this project, identity is a useful category of analysis that encompasses both social relations and individual desires and emotions. Critics of identity studies want to instead focus on desire in regards to sexuality, noting that the relative importance of distinct identities are essentially meaningless (Cameron & Kulick 2003). What this critique overlooks is the implication that if individuals place meaning on the language they use to describe their sexuality, then that in itself is worth studying. In arguing for the utility of studying sexual identity, Bucholtz and Hall (2004) define sexuality as *the systems of mutually constituted ideologies, practices, and identities that give sociopolitical meaning to the body as an eroticized and/or reproductive site"* (470, emphasis in original). They note that "identification is inherently relational," and even when desire is relevant to sexuality, "it is always mediated in some way by

identity" (Bucholtz and Hall, 507). These distinctions are particularly important in the context of social media relations, where identity and relationality are paramount to community building.

In the next few chapters I will examine the ways in which queer girl communities are formed in online spaces, and how being a part of these communities may produce a particular subjectivity. I am using "subjectivity" here to describe an individual's viewpoint or perspective, which would accordingly affect how they interact with the objects they come into contact with. To simplify – one's identity may lead them to a particular community, or conversely, one's identity may form as a result of involvement in a community. In whatever order this happens, one's community ties and/or their identit(ies) may provide a unique subjectivity. In the context of my work I am interested in the subjectivities that are produced by being involved in online communities where members have a certain amount of cultural literacy and consume many of the same media texts. Importantly, these media-influenced and identity-dependent subjectivities may influence one's perspective on the future, and their understanding of their unique position in the world.

In an era where cultural literacy is key to making connections and building community, it follows that media and identity are closely intertwined. Driver argues that "growing up in an era where mass media representations increasingly pervade their cultural environments and imaginations, girls are challenged to use pop cultural images and stories to make sense of their lives and communicate their differences" (1). Rebecca Williams contends that television shows may provide audiences with what Anthony Giddens calls "ontological security," wherein an individual is able to frame their own personal narrative in a logical manner (24). Popular media may allow fans to make sense of their place in the world and articulate their relation to others, which are two pillars in the process of identity formation. Significantly, the formation of an

identity or a subjectivity is not primarily a conscious or an unconscious process, and cannot be defined in such binary terms. Driver claims that the relationship "between representations and identity" is "a dynamic process that is not bound by texts constructed by producers or completely open to the whims of young people's imaginations and subjective longings" (235). Henry Jenkins describes media identifications as an active process of "self-conscious interpolation of the personal and the experiential into the realm of the fictional" (110), noting the way lines between the fictional and the "real" may be blurred. Regardless of whether the consumption of media texts is more passive or active, it is clear that individual's identities – especially those isolated young people that rely on media the most – are shaped by the popular culture that weaves in and out of their lives.

This project seeks to reframe the relationship between the producers of media texts and the viewers. Often audiences are seen as passive agents within systems of media circulation, simply taking in the texts that are directed at them. This perspective is further entrenched in regards to female viewership. As Driver puts it, "femininity has conventionally been associated with gullible and irrational receptions of mass media, which becomes a basis for stereotyping girls as passive consumers […]" (13). Sarah Ahmed argues that emotions are often devalued in relation to thought or reason, and this hierarchy is closely linked to the binary between masculinity and femininity (3). As follows, teen girls are often seen as the most irrational when it comes to their relationship to popular media, and this is partially why shows aimed at younger (female) audiences, such as The CW's *The 100*, are rarely taken very seriously. In this sense it is important to consider the self-reflexivity and awareness of youth audiences, especially queer girl audience. Anna Gibbs (2011) notes that an important distinction between publics (or audiences) and crowds is "their degree of self-consciousness of themselves as a public which may militate

against suggestibility" (261). Viewership is often more complicated than it may appear on the surface.

Rather than look at media production and consumption as a basic circulation loop, I am more interested in the nuanced shifts of power that occur between the producers and consumers of a media text. Stuart Hall defines the circulation of mass media as a process of encoding and decoding wherein viewers may take up different positions in relation to the texts. He defines three positions the *dominant-hegemonic position* (where the viewer decodes the intended encoded meaning)*, the *negotiated position* (where the viewer understands and accepts dominant encodings, but operates through situational rules), and the *oppositional code* (where the viewer understands dominant implications of the text but decodes it subversively) (61). The last two positions allow for space for the viewer to negotiate their place within hegemonic understandings of mass media. Henry Jenkins describes the process of media "poaching," wherein poachers "trespass upon others' property; they grab it and hold onto it; they internalize its meanings and remake these borrowed terms" (63). It is with this nuanced understanding of media production and consumption that we may move towards an investigation of the undiscovered ways in which audiences weave these texts through their lives, particularly in regard to the unique relationship queer audiences have with the texts they consume.

Online Queer Worlds

Queer television viewers, and in particular queer girls, have a distinctive relationship with the media texts they choose to consume. Many queer youth, especially those with limited social and/or economic mobility, face isolation and loneliness in their daily lives, causing them to turn to the internet for support. Previous studies have detailed the proliferation of online spaces where queer youth congregate. What is often discussed in these online spaces, along with personal

issues, is popular media such as movies, television shows, and music. With advent of streaming

services such as Netflix (and some other less-than-legal sites), television shows and movies have

become more accessible than ever to audiences across the world. Thus, queer youth are

becoming more adept at finding media that they feel speaks to them or represents them in some

way, potentially allowing them to reduce their feelings of loneliness. Now, with the popularity of

sites like Tumblr which are often filled with discussions of popular media, queer youth may find

community as a result of their interest in a television show, or vice versa. These engagements

allow queer youth to make connections between themselves, the fictional stories they interact

with, and the intersecting communities of which they are a part. In a similar vein, Driver notes

"the inventive ways in which young people deploy media in their everyday lives, deriving

pleasures while challenging and questioning hegemonic ideologies" (242). In essence, engaging

with popular media, in both normative and subversive ways, is a tool of social survival for many

queer viewers. Appadurai notes that media can "serve as resources" for "experiments with self-

making" (1996, 3), allowing viewers to imagine possible futures without any of the risks of

enacting those possibilities themselves. As Judith Butler puts it, "for those who are still looking

to become possible, possibility is a necessity" (31, 2004). Thus, it is only logical that queer

audiences cling to queer representations on screen, for it provides a means for them to imagine

what is not yet possible, make meaningful connections, and define their own self-narratives.

Along with the explosion of streaming services that has occurred in the last five years, the

popularity of social media platforms has also skyrocketed since authors like Driver were doing

their research a decade ago. In addition to Facebook, two platforms that have become extremely

popular are Tumblr and Twitter. Tumblr, founded in 2007, and Twitter, founded in 2006, both

have about 300 million users as of late 2016. While previous studies on internet communities

have focused on blogging sites like LiveJournal (Driver 2007) or TelevisionWithoutPity

(Williams 2015), these sites have lost much of their traffic to Tumblr, and to a lesser extent,

Twitter. In the mid 2000s, LiveJournal allowed users to create sites catered to their own interests.

Now, young people are more likely to turn towards Tumblr, where users can create their own

unique profiles and be part of as many niche communities as they choose. (Some users go on

Tumblr to engage with various fan groups, others use it to post their writing or artwork, others

even use it to collect pornography). The format of Tumblr allows users to tailor their personal

blog pages to their liking, presenting themselves in whatever way they choose, which in some

cases may be different from how they present themselves offline. Many users put their name,

age, the pronouns they use, and their various interests in the descriptions of their blog. Personal

identifiers like "lesbian," "queer," "trans," or "genderqueer" are common descriptors used on

blogs. On a site with so many differently located users, these personal identifiers allow users to

find other users with similar interests or experiences. Tumblr users define the format,

community, and utility of the site in a number of ways.

sephboy
> i'm so grateful to be living in the age of internet when people can meet
> and bond over their extremely niche special interests

(w/ 755 notes)

weightlesslives
> Posting on Tumblr is like talking to your cat. You don't know if they are
> listening, and you don't know if they care, but for some reason, it still
> helps.

(w/ 743,099 notes)

moriarty
> life on tumblr has always been just living in the moment for me, but
> sometimes i stop and realize that some of us have been part of each other's
> lives for. years. a lot of years. seeing each other grow and change, being
> there for the ups and downs, is comforting. knowing there's a place, this
> place, where i can find all of you… it's nice. i'm very glad i met you, and
> hope to keep meeting all the other you's to come

(w/ 15,134 notes)

Tumblr, as a site that allows for relative anonymity (most users only use their first names or a nickname), allows queer girls a space to perform and communicate their various identities. As Driver puts it:

> Moving back and forth between anonymity and self-disclosure, online communities and home pages create flexible spaces for young people to explore the very process of representing themselves as queer, unfolding layers of their emerging identities with varying degrees of distance and closeness, fiction and reality, self-reflection and social dialogue (172).

Twitter, though also popular with many young people, for the most part serves a different purpose than Tumblr. Though Twitter users may also change the settings of their personal page, there is less possibility for personalization than on Tumblr. In addition, Twitter is often used as a space for politicians and celebrities to build online followings and a create public personas, while Tumblr remains mainly a site for the average person, filled with niche communities and highly contextual inside jokes. The average user on Twitter is also slightly older than the average user on Tumblr, with the largest age group on Twitter being 25-34 compared to 18-24 on Tumblr (*Statista*). Because of these differences in demographics and insularity, most things said on Tumblr remain on Tumblr (unless they are cited in a *Buzzfeed* article), while Tweets are more and more often the topic of international news stories. Thus, it is difficult to say that there is such a thing as "the Twitter community," while Tumblr is more fruitful ground for communities to emerge. If a user wants to make something public to a certain community, they will post on Tumblr, but if they want to make something public to the entire online sphere, they will post to Twitter. This is why Twitter, and not Tumblr, has become a space for social justice efforts such as the Black Lives Matter movement to emerge. Twitter is also the place where trending topics become news. So if a group of people were upset about a beloved television character dying and they wanted the whole world to know it, they would go on Twitter and tweet as loudly and as

frequently as possible. Trending topics often become news articles, and those news articles spawn more articles, and the cycle continues. Thus, queer users of social media may use different platforms in different ways and for different reasons, depending on the level of attention they are willing to receive. These strategic uses of social media platforms complicate fixed binaries between "online" and "offline," illuminating the ways in which queer girls act as creative *bricoleurs*, taking what they can get their hands on to construct spaces that do not yet exist. I use the term bricolage here, as coined by Jacques Derrida, to describe the process of re-configuring and re-contextualizing cultural artifacts to make new meanings. The precarious position that queer girls have in popular culture means that many queer girls learn to strategically navigate popular media in this way.

Although my role as a researcher is to observe the ways in which queer girl audiences interact with media texts on these social media platforms, observation is not enough. In order to frame my research in such a way that it is coherent to the reader, I must pick and choose which utterances I will include and which I will not. I have power in the sense that I am the one compiling these discourses. That being said, I strive to provide the most holistic view of these conversations that I possibly can, choosing to include statements I find to represent the sentiments of the largest number of people, while also not disregarding statements that deviate from the norm. Part of the reason I believe I am up to the task is because I myself am a part of the population I am studying. Like many other users on Tumblr, I am a student, a young queer person, and an avid television viewer. I too began watching *The 100* when I heard the main character was a queer teenager like me. And though I was out of the country when the fateful episode aired and didn't watch it until months later, I too was outraged when I heard that the show's lesbian warrior, Lexa, was unceremoniously killed off in Season 3. Though these

connections may complicate my objectivity in this project, I also believe they provide me with insight into the queer worlds of the internet and the queer girls that populate them, youth that are often overlooked by researchers and the "real world" alike. Though the body of research on queer spaces online has grown slightly in the last decade, the Bury Your Gays trope and the nuances of media representation it brings up remains untheorized as a topic of academic interest. With this study I hope to highlight the complex ways in which queer girl viewers relate themselves to their communities, to the media they consume, and to the imagined worlds beyond what the eye can see. By the end of this paper, I hope to learn something about affective relations and the ties that bind us, and maybe even answer the age-old question, *why do the lesbians always die?*

CHAPTER 2: Media Histories and Contextualizing *The 100*

> Media appearances of queer girls are not simple reversals of marginalized unpopular subcultures into popular cultures, absence into presence, or negative images into positive images. Rather, such representational influx disrupts gender and sexual norms and ideals of girlhood within the popular imagination, as well as within the embodied and psychic lives of girls themselves.
>
>   – Susan Driver, *Queer Girls and Popular Culture* (12)

Lexa: The dead are gone, Clarke. The living are hungry.

Until 1968, the Motion Picture Association of America prohibited depictions of homosexuality on screen, categorizing it as a "perverse" topic. Television was also censored in such a way by the FCC, though the terms of censorship were significantly vaguer. While censorship of media still exists in the United States (the FCC still regulates broadcast television and radio, and films must be categorized within the current rating system), the breadth of what may be broadcast to national audiences has increased significantly since the late 1960s. In addition to this, with the advent of streaming services like Netflix, producers can release content online and bypass any rating system or censorship entirely. Thus, any prescriptions against depictions of taboo topics such as race, sexuality, poverty, or disease are implicitly rather than explicitly defined. In other words, television producers may shy away from depicting topics such as these because of their own prejudices or for fear of backlash, but are not strictly prohibited from doing so. With this context in mind, it becomes increasingly difficult to describe the nuances of cultural representations and their implications.

Queer Context On-Screen

In regards to this project, I am interested in two questions: one, what are the conditions of possibility for the existence of queer characters on the small screen, and two, what are the implications of these characters' deaths? To answer the first question, it is important to examine

broader social context. With the elimination of the Hays Code and the vague regulations of the FCC, censorship since the "Golden Age of Cinema" has decreased overall. This doesn't mean however, that internal regulations and censorship ceased to exist. In the early 2000s, the WB famously told *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997) creator Joss Whedon that he couldn't show two female characters, Willow and Tara, kissing on screen. When Whedon did finally show their first on-screen kiss, it was an entire season after the couple had first been introduced, and only occurred while Tara was comforting Willow after the death of a loved one. (Whedon continued to push boundaries when he depicted the first lesbian sex scene on network TV a few seasons later, in 2003). Though Willow's girlfriend, Tara, was eventually killed off the show (by a stray bullet no less), many queer women remember their relationship as one of the first positive depictions of a queer relationship they had ever seen on television. Fourteen years after that first sex scene, television networks still get complaints from viewers about the over-abundance of "homosexual content" on their shows. One fan of the show *Supergirl* (2015) complained on Twitter that the show was becoming too mature for her children to watch.

> @TaronYoung
> @SuperGirlTheCW please tone down the homosexual messages. Used to watch this with my daughter's now I have to explain to a 7 and 10 y.o. thx.

It is clear that while some producers have gotten past their prejudices, many fans have not. Despite detractors such as this twitter user and Christian organizations like One Million Moms, it appears that depictions of queer characters on screen are becoming (very slowly) more common.

What has caused this gradual shift? It may be tempting to assume that producers of television are just decent people who are trying to depict the lives of everyday Americans, but this doesn't tell the whole story. In the past fifteen years or so, advertisers have slowly begun catering to a consumer base that had previously been ignored – gays and lesbians. One of the

first instances of this shift was in the 1990s, when Subaru realized that lesbians loved their cars

and directed ad campaigns specifically to these women, even making sly references to lesbian

icon *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995) and being featured in Showtime's *The L Word* (2009). In the

2010s, "diversity" has become an increasingly popular term, used in political terms to signify a

commitment to equity and inclusion, while in entertainment often used as a congratulatory

description of doing the bare minimum to include minorities. This type of lip service surrounding

diversity and inclusion is closely tied to a phenomenon fans have dubbed *queer baiting*, wherein

television producers will depict clearly homoerotic tension between characters, but deny an

attraction between them or refuse to definitely write them as a couple. Popular examples of queer

baiting include Sherlock and Watson's relationship on the BBC's *Sherlock* (2010), and the

Scully-and-Mulder-like relationship between Detective Rizzoli and Dr. Isles on TNT's *Rizzoli &*

Isles (2010). In the past few years creators have begun specifically reaching out to young queer

audiences online to attract them to their shows. I will return to this point later when I discuss the

circumstances that lead to the explosive reaction to Lexa's death on *The 100.* It appears then, that

the conditions that have allowed queer characters to exist are the loosening of censorship codes,

the (slight) increase in the acceptance of queer people and general human decency, and the

recognition of queer audiences as a profitable consumer base.

The question that logically follows is thus: Why is the existence of these characters tied

so closely to death, and what implications do these stories have for viewers? In 2016, 27 female

queer characters were killed off television shows available in the United States.[4] Though queer

representation on television is significantly more frequent than in film,[5] these numbers indicate

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[4] According to GLAAD's annual report, there were a total of 92 lesbian and bisexual women on television and streaming platforms during the 2016-2017 season.
[5] According to a study done by the University of Southern California in which 700 films between 2007 and 2014 were examined, only 0.4% of leading characters were LGB and none were transgender (Wong).

an epidemic of queer women death on-screen. For many years, queerness, as portrayed in fantasy and as the lived experience of individuals, has been linked to death. This thread flows from the generation of queer men who died during the AIDs crisis, to the suicides of young people like Matthew Shepard, to the tragic ending of the award-winning film *Brokeback Mountain* (2005). Judith Butler suggests that "the male homosexual is figured time and time again as one whose desire is somehow structured by death, either as the desire to die, or as one whose desire is inherently punishable by death" (1993, p. 83). She contends that these deaths, whether literal or figurative, are made even more unbearable because of their inability to be grieved. If queer life is already saturated with death, it is not a surprise, nor a tragedy, when this life is lost. Sara Ahmed argues that queer bodies are linked to death in such a way because they don't "fit" into the pre-defined social order – they are wrongly oriented. "Compulsory heterosexuality shapes bodies by the assumption that a body 'must' orient itself towards some objects and not others" (Ahmed 145). Because queer lives have failed in such a way, and because heterosexuals have so stridently foreclosed queerness as a possibility for themselves, queer lives and queer loss are unable to be grieved as such. "The failure to recognize queer loss as loss is also a failure to recognize queer relationships as significant bonds, or that queer lives are worth living, or that queers are more than failed heterosexuals, heterosexuals who have failed 'to be'" (Ahmed 156).

Though discussions about queer death are often centered around queer men, the concerns of queer girls about the death of Lexa and the Bury Your Gays trope (or Dead Lesbian Syndrome) elucidate that a link between queer women and tragedy exists as well. *AfterEllen'*s Dorothy Snarker found that only 16 queer women couples have ever been given happy endings in the history of English-language television, and only 10% of all queer women live happily-

ever-after. Overall, 45% of all queer women in the history of television have died.[6] This death, whether corporal or social, is also tied up with invisibility. Radclyffe Hall's hero/heroine Stephen, who dies by the end of the novel, struggles to find recognition in the world into which she was born. "Acknowledge us, oh God, before the whole world. Give us also the right to our existence!" (Hall 427). Whether their lives are cut short or not, queer women have long struggled to be recognized as individuals, a phenomenon leading to a sort of social death which often goes unmentioned.

The repetition of these deaths, fictional or actual, literal or figurative, emerges as the reaction to a particular anxiety about the amount of space queer individuals take up in the cultural imaginary. When new modalities emerge that may work to threaten widely held norms, it is often feared that something old and sacred is being overtaken by something new and dangerous. As Sara Ahmed puts it, "the failure to orient oneself 'towards' the ideal sexual objects affects how we live in the world, an affect that is readable as the failure to reproduce, and as a threat to the social ordering itself" (145). Up to this point, it has been safer to write off queer lives, already structured by anxiety and death, rather than to allow them to proliferate and risk the inevitable outcries from those who fear an extinction of their values. In the next few chapters, I will examine the possibility that this paradigm may be shifting with the introduction of another type of outcry, this time from a younger generation.

The 100 and Queer Women Worlds

It is of significant importance that much of the controversy surrounding the Bury Your Gays trope came to a head after the death of one particular character on a show called *The 100*,

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[6] Autostraddle found that there have been 383 lesbian or bisexual TV characters, and that 175 of them have died. Again, this includes any television that is available to American viewers.

and as such I shall explain the context of this series. The first episode of *The 100* aired on March 19th 2014 on The CW. The CW is well known for producing teen dramas such as *90210* (2008) and *The Vampire Diaries* (2009), and when it was known as The WB it aired queer girl fan-favorite *Buffy The Vampire Slayer.* While many shows that air on The CW are often seen as silly and frivolous (as are most products aimed at teen girls), *The 100* branded itself as a more serious endeavor. The show takes place in a dystopian future where the earth has been destroyed by nuclear warfare, and the remaining survivors have been living aboard a space shuttle called the Ark ever since. After three generations of living in space, the leaders of the Ark decide it's safe enough to send down a few people to see if the earth is habitable once again. They choose to send 100 juvenile delinquents down to the ground, among them the show's main protagonist, 18 year-old Clarke Griffin. While on the ground they realize they are not alone – there are a group of people known as the Grounders who have been on earth all along. Among them is a character who will become increasingly important as we delve further into this story, Commander Lexa. Though the show boasts an attractive young cast and an intriguing plot, a significant factor in *The 100's* popularity was the dedicated viewership of its queer girl fans.

There are a number of reasons why *The 100* became so popular with young queer women. At a basic level, many viewers may have been attracted to the relationship between two of the young women on the show, Clarke and Lexa, known by fans as Clexa. On their own, both Clarke and Lexa were formidable leaders and warriors. Together, they were a powerful and seemingly unstoppable pair, unlike any other depiction of queer girl fans had seen before. They were not defined by their sexuality, but their relationship was treated as an important storyline within the show. In addition, the cast, in particular the two actors who played Clarke and Lexa, Eliza Taylor and Alycia Debnam-Carey, seemed genuinely invested in and excited about the

relationship between the two characters. Not to overlook the obvious, many fans were also attracted to the objective beauty that both Clarke and Lexa possessed. Once the relationship between Clarke and Lexa was established, the show's popularity grew. As it turns out, the addition of this new audience was not accidental.

As I mentioned earlier, queer television fans have popularized the term *queer baiting* in order to describe the ways in which producers will reel in queer audiences with the addition of queer subtext, but drag their feet on actually writing the characters as queer. In the context of *The 100*, the subtext between Clarke and Lexa became actual text, and thus does not seem to fall under the umbrella of queer baiting. However, some fans have noticed that queer baiting has begun evolving into something more nuanced, what Twitter user @BnazF has called "neo queerbaiting." This new incarnation of the phenomenon involves showrunners creating a queer character or queer couple, advertising the queer content heavily, and then sidelining the queer characters for the sake of straight characters. For queer girl fans of *The 100*, the situation that transpired both on and off the show was the most upsetting example of this trend. After the introduction of Lexa, an openly queer character (and the revelation that Clarke was also queer), the producers of *The 100*, likely aware of current discourse about diversity in popular media, observed that there was an energetic and dedicated audience they could capitalize on. After Lexa's sexuality was revealed, *The 100* stepped up their social media presence on Twitter, Tumblr, and LGBT-focused forums to gain more of an audience and raise awareness about the positive queer representation that was being brought to life on their show.

This campaign to capture the attention of queer girl audiences worked, and fans latched on to Lexa. However, fans were still weary about Lexa's security on the show – she was still a lesbian, and fans already knew that lesbians had a notoriously low rate of survival on television.

In order to assuage these fans' fears, producers set out to do what they called "rumor control".

An individual who worked on *The 100*, later revealed to be writer Shawna Benson, showed up on

a popular lesbian forum under the name YFNL (Your Friendly Neighborhood Lurker) in order to

slyly answer questions fans had about the plot. At one point a signed photography of Alycia

Debnam-Carey showed up online saying "thanks for the opportunity," and fans (rightly, as it

turns out) assumed that it meant Debnam-Carey was leaving the show, and that Lexa was going

to be killed off. Shawna Benson, who was already aware of Lexa's impending death, showed up

on the forum to dispel the rumors, and many fans believed her.[7] However, a few weeks later fans

would again become concerned about Lexa's death when it looked like Debnam-Carey hadn't

been filming all of Season 3 with the rest of the cast. In order to again reassure fans about Lexa's

safety, *The 100* creator Jason Rothenberg (who would soon become the villain of this story)

invited fans to come to the set in Vancouver where they were filming the Season 3 finale.

Debman-Carey was on set filming this episode, and along with inviting fans to the set

Rothenberg released a number of behind-the-scenes photos of Debnam-Carey and Eliza Taylor

looking particularly cozy. Since Rothenberg had now confirmed that Lexa was going to appear

in the season finale, many fans (cautiously) believed that Lexa was not going to die in Season 3.

They were wrong.

Though the infiltration of queer spaces online by production staff may have increased

viewership of *The 100*, the interconnected, reflexive nature of queer girl cyber communities

allowed this viewership to flourish. Because on-screen depictions of queer women, and queer

people in general, are still so rare, communities centered around queer media pay close attention

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[7] Fan-created website wedeservedbetter.com extensively outlines these events, including
screenshots of forum posts and tweets from production and writing staff.

to the addition of new texts to what may be understood as the "canon of queer media." It is important to understand that from the perspective of fans, female queer characters exist in a universe of their own. They exist not only within their own fictional universes, but also in relation to the characters that have come before them and exist contemporaneously with them. Thus, when a new female television character emerges who fans read as queer, either textually or subtextually, news travels fast; soon it seems almost every queer girl on Tumblr is aware of this new addition.

> lexacares
>> whenever something big happens in another corner of the wlw[8] world i swear you can feel it fandoms away, it's like a ripple, a chain reaction, there's no avoiding it, if it's gay you can bet your ass you're going to know every single little thing about it within 24 hours of it happening
>>> (w/ 23,670 notes)
>
> @emtothea
>> I feel a sexy disturbance in the force. Did two ladies just kiss on network television?
>
> flesbian
>> there's an entire straight side of tumblr that we're unaware of
>>> (*w/ 52,994 notes*)

Even if a queer girl on Tumblr doesn't watch all the media understood by fans as queer, they are likely aware of the particular shows and characters that belong to this queer women canon. Some Tumblr users refer to this type of intertextual communication as "The Great Gay Migration." Noting that many fans have moved on to other shows after Lexa's death on *The 100*, one Tumblr user wants to reunite the disparate fandom.

> danverscommaalex
>> I know most of us Clexa shippers have migrated, via the Great Gay Migration™, but I would just like a quick show of hands. Reblog if you still hate Jason Rothenberg with a fiery passion.
>>> (*w/ 5,500 notes*)

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[8] "WLW" stands for women-who-love-women, and is a popular shorthand on Tumblr.

Referring to actress Katie Mcgrath, who often plays characters read as implicitly queer by fans, two Tumblr users discuss another instance of the "Great Gay Migration."

> agentdnvrs
>> Merlin is currently in the "popular on netflix" section and it hasn't been there for a long time I'm 98% it's from all the people watching for katie mcgrath
>
> laradanvers
>>> i can't believe a gay migration happened, and to a finished show that's not even gay,,

<div align="center">(w/ 2,226 notes)</div>

Thus, because many queer television fans online are so active and vocal about the media they consume, many queer girls latched on to The 100 as a potentially revolutionary new representation of queer lives. For many queer girl fans, Clarke and Lexa were heroes, comrades, or friends. Lexa offered many queer girls hope and community, and fans self-reflexively integrated their own narratives with hers. These pleasures were what The 100's production staff offered when they began their campaign to gain the viewership and trust of queer girls online. For a time, the relationship between the show and its queer fans was energetic, and mutually beneficial. But it was this carefully cultivated relationship between producer and consumer that would eventually backfire and make the inevitable portrayal that was Lexa's death all the more devastating when it finally did occur.

CHAPTER 3: Lesbian Death and The Production of Affect

> Mourning enables gradual withdrawal from the object and hence denies the other through forgetting its trace. In contrast, melancholia is 'an enduring devotion on the part of the ego to the lost object' (Eng and Kazanjian 2003: 3), and as such is a way of keeping the other, and with it the past, alive in the present.
> — Sarah Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (159)

Lexa: My fight is over.

Clarke: No, I won't accept that!

After all the buildup to Lexa and Clarke's relationship, the trust that production staff had built with their audience, and the subsequently expressed devotion of queer girls to the character, Lexa finally died on March 3rd, 2016. In the coming months, this date would remain important to queer girl fans, signifying a moment of grief, anger and the reiteration of loss. Many queer girl fans of the show expressed feelings of pain and outrage in response to Lexa's death on *The 100,* and eventually this communal grief would work to mobilize an online community towards a common goal, a response which I will delve into further in Chapter 4.

It is difficult to explain the psychological as well as the social processes that allow fans to feel intimately connected to fictional characters, but Rebecca Williams provides some insight into the ways in which these fan/object relations may manifest. Williams argues that media texts allow fans to develop a "reflexive self-narrative" wherein they are able to organize their lives and identities into a stable definition of selfhood (22). She notes that "if a favorite character is killed off in circumstances that the fans finds implausible or unwelcome, trust in the text can be destabilized and the fan's self-narrative must be reworked in order to cope with this disruption" (26). In the case of *The 100*, fans' trust in the text may not have been absolute because they had been disappointed by the Bury Your Gays trope in the past, but many had come to put their hope in Lexa. These circumstances, along with the deception of the production and writing staff, made

her death even more painful. In addition, Lexa's death was grieved by so many not simply because her character ceased to exist, but because her death put another grave in the Bury Your Gays cemetery (see Appendix 1), letting queer girl fans know that for them, happy endings are few are far between. It is in this context that the affective reaction to Lexa's death was so passionate, personal, and long-lasting.

The Day That Lexa Died

Often, no matter what time zone they happen to live in, fans from around the world will come together to watch their favorite television shows together. (This feat is made relatively simple by the prevalence of live-stream websites and not-so-legal streaming platforms that upload episodes right after they are broadcast). So, on the night that Lexa died, thousands of fans were watching with bated breath, hoping that Clarke and Lexa would rekindle their relationship or finally declare their love for one another. In fact, it was in this very episode that Clarke and Lexa psychically consummated their relationship, a tender scene that gave fans a moment of euphoria before the coming betrayal.

> clarkesquad
> > IVE NEVER SEEN A MORE BEAUTIFUL KISS IN MY WHOLE LIFE
> > SNDBSJNABDBSNS
> > > *(w/ 302 notes)*
>
> agtalexdanvers
> > THAT WAS SO FUCKING BEAUTIFUL LIKE JUST EMOTIONALLY
> > CHARGED AND BEAUTIFUL AND THERE ARE /TEARS/ ON MY FACE
> > > *(w/ 179 notes*)
>
> commanderoswald
> > we now live in a world where f/f ships get tender romance scenes the way hetero
> > couples always did. thank you jason.
> > > *(w/ 38 notes*)

While many queer girls initially seem wary of getting too attached to queer characters on screen, there is an unparalleled level of excitement and deeply felt satisfaction that occurs when fans feel that showrunners "got it right." From these responses, it is clear why production staff were so

eager to gain a queer audience for the show. For these fans, it was an amazing feeling to know that the hope they had for Lexa finally came true, and to know that Lexa, and by extension her fans, now had the possibility of a happy ending. In only a few minutes, this euphoria would be destroyed.

In Season 6, episode 19 of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997), an episode entitled "Seeing Red," Willow's girlfriend Tara is shot by a stray bullet just after they have their first on-screen love scene. In Season 3, episode 7 of *The 100* (2014), an episode entitled "Thirteen," the same sequence of events occurs. Approximately twenty-nine minutes into the episode, Clarke and Lexa, after reconciling their differences and coming to an agreement on how to bring together their two clans, have sex on Lexa's bed. This is perhaps the very first moment fans have seen Lexa exhibit any sense of visible happiness. A mere minute later, Lexa is accidentally shot by her trusted advisor, Titus. Thirty-five minutes in, Lexa utters her last words, "life is about more than just surviving," Clarke kisses her goodbye, and Lexa takes her final breath. Lexa's death, the sequence of events leading up to it, and fans' overall relationship with the show, made this episode exceedingly painful for many queer girl fans.

truealph
> a part of me died tonight
> lexagriffins
>> all of me died with lexa, i'm dead and i'm done, i'm so fucking done
>>> *(w/ 2,013 notes)*

agtalexdanvers
> i feel sick to my stomach right now
>> *(w/ 446 notes)*

daddylexas
> i cant stop crying oh my god i miss her shes only been gone two hours but i miss her and her stupid little ears and head tilt and small smiles and candles fucking everywhere and her heart eyes and he curly soft hair and her little twirls and i can't believe they took her like this
>> *(w/ 2,507 notes)*

grammymeagle
> I dont have words I honestly feel stabbed
>> *(w/ 5 notes)*

anothergayshark

> i honestly can't voice how much i don't want this to happen like i feel like i've been kicked in the gut
>
> *(w/ 1,068 notes)*

lexagriffins
> I'm so scared i will break down for real in the next few days, everything that made me happy just got ripped away from me, and i want to hurt myself, i've never had it this bad
>
> *(w/ 104 notes)*

anonymous
> i want to die. im honestly thinking about killing myself rn
> > clarkesquad
> > > please dont please dont do that please hold out until some of this passes I promise if you just wait 3 days you'll find something that makes you glad you didn't

fawnmother
> no lie it's psychologically exhausting and traumatizing getting attached to fictional lesbians and watching them die

(tagged: #im just so tired #of everything)   *(w/ 10,390 notes)*

These posts are just a small sampling of the affective, emotional responses to Lexa's death on *The 100.* Many users posted about how they were crying, feeling physically ill, or having suicidal thoughts. While the phrase "I feel like dying" is often a hyperbolic one online, it is clear from the amount of anonymous messages that users like clarkesquad received expressing suicidal ideations that depression and suicide were real concerns after this episode aired. For users involved in the *The 100* or the Clexa fandom, their Tumblr dashboards on the night the episode aired would have looked something like the above examples, an endless stream of emotional outbursts.

officialcommanderlexa
> there's nothing like waking up to a healthy dose of complete emotional devastation in the morning
>
> *(w/ 3,689 notes)*

agtalexdanvers
> im sorry if im absent but my dash is a lot of gifs of the death scene and im not emotionally capable of dealing with it
>
> *(w/ 38 notes)*

As the above users indicate, the "queer side" of Tumblr was an emotional minefield after Season 3, episode 7 aired. It is in this affective environment that queer girl fans of *The 100* expressed their anger, grief, depression, and mourning about Lexa's death.

The Transmission of Affect Online

This phenomenon that I have just outlined, the use of Tumblr as a platform for the cyclical reproduction of emotional responses, is what Theresa Brennan calls "the transmission of affect" (6). This describes the ways in which our energies, our emotions, our feelings, are not "self-contained," but rather jump from object to object, from body to body. Here, affect is defined as an instinctual reaction to an object or a group of objects that may induce a bodily response. Sarah Ahmed suggests that emotion, or in this case affect, is a cultural practice wherein individuals are expected to orient themselves towards certain objects and subsequently express a particular emotion. Ahmed notes that "bodies take the shape of the very contact they have with objects and others," and when an individual is wrongly oriented, they do not "fit" into the space allotted for them and are made to feel shame (1). Many queer girl fans of *The 100,* already invested in the queer lives depicted on the series from the moment of their introduction, had been made to feel wrong for their non-normative attraction, quite literally, their "orientation." Thus, for many fans, the importance of Clarke and Lexa was their ability to reshape the spaces in which they exist, (both on-screen and off), paving the way for new pathways of affect to be transmitted. This newly molded space allowed for a pleasurable affect to be transmitted between Clarke and Lexa on-screen, between the characters and the fans, and between the fans themselves.

It is this new space for expression that *The 100* provided queer girls, and the shame many had felt previous to watching the show, that helps to explain the devastation wrought by Lexa's

death. Ahmed notes that "Emotions shape the very surface of bodies, which takes shape through repetition of actions over time, as well as through orientations towards and away from others" (4). For queer girl TV fans, the Bury Your Gays trope had become so commonplace, many had learned to live with it, bringing it within themselves in order to press on. As I mentioned earlier, though fans were saddened by Lexa's death, many were not surprised because they had been expecting it from the beginning. With every addition of new female queer characters on screen, there is the added fear that she will wind up dead.

grammymeagle
> I love how the writers think Lexa dying is a surprise like literally no queer viewers of the show are surprised we've been worried about this happening form the moment Costia[9] was first mentioned it is so expected we were all just wondering which episode
>
> (*w/ 210 notes*)

earpwave
> i hope the cw knows what they did to me, every time i see alex or maggie[10] i'm in a constant fear for their lives
>
> (w/ 8 notes)

Though the events that followed Lexa's death were fairly unprecedented, the circumstances surrounding her death were not. Thus, I propose that the painful reiteration of the Bury Your Gays trope and fans' subsequent internalization of its meaning has *produced a particular queer girl subjectivity* among queer consumers of television, giving these fans a unique perspective and reaction to these texts. For many fans this subjectivity is characterized by a sense of vulnerability and vigilance, and for some queer girls this affective response carries over into their "offline" lives.

It is because of this unique perspective and the previous experiences of these queer girl fans that the outpouring of grief on social media was so strong. In addition, the use of Tumblr as

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[9] Costia was Lexa's first significant other. She was killed before Lexa was introduced.
[10] Alex and Maggie are two queer women on The CW's *Supergirl* (2015).

a means of expression provided an ideal platform for the immediate and overwhelming transmission of affect between fans. For many queer girl fans of *The 100*, the emotions and reactions they were having about Lexa's death must have been amplified by the cyclical reiteration of grief they were witnessing on their Tumblr dashboards. In this way, affect is extremely contagious, and has the propensity to create positive feedback loops. For some, like user agtalexdanvers, this snowball effect became too overwhelming and they had to log off in order to safeguard their own mental health. The mediums of television and social media here are both significant in that they provide a sense of immediacy – many fans were watching the show live or on the night it aired, and many Tumblr users were "liveblogging" their reactions. The immediate temporality of this sequence of events made the moment of Lexa's death particularly powerful, and allowed fans to look back to this point in time as they continued to grieve, reflect, and mobilize around her death.

As Ahmed puts it, "Pain has often been described as a private, even lonely experience, as a feeling that I have that others cannot have, or as a feeling that others have that I myself cannot feel" (20). While this is often true, Clexa fans re-inscribed societal norms about pain and about grief – *who* can be grieved, and *what* can cause pain. Unexpectedly, queer girl TV fans were able to bond over Lexa's death and the many other reiterations of the Bury Your Gays trope, displacing pain from an internal phenomenon to an external and communal one. As we have now seen, there was a massive outpouring of grief that got transmitted online in the day or so following Lexa's death. But these affective transmissions did not cease to be as the days went on. Rather, Lexa's loyal followers and fans continued to publicly mourn for Lexa for weeks, and even months. Fans began to commemorate how many days it had been since Lexa's death, and started using hashtags like #LexaDeservedBetter and #LGBTFansDeserveBetter. These public

declarations of mourning kept Lexa's memory alive and also sent a powerful message to

showrunners.

>@em_pink
>> Two months without Lexa and my heart is still hurting. #lgbtfansdeservebetter

>@LexaKomClexa
>> It has been, officially, three months without our Commander.
>> I still have not healed. I will always miss Lexa. #Clexa #lexadeservedbetter

>@BeaSmithRise
>> THREE MONTHS WITHOUT LEXA
>> 3 Days without Root[11]
>> I miss my gay babies
>> #LGBTFansDeserveBetter

>@SaraArranzCobos
>> Six Months Without Lexa #LexaDeservedBetter #LGBTFansDeserveBetter
>> [Pictured: Burning candles that read "We will not forget you, Heda"]

>lovelikesongbirds
>> 11 months without Lexa… [Pictured: GIF with the caption
>> "I miss her so much."]
>>   (*w/ 923 notes*)

>carmillacatstein
>> I can't believe it's been a year since Lexa died. It still hurts.
>>   (*w/ 16 notes*)

Along with posting on Tumblr, Twitter, and other sites, some fans also lit candles and made

artwork in order to commemorate Lexa's death. Instead of internalizing Lexa's death and

moving on like many had done with other characters, these fans chose to publicly communicate

their grief in an organized and purposeful manner, in the process re-constituting the rules of grief

and envisioning a new, affective connection between TV fans and the characters that speak to

them.

Grief & Mourning

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[11] Root was a queer character on the CBS show *Person of Interest* (2011) who was killed off in the final
season of the series.

In *Precarious Life* (2004), Judith Butler asks the question "What *makes for a grievable life*?" (20, emphasis in original). In order to answer that question she urges us to consider sanctioned forms of public grief, such as obituaries, as "act[s] of nation-building," delineating which lives are considered lives at all (Butler 34). In publicly and communally grieving Lexa, a fictional queer woman on a television show, fans are making a claim about the intrinsic *grievability* of her life, and exposing the integral yet tenuous connections that bond us to who and what we love. On one level, queer girls are claiming that Lexa, a queer character and by extension a queer *person,* deserves to be respected both in life and in death. On another level, these queer girl fans are uncovering the diverse relationships that make us who we are, complicating distinctions between our connections to the "fictional" and to the "real." Butler suggests that what makes grief so powerful is not the loss of something external to us, but rather something within us. "But maybe when we undergo what we do, something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are, ties or bonds that compose us" (Butler 22). Thus, losing someone is not simply the loss of one individual but also the loss of a unique bond between two or more individuals that can never again be replicated. Butler goes on to suggest that far from alienating us from each other, grief has the power to reveal something about who we are, both as individuals and as inhabitants of the same world. We are composed of the ties we have with others, and this makes our position inherently precarious, Butler says. If we are able to mobilize this shared precarity, perhaps we can find new and powerful ways of organizing. Queer girl TV fans, who so often experience this feeling of precarity, have managed to form a community based on this feeling, and have used their grief as a tool to reveal that which has made them precarious.

For Clexa fans, grieving Lexa's death meant re-iterating the importance of her life. As we will see in Chapter 4, it also meant creating enough momentum to organize an online social movement. In his book *Disidentifications* (1999), José Esteban Muñoz suggests that a combination of mourning and militancy is a constructive way to move forward without forgetting that past. He proposes that we de-pathologize the Freudian process of melancholia, instead constituting it as a necessary and productive step in dealing with loss. On the one hand, the process of mourning describes detachment from an object, and is "in its simplest formulation, a gradual letting go" (Muñoz 63). Melancholia, on the other hand, is the refusal to let go of an object, to the point where the lost object becomes incorporated into the unconscious. Muñoz proposes a type of queer melancholia wherein this not-letting-go becomes a means of mobilization, and the lost object, perpetually kept alive, becomes an "identity-affirming example" (52). In the case of Lexa's death on *The 100*, it was fans' refusal to let her go or to "properly" mourn her that created the conditions for them to contribute to the discourse about the ethics of queer representation. Queer TV fans were not just mourning Lexa, but all of the queer women who had died on-screen before her, refusing to let any of their deaths go lest they forget and become complacent with their undesirable reality. This type of communal mourning is particularly powerful and complicated, felt as a whole "experiencing the loss of its parts" (Muñoz 73). By refusing to forget *what* they have lost and *who* caused this loss, queer girl TV fans have used their grief to engender a project of community-building and advocacy. Muñoz writes,

> I have proposed a different understanding of melancholia that does not see it as a
> pathology or as a self-absorbed mood that inhibits activism. Rather, it is a mechanism
> that helps us (re)construct identity and take our dead with us to the various battles we
> must wage in their names – and in our names (74).

As the days following Lexa's death went by, Clexa fans would continue to grieve Lexa on social media, enacting the type of queer melancholia that Muñoz highlights. It is this internalization of the characters they love and their inevitable deaths that comprises the queer perspective of these fans, allowing them to construct new online worlds where they can lay out their battle plans, blurring the lines between dead and alive, make-believe and material.

CHAPTER 4: Queer Warriors and Emergent Discourse

> Queerness should and could be about a desire for another way of being in both the world
> and time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough.
> – José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia* (96)

> **Lexa**: As Clarke said, we spare the innocent.
> As for the guilty…*jus drein jus duan* [blood must have blood].

At the time of this writing, it is soon to be the first anniversary of Lexa's death. Since that fateful day in 2016, much has changed for *The 100.* Many queer fans of series have stopped watching the show, the ratings for the episodes after Lexa's death plummeted, and showrunner Jason Rothenberg was forced to write an open letter regarding Lexa's death. Before *The 100*, the discourse surrounding the Bury Your Gays trope – though often in the back of queer girls' minds every time they began watching a new show – had not yet coalesced into a directed movement aimed at influencing television production itself. Before Lexa's death, fans had grieved over the deaths of queer women on shows like *Arrow* (2012), *Chicago Fire* (2012), *Pretty Little Liars* (2010),[12] and *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* (1997). When Lexa died on *The 100*, something changed. Fans' grieving process over her character, though not unprecedented, was louder and lasted longer than the reaction to any of these other fictional queer deaths. Even more significantly, the momentum created by Lexa's death was channeled into a cohesive movement with a unified platform, wherein fans produced a unique discourse about representation that could be broadcast beyond the queer worlds from which it emerged.

In this chapter I will discuss the unique reaction queer girls had to Lexa's death, which involved both a celebration of Lexa as a character and a rejection of the series as a whole. This reaction influenced the direction fans would take the movement for queer representation, aiming

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[12] Despite having a queer main character, *Pretty Little Liars* has killed off more queer and trans women than any other show, with a total of four dead (Hogan "Pretty Little Liars").

their critiques at showrunners and writers while still holding close the characters that had sparked the movement. By broadcasting their concerns on social media, queer girls and were able to reach a broad audience and expand their argument to the television industry as a whole. In arguing for a world where fantasy includes queerness that lives on, queer girls are striving to create a kind of queer utopia, and the proliferation of queer spaces online serve as a blueprint for what this utopia might encompass. Through the creation of fanfiction wherein queer characters may live forever, queer girls are imagining a future which does not yet exist.

Actions and Reactions

In *Post-Object Fandom* (2015), Rebecca Williams describes two different reactions to the conclusion of a television show. The first is a "reiteration of discourse," wherein fans reminiscence about how much the show meant to them in order to say goodbye (Williams 79). The second reaction is the "rejection discourse," wherein fans sever their connection to the show altogether, either because of an observed drop in quality or a disagreement with writing choices. Williams argues that this reaction occurs "when the ending of fan objects is perceived as violating the sense of ontological security that has previously been negotiated via fandom" (103). Queer girls' reaction to Lexa's death, which though it did not coincide with the conclusion of the series itself, was a combination of these two discourses. In the end, many queer fans rejected the show not because of a perceived drop in quality (though some claimed this had happened), but rather because they perceived Lexa's death as an injustice that caused the show to be too painful for them to continue watching. At the same time, fans reacted to Lexa's death by reiterating how important she had been to them in their individual lives and how much her story had personally affected them. Unlike fans' reactions to the finale of a show (which have no effect on the direction of the show because it has already concluded), fans' reaction to Lexa's death had the

potential to make an impact on the future of the series. This is why a discourse that rejected of *The 100* as a whole but reiterated the significance of Lexa's storyline was able to enter the conversation about representation in television broadcasting.

What makes the controversy surrounding *The 100* significant is that the reaction to Lexa's death was subsequently turned into action. Rather than simply reject the show altogether, fans engaged in a united effort to change the discourse about television representation and assert their right to not only exist but *thrive* in the world of fantasy. By arguing for more respectful fictional representations, queer girl fans asserted a connection between their own well-being and the ways in which they were being represented on-screen. Lexa, a powerful and respected warrior on the show, remained a warrior even after her death, becoming the imagined leader of her legions of fans that would fight in her name.

Artwork posted on wedeservedbetter.com

The first action fans took was the creation of hashtags to assert their point of view. With the direction of two fan-run (but highly organized) websites, LGBT Fans Deserve Better and We

Deserved Better, an organized movement to trend specific hashtags was put into place. In order to have the biggest impact, a schedule was created wherein users around the world would begin trending a hashtag at the exact same time. Popular hashtags included #LGBTFansDeserveBetter, #LexaDeservedBetter, #AlyciaIsOurCommander, #CWStopJasonRothenberg, among many others. This concerted effort was effective, and some of these hashtags were tweeted upwards of 200,000 times.

> @jiathoughts
>> Reshop, Heda. We will carry your torch from here. #LexaDeservedBetter #LGBTFansDeserveBetter
>
> @ambl888
>> The coalition will survive no matter the commander. Lgbtfansdeservebetter LexaDeservedBetter
>
> @BurntCB
>> Wipe your tears. Put on the warpaint. Say: I'm never gonna let them hurt me like this again. #LGBTFansDeserveBetter #LexaDeservedBetter

At this point, the grief and anger fans had expressed about Lexa's death was now being broadcast outside the insular queer worlds of Tumblr. Users who had at first expressed their sadness on their Tumblr accounts switched to posting to Twitter instead, participating in a more public and far-reaching movement. The grief that had so obviously been shared by so many queer girls online was now being transformed into an organized, yet still *affective* movement to influence conversations about television production. This effort would affect both the singular world of *The 100* and the broader world of television production as a whole.

The production and writing staff of *The 100* were right when they predicted that queer viewers would be a particularly powerful fan base. After Lexa's death, queer girls made sure that the producers of *The 100* knew how they felt. Many of the earlier efforts to trend particular hashtags relating to Lexa or LGBT representation also worked as boycotts of *The 100*. Users were instructed not to mention the name of the show or use its hashtags in their tweets in an

effort to raise the visibility of their platform without supporting the show itself. After Lexa's

death, many queer fans vowed to never watch the show again.

> @BurntCb
>> @theCW Guess what I'm doing right now? Reading a Clexa Fanfiction. I'm not watching the show. #LGBTFansDeserveBetter #LexaDeservedBetter

> @confusedlexa
>> I can't believe the 100 is named after how many people still care.
>> (*w/ 2,276 retweets, 3,717 likes*)

> heyhollis
>> i remember a year ago when season 3 for t100 was premiering, everyone on my dashboard was so excited for it and this year came around after the shit-show last march, i am absolutely living for the utter silence today. [Pictured: GIF of Viola Davis drinking wine and throwing popcorn]
>> (*w/ 1,050 notes*)

As it turns out, this boycott may have actually had an effect on *The 100*'s ratings. The episode

after Lexa's death had the worst ratings of the entire season, with only 1.25 million viewers as

opposed to the 1.39 million viewers that tuned in the week before (Cranz). Ratings for the

Season 4 premiere also dropped 32% from the previous season (Patten). In addition, the

popularity of *The 100* showrunner Jason Rothenberg also decreased significantly. In the 24 hours

following Lexa's death, Rothenberg lost over 10,000 Twitter followers, and his followers

continued to decrease in the following days and weeks (Cranz). After the reactions of queer TV

fans began to trend on Twitter, thousands of dollars were raised for an LGBT hotline aiming to

prevent suicide. Numerous respected news outlets began to report on the movement and it

became clear to those in the television industry that this problem would be difficult to ignore.

Much of the anger about Lexa's death was directed specifically at Jason Rothenberg, who

fans perceived to have promised them a future for Clarke and Lexa and then callously reneged.

The public outcry became so unavoidable that Rothenberg felt he needed to write an open letter

to fans. In a statement he published on Medium, he claimed that "I promise you burying, baiting,

or hurting anyone was never our intention. It's not who I am" (Roth). For queer girl fans, this apology fell flat, with many pointing out that he had in fact, buried, baited, and hurt fans of the show. In addition, Rothenberg said in an interview conducted just days before his apology that he would not change the story in any way if given the chance (Roth). Most fans of Lexa did not accept his apology and continued to boycott the show and publicly mourn Lexa's death. While this interaction is significant in and of itself, it also points to a broader trend in television production in the era of social media. From this interaction between Rothenberg and viewers, it's clear that the balance of power between the producers and the consumers of television is beginning to shift. Because social media provides a platform for direct and immediate response, fans are now able to assert their right to influence the direction of the show. Of course, no television writer is going to let themselves be completely directed by opinions of viewers, but the power that queer girl fans of *The 100* had to influence the popularity of the show cannot be ignored. As I will discuss later, the outcry from Clexa fans reverberated throughout the television industry, and the topic of the Bury Your Gays trope emerged as a serious topic of discussion for fans and writers alike.

Beyond The 100

As I explained in Chapter 2, online queer girl fandoms have created a world in which queer characters on television exist not only in their own fictional universes, but also as figures in the larger imaginary of online queer culture. The conversations about the Bury Your Gays Trope prompted by Lexa's death on *The 100* only intensified the interconnectedness of these ostensibly distinct queer stories. Even more than before, fans began connecting Lexa's death and the implications of her story to the deaths of other queer women on-screen. This meant that often, fans' reactions to these deaths were more vocal and complicated than showrunners

expected. Fans began using #LGBTFansDeserveBetter on Twitter to call out shows other than

The 100, and even users who had never watched *The 100* before pledged their support.

> @BeaSmithRise
>> #Shoot[13] fandom where you @? #Clexa wants to help you trend ww just let us know what. #LGBTfansDeserveBetter

> @oliviaisokay
>> Killing a queer character is not revolutionary, shocking, or surprising. #LGBTFansDeserveBetter #PersonofInterest

> @breannaoohlala
>> I don't watch #The100 but I have a lot of love and respect for #clexa shippers #lgbtfansdeservebetter

> @CaptainCold13
>> I back the #lgbtfansdeservebetter tag because I'm still not over Willow and Tara

> @UisceEowyn
>> @netflix the treatment of Poussey[14] is unacceptable #pousseydeservedbetter #lgbtfansdeservebetter

Media outlets also began to catch on to this movement, reporting on the deaths of queer women

characters and the Bury Your Gays trope after Lexa's death. Just weeks after Lexa's demise on

The 100, a lesbian character named Denise was killed on AMC's *The Walking Dead* (2010),

leading to another public outcry. (Incidentally, she was killed by an arrow not meant for her,

much like the bullet that killed Lexa). News outlets such as *The Hollywood Reporter, Vanity*

Fair, and *Entertainment Weekly* reported on Denise's death and the broader context in which it

occurred. Some fans noted that only three months into 2016, eight queer women had already

been killed on television. Because of the efforts of queer TV fans, the implications of queer

deaths on-screen became an inescapable part of television discourse.

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[13] Shoot is the name for fans of Shaw and Root, two queer women on *Person of Interest* (2011).
[14] Poussey was a character on Netflix's *Orange is the New Black* (2013) who was killed in the Season 4 finale. Many fans were upset about her death in as it relates to her status as a black lesbian, a particularly underrepresented and often invisible identity.

For television producers who were involved in the creation of queer storylines, questions regarding the Bury Your Gays trope became difficult to avoid. At the 2016 ATX Television Festival, television writers and producers gathered at a panel entitled "Bury Your Tropes" to discuss the Bury Your Gays trope. The panel included Javier Grillo-Marxauch, who wrote the episode of *The 100* in which Lexa was killed. While the existence of the panel itself signals an increase in awareness of the trope, the responses of these television producers indicate a disconnect between the producers and their queer audience. Grillo-Marxauch acknowledged that writers lacked an awareness of the "cultural impact" Lexa's death would have on fans, but continued to defend his storytelling decision (Stanhope). Carter Covington, the creator of MTV's *Faking It* (2014), defend Grillo-Marxauch, claiming that "I feel like I have one of the gayest shows on TV so I've earned the right to speak to this," and suggesting that LGBT fans should be happy for what they have been given because "there is so much good that *The 100* is doing for the community." (Wagmeister). Covington seemed to blame queer fans for putting fear into the hearts of television producers, noting that "networks are terrified. They're completely scared right now" (Stanhope). The writers on the panel seemed to be concerned that not being able to kill off queer characters would limit their storytelling. This argument seems slightly suspect considering the number of queer characters on television, especially queer women, remains quite low. (LGBT Fans Deserve Better notes that only 1% of characters during the 2015-2016 television season were queer women).

To that end, lgbtfansdeservebetter.com collaborated with television creators to craft a pledge to the LGBTQ fandom, entitled "The Lexa Pledge." Three television producers and writers and a Leskru fundraiser wrote the pledge, which promises that:

1. We will ensure that any significant or recurring LGBTQ characters we introduce, to a new or pre-existing series, will have significant storylines with meaningful arcs.

2. When creating arcs for these significant or recurring characters we will consult with sources within the LGBTQ community, like queer writers or producers on staff, or members of queer advocacy groups like GLAAD, The Trevor Project, It Gets Better, Egale, The 519, etc.
3. We recognize that the LGBTQ community is underrepresented on television and, as such, that the deaths of queer characters have deep psychosocial ramifications.
4. We refuse to kill a queer character solely to further the plot of a straight one.
5. We acknowledge that the Bury Your Gays trope is harmful to the greater LGBTQ community, especially to queer youth. As such, we will avoid making story choices that perpetuate that toxic trope.
6. We promise never to bait or mislead fans via social media or any other outlet.
7. We know there is a long road ahead of us to ensure that the queer community is properly and fairly represented on TV. We pledge to begin that journey today.

The television creators on the ATX panel were aware of "The Lexa Pledge," but Grillo-Marxauch and Covington declined to sign it, claiming that it would limit their storytelling process (Stanhope). According to lgbtfansdeservebetter.com, 16 members of the television industry have signed the pledge thus far. As evidenced by the disagreement among television producers about how to respond to the concerns of queer viewers, it is clear that this ethical debate about the Bury Your Gays trope is far from over. Regardless of whether creators enact any of these pledges, as a result of the efforts of Clexa fans and other queer girl fandoms, the implications of killing off queer characters on television are no longer invisible.

Online Worlds and Queer Utopia

I would be remiss if I did not further expound upon the ways in which this discussion of the Bury Your Gays trope was created by and has created online queer worlds. The Bury Your Gays trope would not be understood as a significant problem for the queer community if the consumption of media texts and engagements with queer fandom were not substantive practices for many queer individuals, especially queer girls and queer youth. As I proposed in Chapter 3, individual experiences with popular media have produced a particular queer girl subjectivity that many queer youth hold in common, and this is one of the reasons the recurrence of the Bury Your Gays trope feels like a personal attack on so many queer fans. A number of YouTube

videos portray this subjectivity in a visually and rhetorically evocative manner. One of the most popular, with over 90,000 views, is a video posted by user fearlessumer entitled "LGBT FANS DESERVE BETTER." The video features a voice-over from a previous video created by popular Tumblr user and YouTuber named Moog, paired with tragic clips of queer characters on television and in films. In the voice-over, Moog laments how difficult it is for queer kids to find positivity in the media they so desperately cling to. "In movies, we die. In TV shows, we die. In books, we die. In video games, we die. In real life, we're dying. How motivating is that to a 14-year-old kid who hates them self?" (1:42). Paired with haunting music and visuals, this video is a particularly powerful representation of the worlds that form in the imaginations of queer viewers and in the online communities that queer youth and adults turn to for support and comradery. It is the existence of these unique queer worlds that non-queer television creators fail to understand when are they creating content aimed at pleasing a queer audience. Whatever the intentions of the producer, it is the viewer who has the power to accept or reject the stories they are being told.

For some fans, a rejection of the canon of a show also involves the re-writing and re-reading of these televisual texts. For many participants in the LGBT Fans Deserve Better movement, the goal is to convince television creators to imagine a future where queer characters don't end up dead. Other queer fans who may be fed up with asking for recognition instead get to work creating these imagined futures themselves. The creation of fanfiction, especially when it depicts female queerness,[15] may be read as a utopian impulse. These authors, whether rejecting the trope of heterosexuality by placing two women in a romantic union or rejecting the Bury Your Gays trope by keeping queer characters alive, are imagining a future that does not yet exist.

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[15] Scholarship on fanfiction often centers on "slash" fiction, which often involves heterosexual women writing gay male romance or erotica (Jenkins). A significant part of queer women fandoms is "femlash" writing, fanfiction written by, for, and about queer women.

In his book Cruising Utopia (2009), José Esteban Muñoz describes the ways in which queer aesthetics and performances may represent a "critical investment in utopia" that resists the restrictive and stagnant present (12). He writes that "queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (1). The creation of fanfiction, which may or may not be aligned with the desire for recognition from wider mass-media, represents an impulse to create new worlds-within-a-world, satisfying desires that go un-acknowledged by canonical works. In Textual Poachers (1992), Henry Jenkins writes, "undaunted by traditional conceptions of literary and intellectual property, fans raid mass culture, claiming its materials for their own use, reworking them as the basis for their own cultural creations and social interactions" (18). Thus, fans are able to act as creative bricoleurs, re-working the texts they have been given into something that fulfills their own desires and needs.

One of the reasons The 100 was so popular with queer girl viewers was of course because Clarke and Lexa's relationship on the show was fully canon. Nonetheless, a thriving community of Clexa fanfiction writers emerged, with authors imagining the characters in scenarios both within and outside the universe of the show. As of now, the most popular fanfiction site is Archive of Our Own, launched in 2009, which overtook the previously dominant fanfiction.net. On Archive of Our Own there are as of this writing 7,998 works tagged as Clarke Griffin/Lexa. Before Lexa's death on *The 100*, fanfiction was a way for fans to continue to engage with the characters outside the show itself, imagining new possibilities for the characters and by extension, for themselves. Jenkins notes that fandom allows fans to "find a space that allows them to discover 'what Utopia feels like'" (289). After Lexa's death, fanfiction took on another meaning, becoming a tool for fans to express their grief and a space where Lexa could be kept alive for eternity. (5,000 of these 7,000 works were published or updated after Lexa's death).

This short piece, posted on Tumblr the night of Lexa's on-screen death, was (according to the author) written to temporarily lift their spirits and the spirits of others in the fandom. Here is an excerpt posted by user hedaswolf:

> clarke says the words again, slowly, carefully, like she's stitching the most delicate wound. she says them as she cups lexa's jaw, fingers black with dried blood. she says them as lexa's lips part to pull in a sharp breath. she says them as the first morning rays drift in through the window, casting out clarke's lingering despair.
>
> two gray-green eyes find hers and she sags against lexa, collapsing from the weight of relief. clarke feels shaky fingers sifting through her hair and she sobs against lexa's neck.
>
> lexa tries to talk but her voice is hoarse. clarke leans back, shushes her, rubs her thumbs over her cheeks, but lexa clears her throat and tries again.
>
> "i love you, too."
>
> (and so lexa lives.)   (*w/ 1,925 notes*)

In the case of this fanfiction, it functioned not as a eulogy per se, but as a re-iteration of the life and love that was, and as a temporary denial of reality (or in this case canon). Thousands of other fanfictions would be posted after this night, stories where Clarke and Lexa were each alive and well, both within the universe of *The 100*, and in other universes as doctors, lawyers, artists, students, mothers, and children. By keeping Lexa alive, these authors are engaged in the virtual production of utopia, rejecting a present-day that continues to deny them icons of dignity and happiness.

In *Undoing Gender* (2004), Judith Butler writes "fantasy is a part of the articulation of the possible; it moves us beyond what is merely actual and present into a realm of possibility, the not yet actualized or the not actualizable" (28). It is this not-yet-actualized future that fanfiction writers and fan creators are imagining and allowing these characters to embody. In turn, this collective imagining allows for the emergence of queer worlds where fans can defy the rules of production and consumption and create new avenues of pleasure and relationality. As Muñoz puts it, "from shared critical dissatisfaction we arrive at collective potentiality" (189, 2009). The

reaction to Lexa's death on *The 100* and other instances of the Bury Your Gays trope have produced an environment of online community building wherein fans gather to commiserate, share new ideas, and imagine new worlds. Muñoz calls this recycling of dominant culture a "queer worldmaking" project that may work to "reshape and "deconstruct reality" (196, 1999). Regardless of the intentions of television producers, the existence of queer women on screen, and their subsequent deaths, has produced a strong community of queer women and other queer folks who create and exist within intertextual worlds of their own. It is these intertextual queer worlds that allowed for the LGBT Fans Deserve Better movement to flourish and enter into conversations about television representations. These communities and this movement are particularly important for many queer youth because, as Susan Driver puts it,

> connecting with a TV character who is confronting violence, falling in love, and finding community may provide a young person with more than merely a positive image or role model, enabling hope and imagination through and beyond the specific conditions of their everyday lives (59).

This imagination is enabled through a personal, creative, and communal consumption of these texts, producing new modes of relationality between people and between texts. Thus, it is through these conversations about the Bury Your Gays trope that queer girl TV fans are working through the unstable and contingent pleasures and disappointments that popular culture may provide, moving towards an as of yet undefined vision of a fantastical future.

CONCLUSION: Implications and Reverberations

> But we all hurt in so many different ways, all the time, and the pain will either change or end. Death, on the other hand, is the final silence.
>
> – Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (41)

Lexa: Don't be afraid, Clarke. Death is not the end.

On March 3rd, 2017, exactly one year after Lexa's death, a convention called ClexaCon was held in Las Vegas. The convention took place over the course of three days and was the first ever of its kind, described as "A Media & Entertainment Convention for LGBTQ Women and Allies".[16] Featuring a lineup of 22 special guests, both actors and writers/producers from series such as *South of Nowhere* (2005), *Person of Interest* (2011) and *Lost Girl* (2010) as well as dozens of other panelists and speakers, the convention served as a "real-life" manifestation of the online queer worlds that queer girls had built around their favorite media. The convention allowed fans to meet each other as well as meet the women who had produced and starred in the media texts that were most important to them. The event also allowed the performers and producers to psychically see the impact they had on their queer girl fans and understand their place within the universe of queer women at large. The events of the convention were, of course, broadcast widely on Twitter and Tumblr so those unable to attend could remotely watch videos of the various panels and hear the ecstatic reactions of attendees. Sarah Shahi and Amy Acker, two actors from *Person of Interest*, strongly suggested that Acker's character Root (who appeared to have been killed in 2016) was still alive, and even acted out a scene of her homecoming, much to the excitement of fans. The convention re-invigorated fandoms that had fizzled out and fulfilled fans' desires for more queer media content.

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[16] See clexacon.com for more details and a full lineup of guests and panels.

The success of the convention indicates that Lexa may have been right – death, in fact, is not the end. Though many are still saddened by Lexa's death and do not want the situation to be repeated, it seems that there is a sense among fans that all is not lost. It appears that some television producers are taking into the account the concerns of queer audiences, and in fact queer women themselves are beginning to produce their own content. However, the LGBT Fans Deserve Better movement has not been without backlash, both from within the LGBT community and outside it. Much of the criticism surrounding these arguments for better representation centers on the assumed frivolity of these issues. Nonetheless, the concerns of queer girl television audiences have been given more consideration than ever before. This does not mean, of course, that everything is suddenly going to change, nor does it mean that queer women's concerns are singular and unassailable.

Queer Activism, Online Anonymity, and the Issue of Race

The most frequent criticism lobbed at the LGBT Fans Deserve Better movement is its lack of importance, especially in relation to other issues facing the LGBTQ community.

> Toxicc Games
>> Guys they are just tv shows, how about you start caring about the important things in life like people who are part of the LGBT community and dying in real life. Bunch of retards

Though comments like these are often mean spirited and ignorant of the full context, The Bury Your Gays trope's connection to so-called "real-life" issues is a legitimate concern, and one that some fans have addressed. Many queer youth link lack of positive media representations of queer people to feelings of loneliness and depression, feelings which can lead youth to attempt

suicide.[17] In addition, some fans link positive representations (or the lack thereof) of LGBTQ people to political issues such as the anti-transgender bathroom bills in North Carolina.

> @kristen_zimmer
>> Why am I so passionate abt the #LGBTFansDeserveBetter movment? Look at North Carolina and Georgia right now. Media+exposure can change minds.

However, the question remains: does involvement in the LGBT Fans Deserve Better movement lead to other forms of activism? The answer is, no, not necessarily. On the other hand, participation in this movement doesn't preclude participation in other forms of social activism, and as @kristen_zimmer argued above, the Bury Your Gays trope may already have connections to other "real life" issues. In addition, what angry YouTube comments like the one above fail to consider is that focusing on one problem does not impede one's ability focus on other problems as well. As is the case with any large group of people, the individuals involved in this discussion of the Bury Your Gays trope do not always agree, and while the movement has a clear platform, not all users understand the problem in the same way.

Another concern those peripheral to the LGBT Fans Deserve Better movement have is whether or not this focus on representation extends to people of color (POC). There are in fact links from the claims of queer fans for better representation to the argument for better representations of POC.

> @JenniferPolish
>> Although, #The100 has been hella racist from the jump. White queers, we need to be enraged & loud about that too! #lgbtfansdeservebetter
>
> beforeweknew
>> Name a more iconic duo than the CW and queerbaiting. I'll wait.
>> lesbopoisonivy
>>> the CW and racism   (*w/ 24,126 notes*)

---

[17] The Trevor Project found that LGB youth are four times more likely to attempt suicide than straight youth, and that 40% of transgender adults reported having attempted suicide (92% of these before the age of 25).

In theory, the arguments for queer representation and POC representation are closely linked. However, as @JenniferPolish's reminder indicates, white queer TV fans are not always attentive to the concerns of queer POC and POC in general. In the case of *The 100*, the two queer women on the show, Clarke and Lexa, were both white, as are the majority of queer characters on screen (GLAAD). This allows white LGBTQ individuals to separate the two issues or ignore POC representation altogether. In addition, race remains a tricky topic online, partially because the race of individual users often remains unknown (particularly on Tumblr where users' icons are often not of the users themselves), creating the illusion of users all existing on an equal playing field and effacing notions of difference. It is often difficult to tell where particular posts on Tumblr originated, making productive conversations challenging. Nonetheless, the issue of race and representation remains a topic of discussion in these online spaces, and will hopefully not be effaced as the debate about queer representation continues.

On-Screen Refusal of Queer Death

As indicated by the enthusiasm of so many ClexaCon attendees, there are TV producers, writers, and actors who are committed to doing right by their queer girl viewers. Since the heightened visibility of the Bury Your Gays trope following Lexa's death, there have been a number of programs that have subverted the trope, whether consciously or subconsciously. One of the most popular programs among queer girls in the last few years is a Canadian web series called *Carmilla* (2014). As I mentioned in the introduction, *Carmilla* was originally a novella published by Sheridan Le Fanu in 1872, and the web series adapted the "queer" aspects of the novella (a seductive vampire prays on a young ingénue named Laura) and transplanted it into the modern day. A number of the actors on the series and some of the production staff are queer themselves, and the effort made to do justice to the queer community was not taken lightly by

fans. Carmilla producer Steph Ouaknine has spoken at length about the Bury Your Gays trope

and the commitment of the production and writing team to think about what their stories mean in

a broader context (Ennis). Many fans were pleasantly surprised when in the series finale, the

main love interests, Laura and Carmilla, quite literally walked off into the sunset together.

> templejog
> | Plot twist: A fictional lesbian couple gets a happy ending
> laurasyellowpellow
> > I MADE THIS TEXT POST 3 YEARS AGO AND NOW I'M
> > BRINGING IT BACK BECAUSE I FINALLY GOT MY PLOT
> > TWIST (Pictured: Carmilla and Laura kissing in the season finale of
> > *Carmilla*)
>
> (*w/ 9.154 notes*)

One of the reasons the series may have been so successful (the pilot episode has more than 2

million views on YouTube), was because its creators had their fingers on the pulse of youth

culture and queer girl culture in particular. The series had a social media manager who posted on

behalf of the characters (they each had their own Twitter and Tumblr accounts) and was able to

engage with fans and understand what was resonating with them. This multimedia approach

differed from the actions of *The 100* producers first of all because it expanded the online

universe of the show, which was shot in vlog[18] format, and second of all, because *Carmilla* staff

were not interested in leading on and then disappointing the majority of their fan base. Because

the producers of *Carmilla* understood their fan base and made an effort to take their

considerations into account,[19] fans of the show were incredibly enthusiastic and loyal and the

web series garnered an unprecedented amount of attention and commendation.

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[18] "Vlog" stands for "video-blog" and usually involves an individual speaking directly to the camera or recording some aspect of their daily life.

[19] For example, in Season 1 fans complained that there were not enough POC in the series, and in Season 2 more POC characters appeared.

Another show which garnered a lot of attention for subverting the Bury Your Gays trope is another Canadian series called *Wynona Earp* (2016). In Season 1, the main character's sister, Waverly, begins a relationship with a local cop named Nicole. In the series finale, which premiered in June of 2016, Nicole gets shot in the chest. Luckily, and to the relief of queer girl fans, she was wearing a bulletproof vest and walked away relatively unscathed. Much to the surprise of writer Emily Andras, previous to the finale fans had been posting online that they hoped Nicole was wearing a bulletproof vest so she wouldn't get shot and killed like TV lesbians often do. After the finale aired, Andras noted that she had already written the episode when fans started worrying about Nicole's fate, and though she was aware of the Bury Your Gays trope she hadn't written Nicole's brush with death in response to fans' concerns (Liszewski). Nicole's choice of protective wear endeared queer fans to the series even further, and the two actors who play Nicole and Waverly attended ClexCon and were met with massive applause and admiration. A similar series of events occurred on the CW's *Supergirl* (2015), wherein a queer woman named Maggie (who was dating Supergirl's sister, Alex) was shot by an alien bullet but survived thanks to her bulletproof vest. Since Maggie's introduction to the show queer girl fans were worried for her safety, and like Nicole on *Wynona Earp* they were relieved and ecstatic when she got to live another day. In addition, actor Chyler Leigh, who plays Alex, has spoken at length about the positive engagements she has had with her queer fans and her commitment to telling their stories the right way (WHOSAY). As indicated by the conversations that occurred at ClexaCon and the interactions actors and producers are having with fans, it appears as though some television creators are beginning to develop an understanding of the broader queer girl universe in which fans exist and the importance of these characters in fans' lives.

Often, it is the actors on these series who get the most interactions with fans and come to realize the impact their characters have had on people lives. (Actors like Chyler Leigh frequently get told stories about how characters helped them come out, or helped their family accept them, or gave them a sense of hope etc.). Of course, depending on the circumstances, actors don't always have the power to change the direction of a series, but as the faces of a show their voices aren't completely without impact. What has proven to be the most successful strategy for creating queer stories is queer producers creating the content themselves. Shows with queer people on the production and/or writing staff such as *Carmilla* are often able to produce stories that resonate with queer fans. For many queer girl fans, the most satisfying content is the content created by fans themselves, such as fanfiction, fan art and fan videos. On occasion these writers and artists go on to spread their work to a wider audience, turning their fanfiction into a book or creating their own web series. Since the Bury Your Gays trope became a topic of conversation, the two most effective strategies for changing the TV and media landscape have been advocacy through social media campaigns and the creation and proliferation of fan works and queer-produced content. The effects of these efforts are already beginning to appear, only one year after Lexa's death, and only time will tell what the future of queer representation will look like.

While the reactions of queer girl audiences to particular media texts may on the surface seem insignificant, these relationships (between the audience and the text, as well as fan-to-fan interactions) reflect and impact broader social dynamics. For the most part, the so-called "gatekeepers" of popular culture are not fans themselves. They are producers, creators, writers, critics, CEOs. But in the context of mass media, which is supposedly *for* the masses, the role of the consumer (the viewer) as more than just a passive receptor is often overlooked. By asserting that "LGBT Fans Deserve Better", queer girls and queer TV fans are declaring that their interests

deserve to be represented in the media they consume, media that would not exist without the dedicated viewership of its fans. Though television producers have long had ultimate power in deciding every aspect of a TV series, queer TV fans are exercising their ability to influence the direction, as well as the public opinion, about the shows in which they invest their time and energy. It has become evident that organized groups of viewers have the power to affect the popularity of a television series, as well as the discourse around it, by purposefully adding or subtracting their viewership and engendering a newsworthy public outcry. Some participants in the LGBT Fans Deserve Better movement even took the conversation offline, putting up billboards across Los Angeles and writing "LGBT Fans Deserve Better" or "Lexa Deserved Better" on public spaces.

@SumisaDeLexa

@NikkiandNora

News outlets also picked up the Bury Your Gays trope in part because fans organized a campaign with the Trevor Project and raised over $162,500 for LGBTQ suicide prevention. If the goal of publicly discussing the Bury Your Gays trope was generating more visibility, then this movement met its goal. If the goal was to produce better queer representation on television,

then we'll have to wait and see. While producers and writers are never going to give the reins over to the fans, it is becoming clear that the balance of power between television producers and television viewers has begun to shift slightly. With audiences becoming more vocal and active participants in television culture, debates about the role of television in society and the role of the audience in television production will continue.

One reason that television can never cater completely to one audience is because everyone interprets and understands the media they consume differently. The reason queer girls were so upset by Lexa's death on *The 100* was because of their specific subjectivity, which had been built up by years and years of lackluster queer representation and queer death on-screen. In essence, the meanings that are derived from a text depend on the specific relationship between the text and the viewer themselves. What proponents of the LGBT Fans Deserve Better movement have done is illustrate the ways in which the media we consume may profoundly influence our perspectives and the relationships we have with others. Queer girl TV fans have shown that the ties that bind are not just physical and emotional bonds with the people in our inner circles, but also the connections we make between ourselves and the media that may help us constitute our identities and imagine our connections to others that we cannot see. By asserting that "LGBT Fans Deserve Better," queer audiences have asserted their right to exist in the world of fantasy, claiming a fundamental connection between the well-being of fictional characters to their own well-being. As Kerry, a 16-year-old girl in Susan Driver's study of queer girls puts it, "If it weren't for queer girls on TV, so many teenage lesbians would have killed themselves in the struggle to find themselves" (57). The online spaces that queer girls have created, centered around these important media texts, have expanded the possibilities for what it

means to grieve and who is *worth* grief, creating ties between people (both real and fictional) that transcend normative expectations of relationality.

The production and transmission of affect in online spaces deserves further study. It is among these communities that I have just described where affect can be transmitted in both already defined and as of yet undiscovered ways. These online communities are re-defining the way we understand emotion in others and the acceptable causes of powerful emotions such as anger and grief. It is important to consider how the relationships and online communities built around an interest in popular media may shift the production and the direction of empathy and how we feel for others and for ourselves. Consuming diversely populated media can allow viewers to extend empathy to those outside of their inner circles. Queer representation can allow viewers to have empathy for real-life queer people, but it may also allow queer viewers to have compassion for themselves. While killing off a queer character may produce empathy in non-queer audience members, it only produces a cathartic affect in queer viewers if this death is *unexpected* and *meaningful.* For television producers, the specific affect that queer fans expressed was unexpected, and served as a starting point for the LGBT Fans Deserve Better movement. Significantly, the movement started as the buildup of powerful affect being transmitted online, and was transformed into an intervention into the system of television production as a whole.

There is, of course, a concern here about working within the corporate system of mass media itself. However, while the mass media machine may be an inherently stratified system because its primary goal is to make a profit, that does not mean individuals can't work productively and subversively within it. If you were opposing capitalism altogether, you might not make the argument for better media representation – but that is not the argument being made

here. The dominance of mass media is taken as a given, and the question is, what can we do with it? For organizers of the LGBT Fans Deserve Better movement and those fighting against the Bury Your Gays trope, the answer is to strategically pledge or withdraw viewership of a series and to engage in nuanced conversations about representation that complicate simple distinctions between visibility and invisibility. By pouring their hearts out online, queer girls are demonstrating the complex relationships they have with normative/subversive media texts and the distinct subjectivity that queer girls possess as a result of their consumption of popular media and the other social and political significations they take in. While the future of television production remains unclear, it is important to accord value to the creative ways in which queer girls are working to push the conversation about television representation in new directions, channeling their grief into a space that straddles the line between this world and another. As scholars struggle to identify the implications of television consumption and the interpretative practices of audiences, the richly inventive worlds of online queer girl TV communities may be a productive place to start.

Appendix

All Dead Lesbian and Bisexual Women on Television (AKA The Graveyard of Dead Queer Women)

Julie, *Executive Suite* (1976)
Franky Doyle, *Prisoner: Cell Block H* (1980)
Sharon Gilmour, *Prisoner: Cell Block H* (1980)
Karen O'Malley, *Casualty* (1987)
Cecília, *Vale Tudo* (1988)
Cicely, *Northern Exposure* (1992)
Talia Winters, *Babylon 5* (1995)
Beth Jordache, *Brookside* (1995)
Susan Ross, *Seinfeld* (1996)
Naomi "Tracy" Richards, *Band of Gold* (1996)
Lucy, *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of Moll Flanders* (1996)
Kathy, *NYPD Blue* (1997)
Sondra Westwood, *Pacific Drive* (1997)
Jadzia Dax, *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (1998)
Sonia Besirky, *Lindenstraße* (1998)
Leila and Rafaela, *Torre de Babel* (1998)
Susanne Teubner, *Hinter Gittern* (1999)
Shaz Wiley*, Bad Girls* (2000)
Laura Hall, *Shortland* Street (2000)
Diamond, *Dark Angel* (2001)
Xena, *Xena the Warrior Princess* (2001)
Beate "Bea" Hansen, *Hinter Gittern* (2001)
Jule Neumann, *Hinter Gittern* (2001)
Frankie Stone, *All My Children* (2001)
Bridgit, *24* (2001)
Tara Maclay, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (2002)
Kelly Hurst, *Family Affairs* (2002)

Megan Hartnoll, *At Home With The Braithwaites* (2003)
Juliet Becker, *The Bill* (2003)
Tina Greer, *Smallville* (2003)
Sandy Lopez, *E.R.* (2004)
Al Mackenzie, *Bad Girls* (2004)
Hanna Novak, *Verbotene Liebe* (2004)
Ines Führbringer, *Hinter Gittern* (2004)
Thelma Bates, *Hex* (2004)
Flora, *Deadwood* (2004)
Brenda Castillo, *Charmed* (2004)
Tosha, *The Wire* (2004)
Marissa Cooper, *The O.C.* (2005)
Servilla, *Rome* (2005)
Dusty, *Queer As Folk* (2005)
Dana Fairbanks, *The L Word* (2006)
Helena Cain, *Battlestar Galactica* (2006)
Manuela Wellmann, *Hinter Gittern* (2006)
Maya Robertson, *Hex* (2006)
Natalie, *Bad Girls* (2006)
Gina Inviere/#6, *Battlestar Galactica* (2006)
Eve Jacobson/Zoe McAllister, *Home & Away* (2006)
Van, *Dante's Cove* (2006)
Angie Morton, *Strictly Confidential* (2006)
Rae Thomas, *Passions* (2007)
Jay Copeland, *Shortland* Street (2007)
Lily Baker, *Supernatural* (2007)
Toshiko Sato, *Torchwood* (2008)
Franzi Reuter, *Gute Zeiten, schlechte Zeiten* (2008)
Snoop, *The Wire* (2008)

D'Anna Biers/Number Three, *Battlestar Galactica* (2009)
Sarah Barnes, *Hollyoaks* (2009)
Olivia Lord, *Nip/Tuck* (2009)
Doctor Marina Ranieri del Colle, *Terapia D'Urgenza* (2009)
Jenny Schecter, *The L Word* (2009)
Silvia Castro León, *Los hombres de Paco* (2010)
Isabella Kortenaer, *Goede Tijden, Slechte Tijden* (2010)
Dahlia, *Legend of the Seeker* (2010)
Amy Tyler, *Sons of Anarchy* (2010)
Sophia, *Skins* (2010)
June Stahl, *Sons of Anarchy* (2010)
HG Wells, *Warehouse 13* (2011) (Resurrected in 2012)
Marissa Tasker, *All My Children* (2011)
Patty O'Farrell and Veronica Cortes, *La Reina del Sur* (2011)
Susan Grant, *Private Practice* (2011)
Bizzy Forbes, *Private Practice* (2011)
Queen Sophie Ann Leclerq, *True Blood* (2011)
Gaia, *Spartacus: Gods of the Arena* (2011)
Angela Darmody & Louise Bryant, *Boardwalk Empire* (2011)
Freya Wilson, *Doctors* (2012)
Nadia, *Lost Girl* (2012)
Laure, *Les Revenants* (2012)
Cat MacKenzie, *Lip Service* (2012)
Charlie, *Home & Away* (2012)
Wendy, *American Horror Story: Asylum* (2012)
Lucretia, *Spartacus: Vengeance* (2012)
Maya St. Germain, *Pretty Little Liars* (2012)
Nora Gainesborough, True Blood (2013)
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Nan Flanagan, *True Blood* (2013)
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Naomi Campbell, *Skins* (2013)
Cristina, *Tierra de Lobos* (2013)
Alisha, *The Walking Dead* (2013)
Emily, *Teen Wolf* (2013)
Alice Calvert, *Under the Dome* (2013)
Bullet, *The Killing* (2013)
Tricia, *Orange is the New Black* (2013)
Lucy & Alice, *American Horror Story: Freakshow* (2014)
Jana Murphy, *The Following* (2014)
Uriel, *Dominion* (2014
Lucy Westenra, *Dracula* (2014)
Ana and Teresa, *Ama en Tiempos Revueltos* (2014)
Claire Bennet, *Heroes Reborn* (2014)
Victoria Hand, *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D* (2014)
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Catriona, *Doctors* (2014)
Nadia Petrova, *The Vampire Diaries* (2014)
Reyna Flores, *Matador* (2014)
Tara Thornton, *True Blood* (2014)
Leslie Elizabeth Shay, *Chicago Fire* (2014)
Kenya Rosewater, *Defiance* (2014)
Sara Lance, *Arrow* (2014) (Resurrected in 2015)
Rose, *Crossbones* (2014)
Rachel Posner, *House of Cards* (2015)
Elise Beaupré, *Unité 9* (2015)
Tituba, *Salem* (2015)

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Kate, *Last Tango in Halifax* (2015)
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Wendy Ross-Hogarth, *Jessica Jones* (2015)
Samantha Krueger, *Ascension* (2015)
Delphine, *Orphan Black* (2015) (Resurrected in 2016)
Maddie Heath, *Coronation Street* (2015)
Lillian Moss, *Murdoch Mysteries* (2015)
Tamsin, *Lost Girl* (2015)
Carolyn Hill, *Under the Dome* (2015)
Vivian, *Mistresses* (2015)
Sam, *Scream Queens* (2015)
Sophia Varma, *Blindspot* (2015)
Sally, *American Horror Story: Hotel* (2015)
Charlie, *Supernatural* (2015)
Rachael Murray, *Scream* (2015)
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Ruby Haswell, *Emmerdale* (2015)
Zora, *The Shannara Chronicles* (2016)
Julie Mao, *The Expanse* (2016)
Ash, *Janet King* (2016)
Lexa, *The 100* (2016)
Kira, *The Magicians* (2016)
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