Original Article

Tug of War:
Social Media, Cancel Culture, and Diversity for *Girls* and *The 100*

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Abstract: Hate the most recent season of a television show? Create a viral petition! Better yet, find an old tweet of a cast member to publicly shame them. These are examples of audience participation and expectations when it comes to television. Audiences react to several types of fiction, but this article mostly focuses on the impacts of television shows and audience reception. Analyzing audience and critical reception of certain TV shows may reveal motivations for subsequent creative decisions by the creators. On shows like *Roseanne*, audience reception has influenced decisions concerning creative control. Audience demands help sway the market and have opened up diversity initiatives in speculative media. The theoretical base for this article is formed from reception theory and primary research of Twitter posts. To further explore the phenomenon of audience sway over artistic ownership, two television shows, *Girls* and *The 100*, will be examined in context with audience and critical reception, cancel culture, and diversity initiatives across media.

Keywords: audience, reception, media, twitter, diversity, television, HBO girls, the 100

Introduction

After the last half of Season 8 streamed on HBO, 1.7 million *Game of Thrones* fans signed a petition demanding new writers and an alternate ending (Mccluskey, 2019, para.2). HBO responded, sharing how they had no intention of making changes. Instead of closing the chapter on *Game of Thrones*, the fans and critics continued to backlash. *Saturday Night Live* mocked the now infamous series finale. Former *Game of Thrones* co-star Jason Mamoa publicized his disappointment with the last episode via an Instagram video that was viewed over 136,000 times. Showrunners D.B. Weiss and David Benioff were "extremely quiet, even going so far as to cancel their scheduled appearance at Comic Con" (Placido, 2019, para. 1). The pair had been signed to direct and write the next series of *Star Wars* projects. However, after the backlash, they signed with Netflix and bowed out of the *Star Wars* deal. Laura Bradley of *Vanity Fair* describes how Weiss and Benioff may have decided against joining the *Star Wars*-verse. After watching "Star Wars fans bully actors and directors […] they began to have doubts

about whether they should dip their toes in as well" because "who wants to go through that again?" (Bradley, 2019, para. 2). *Game of Thrones* is but one example of television audience participation and how the gears of reception and fandom push back against corporations, networks, and production companies. Though not necessarily a new constraint, audiences increasingly make demands of creators and studios to influence content and shape productions. The novelty, and sometimes effectiveness, of such demands, is in part the result of social media platforms that allow for opinions to quickly spread and to then be picked up by news outlets and critics. This symbiotic relationship between creators, audiences, and critics can help boost or sink shows and films. While to some degree creators and commercial distributors have always considered audience needs and wants, the persistence of contemporary audience expectations has come to influence entertainment production. In particular, Wolfgang Iser's (2006) Reception Theory calls for text, context and text, and the reader (p. 58). In the case of this article, the "reader" becomes the "audience," and "context and text" become "interpretation of critical reception." Audiences react to several types of fictional entertainment, but this article investigates online audience reception of recent television shows. In conjunction with various reception theories, primary research was assessed from individual social media posts via Twitter. Although other sites like Reddit and Tumblr encourage users to discuss media, Twitter is easily accessible (for users and researchers) and is more popular. As the title of the article suggests, the very act of watching may engender a feeling of possession for the audience, a feeling nurtured by online spaces. While at times considered toxic and labeled as cancel culture, this amplification of sentiment can also evolve into positive calls for change, such as calls for diversity. To further explore the phenomenon of audience sway over artistic ownership, this article examines two television series, *Girls* and *The 100*, using such frameworks as audience reception, cancel culture, and diversity initiatives across media.

First, an outline of rationale in choosing *Girls* and *The 100* as examples for this article will establish greater context. In decades past, audiences have rallied to influence networks to stave off show cancellations, like with letters, phone calls, and word-of-mouth campaigns with *Star Trek* and *Twin Peaks* (Guerrero-Pico, 2017, p. 2072). Additionally, there are several recent shows that could have been evaluated for audience reception. *Friends*, *Sleepy Hollow*, *Roseanne*, and the aforementioned *Game of Thrones* weathered controversies that reflect the influence of audience opinion. However, the focus of this article is to explore what, if any, tangible production changes (i.e., new or revised characters) result in response to audience reception in which "television fans now make strategic use of social media" (Guerrero-Pico 2017, p. 2072). Thus, *Girls* and *The 100* are two shows that altered production in reaction to online controversy, rather than simply cancelling, renewing, or re-naming a show through other means. In assessing these phenomena, it helps that *Girls* has concluded and *The 100* is ongoing. Whereas one show ended three years ago (*Girls*), the other (*The 100*) is still beholden to fans and critics. Furthermore, Twitter and other social media became more influential from 2012 onward, lending audience opinion and increased presence and influence. The focus on *Girls* and *The 100* also reviews the impact of audience reception in two distinct corners of television: *Girls* originates from a premium cable channel, HBO, whereas *The 100* represents a basic cable network, The CW. Even as their fan demographics may be similar in gender and age, their viewership is different enough to support the theory that audiences of all types can express expectations that influence production. However, as this article will outline, the impetus and application of fan criticism varies and produces divergent results.

A brief overview of *Girls* (2012-2017) and *The 100* (2014 --) will provide background on the impact of their audience reception, along with critical reception of the time. This is to ensure less of a nostalgic view as sometimes adopted by present-day critics that may not consider critical reception and categorization of television shows at the time of their release. Such a dualistic approach, critical plus audience reception, may help "readers to grasp a reality that

was never their own" (Iser, 2006, p. 63). Starting chronologically, *Girls* premiered on HBO on April 15, 2012 amid rave reviews for "its voice and colorful storylines," even being compared to the network's other NYC dram-edy, *Sex and the City* ("Lena Dunham," 2012, para. 1-2). The show follows a group of four post-college white twenty-somethings as they deal with life in New Yok City, specifically focusing on Hannah (played by Dunham) and her career as a writer. Dunham, the show's co-creator, head writer, and lead actress, had written award-winning independent films, and was labeled a "wunderkind" by several news outlets, such as *The New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times*. Still, within hours of the premiere, viewers and critics criticized the show's penchant for an all-white cast lamenting upper-class privileged issues ("Lena Dunham," para. 3). That same year on NPR's *Fresh Air*, Dunham professed "sensitivity" to the diversity issues, but insisted she wrote the characters to "avoid rendering an experience I can't speak to accurately" ("Lena Dunham," 2012, para. 6). Yet, seemingly in acknowledgement of the diversity criticism, *Girls* began filming new episodes in May of 2012, with star Dunham spotted by outlets like *TMZ* with supposed cast addition, Donald Glover. In another interview, Dunham expressed excitement for adding "new characters into the world of the show. Some of them are great actors of color" (as cited in Storey, 2012, para. 5). Eventually, Glover's role is revealed as a guest star. His character is a soft-spoken law-student and Republican who only remains for two episodes. Though never as predominant as it had been in 2012-13, critique about diversity continued for the duration of the show.

In 2014, The CW released *The 100*, a sci-fi show based on the eponymous Kass Morgan book series. The plot centers around Clarke Griffin, an incarcerated teen aboard a space station after a worldwide nuclear strike 100 years in the future. Clarke and 99 incarcerated (therefore disposable) teens are sent to Earth to see if it can be safely re-colonized. The first season was described as a futuristic *Lord of the Flies* by outlets like *The San Antonio Times* and *IGN* due to its proclivity for killing off main characters. Deviating from Morgan's novels, the television writers even killed off show favorites, like the character Wells Jaha. This trend continued into Season 3, when Commander Lexa was killed by a stray bullet. In a show where so many characters die, Lexa'a death could have been explained as par for the course. However, fans felt differently, pointing out on social media platforms how she was killed right after a sexual encounter with another female character, the protagonist Clarke Griffin. Thus, to viewers, Lexa's death paralleled trends in which LGBTQ characters were more dispensable than straight characters (Framke, 2016, para. 14). In online articles for *TVInsider* and face-to-face forums like the Writer's Guild Panel in 2016, showrunners of *The 100* openly discussed their snafu, and how it might be remedied. A staff writer for the Lexa-death episode, Javier Grillo-Marxuach, conceded, "I think it was a failure to recognize the cultural impact that this would have outside the context of the show" (as cited in Wagmeister, 2016, para. 4). Ultimately, showrunners did not revert Clarke (Lexa's lover) to a heteronormative relationship upon Lexa's death, as many viewers assumed would be the case. Queer and gender critiques of *The 100* persist to this day. Part of why *Girls* and *The 100* were chosen for analysis over series with similar issues is because of the presence of social media in response to controversies (or as an impetus for what fans perceived as controversial). The fan voices were amplified due to the prevalence and easy use of social media, gaining attention for racial and queer issues of diversity.

Audience and Critical Reception

This article will primarily rely on audience reception as the lens for interpretation. A rift between traditional criticism and popular receptions of media "raises a key issue regarding the use of film criticism in reception studies: to what extent can the critics' views be taken as representative?" (Chapman et al., 2007, p. 195). In an age of new "media citizenship" and "the ethics of performativity" (Elsaesser, 2004, p. 76), this question may be extended to revise (and re-envision) the very function of the critic, getting to the heart of contemporary reception studies. To what extent does the viewing public come to *perform* the role of film critic through new media participation, and what is the impact of such criticisms on televised content? Analyzing audience reception of *Girls* and *The 100* may illustrate how subsequent creative choices were informed, with little or lasting impact. As mentioned above, audiences for both shows expressed their displeasure for the perceived status quo of the narratives. Emily Keightly (2008) suggests that in research, memory is a useful method for cultural studies, as different voices come together to analyze one story (p. 181). Given that the diversity issues for the shows took place eight years ago for *Girls*, and four years ago for *The 100*, the audience critiques amount to a socially constructed memory of what occurred. Studying this in tandem with critical responses may reveal complexities in the showrunner's creative decisions.

Though memes and posts were widely shared on Facebook and other social media, Twitter produced the brunt of audience conversation. From its inception in 2006, Twitter was designed for mobile users and thus held greater appeal to younger users (the target audience for *Girls* and *The 100*) than the desktop site for Facebook (Jackson, 2012, para. 3). Twitter is a platform that empowers users to share, and then reshare, their opinions, particularly with showrunners. Mar Guerrero-Pico (2017) explores how following the internet's inception in 1989, "There has been an empowerment of consumers, who, thanks to the expansion of social media in recent years, now have more tools at their disposal to become more visible and ensure their comments, opinions, and requests reach the interested parties without intermediaries" (p. 2071). Other series, like *Scandal*, also utilized Twitter in 2012 to their marketable advantage: "*Scandal* is also an important mark in the historical development of #TGIT (or Thank God It's Thursday) programming because it demonstrated the possible success of social television from an industrial perspective. Indeed, *Scandal* has come to be referred to as the industry standard for 'must-tweet television'" (McNamara, 2013). With Twitter, fans learned how to create an entire force, ready to mobilize and then capture the attention of critical news outlets. From Nagy and Midha (2015) in "The Value of Earned Audiences: How Social Interactions Amplify TV Impact": "As Tweet exposure drives actions across platforms including searching, engagement, and purchase, marketers should learn to integrate Tweet messages, #hashtags, and calls to action with campaigns on other media" (p. 453). The following section balances modern and past critical perspectives, while also allowing room for individual interpretation. As Halbwachs (1980) believes, memories are the products of something larger, or an "intersection of collective influences" (p. 44). Due to ready availability of online spaces, audience are now able to share their influence in an easier and quicker fashion, in opposition to the letter writing and phone calls of the past. Thus, truth and story are shaped by what is communicated, and in the context of others.

Analyzing audience reception through a relatively newer type of media, like Twitter, may archive, analyze, and legitimize the vast array of popular responses to television across new media. Elsaesser (2004) notes how "theories of cinematic spectatorship, initially elaborated around class and (immigrant) ethnicity, have been extended to gender, race and other forms of cultural identity" (p. 76). Audience criticism for *Girls* involved complaints about a lack of diversity among the cast and charges of nepotism. The online discussions included fans and

critics. Even before the premiere, critics like Judy Berman had early access, and posted articles decrying the series for covering "first-world problems" from a "white lens." As Berman (2012) suggests in an April 13, article (before the premiere), several popular shows of the time were guilty of promoting white "problems" without diverse voices entering in—*Two Broke Girls*, *How I Met Your Mother*—and yet, the need to examine *Girls*, and then examine it again, was oddly acute (para. 5). On the date of the premiere, April 15, 2012, viewer angst and independent think-pieces on the lack of diversity, like the *Intellichick* post "These Aren't My 'Girls'," were widely shared on Twitter. Before such posts, there seemed to be an unspoken agreement from formal critics that the show "spoke" to young women's issues in big-city life. Not every Twitter user was unhappy with *Girls*, as @LCoan_'s tweet (Figure 1) gives Dunham "props" for avoiding what she deems "forced and fake diversity."

*Figure 1. "*Girls *criticism and praise on Twitter." Screengrab from Twitter. 2020.*

From April 12-17, there were only two tweets discussing race or diversity, increasing to nine tweets from April 18-22. On April 18, journalist Dave Weigel acknowledges the critique of *Girls* as a new "national pastime" (Figure 2).
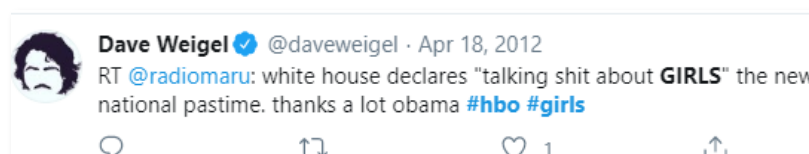

Figure 2. "Journalist Weigel on Girls *controversy." Screengrab from Twitter. 2020.*

Some tweets even mentioned "nepotism," since the four main co-stars all hail from famous and/or wealthy families. Then, on April 23, there were seven tweets about race, almost the same amount there had been on a five-day run. April 23, a week after the first episode, was also the day *CNN* aired a panel critiquing *Girls* and race. The *CNN* panel was critical of a show that takes place in the diverse city of New York full of so many white characters and themes (Crugnale, 2012, para. 2). On air, host Soledad O'Brien showed *Girls* staff writer Lesley Arfin's post (Figure 3) in response to diversity criticism. Though not participating in the *CNN* panel, Arfin later deleted the post and apologized for her comment. Even as she tried to argue that narratives often focus on particular characters and their trials and tribulations, her tweet seemed dismissive and racially-charged.

*Figure 3. "*Girls *staff writer Arfin on* Precious *film." Screengrab from Twitter. 2020.*

Diversity and nepotism were not the only controversies to haunt the show in audience and critical circles, though they were two of the most prominent and persistent. Other controversies include depictions of nudity and sex acts. The web magazine *Vulture* chronicles all the controversies on their website, from 2012-2017 (Moylan, 2017). Interest in the show from critics and audiences was high. Notably, "the *New York Times* ran seven articles per week during the show's first three months" (Watson, 2015, p. 145). Dunham, as the main character Hannah, even reflects satirically on her role as "the voice of my generation" versus "a voice of a generation" (S1x1, "Pilot"). This could be because, months before the show aired, critics were already lauding *Girls* as "important" and a modern instantiation of feminism, which was assumed to be global feminism. Instead of including intersections on gender, race, and class in a way that was supposed to be "highly current, and thoroughly modern" and "unlike what was on TV" (Stewart, 2012, para. 7), the show released promotional posters featuring a cast of four white young women. The white feminist narrative seemed reminiscent of what viewers had seen from *Sex and the City* fourteen years earlier, and so the progressive expectations for the show did not meet with the show's creative reality.

In *The New Film History: Sources, Methods, Approaches*, Justin Smith (2007) describes the method of "web ethnography," identifying new media participation as constructing "the politics and rituals of cult film fandom" (p. 229). Approaches such as Smith's help illustrate the constraints of traditional critical reception studies, which prioritize critical discourse at the exclusion or marginalization of popular reception, and conversely suggests the benefits of more democratic approaches to media reception. Berman (2012) scratches at another plausible reason why *Girls* received so much critical attention: "It's almost as if we're holding Lena Dunham accountable in a way that these earlier Voices of a Generation didn't have to be because she's already somewhat outside the mainstream—a young woman whose body isn't magazine-perfect" (para. 6). The very title of the show, *Girls*, implies it appeals on a universal-feminist scale, though the main characters and their social and class concerns seem to refute the "every-girl" implication. Still, Ta-Nehisi Coates (2012) believes Dunham and Arfin should avoid writing in minorities simply because of audience and critical push-back. Instead, he calls for greater scrutiny for the platforms producing content like *Girls*: "There has been a lot of talk, this week about Lena Dunham's responsibility, but significantly less about the people who sign her checks" (Coates, 2012, para. 12). In 2012, out of a few dozen offerings of original fictional content, HBO only had one show with a minority listed as the first lead character, with only another two featuring minorities as co-stars. However, their 2020 lineup and beyond has been building upon past diverse shows, to be explored later in this article.

Through a comparative case study approach, this article illustrates how such theories of popular reception are particularly insightful when analyzing the reception of contemporary television series like *Girls* and *The 100*. Ultimately, as shown below, sensitivity to actual audience reception may be understood as central to the success and creative trajectory of contemporary television series. Alternatively, The CW's *The 100* enjoyed almost no criticism for its casting, which was more diverse than *Girls*. It was not until Season 3 that creator Jason

Rothenberg heard from upset viewers across various social media. By that time, *The 100* was notorious for killing off central characters, and did so with Commander Lexa in the episode "Thirteen" (S3x7). After this episode aired on March 3, 2016, viewers vented their disappointment on Twitter, as shown in Figure 4.

*Figure 4. "*The 100 *fans' Twitter discontent." Screengrab from Twitter. 2020.*

A total of seven negative tweets emerged on March 3 about Lexa's death, with another seven on March 4. For perspective, March 2 had only one promotional tweet, and March 1 had eight positive tweets and two negative tweets concerning the quality of the show. The discontent evolved into fan-led online petitions and a viral trend of the Bury Your Gays trope, that acknowledges how media will often portray an LGBTQ character, only to kill them off, usually after engaging in a sexual act. Originally a literary trope to "rid" storylines of characters unapproved by society, Haley Hulan (2017) notes how Bury Your Gays bled into other media forms (p. 17). However, as same-sex marriage is now legal and "many laws against homosexuality have been abolished, Bury Your Gays is no longer necessary" (Hulan, 2017, p. 17). Despite wider tolerance for difference in society, narratives still employ the trope. Often, if a character engages with someone of the same sex, it's merely a blip in the narrative, as they quickly return to heteronormative relationships. The violent deaths of *The 100*'s female LGBTQ characters brought #BuryYourGays to the forefront of online fan concerns, as noted by formal critics.

For instance, Dhaenens et al. (2008) have argued "that queer-sensitive audiences cannot be ignored in research on queer representations and reception in media studies" (p. 336). This article will use as a starting point their description of a *queer reading* of film reception, "a multidisciplinary approach that includes queer theory frameworks and insights from audience" (Dhaenens et al., 2008, p. 336)—one which resists the strict categories of gender, sexuality, genre, and even the distinct categorization of "critic" and "popular audience." It is here that intersections of youth, queer-sensitive audience identification, and critical performativity allow

us to better understand not only the reception of such films across a range of popular and critical responses, but indeed the very processes of film reception and criticism in a new media age. Part of the audience dissatisfaction for *The 100* stemmed from expectations versus execution.

At times, writers employ what fans call "queerbaiting," or writing in queer characters to attract queer audiences, only to then "ditch the characters so they can focus on developing heterosexual plots" (Guerrero-Pico et al., 2017, p. 3). With the development of Clark and Lexa's relationship, and subsequent death of Lexa, the charge of queerbaiting on the part of *The 100* writers seemed valid to fans. Dorothy Snaker (2012) of *The Hollywood Reporter* notes how the Clarke and Lexa dynamic trended on social media during Seasons 2 and 3, "encouraged and engaged by series creator Jason Rothenberg and his staff" (para. 5). Following the character build-up, the swift end did not meet fans' hopes for strong, feminist storylines, particularly for the LGBTQ community. Snarker (2012) states how "in retrospect, many now feel the show misled them into hoping" for those storylines (para. 5). The CW focused on Clark and Lexa's relationship in the twenty-one second promo video by having a character chide Lexa: "Your feelings for Clarke put both of you in danger" (TV Promos, 2016, 0:10). In the context of Lexa's death, that particular line seems to further underscore the Bury Your Gays trope. In an online post, Rothenberg admits that the "aggressive promotion" of the episode and of Clarke and Lexa's relationship (also known as "Clexa"), "only fueled a feeling of betrayal" (as cited in Roth, 2012, para. 4). Initially, Rothenberg attributed Lexa's death to creative freedom, while apologizing for not understanding how hurtful the decision might seem to LGBTQ audiences. When asked about re-writing Lexa's ending during a March 21 *TVInsider* interview, Rothenberg said he would have kept everything the same (as cited in Holbrook, 2012, para. 7). Though he expressed regret for unwittingly playing into the Bury Your Gays trope, Rothenberg was perceived as unconcerned with the audience impact.

The shows had differences and similarities concerning audience and critical reception. The height of audience and critical reception occurred at different times; for *Girls* it was before and after the premiere, and for *The 100* it peaked during Season 3. Though both shows were analyzed for issues of diversity, the points of diversity were not the same. For instance, *Girls* was scrutinized for an all-white and upper-class cast, whereas *The 100* came under fire for upholding an anti-lesbian trope, Bury You Gays. It seemed that the formal media criticism for *Girls* increased the audience reception on Twitter, while the opposite was true for *The 100*. The perceptions of either show cannot be distilled through formal critical and audience reception alone, because "the first meaning of history—what has happened—posits a base reality whose totality can never be fully reconstituted" (Friedman, 1997, p. 233). Thus, the opinions of the audience and critics will be assessed through subsequent sections of this article, and will be treated as separate pieces of the puzzle. Audiences and critics can rally behind different points concerning fictional narratives. Generally, the increase in online discussion (whether audience-led or in the form of media criticism) elevated both shows and fostered more analysis of diversity issues. Once these initiatives gain momentum, for good or ill, they sometimes spiral into cancel culture.

Cancel Culture

Recently, audience reception has influenced decisions concerning creative control, which may be linked to cancel culture. Jeannie Parker Beard (2020) codifies cancel culture as a hinderance to civic discourse, in the way that it "cultivates the mob mentality" and demands a "100% consensus" (para. 4-5). In part, cancel culture can be linked to what is perverse or taboo in a society. However, cancel culture goes further than recognizing supposed taboo words and actions because it is also places pressure to withdraw the taboo words or actions. On Twitter,

users may "encounter an affective flow of outrage, as well as fun and enjoyment, at the expense of an evil other who must be 'cancelled,' and the pleasures of moral posturing" (Bouvier, 2020, p. 10). In online spaces, cancel culture hashtags can go viral, resulting in online petitions or movements calling for the entertainment industry to make drastic changes. In the end, entertainment industries are also businesses and strive to keep fans (aka customers) happy. While this can be conflated with cancel culture, it may be indicative of a business decision and customer demand.

Online platforms could be changing society's response to taboo behaviors. Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and more are making it easier to quickly share information, and then to quickly respond with individual opinion. Gwen Bouvier (2020) writes how Twitter drives users to share short, snappy comebacks that encapsulate "high levels of affect and emotion" and then "bind affective communities" (p. 2). This level of emotion is what can also ramp up the number of "likes" for a tweet (aka commentary), or hashtag (aka trending topic). The desire for increased exposure can lead to a cycle of provoking emotional response from other users (Bouvier, 2020, p. 2). Some incidents and opinions are widely disseminated, becoming "viral," and it becomes contingent upon users to either disagree or agree. Beard (2020) outlines how "what seems to be an escalation in the culture war and the demise of civic discourse could, in part, be a symptom of big tech's dominance over the modes of communication and dissemination of information" (para. 1). Before the internet, consumers and audiences complained mostly via newspapers, consumer groups, and letters to companies. The turn-around time on a substantive response was comprably slower than the swift responses as seen with the online campaigns against *Girls* and *The 100*. While the messages against the shows were amplified due to online delivery, the messages were perhaps shared because of the anonymity perpetuated by virtual spaces. Partha Kar (2019) recalls how at in-person healthcare conferences, one speaker referenced a joke about "choking a female partner but was not interrupted or challenged" and it was only afterward that "some people did protest on social media" (para. 2). There is an elusive element to sharing sentiments online. Bouvier talks about how tweeting takes place while doing other things, is done quickly, and so users may not think through their words before hitting "submit." This lack of reflection, "bolstered by a compelling sense of affective community, [ensures] there is a corresponding distance from the victim, and no real fear that there will be any consequences" (Bouvier, 2020, p. 3). The easy access of social media coupled with the distance provided by technology allows for a disconnect and sense of freedom that may be absent from in-person interactions. Therefore, live audiences may be less likely to call attention to taboo words or actions without the shelter of social media.

The motivation for canceling certain media depictions and actions could be construed as an attempt to challenge offensive behavior. In society, "if something is considered to be inappropriate or offensive, there must be some set of common cultural standards that tells us what is appropriate or what is not" (Jay, 2017, p. xiii). In the case of *Girls*, Twitter users deemed the lack of diversity as inappropriate in a discriminatory context. For *The 100*, the death of Lexa was a resurgence and confirmation of the Bury Your Gays trope surrounding queer characters. Like Timothy B. Jay (2017) examines in *We Did What? Offensive and Inappropriate Behavior in American History*, "it is important to recognize that what is appropriate or not depends heavily on context, the 'who, what, where, and when' as something questionable happens" (p. xvi). In both cases, outraged users assessed the behaviors, deemed them taboo, and demanded change. In fact, what is coined as "cancel culture" can sometimes become synonymous with "outrage-culture," or an expectation to never be offended. What often goes unrecognized is the hidden allure of taboos. As Jay (2017) further notes, "the force of taboos insulates us from danger (we abstain from the taboo behavior) but at the same time brings us nearer to them (our curiosity is aroused)" (p. xiv). The push and pull of taboo may be what feeds into the outrage. As comedian Tom Segura shares in his Netflix special *Tom Segura:*

Ball Hog (Hachachi, 2020), "I believe you [the audience] have the right to be offended, and share these grievances publicly. I also believe you shouldn't expect anything to be done about it" (38:01). Segura's point hinges on the belief that offensive things are going to be said and done, particularly with comedians, and that audiences can simply avoid being offended by never watching or listening, as is their choice. However, avoiding a taboo, as Jay describes, is hard because the very codification of an action or word as taboo builds a hidden attraction. Still, when an opinion is shared, and deemed by social media users (or other stakeholders) to be "unpopular" or taboo, this sort of outrage is construed as a cancellation, or even a threat to freedom of speech. For instance, the "Letter on Justice and Open Debate," released online by *Harper's Bazaar* in June 2020, chronicles the supposed threat of cancel culture. The letter was a collaborative effort, penned by public figures like Gloria Steinem, Margaret Atwood, David Brooks, Noam Chomsky, J.K. Rowling, and others, who feel:

"The free exchange of information and ideas, the lifeblood of a liberal society, is daily becoming more constricted. While we have come to expect this on the radical right, censoriousness is also spreading more widely in our culture: an intolerance of opposing views, a vogue for public shaming and ostracism, and the tendency to dissolve complex policy issues in a blinding moral certainty." (Ackerman et al., 2020, para. 1)

The collective authors are correct to some degree: those "cancelled" in Hollywood, such as actress Roseanne Barr and director James Gunn, faced swift consequences as a result publishing their views online. Yet, it wasn't so much as a public shaming as a business decision on the part of Disney. Creative endeavors have been, and likely will remain, beholden to audience interest. Instead of cancel culture as first-amendment suppression, it can perhaps be viewed as another expression of free speech. Writers of *Girls* and *The 100* were not censored in sharing their storylines. Once shared, social media users exercised their first amendment rights and responded, and showrunners made a business decision. Rather than suppression, cancel culture can be a fervent exchange of ideas, and is the sort of dialogue spoken of by authors of the *Harper's Bazaar* letter. Segura may agree that just because opinions (or creative decisions as seen on *Girls* and *The 100*) are shared, don't expect anyone to *like* said opinions, as an expression of dislike does not necessarily translate to suppression. Social media users have become adept at hosting online campaigns to champion causes, and though this may seem like suppression, it is not that different from buying power (boycotting a product/opting out) that the public has been used to seeing and using for decades. Social media has merely made it easier to use this power. There will always be delays and cancellations due to outside events and pressure. However, for shows like *Girls* and *The 100*, audience reception resulted in more than a cancellation. It permeated the creative decisions of showrunners, which changed the course of each show and their characters.

After the critique of Season 1, casting decisions for Season 2 of *Girls* had changed. Laura Bennett (2013) of *The New Republic* writes how the "casting notices [were] seeking 'hipster types' of 'all ethnicities'" (para. 1). Eventually, the Season 2 cast role went to Donald Glover, a young black actor. As Bennett (2013) mentions, television shows had added to their casts for similar "complaints of whiteness," like *Friends* adding black guest stars Gabrielle Union and Aisha Tyler with "nearly identical storylines […that…] felt like a cheap kind of appeasement" (para. 5). For some, Glover wasn't so much an addition as he was ill-used. In a *Huffington Post* piece, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (2013) echoes other critics on how *Girls'* "world is mostly white", and emphasizes how:

that white ghetto was breaching by a black character who is introduced as some jungle fever lover, with just enough time to have sex and mutter a couple of lines about wanting more of a relationship. A black dildo would have sufficed and cost less. (para. 4)

On the surface, adding Glover looked as "forced" as Abdul-Jabbar claims.

Though it's hard to say if Dunham did in fact cast Glover due to outside pressure, she at least used the on-screen relationship of Hannah and Sandy (Dunham and Glover) to enact brief but uncomfortable arguments rooted in racial difference. One of the arguments begin because Sandy dislikes Hannah's essay, admitting that "It wasn't for me," and her insisting "It's for everyone" (S2x02 "I Get Ideas"). Bennett (2013) observes how even this small slice of their conversation is a nod to the larger controversy surrounding *Girls*: "whether 'Girls' is about all girls or about four girls' very particular bubble" (para. 4). The types of viewers interested in the show do not support the "every-girl" theory. Per a report from *Vulture*, 56% of the audience for *Girls* are male, with 22% of them being "white dudes over 50" (Adalian, 2012, para. 2). Despite the audience metrics, Glover's casting and the meta-conversation appeared indicative of the validity of cancel culture. Dunham may have also yielded to the "whitewashing" claims because of the scrutiny surrounding *Girls*, even before the premiere. To sustain positive perceptions of the supposedly critically-acclaimed show, tackling the lack of diversity (even in a short-lived manner) was necessary to keep in line with market demands from viewers.

As stated earlier, *The 100* fans created online petitions, calling for greater empathy and recognition for LGBTQ characters. Part of this was the trending #BuryYourGays and also #LGBTQDeservesBetter hashtags on Twitter. Aside from the abstract demands, fans created a fundraiser for the Trevor Project, which is dedicated to LBGTQ issues. From the beginning of March 2016 until Rothenberg's *TVInsider* interview, the petition had raised over 80,000 dollars for the Trevor Project. On March 24, Rosenberg apologized again, and shared that he would have "handled Lexa's death differently" (as cited in Roth, 2012, para. 6). Originally, he most likely deemed fans were upset over the loss of a favorite character, much in the way fans denounced previous character deaths on *The 100* in a similar fashion. However, the mixture of fan backlash and fundraiser may have illustrated for Rosenberg the seriousness of the LGBTQ issue of character representation, which was separate and distinct from past instances of fan backlash over character deaths. Seeing as how writers could not "reverse" Lexa's death, they did write in a continued lesbian story arc. In Season 3, Clarke starts a relationship with Niylah, sustaining their bond through Season 4. Entering into Season 7, Clarke has yet to enter into a romance with a man. Through viewers' online demands, the showrunners of *The 100* changed the creative outcomes to align with what was deemed appropriate and fair.

Realistically, like with *Girls*, a combination of business and fan-fueled issues may have convinced Rosenberg to change course. For instance, the Trevor Project initiative grabbed the attention of advertisers like Maybelline, who promised to no longer air ads during *The 100* via Twitter posts to fans. According to journalist Brian Steinberg (2016), this did not mean that the company was pulling ad revenue from The CW, but it was still a substantive threat in terms of "energizing a fan base" (para. 7). Even before the March 3 airing of episode "Thirteen," the sci-fi drama was rumored for cancelation. It's possible that the #BuryYourGays controversy simultaneously forced Rosenberg to yield some creative positioning to save face with The CW executives deciding the future of his show, while also giving Rosenberg reason to demonstrate how cancelling his show would be counter-productive, given the boost in popularity.

Both shows apparently capitulated to the online critique period. *Girls* was accused of white-washing and sought to counter this perception. *The 100* was accused of perpetuating anti-LGBTQ tropes and was likewise determined to "correct" the perception. However, *The 100* made a lasting change that the character trajectory for Clarke has followed for five seasons, whereas *Girls* made surface changes with a two-episode guest star, Glover. As identified by Watson (2015), in *Girls*, "non-white characters are often transient men and women—disposable figures quickly dismissed, or at the very least, marginalized by her group" (p. 147). The shorter and less-sustained response could be because of the nature of diversity issues on

Girls that originated from a more ambiguous systemic trope (an all-white cast), compared to the violent and more "in-your-face" offing of an LGBTQ character under circumstances that reinforced another trope. It is worth noting that even as *Girls* remained transient in its inclusion of diverse characters, the critical and audience reception may have influenced HBO to cast increasingly diverse characters in subsequent show offerings (which will be explored later in this article). While both tropes are hurtful to different groups, one for racial diversity and one for gender and sexuality reasons, lasting character changes may have occurred because of the substantive initiative taken by *The 100* fans. Instead of just writing or sharing memes, the fans decided to act, such as raising funds for The Trevor Project. The fandom also shifted from antagonistic rhetoric to instead "establish channels of collaboration for a common cause" (Guerrero-Pico, 2017, p. 2). The fandom tried to refocus the online discussion away from hate of the show and on to social recognition of a damaging trope. The newly adopted tone and efforts in campaigning for queer rights gained the notice of The CW network. Rallying as an online community and creating a tangible output (more than 80 thousand dollars raised) generated intense pressure for the showrunners. Fans of *The 100* built a smaller community-based following, and so they may have felt they had more buy-in, or even a type of ownership over the show.

Artistic and Creative Ownership

When audiences identify with a character (as they had trouble with in *Girls* or found troubling when a queer character was killed off with *The 100*) they may feel a type of possession over that character. As Michel Foucault (1992) argues in "What is an Author?," a writer's name and ownership may be "regulated" by a culture (p. 305). "Partially at the expense of themes and concepts that an author places in his work," Foucault explains, "the 'author function' could also reveal the manner in which discourse is articulated on the basis of social relationships" (p. 313). By extension, "suspicions arise concerning the absolute nature and creative role of the subject" (p. 314), which could mean that audiences also hold power over stories and increasingly express interest in influencing these outcomes. Thus begins a battle for control between the artist and the audience, who create and influence characters, respectively.

The idea of artistic ownership and authorship is hard to pinpoint in an artform like a play, film, or television show. These forms are penned by one or many people and require producers, editors, and other collaborators to bring the story to fruition. Michael J. Meyer (2004) suggests of the novel *Misery*:

[Stephen] King poses the ambiguous question faced by all writers: whether their concern for the symbiotic relationship with their reading public is great enough to overcome their fear of catering to inferior quality in order to attain a more measurable goal: reader acceptance and financial success. (p. 97)

Indeed, as displayed in the face-to-face power play between characters Annie Wilkes and Paul Sheldon, artists must decide to concede or not concede, in varying degrees, with varying results. However, in making these changes, artists may believe the writing and characterization will be lessened, and the result will be not as envisioned. In a technical sense, this interplay between artists and audience may now also include the influence of online fandoms, whether it results in renewal, casting decisions, or new character arcs. With *The 100* in particular (and to a more limited degree with *Girls*), audiences were not so much "authors" as they functioned as what Foucault might call "initiators." As he describes, "the distinctive contribution of these [sorts of] authors is that they produced not only their own work, but the possibility and the rules of formation of other texts" (1992, p. 310). Foucault uses "initiators" to describe authors like

Homer, Freud, and Marx, and obviously online discussion is not an identical comparison. Yet, the moves made by *The 100* fandom is like the initiator in that it shifted discourse to focus on import larger than the original work in reference. In highlighting the social injustice of Bury Your Gays, *The 100* fandom may represent a more modern initiator, establishing a larger conversation of how the trope had permeated into other shows and films. This sort of action differs from the simplicity of "cancel culture," and may instead be cited as a diversity initiative.

Instead of expecting creative changes based on want, like with *Misery*, the criticism of *Girls* and *The 100* was an expectation of change based on what was considered to misalign with reality. To see normative characters fixed in a setting that ignores, or at least doesn't showcase, a diverse reality is largely behind the diversity criticism for *Girls* and *The 100*. Essentially, as opposed to calling for creative change based on expectations of what is correct or appropriate, the diversity criticism aimed at *Girls* and *The 100* was more of a critique of social injustice, rather than an instance of cancel culture. Despite the negativity of the blanket term "cancel culture," this is not a reason to "disengage from Twitter and Facebook, as some commentators advocate, nor to give up on social media's potential for progressive action" (Ng, 2020, p. 622). As explored above, though audience pushback sometimes results in snap decisions, it can also inspire positive initiatives for diversity.

Diversity Initiatives Across Visual Media

Audience demands help sway the market and have opened diversity initiatives in various forms of media. A diversity initiative can be described as an attempt to acknowledge diversity gaps, while also promoting greater diversity.

In the wake of the murder of George Floyd in 2020, protests across the US have reignited conversations about race and representation. Television executives have taken notice, and have launched diversity initiatives. To start, in June 2020, Hackman Capital promised to invest 2 million dollars in diverse communities and media training for minorities. The funds will enable "work with local schools, production studios, and content creators to offer Black students and other underrepresented communities the resources to obtain mentorship, internships, scholarships, and the necessary education and onsite training to secure jobs in Los Angeles' largest industry" (Low, 2020, para. 5). Similarly, CBS has set a goal to hire more minority writers. The network hopes to expand to 40% diverse writers by the 2021-22 broadcast season, widening to 50% by the 2022-23 season (D'Zurilla, 2020, para. 1-2). Even actors are making strides to develop opportunities for underrepresented writes. Working with the organization Color of Change, Michael B. Jordan started the #ChangeHollywood initiative in July 2020, which "outlines a road map with concrete ways to invest in anti-racist content and authentic Black stories, invest in Black talent and reinvest police funds to support Black communities" (Ali, 2020, para. 4). Even as the drive for greater diversity in visual media expands and is quantified, the current gaps in representation are still acute. Social media plays a role in how knowledge of representation is changing, because "as the communications landscape gets denser, more complex, and more participatory, the networked population is gaining greater access to information, more opportunities to engage in public speech, and an enhanced ability to undertake collective action" (Shirky, 2011, p. 29). The combination of communication and dissemination of sentiment can drive change, like a diversity initiative. As Meadow Jones (2014) tells it, "Artists and authors commonly strive to bring the viewer or reader into a world made through description or expression" (p. 49). So it makes sense that those same audiences would voice their opinions to reach the authors in pursuit of new artistic development. Ultimately, collective action allowed *The 100* to sustain a longer lasting initiative, whereas the collective action for *Girls* was less focused and produced different results.

Though Dunham initially reacted to the lack of diversity by basically saying she "couldn't relate" and therefore "couldn't write to the experience," she nevertheless added a prominent black guest star at the start of Season 2. Given that filming took place only one month after the premiere, the audience and critical reception may have swayed whom *Girls* ultimately chose to cast. Either way, Dunham's decision to publicize this choice was certainly in part a response to the critique. Similar to *The 100*'s Clexa promos, which built up a diverse and strong character, the promos for Glover's addition hinted that he would be a series regular. After the Season 2 premiere, rumors hit that he was only a guest star. Glover's departure after two episodes initiates when the main character, Hannah, confronts him for critiquing an essay she's written, a conversation that devolves into racial awkwardness with Glover's character shooting back, "Oh, I'm a white girl and I moved to New York and I'm having a great time and I got a fixed gear bike and I'm gonna date a black guy and we're gonna go to a dangerous part of town" (S2x2 "I Get Ideas"). His critique of Hannah's white privilege reflects self-awareness on the part of *Girls*. Importantly, Jones (2014) talks about how "empathy may be best understood through a narrative context" (p. 54). With the storyline including Glover's minority character, both the audience and artist may have experienced empathetic moments for diverse characters and situations. However, in a 2018 interview with *The New Yorker*, Dunham revealed that Glover ad-libbed the lines. His interpretation of Hannah's white privilege was "one-hundred percent him. I emailed him later to say 'I hope you feel the part on *Girls* didn't tokenize you,' and his response […]: 'Let's not think back on mistakes we made in the past, let's just focus on what lies in front of us'" (as cited in Friend, 2018, para. 70). As time passed from the 2012 premiere, Dunham seemed more comfortable expressing self-awareness for the diversity issues pointed out by fans and critics. During an interview with *Nylon*, Dunham professes "I wouldn't do another show that starred four white girls" (as cited in Wappler, 2017, para. 8). In reflecting on other *Girls* controversies, the aforementioned claim of nepotism was perhaps linked to the lack of diversity. Nepotism is a sort of bias based on familial or friendly connections. There is an adage among writers to "write what you know," and Dunham acknowledges she "wrote" from "what [she] knew. Jones (2014) believes that to truly write "what you know," greater reflection is necessary, because "the ability to synthesize information directly relates to one's ability to combine the given experiences and create new knowledge through appropriation and reconfiguration" (p. 50). If normative white showrunners continue to influence television, then falling back on "what you know" becomes a trap of bias couched in artistic freedom, lacking reflection or synthesis of self and of others. Thus, until more diverse showrunners are included at all levels of television, writing from beyond what is familiar (i.e., casting diverse leads) is a healthy start in combating a lack of diversity. Such steps should be taken with consideration, so as to avoid tokenism or misappropriation, but in moving from "what is known," or rather, "what is comfortable," new perspectives and stronger stories may flourish.

As outlined in the first section, staff writers of *The 100* ultimately decided for Clarke's character to remain bisexual rather than play out the potential heteronormative relationship with the protagonist Bellamy. Many factors could have influenced this decision, but the audience and critical response may have played a part. Likewise, before the Clexa debacle, audiences were previously on edge from another LGBTQ character death on *Jane the Virgin* in February 2016. With March came Lexa's death on *The 100*, Kira's death on SyFy's *The Magicians*, and Denise's death on AMC's *The Walking Dead*. The culmination of queer character deaths via various television shows accentuated the Bury Your Gays trope in a very short time span.

Fictional characters are killed off in any genre, regardless of demographics or social standing. However, fans of *The 100* believed queer characters have been repeatedly discarded in film and television. As the Bury Your Gays trope outlines, this is in part because such characters are cast so infrequently (or commonly as antagonists), so their deaths are all the more noticeable and give rise to the notion that these characters are expendable. Autostraddle

published a list of 212 lesbian and bisexual characters that are killed off from 1976 through 2020 (Riese, 2016, online chart). Of all modern queer characters and relationships on television, not many end up surviving. Snarker (2012) reports that television has in large part allowed "happy endings" for "only around 18 couples, on some 16 TV shows" (para. 8). Like other fans, queer fans hope to see themselves represented in fictional characters. Erin B. Waggoner (2018) explains that,

"for LGBTQ fans, this is especially important in their own meaning-making as representation becomes an important aspect of this process. Essentially, there needs to be good representation to help people understand who they are and the challenges they can expect to face with regard to this particular identity." (p. 1880)

Audiences understandably want characters to identify with, to see themselves in, and to recognize. This representation is hard to come by for queer audiences, so instead of just being upset over the loss of a beloved character, fans were perhaps upset over the loss of a role-model. The limited or poor representations of queer characters in February and March 2016 led to an amplified response from fans. Such a response contributes meainigfully to participatory culture.

As noted above, certain hashtags trended on Twitter to call more attention to the diversity criticism, like #BuryYourGays. *The 100* showrunner Rothenberg's Twitter account lost 15,000 followers after the March 3, 2016 episode aired. Moreover, "Fans got the hashtag #LGBTFansDeserveBetter to trend for hours worldwide on Twitter the week after Lexa's death to coincide with the airing of *The 100*" (Snarker, 2012, para. 15). Viewers also created two websites to express thoughts and discontent with queer representation on media (lgbtfansdeservebetter.com and wedeservedbetter.com), and raised over 100,000 dollars to donate to the Trevor Project. The combination of social media blitzes and other forms of outreach effectively conveyed how powerful the audience discontent could be. As Snarker (2012) observes, "The intricate pas de deux that shows and fans play with each other is the new social capital that drives ratings" (para. 20). Showrunners that ignore critics and fanbases are ignoring the potential for media exposure, which in turn could impact the number of viewers.

Diversifying Show Catalogs: The CW and HBO

Perhaps intent on investing the "new social capital" for creative and economic gain, The CW and HBO have diversified representation in the last five years. In 2020, The CW features six shows with minorities billed as lead and six shows with minorities as co-stars (out of twenty-four offerings of original content). Two shows star white women as the lead, but are diverse in their characterizations: *In the Dark* is about a blind woman, while *Batwoman* features a queer lead as Batwoman (and the actress also identifies as lesbian). Also in 2020, HBO now features more than eight shows with minorities billed as the lead (out of over thirty-six offerings of original content), with minorities writers to boot. As diverse successors to *Girls*, shows like *Insecure*, *Euphoria*, and *Betty* reflect—respectively—on: relationships for women and teens working and dating in the city, overcoming drug use, and resisting sexism. This diversity of characterization could be framed as cancel culture phasing out white characters. However, it is better understood as a diversity initiative, which the following sections evaluate and distinguish.

Cancel Culture or Diversity Initiative?

As previously suggested, cancel culture is a sort of group mentality by which the actions or words shared in a public forum are deemed taboo, and therefore should be amended.

Sometimes, the desire to "amend" goes too far (in which the push and the allure hit an apex), and online forums demand similar taboo action or content be deleted or "cancelled." For *Girls* and *The 100*, the writers of this article believe that the audience and critical receptions cut across cancel culture *and* the larger diversity initiative influencing Hollywood and other media spaces. Cancel culture can have negative connotations; however, in the cases of *Girls* and *The 100*, what was being identified as taboo coincided with diversity initiatives and could be deemed positive, instead of being classified with the more toxic elements of cancel culture, which sometimes lead to the dismantling of a cause without reflection. Instead of intending to "silence" what was considered taboo, the criticism surrounding *Girls* and *The 100* aimed to *remedy* problematic character representations. With these remedies, there is an intent to "end" or "cancel" the predominate representation of white and heteronormative characters. In that way, the social media calls for change complicate negative connotations of cancel culture.

Even as cancel culture and diversity initiatives may overlap, they are not the same. Cancel culture is a consensus to end taboos, whereas diversity initiatives constitute an attempt to add new perspectives to an otherwise homogenous creative landscape. Even still, there are audiences who believe that diversity initiatives are a type of cancelling, or destruction, of creativity (Figure 5).

Figure 5. "Twitter user Patrick on Friends *and diversity." Screengrab from Twitter. 2020.*

Twitter user Patrick suggested the diversity criticism of *Friends*, may have contributed to fewer viewers. This view also leads to the perception of diversity initiatives as "forced creativity" and therefore diminishing their quality, much in the way *Misery*'s Sheldon was concerned about forced revisions from fan Wilkes as a weakening of the storyline. Yet, diverse casting in shows like *Scandal* and *Evil* have drawn large audiences. Clearly, a series can be both diverse and profitable, as noted by Weinstein (2014): "*Scandal*'s success as both a form of social TV and Black female-centered programming encouraged ABC to sign Rhimes to a lucrative four-year contract and schedule their entire Thursday-night prime-time programming around a block of Rhimes-produced programs" (para. 5). There is also the line of reasoning to just let characters and storylines appeal to viewers without needing to infuse diversity. Lisa Kudrow explains how in *Friends* "there was a guy whose wife discovered she was gay and pregnant, and they raised the child together? We had surrogacy too. It was, at the time, progressive" (as cited in Donnelly, 2020, para. 11). What this points to is that series like *Friends*, *Girls*, or *The 100* are not irredeemable for their audience-perceived issues of diversity. Rather, audiences have shifted their expectations of what character portrayals can mean on a personal level since *Friends* premiered in 1994, just as *Girls* and *The 100* manifest more recent societal trends. It's important to reassess where television content stands in the hopes of looking forward. Even if audiences admire television shows, they may still hope for new narratives that incorporate societal changes in a meaningful way.

Diversity initiatives may also be perceived as unnecessary because all-black casts in similar shows promote a "separate but equal" ideal. As seen in Figure 6, Twitter-user Jabber questions why minority-centric shows are not questioned for their lack of diversity.

Figure 6. "Twitter user Jabber on diversity critiques." Screengrab from Twitter. 2020.

In fact, such analogy betrays a deceptively false equivalence, as minority-centric shows are so rare compared with the proliferation of white, heteronormative spaces. White showrunners may be given preference (for nepotism or other privlege), which excludes minorities from participation, even if all-black casts are promoted in shows like *Sanford and Sons*, *Good Times*, or more recently *black-ish*. Overall, though cancel culture and diversity initiatives share similarities, diversity more aligns with market sway (audience interest and trends) that many writers and distributors already account for and respond to.

Conclusion

Overall, our premise was to detail audience receptions for *Girls* and *The 100* and analyze how they affected each show's production. The writers of this article believe that participatory culture reflects established online practices and may be used to sustain media projects, end them, or to invite revision and the production of new media content. While some use pejorative terms like "cancel culture," the term "diversity initiative" might be more appropriate and aptly describes viewer critiques of *Girls* and *The 100*. Creativity and authorship are *always* about reception and pleasing the audience; in a networked media age, the audience simply has more immediate and wide-reaching means to make their perspectives heard. The two cases of *Girls* and *The 100* diversified production in response to viewer criticisms. Considered separately, the more substantive change occurred with *The 100*, perhaps because writers weighed the pushback from fans in tandem with market concerns, since cancellation is of greater concern for basic cable networks like The CW. Even so, this confluence does not negate the strength of audience reception. Instead, it perhaps underscores how network series are at the mercy of the market, unlike series on premium channels like HBO that can respond in relatively minor ways (such as with tokenism). This article also explored how diversity in television has a role to play in those very market concerns, and that writing from "what you know" can contribute to a lack of diversity if showrunners and writers are not representatively diverse. While tradition, or the familiar, is comforting, it can also perpetuate harmful practice. *Girls* is a high-profile example demonstrating how the temporary addition of "diverse" characters may not be the ultimate answer to television's lack of diversity, especially for guest-starring roles, which seems to diminish the cultures and criticisms (as a means of placating rather than consideration), whereas the sustained plot response from *The 100* showrunners with Clexa impactfully addresses a harmful trope. In the end, both series exemplify how diversifying characterization may prove to be a temporary fix so long as diverse writers and producers are not given more opportunities to co-create media.

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