

August 2019

Bi the Wayside?: Shifts in Bisexual Representations in Teen Television

Analise Elle Pruni
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.uwm.edu/etd>



Part of the [Journalism Studies Commons](#), and the [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Pruni, Analise Elle, "Bi the Wayside?: Shifts in Bisexual Representations in Teen Television" (2019). *Theses and Dissertations*. 2582.

<https://dc.uwm.edu/etd/2582>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by UWM Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of UWM Digital Commons. For more information, please contact open-access@uwm.edu.

BI THE WAYSIDE?: SHIFTS IN BISEXUAL REPRESENTATIONS IN TEEN TELEVISION

by

Analise Pruni

A Thesis Submitted in

Partial Fulfilment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in Media Studies

at

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

August 2019

ABSTRACT

BI THE WAYSIDE?: SHIFTS IN BISEXUAL REPRESENTATIONS IN TEEN TELEVISION

by

Analise Pruni

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2019
Under the Supervision of Professor Elana Levine

Television can be a reflection of the values we have as a society and its representations can have an impact on the way people, especially youth, shape their identities. This examination of teen-oriented television shows on the CW network looks at bisexual and queer representations and compares them with previous representations. I ground this essay in the youth-oriented television context, the progression of queer television representations, and ideas about media representation in a post-gay era. My assessment of the CW's bisexual protagonist Clarke Griffin in *The 100* and several sexually fluid characters in *Legacies* help show how the network has evolved in branding itself around diversity of representation, and aiming their content at a socially-liberal target audience. There are several tropes that the network falls into, particularly the death of Lexa in *The 100* that sparked a queer/ally social movement characterized by the hashtag #LexaDeservedBetter; these representations have helped inform the TV industry about the stakes of minority representation. My textual analyses find that the queer characters I examine avoid stereotypical coming out narratives and labels of sexual identity, in what I argue is a progressive form of representation. Ultimately, I argue that a larger

quantity of queer characters on the CW has resulted in more diverse representations of teen/queer identity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE	
Abstract	ii	
List of Figures	v	
CHAPTER		
I. INTRODUCTION	1	
Literature Review	6	
Chapter Breakdown	25	
II. AMBASSADOR FOR BISEXUAL REPRESENTATION: <i>THE 100'S CLARKE GRIFFIN</i> 27		
Bisexual Confusion and “Failed” Heterosexuality	29	
Whiteness, Lesbian Appearances, and Race.....	33	
Narrative Codes and Symbols of Queer Content	37	
Post-gay Television: Coming Out, Bisexual Identification and Erasure	41	
Queer Intimacy: Authenticity and Dead Lesbians.....	45	
#LexaDeservedBetter “LGBT Fans Deserved Better”	48	
III. <i>LEGACIES</i> IS OPEN TO ALL		59
The Salvatore Boarding School for the Young and Gifted: Supernatural as a Place for Queer.....	60	
Josie Saltzman and Penelope Park: Non-Binary Sexuality and the Bisexual Temptress..	64	
Werewolves, Witches, Vampires, and Tribreds: Species as a Metaphor for Inclusivity..	69	
Showrunners, Target Audiences, and Diversity	72	
Value of Live Viewing vs. Streaming	77	
#CWOpenToAll	81	
IV. REASONS TO CELEBRATE IN THE POST-GAY TELEVISION ERA		89
BIBLIOGRAPHY		99

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Tweets using the hashtag #LexaDeservedBetter.....53

Figure 2. #LexaDeservedBetter Tweet continued53

Figure 3. *Legacies* season 1 Nielsen ratings.....78

Figure 4. *Legacies* compared to other Thursday 9 p.m. slot Nielsen ratings78

Chapter One: Introduction

Studying representations in television has increasingly become an important area of media studies where ideas about identity, morality, and sexuality, including that in teen-targeted content, can be explored. As a teen, I was addicted to shows like the WB's *Smallville* (2001-2011) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), which over the years secured my loyal fandom to CW shows. However, as I began to question my own sexuality, I found that representations of queer identity in the media tended to be either lacking or stereotypical. In this thesis, the term "queer" is used to describe non-heterosexual or non-cisgender identities, as well as queer in the broader sense of norm-breaking.¹ Some scholars have emphasized the particular importance of media representations for those negotiating the "teen condition," or testing their agency and the boundaries of their adolescence.² In my late teens and early 20s, I sought out programs in search of more open ideas about sexuality and was excited to find that newer CW shows such as *Arrow* (2012-) and *The 100* (2014-) offered what I thought were more progressive representations of queer identity, and specifically of bisexuality. When Clarke Griffin on *The 100* (2014-) went from male love interest Finn Collins to a same-sex relationship with Lexa, it seemed like bisexuality was finally getting some positive screen time. I know am not alone in seeking out such diversity in my youth-oriented television.

Like many young adults, the ideas about sexuality that I found on television had an impact on the way I viewed and shaped my own identity. Now I also understand that just as identities can be shaped by television, so too are television's narratives shaped by and

¹ Annemarie Navar-Gill and Mel Stanfill, "We Shouldn't Have to Trend to Make You Listen": Queer Fan Hashtag Campaigns as Production Interventions." *Journal of Film and Video* 70, no. 3-4 (2018): 88.

² Sherri Jean Katz, "Degrassi Then and Now: Teens, Authenticity and the Media." In *Growing Up Degrassi: Television, Identity and Youth Cultures*, ed. by Michele Beyers. (Toronto, Ontario: Sumach Press, 2005), 88.

reflective of real-world, socially constructed ideas about sexual identity, gender, and race. The significance of the relationship between representation and practices of identity formation raises the question of how a growing *quantity* of queer representations may resonate in relation to real-world experiences. In my own youth, the narratives I familiarized myself with were filled with stereotypes that defined sexuality in heteronormative terms and suggested that those I loved would probably not be okay with who I was. Heteronormativity can be described as “the attitude that heterosexuality is the only normal and natural expression of sexuality,” or the “ways in which heterosexual privilege is woven into the fabric of social life, pervasively and insidiously ordering every day existence.”³ In such representations, I was told that coming out was an act steeped in conflict and controversy.

In recent years, we have seen changes in LGBTQ representation in television, leading not only to more representation, but also to less stereotypical narratives and characters that encompass a broader swath of the LGBTQ community. Organizations like the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), which started in 1985, have lobbied for and essentially graded the television industry on this progression. According to GLAAD’s 2017-2018 annual report on LGBTQ inclusion, of the five major primetime broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, FOX, the CW, and NBC), the CW leads every other network with 11 percent of its series regulars counted as LGBTQ.⁴ Media scholar Melanie Kohlen has analyzed the evolution of queer representation in accordance with this visibility: “This story of progress sketches the development of queer media visibility from absence to marginalization to integration- in other words- it is a classic

³ "Heteronormative." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/heteronormative>. Stevi Jackson, "Gender, sexuality, and heterosexuality: the complexity and limits of heteronormativity," *Feminist Theory*, 7, no 1. (2006): 108.

⁴ "Where We Are on TV 17'-18' GLAAD's Annual Report on LGBTQ Inclusion," (Los Angeles, CA: GLAAD, 2017), 7.

coming out story.”⁵ However, how well do “classic coming out” stories reflect a diverse range of queer narratives? As media content that can be read as queer has slowly become integrated into TV texts over the last 70 years or so, notable moments and shows such as Ellen DeGeneres’ 1997 television coming out episode, or Showtime’s lesbian-centered drama *The L Word* (2004-2009) are indicative of this integration. Themes within these representations have covered many depictions, from occult or supernatural fixations within queer identity, coming out stories, and AIDS narratives to, more recently, themes of marriage equality, race, and other representational intersections of queer identity. Although there is no denying the proliferation of representations of queerness in contemporary television, several scholars debate the implications and meaning of a “post-gay” era where the depictions of “progressive” queer narratives are changing.⁶

In the post-gay era, gay and lesbian identities that fit neatly into heteronormative societal expectations are some of the most frequently explored versions of non-straight sexuality. However, as more contemporary shows like Freeform’s *The Fosters* (2013-2018) and ABC’s *Modern Family* (2009-2018) have begun to address broader issues such as racial diversity and marriage equality in the queer community, they are also chipping away at the “BTQ” iceberg of queer representations and other identities that may be on the fringe of the queer community. In the 2010s, bisexual, transgendered, and other facets of queer identity are

⁵ Melanie Kohnen, *Queer Representation, Visibility, and Race in American Film and Television* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 16.

⁶ Julia Himberg, *The New Gay For Pay* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), 36. Amin Ghaziani. "Post-Gay Collective Identity Construction." *Social Problems* 58, no. 1 (February 1, 2011): 100. Eve Ng. "A "Post-Gay" Era? Media Gaystreaming, Homonormativity, and the Politics of LGBT Integration." *Communication, Culture & Critique* (May 10, 2013): 274.

increasingly being broached on American television. In this thesis, I combine my interests in teen television and queer representation to examine representations of bisexuality on the CW to see how they relate to past queer representations. This is important to consider because when societal stereotypes about sexual identity are reflected within media directed toward teenagers, they may affect the ways in which teens view themselves.

The term “post-gay” has been used as a common scholarly descriptor for contemporary queer television representation. Post-gay era television may initially assume that positive and progressive queer representations have been achieved in a way that they need not be studied further or discussed, and activism is no longer necessary. Scholars such as Julia Himberg and Eve Ng debate ideas about post-gay television representation and production mentalities wherein representations of queer sexual identities are becoming more normalized and merit different types of discussion as a result. The term may be used as a critique of the assumption that queer representations have been integrated so progressively and diversely as to deserve no further discussion, as Ng states.⁷ Or, as Himberg notes, the post-gay label may be used as a hopeful nod toward the progress television has made.⁸ I use this concept in my thesis to examine contemporary CW shows as a key site for debating the question of post-gay TV representation. What are the characteristics and trends of post-gay representation in teen TV and how does bisexuality fit in? Has the “post-gay” era resulted in a broader diversity of queer representation or has it limited the representations available?

⁷ Ng, 271.

⁸ Himberg, 45.

To explore these questions, my thesis combines textual analyses of queer representations of several characters on the CW with analyses of underlying television industry and production factors. My main cases are the bisexual representations of character Clarke Griffin in *The 100* (2014-) and the fluctuating relationship between Josie Saltzman and ex-girlfriend Penelope Park on *Legacies* (2018-), wherein both characters have revolving doors of male and female partners. I examine how certain narrative coding can be read as symbols of queer content. My thesis also explores the audience response to the controversial “dead lesbian” narrative trope that occurred in *The 100*, when Lexa was killed directly after she and Clarke were intimate for the first time. The scene created a fan and internet backlash, thus my research also considers whether audience responses influence industry and production decisions when it comes to queer TV representations. I also explore how other dimensions of the current television industry context, such as the involvement of openly gay showrunners such as the CW’s Greg Berlanti, may play a part in the CW’s production practices. I apply these questions in order to consider what types of queer narrative models the writers and producers of *Legacies* and *The 100* have used in telling stories of bisexual characters. Do they differ from previous queer representations? Finally, I look at the CW’s 2018 diversity campaign, “CW Open To All,” to see how the industry’s marketing strategy helps shape the representations in the shows.

Through exploring these questions, I argue that queer representations on the CW employ a more diverse and progressive meaning of sexual identity than previously seen in most TV representations. In particular, I see the CW’s representations as examples of a post-gay television era that turns away from defining sexual identity in heteronormative terms. In my

analysis of several such representations, such as the relationship between *The 100*'s Clarke and Lexa, I examine the ways that the coming out narrative disappears in favor of the display of sexual fluidity between different love interests. In some instances, the narratives almost aggressively announce their characters' non-binary identities, and do not presume to need to explain their queer sensibilities in a stereotypical fashion to a non-comprehending heterosexual audience. I assert that this is due to the CW's conception of its audience as socially liberal, urban-minded professionals or "slumpies" as media scholar Ron Becker calls them, and/or as teens-to-young-adults sympathetic to progressive queer culture.⁹ I examine what motivates these representations, considering cultural explanations as well as the business practices of the media industries.

Literature Review

There are three relevant sections of literature that pertain to my research on bisexual representations in the media. The first section examines the intersections of race, gender, identity, and sexuality found in teen television representations. The second section highlights important ideas about the progression of queer television and some of its defining attributes. Finally, I look at debates about a "post-gay" mentality in television production.

⁹ Ron Becker, *Gay TV and Straight America* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, London: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 95.

Teen TV

The CW teen-niche network was formed in 2006 when the WB and UPN merged their resources to tackle the “teen” audience together.¹⁰ Their motto now boldly states, “Dare to Defy.” This progression of teen content, albeit with a few stereotypical narratives, harkens to increasingly progressive liberal ideas outlined in this section, and helps to position CW shows *The 100* and *Legacies* as important media texts to examine as places where young people begin to form ideas of self and identity.

Before there were any teen-centric networks, TV broadcasts of the original major three networks, ABC, NBC, and CBS, historically sought the widest, most general audiences that would secure the broadest range of advertisers.¹¹ Since the 1970s, and into the 1980s with the addition of cable channels, narrowcasting and more niche marketing became a new strategy.¹² By the early 1990s, Warner Brothers’ WB and Paramount’s UPN networks recognized that the number of teenagers had increased and, consequently, advertisers began to target 12-to-24-year-olds to secure their brand identities with audiences at an early age.¹³ Scholar Valerie Wee notes that, “The term ‘teen’ had less to do now with age and more to do with a lifestyle and shared cultural tastes and interests.”¹⁴ By the end of the 1999-2000 season, the WB was the acknowledged teen television-oriented network and had consolidated its brand with shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Dawson’s Creek* (1998-2003), and *Roswell* (1999-2002). These hour-

¹⁰ Valerie Wee, “Teen Television and the WB Network,” In *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*, eds. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2008), 57.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

long drama/soap format shows shared a distinct range of characteristics that featured young and attractive cast members that faced teen and coming of age issues such as self-destructive behavior with drugs and alcohol, teen sex, and negotiating sexual identity.¹⁵

Scholars have repeatedly attested that television representations and the media driven conversations that revolve around them are a place for teenagers and young adults to negotiate ideas about themselves in a fairly low-stakes environment.¹⁶ Teen networks, such as The N, showed a trend toward liberal humanism and increasingly offered shows with diverse casts and interpretations to allow for the potential validation of people's thoughts and opinions. Niche networks, especially teen-oriented ones, represent "liminalities" or "spaces in between or on the margins of accepted discourse and societal norms," and are arguably a synonym for being "teenaged" in Western Culture.¹⁷ From this standpoint, the shows that I will be examining already lend themselves to challenging societal norms. In all of the *Degrassi* series, for example, issues about race, gender, politics and sexuality are constantly being debated and ideas about "authenticity" are posited that may be less than "mainstream." The shows' integration of "real life" teen narratives may have helped set a precedent for American television networks such as The N or the CW to take some of the same cues. Sharon Marie Ross notes that U.S. television often resolved "intense" teen issues in the course of one episode, yet when Stephanie Williams was casting for Canadian Television's *Degrassi: The Next Generation*,

¹⁵ Ibid, 48.

¹⁶ Caralyn Bolte, "Normal is the Watchword": Exiling Cultural Anxieties and Redefining Desire from the Margins." In *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*, eds. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2008), 111. Katz, 87. Mary Celeste Kearney, "The Changing Face of Teen Television, or why we all Love Buffy." In *Undead TV: Essays on Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, eds. Elana Levine and Lisa Parks (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 31.

¹⁷ Barbara Brickman, "The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Fan: Consumption and Queer Inspiration in *Six Feet Under*." In *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*, ed. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2008), 157.

she was encouraged by the network to “push the envelope” surrounding teen issues, and also cast diverse and authentic actors that more closely resembled the age and physicality of the regular teens they were meant to represent.¹⁸ The show’s slogan “Degrassi... it goes there!” demonstrated its social relevancy, diversity, and new media literacy. In *Growing Up Degrassi: Television, Identity and Youth Cultures*, the scope of the series’ appeal to teenagers is examined. Authenticity is defined there as “the quality of perceived believability or realness that makes television viewers buy-in on a fundamental level to what is happening on screen – even though they know it is fiction.”¹⁹ Ideas about authenticity are helpful in my assessments of the contemporary CW in that audience members may respond differently to teen-and-queer representations that they deem “less” or not authentic.

Recurring teen issues of gender, race, class, sex, and sexual identity have been examined in series such as the WB’s *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and the CW’s *Gossip Girl* (2007-2012) and *One Tree Hill* (WB 2003- spring 2006 and CW fall-2006- 2012). Elke Van Damme draws arguments from the cultural studies’ frameworks of scholars like Stuart Hall and David Buckingham showing that representations on television of gender and sexuality are socially constructed, and while they do not reflect reality 100 percent accurately, they offer a space in which people can negotiate meanings about their identities. Van Damme also posits that sex is more abundant on teen television than ever before. She questions whether the time hasn’t come to “reconsider sexual license as part of youth-as-fun” as a conventional television

¹⁸ Sharon Marie Ross, "Defining Teen Culture: The N Network." In *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*, eds. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2008), 62-63.

¹⁹ Katz, 77.

practice, rather than a “youth-as-trouble,” perspective.²⁰ Sexual activity and agency amongst teenagers are becoming more acceptable in the 21st Century and she argues that the representations on television should reflect that. As teen sexual agency on television is becoming more apparent, my thesis considers how that is portrayed in queer narratives as well.

Queer TV: Tropes, Whiteness, and the Supernatural

The history of queer television representations depends on what one can consider “queer” content. As early as the mid-1960s, the use of the supernatural as a space to denote queer content when “true” representations were lacking appeared in television shows such as ABC’s *Dark Shadows* (1966-1971) and later in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, which aired between 1997-2001 on the WB and from 2002-2003 on UPN. This progression of queer television helps define the frameworks upon which some more contemporary queer and teen narratives are modeled. It illuminates what aspects of sexual identity have been represented, in what ways, and allows me to compare consequent representations in *The 100* and *Legacies* to past representations.

Andrew Owens’ argument examines the queer potentiality of the supernatural, (oc)cult, and queer counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s. *Dark Shadows* aired under the operating guide of the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), which meant opportunities for televised queerness were “somewhat limited.”²¹ Other scholars have noted the queer appeal of

²⁰ Elke Van Damme, "Gender and Sexual Scripts in Popular US Teen Series: A Study on the Gendered Discourses in *One Tree Hill* and *Gossip Girl*." *Catalan Journal of Communication and Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (June 1, 2010): 81.

²¹ Andrew Owens, "Coming Out of the Coffin," *Television and New Media* 17, no. 4 (May 2016): 362.

the supernatural form in its ability to relate the plights of the “Others,” or even youth as other.²² Vampires, witches, and lycanthropes have been used as metaphors for the liminal spaces they occupy in society along with the queer community. The *Washington Post*’s Marilyn Goldstein compared occultism in the late 1960s and 1970s as “coming out of the closet.”²³ In a later period, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* similarly presented “youth and race as metaphorically related identities, especially as race refers to human and non-human and youth refers to a deviant other.”²⁴ Just by the mere fact that these supernatural identities are “fictional,” television creates a conceptual space for teens and others who are forming identities to enter the world of “deviant” or “other” identities that do not conform to dominant social paradigms. The CW has embraced this strategy in *Legacies*’ world of vampires, werewolves, and witches; the program is set in a school for the young and supernaturally gifted. The teen condition and occult are quite literally paired in this association. *The 100*’s post-apocalyptic flair provides similar fantastical situations where non-conformities, sci-fi, and teenagers collide.

Owens also references the young Americans that were critical of white, middle-class-suburban values, and were experimenting with mysticism, drugs, and erotic alterity as the target audience for these type of occult shows; this may have been one of the first instances where this demographic was defined.²⁵ He notes the “big three” networks’ turn from numbers

²² Cynthia Fuchs, “Did Anyone Ever Explain to you What ‘Secret Identity’ Means?’: Race and Displacement in *Buffy* and *Dark Angel*.” In *Undead TV: Essays on Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, eds. Elana Levine and Lisa Parks (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 98. Allison McCracken, “At Stake: Angel’s Body, Fantasy Masculinity, and Queer Desire in Teen Television.” In *Undead TV: Essays on Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, eds. Elana Levine and Lisa Parks (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 117.

²³ Marilyn Goldstein, “Strange Things Are Happening in the Occult.” *The Washington Post*, July 25, 1971. As cited in Owens, 353.

²⁴ Fuchs, 100.

²⁵ Owens, 352.

to demographics (especially ABC). This demographic seems very similar to the “slumpys” that Ron Becker identified in the 1990s, or socially liberal, urban minded professionals and young people.²⁶ Owens, however, specifically uses the soap genre to reiterate the acts of decoding that may be done by the queer community or slump-like demographic. Owens draws from Robert Allen’s assertion that the soap opera represents “over-coded” narratives and form where, “characters, events, situations, and relationships are invested with signifying possibilities greatly in excess of those necessary to their narrative functions.”²⁷ This soap opera-style serves a similar function in more contemporary queer readings of shows leading up to those discussed in this thesis, where initial perceived absences of queer content may be negotiated “between the lines.” *The 100* and more so *Legacies* boast clear representations of queer identity but where they may be lacking, their narratives are coded and overly-dramatized with a very teen TV-like propensity. Shows such as *Dark Shadows* helped develop the cult-like fandoms, later noted as well with *Buffy* fans, which draw marginalized audiences to the types of environments where they can negotiate their real lives within the realm of fiction.

Over the years, these dedicated fans have recognized several queer narrative television tropes and stereotypes that they wish the industry would stay away from. Don Tresca identifies problematic tropes in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* while simultaneously recognizing the significance of the relationship between Willow and Tara, the longest lasting and most

²⁶ Becker, 81.

²⁷ Robert C. Allen, *Speaking of Soap Operas*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), as cited in Owens, 360.

realistically depicted (at the time) lesbian couple in network television.²⁸ Producer Joss Whedon fell into one of the worst tropes, coined “bury your gays” or “dead lesbian,” by killing off Tara immediately after the couple had their first real display of on-screen intimacy and sex. This same trope caused a very publicly reactive social media campaign against the showrunners of *The 100* after the character Lexa was killed off immediately after she and Clarke Griffin’s experienced their first (and only) on-screen sexual intimacy in the 2014 season episode “Thirteen.” I will analyze this representation and the reactive responses to it as a way of exploring how queer representations have or have not changed since these tropes were initially identified.

Several scholars have examined the ways in which queer fan audiences, especially those surrounding *The 100*, have advocated against queer narrative tropes using social media directed at the production industry. The hashtag movement #LexaDeservedBetter shows that, “Queer fan hashtag campaigns are strategic interventions meant to alter both representational and structural television production by leveraging the importance of audience feedback in a connected viewing environment.”²⁹ Show writers constructed the relationship in a way that encouraged a “social contract” between fans and producers and when that contract was “broken” upon Lexa’s death, many felt prey to the trope of gay-or-queerbaiting and organized under the social movement LGBT Fans Deserve Better.³⁰ The fans’ active rebuke of the industry

²⁸ Don Tresca, “Skeletons in the Closet: The Contradictory Views of the Queer in the Works of Joss Whedon,” In *Queer TV in the 21st Century: Essays on Broadcasting from Taboo to Acceptance*, ed. Kylo Patrick R. Hart (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2016), 26.

²⁹ Navar-Gill, Stanfill, 85.

³⁰ Mar Guerrero-Pico, Maria-Jose Estables and Rafael Ventura. “Killing Off Lexa: ‘Dead Lesbian Syndrome’ and Intra-fandom Management of Toxic Fan Practices in an Online Queer Community.” *Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*. 15, no. 1 (May 2018): 312-13.

after the incident outlined the specific responsibilities television has when engaging with marginalized audiences.³¹ Although the queer representation ended in fans' disappointment, Clarke's transition from male-love interest Finn to female Lexa takes a progressive step toward representing bisexuality neither as confusion nor as centered around a "coming out" narrative. This representation helps this thesis explore narrative models for how bisexuality is portrayed. By specifically and more progressively portraying bisexuality, my thesis argues that the CW may be steering away from more traditional or stereotypical representations of queer identity. These representations and the responses to them will be an important part in my assessment of the relationship between television producers, queer narratives, and marginalized audiences.

Representations of bisexuality appeared much earlier in film than they did in television. Maria San Filippo details how bisexuality first emerged from sexploitation films in the 1960s where they used the "titillation of female bisexual desire as a primary narrative conceit."³² Bisexuality in film and television seems to have always had a much different social and political connotation than the categories of gay and lesbian. Whereas gay and lesbian content has been linked and indicative of broader social narratives, bisexuality has taken much longer to afford the same motives and lens. San Filippo defines bisexual as referring "to a biological duality of male and female traits,"³³ but then details how bisexuality in film has been defined first by sexploitation and then transposed onto the identities of femme fatales, "rich bitches," and temptress vampires that inspired a "golden age" of female vampire films in the 1960s and

³¹ Myles McNutt, "The 100" and the Social Contract of Social TV." *Transformative Works and Cultures* (March 15, 2018): 2-3.

³² Maria San Filippo, *The B Word: Bisexuality in Contemporary Film and TV* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), 95.

³³ *Ibid.*, 101

1970s. Again we see the use of the supernatural for queer identity, however with the bisexual vampire that representation becomes more sinister. San Filippo notes that these character types possess “appetites for which the limiting binary of monosexuality does not suffice,” and this independent (supernatural) woman disrupts the foundations of a hetero-patriarchal capitalistic society and nuclear family.³⁴

In more contemporary readings of bisexuality, Michaela D.E. Meyer analyzes the bisexual representation of Anna Taggaro on the WB’s *One Tree Hill*. She notes that scholars have found that television directed toward adults “often filters non-heterosexual identities through the lens of heterosexual norms to the point that sexuality is removed from the television text.”³⁵ However, television directed toward teens and young adults “is often more liberal in its representation of queer identities, often depicting intimate contact between same sex couples.”³⁶ She notes that although the WB is constantly tackling teen sexuality and identity, bisexuality is still often thought of as an in-between stage while passing from heterosexuality to homosexuality and bisexual characters and people are not fully understood or accepted by either group. Paradigms of monosexism and homonormativity dominate. On *One Tree Hill*, Anna’s attraction moves from male character Lucas to female Peyton, with the very stereotypical and dramatic “coming out narrative” that has often stylized queer sexuality (especially in young people) on television. However, as CW shows have progressed, queer narratives such as the ones I examine in *Legacies* are becoming more direct in distinguishing

³⁴ Ibid, 99, 115.

³⁵ Michaela D.E. Meyer, "I'm Just Trying to Find My Way like Most Kids": Bisexuality, Adolescence, and the Drama of *One Tree Hill*." *Sexuality and Culture* 13, no. 4 (July 29, 2009): 238.

³⁶ Meyer, 239.

bisexuality from other queer identities. Representations also engage in more on-screen intimacy than what Meyer had noted as non-heterosexual sexuality's tendency to be completely removed from television texts, again helping my research to distinguish the recent practices of CW series.

Joshua Gamson's assessment of bisexuality in media representation notes that, "In the case of bisexuals, the immediate "problem" is that they do not fit the mold of identifying as one of the two fixed and recognizable categories."³⁷ Those recognizable categories or values of homonormativity promote "bisexual erasure" and "monosexism" that persist in current representations. Sarah Corey cites Flander, Dobinson, and Logie in their definition of monosexism as "society's belief that orientations such as heterosexuality or homosexuality- in which a person is attracted to a single gender- are more legitimate than plurisexual identities."³⁸ Similarly, Hannah Johnson argues that bisexual erasure in media and in everyday life can lead to higher levels of stress or mental illness for those who identify as bisexual. Bisexuality is often pitted negatively against heterosexuality and homosexuality as a passing phase, sexual confusion, or promiscuity. She notes that even some medical providers were reluctant to validate bisexuality as an identity and attributed their "confusion" to a symptom or a cause of their mental health issues.³⁹ In comparing bisexual representations in ABC's *Grey's Anatomy* (2005-), Canadian cable's *Lost Girl* (2010-2015), and streaming service Netflix's *Orange is the New Black* (2013-), Corey argues that bisexual erasure is found in all of these

³⁷ Himberg, 92.

³⁸ Sarah Corey, "All Bi Myself: Analyzing Television's Presentation of Female Bisexuality." *Journal of Bisexuality* 17, no. 2 (April 13, 2017): 191

³⁹ Hannah J. Johnson, "Bisexuality, Mental Health, and Media Representation." *Journal of Bisexuality* 5, no. 3 (May 9, 2016): 380

narratives in their refusal to use and claim the term bisexual (she notes *Grey's Anatomy* is slightly more successful in this regard). "Naming a sexual identity gives the identity credibility. Credibility and validity are important when discussing minority groups."⁴⁰ Accepting "the B word" is one of the next steps for scholars assessing contemporary queer television. By examining progressive bisexual representations that legitimize bisexuality on television, my project seeks to show a shift toward representations of bisexual identity as having the same credibility that other represented queer identities, such as gay and lesbian, afford.

There can be no assessment of queer television without the inclusion of the "Gay 90s." The late 1980s through the 1990s' battle to capture the attention and advertising dollars of this new potential young and upscale audience of "slumpys," or socially liberal, urban-minded professionals, brings Becker's argument into the 1990s plethora of gay-themed characters and narratives.⁴¹ Kohnen adds to this era by examining the "screening" of the closet as a metaphor for screening sexual identity through race and other factors, and gives credit to the 1990s for increased queer visibility, although she also critiques the "clear separation of gay culture and straight America."⁴² Both Kohnen and Becker focus on the types of gay representations that were being presented and that, by favoring one particular or stereotyped image of homosexual visibility, kept other possibilities "screened" from view. The constant whitewashing of queer identity is noted by both Kohnen and scholar Julia Himberg.

Different shows such as *Roseanne* (ABC 1988-1997) and *Seinfeld* (NBC 1989-1998) boldly explored LGBT narratives and sometimes episodes or narratives became iconic in industry lore

⁴⁰ Corey, 197.

⁴¹ Becker, 23

⁴² Kohnen, 22.

and showed that advertisers were becoming less timid about airing during “controversial” material. In the 1997-98 season, Becker noted that networks were “downplaying rather than exploiting gay content,” as a significant change in promotional strategies.⁴³ Networks began to use gay material as less of a ratings gimmick and more of an integrated narrative as television evolved into the new millennium. In Himberg’s assessment of the early 2000s, she argues that the “lesbian chic” representations that were proliferated through shows such as Showtime’s *The L Word* were representative of networks’ branding strategies of “high-quality” and racy television centered around consumerism and the male gaze.⁴⁴ Kohnen notes that newer shows such as Freeform’s *The Fosters* or Netflix’s *Orange is the New Black* offer a more progressive landscape to examine queer television in what scholars debate as a “post-gay” era. “While the filtering mechanisms of the closet-as-screen became increasingly refined during the late 1990s and early 2000s, the post-2010 filter seems more porous, as if it has switched to a coarser grain that allows for a greater mix of queer visibilities in the media.”⁴⁵

“Post-Gay” Ideologies

Ideas about collective identity and representations in a “post-gay” television era imply that traditional narratives may no longer reflect what contemporary queer identities look like. Amin Ghaziani cites *Out* magazine editor James Collard’s use of the term post-gay in his 1998 claim posted in *The New York Times*: “We should no longer define ourselves solely in terms of our sexuality- even if our opponents do. Post-gay isn’t ‘un-gay.’ It’s about taking a critical look

⁴³ Becker, 174.

⁴⁴ Himberg, 36

⁴⁵ Kohnen, 165.

at gay life and no longer thinking solely in terms of the struggle.”⁴⁶ Eve Ng notes this decided “de-emphasis on the struggle of being queer,” in some television representations. The idea that “coming out” may no longer be the most important narrative for LGBT representation on screen is a prevalent point of debate. This is not to say that this is not an important representation, but that there are many other stories to explore. Himberg’s assessment of industry professionals and other scholars notes that a range of these individuals “framed this post-gay rhetoric as a popular and progressive form of representations, one that accurately reflects peoples’ lived experiences in early 21st Century America.”⁴⁷ She interviewed openly lesbian Meredith Kadlec, the senior vice president of original programming at Here Media, who noted, “I’m not opposed to coming out stories, I would say that I’m not doing them because I feel like there’s so much other stuff to be done...It’s not enough for me to be like, ‘Now I know I’m gay.’”⁴⁸ Another interview said that adding lesbian or gay characters to a narrative for the sake of diversity is “sort of a ten-years-ago sensibility.”⁴⁹ Having openly queer workers writing queer media narratives helps create more diverse representations of lived queer experience. Himberg notes that “diverse” representations on television are rated by the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation or GLAAD and, in turn, networks hope to use these “diverse” ratings to secure a broader audience, while also being caught up in activist movements.⁵⁰ Amin Ghaziani expands on ideas about diversity and argues that, “In a post-gay era, activists

⁴⁶ James Collard, “Leaving the Gay Ghetto.” *Newsweek*, August 17, 1998. As cited in Ghaziani, 99.

⁴⁷ Himberg, 45.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 44.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 45.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 79.

construct collective identity using an inclusive, distinction-muting logic of ‘us *and* them’.⁵¹ He makes a distinction between this new ideology that encourages full assimilation of LGBTQ culture into heterosexual narratives, emphasizing similarities of experience, and more traditional ways of differentiating queer and hetero identities. The contradictory “us vs. them” narrative is what had previously been used to define queer representations on the grounds of diversification, yet assimilation or post-gay mentalities could also be considered an erasure of those identities. Nonetheless, he argues that post-gay mentalities tend toward inclusiveness and encompass a larger range of queer identities.

Ng critiques the notion of the post-gay era as one in which television really is encompassing a broader range of queer identities. She assesses MTV’s 2005 cable channel Logo that was initially meant to be narrating explicitly lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender content. The network called this strategy “gaystreaming,” however Logo moved away from serving a diverse LGBT viewership in favor of a broader demographic, such as heterosexual women and again Becker’s prized “slumpys.”⁵² Logo, like other broadcast networks, relies on advertising and does not wish to alienate its mainstream audiences. She notes Ghaziani’s argument about assimilation versus diversification and posits that we still need strictly queer representations to not marginalize the outer edges of the gay community. “The shift to gaystreaming, by definition, involves a decrease in the LGBT specificity of programming.”⁵³ She adds however, that these assessments may fail to address the negotiation and range of queer

⁵¹ Ghaziani, 100.

⁵² Ng, 261.

⁵³ Ibid, 274.

meanings a text can have and the ways in which it can be decoded. Viewing the post-gay era from the standpoint of a critique would urge the continued consideration of the further edges of representations of the gay community on television, which is what my thesis seeks to do in exploring bisexuality on the CW.

Methods/Theory

In my thesis, I discuss the significance of shifting representations of bisexuality on television in regards to queer teen identity formation. I apply teen-representation theory, bisexual theory under the umbrella of queer theory, and concepts about post-gay television to explore the implications of television surrounding identity and sexuality. A paper by Michaela D.E. Meyer on bisexual representations in *One Tree Hill* provides a framework essay for exploring bisexual narratives in teen television. She grounds her argument in “observations about bisexuality, media representations and adolescent identity formation processes,” which is similar to the approach for my project.⁵⁴ She does a textual analysis of bisexual character Anna Tagaro and finds, “Anna’s representation as *both* a viable coming out story for an adolescent audience *and* a systematic erasure of bisexuality as a valid social identity.”⁵⁵ She also considers the implications of these troubled representations on queer youth identity formation.

My approach to analyzing representations is shaped by the theories of Stuart Hall. He helped define the connection between representation, identity, and culture by analyzing the complex interactions between people, language, signs, and codes in the media. Most simply

⁵⁴ Meyer, 237.

⁵⁵ Ibid

put, “Representation connects media and language to culture.”⁵⁶ Media representations contain socially constructed reflections of cultural ideas about sexuality, gender, race, and other facets of identity. Scholar David Buckingham adds that, “The media do not offer a translucent window on the world. However, they do shape our view of reality and offer us tools to interpret our relationships and define our identities.”⁵⁷ Building largely on Hall’s work, researchers interested in teen television have been able to apply these concepts to a growing array of shows that grapple with issues of the “teen condition” such as alcohol, drugs, sex, and identity. If representations have a bearing on the way in which people view the world, then it is important to study representations aimed at teenagers, who are in a critical phase of developing their world views and ideas about themselves. That is why I have chosen two shows from the teen-oriented CW network. Hall noted that making meanings out of representations “depends on the practice of interpretation, and interpretation is sustained by us actively using the code – *encoding*, putting things into code – and by the person at the other end interpreting or *decoding* the meaning.”⁵⁸ By analyzing cultural codes imbued within contemporary queer representations, I build upon Hall’s idea that representations can help people to negotiate shifting, culturally constructed ideas about identity.

I conduct textual analyses to examine several key episodes that highlight the bisexual or queer representations of characters Clarke Griffin in *The 100* and Josie Saltzman and Penelope Park in *Legacies*. There are three pivotal episodes in *The 100* that I use to examine queer

⁵⁶ Stuart Hall, ed. *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Vol. 2 (London, ENG: Sage, 1997), 15.

⁵⁷ David Buckingham, *Media Education. Literacy, Learning and Contemporary Culture* (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 2003), as cited in Van Damme, 78.

⁵⁸ Hall, 62.

representations: “Spacewalker,” episode 8 in season 2, “Bodyguard of Lies,” episode 14 in season 2, and “Thirteen,” episode 7 in season 3. I chose these because I have watched all of the seasons in their entirety and these contain scenes that are representative of key parts of the bisexual narrative and were very “visible” in the online public responses to the narratives. Episode 1 in season 1, “This Is the Part Where You Run,” and “Hope is Not the Goal,” episode 4 in season 1 in *Legacies* illustrate the most contemporary representations of queer sexuality and identity. Josie and Penelope are ex-girlfriends at the beginning of the show and they flaunt other male and female romantic interests to vie for each other’s attentions. I will be able to apply a queer lens through the supernatural or “other,” in that the show involves a cast of vampires, witches, werewolves and other mystical creatures that have historically been a space for queer representations to flourish. The show largely takes place at a boarding school for the supernatural, so it is easy to apply ideas about being teenaged and about the teen-condition.

Ideas from queer/bisexual theory help me to analyze how these episodes portray bisexuality compared to previous queer representations. These studies have outlined narrative tropes such as bisexual erasure or confusion, and “bury your gays/dead lesbian syndrome,” or “coming-out stories” that help me position these more contemporary shows against previous queer representations. Authors such as Sarah Corey and Hannah Johnson note that a bisexual identity has to fight for “legitimacy” against other queer identities such as gay and lesbian.⁵⁹ Although bisexuality was visible on other CW shows before *The 100*, this representation begins to show and use a progressive lens through which show writers and producers may model other bisexual or queer representations thereafter. That said, I also apply ideas about audience

⁵⁹ Corey, 191. Johnson, 380.

reception rooted in social media and internet responses, to determine what the implications are of audience reactions and input on industry and production practices. For example, scholars Annemarie Navar-Gill and Mel Stanfill examine the queer fan hashtag campaign #LexaDeservedBetter that was initiated by the intersection of production and queer audiences advocating for queer texts. I look at this hashtag campaign's progression in contemporary use as well as look at other several other audience responses to representations in contemporary queer television. I analyze more recent audience discourse through the hashtag campaign on Twitter to see how fans continue to make meanings of the original representation and link the hashtag to new meanings and representations.

In relation to the production side of television, I examine industry trade press articles and interviews to try and determine if people like CW lead show runner and openly gay Greg Berlanti influence queer representations in the shows. Reports from GLAAD, *Broadcasting and Cable*, and other interviews can help explain this environment. I look at the media coverage surrounding the CW's 2018 on-air, digital, and print campaign #CWOpenToAll, geared toward their commitment to inclusion and diversity. "We think this campaign really captures the spirit and mission of The CW and why our fans come to us," said Mark Pedowitz, president of CW. "We are committed to making sure our viewers see themselves represented on screen, and that we also have diverse voices being heard behind the camera."⁶⁰ These more socio-political ideas about diversity and representation help show how and why the CW's representations are shaped as they are. Here, I also posit ideas about post-gay television, what that term means,

⁶⁰ Bruce Haring "The CW Network Unveils #CWOPENTOALL, A Diversity/Inclusion Campaign." *Deadline Hollywood*, October 14, 2018, <https://deadline.com/2018/10/cw-network-unveils-cwopentoall-a-diversity-inclusion-campaign-1202482346/>.

and how that might affect queer representations. By combining textual analyses of queer teen television, industry factors, and post-gay ideologies, my thesis explores the implications of shifting bisexual representations on sexual identity.

Chapter Breakdown

In my second chapter, I look specifically at *The 100* and the bisexual representation and relationships of character Clarke Griffin. She is one of the first highly visible bisexual protagonists on the CW. How is bisexuality framed in this queer narrative? How does it compare to previous representations? In regards to the controversial episode, "Thirteen," has the focus on online audience advocacy shifted or changed? In what ways did the audience use the Lexa incident to negotiate ideas about representational tropes and how was this visible outside the representations in the show? Do audience responses influence industry and production decisions when it comes to queer TV representations? How was the hashtag #LexaDeservedBetter used by the fan community in social media discourse?

In my third chapter, I look at *Legacies'* queer/bisexual representations of Penelope Park and Josie Saltzman. As queer representations become more central to overall narratives, how is bisexuality being used to illustrate this? Are coming-out stories still one of the predominant representations? How is the supernatural narrative used to signify queer and Othered content? What does their target audience look like and how does that influence narrative content? What part do showrunners play in the CW's production practices when it comes to queer representation? Also, what sort of distribution strategies does the CW use to reach young

audiences and how has their promotional campaign “CW Open To All” influenced their message and directed their content since it began in 2018?

Does this audience resemble Becker’s slumpy demographic? What are the characteristics and trends of post-gay representation in teen TV and how does bisexuality fit in? Has the “post-gay” era resulted in a broader diversity of queer representation or has it limited the representations available? These are questions that I examine chapter three. My final chapter will posit questions for future research on bisexual representations and discuss the implications of the content I have covered. Most generally, are queer narratives shifting and what are the implications for teen and young adult identity formation?

Chapter Two: Ambassador for Bisexual Representation: *The 100*'s Clarke Griffin

"You were right Clarke. Life is about more than just surviving." -Lexa

On March 19, 2014, the CW premiered the first episode of the post-apocalyptic science fiction drama series *The 100*, which is loosely based on a novel series by Kass Morgan. In the show, ninety-seven years after the Earth is irradiated, 4,000 "sole" survivors orbiting the planet in a space station called The Ark send 100 juvenile delinquents back to the ground to see if it is indeed survivable once again. They can breathe the air, but they are not alone. At the time, it seems unlikely that Jason Rothenberg, the developer of the niche sci-fi show, could have predicted the implications about identity, politics, and sexuality that would come to pass in the queer and ally community from the bisexual representation of lead character Clarke Griffin. In this chapter, I identify several tropes found within the representations and examine trends in the discourses of audience response to industry practice through the Twitter hashtag campaign #LexaDeservedBetter. I argue that #LexaDeservedBetter has become a tool for cohesion, linking queer audiences together on social media, a directive for change in the industry, and a way to talk about a politics of queer representation. I also argue that this particular series is an important and increasingly popular portrayal of non-heterosexuality in "post-gay" television that uses bisexuality to negotiate queer identity in a way that avoids the "coming out" narrative and tackles tropes of earlier representations. Focusing on these representations on *The 100* allows me to examine the intersections of teen, sexual, and racial identities on American television of the 2010s.

The 100 is a useful case to study because of its positioning on the dominant teen television network, the CW. But the program is also a telling example because it is centered around the idea that delinquent teenagers, initially left to fend for themselves on earth, hold authoritarian power and are, for a time at least, masters of their own destinies. Teen television representations often maintain that adult authoritarian figures ultimately make the rules, and have generally more conservative values on matters of sex, drugs and alcohol, and identity. The show's critical position to the status quo may resonate with the prized "slumpy" demographic, or "socially liberal, urban minded professionals and young people," critical of the paradigmatic values of the white, suburban middle class that Becker has identified as key to the expansion in gay representation in 1990s TV.⁶¹ The CW's target audience is a new generation that has some of the same characteristics as that of the slumpy audience, keeping in mind that the CW defines its audiences more by shared cultural tastes rather than specific age demographics, a trend emerging from the 1990s.⁶²

In the case of *The 100*, the characters need not only survive on the planet, but also survive the teen condition. Casual sex, intimacy, and sexual license "as part of youth-as-fun," as Van Damme puts it, are showcased often and early across various character storylines. The idea of youth as the "Other" and then, concurrently, of queer as Other, are already embedded within the realm of the supernatural or sci-fi aesthetic of the show. These imaginative spaces offer an intersection within which non-dominant ideas and identities can be examined. Radioactive plant life, genetically altered creatures, and eventually artificial intelligence or "AI"

⁶¹ Becker, 95.

⁶² Wee, 47.

technologies that far outpace the real-life contemporary world create a space where the imagination immediately exceeds “normal.”

This chapter explores this case through a number of different avenues. First, I more broadly address previous tropes and trends of bisexual representation and compare them to those found in *The 100*. I argue that the show largely avoids previous bisexual narrative tropes. Then I look at race and appearances as they intersect with queer identity among the characters. Although the show villainizes several darker-skinned characters, it also includes a diverse range of races and ethnicities. After that, I will examine symbols of queer content and narrative coding from the show that act as metaphors for queer ideas about the closet. Then I assess what post-gay television looks like within this representation and also representations of queer intimacy between Clarke and another woman. Finally, I will look at audience responses to industry strategies through a social media campaign that was a direct response to a representation in the show that queer audiences felt was done poorly. Although that representation fell into the problematic trope of “burying your gays,” it helped create a social movement that raised awareness about queer representations and that also binds the queer fan community together.

Bisexual Confusion and “Failed” Heterosexuality

The use of Clarke as *The 100*'s bisexual protagonist defies several of the past bisexual narrative television tropes and adheres to others. As this was the first female, bisexual lead character the network had introduced, queer fans and audiences seemed extra attentive to the ways that she was represented. This adds to my overall argument that this representation was

an important step in the network learning how to progressively represent queer characters. One common trope that can be found in previous bisexual representations is the idea that bisexuality and lesbianism are preceded by failed or awkward heterosexual relationships, which is not the case here. Throughout *The 100*, Clarke first has a relationship with Finn Collins, and then moves on to relationships with two women: Lexa and Niylah. The broad strokes of Clarke's relationship with Finn Collins and how she moves on to Lexa can be seen in three central episodes I analyze below.

The eventual breakdown of Clarke and Finn's relationship runs contrary to previous LGBTQ narratives where characters questioning their sexual identities are faced with "failed heterosexual relationships" because of stereotypical homosexual tendencies. Previous representations of bisexuality have included "confusion" or complete failures of heterosexual relationships as a defining trait of the "straight" side of their sexuality. For example, in Meyer's assessment of Anna Taggaro in *One Tree Hill* Anna put all hope of a "normal" relationship on Lucas Scott's shoulders, and only after that relationship fails awkwardly does she feel like she can validate/explore her true (bi)sexual self. Representations of Clarke and Finn however, show strong feelings, "normal" traits of a relationship, and a "breakup" that ends in forgiveness and acceptance when Finn dies.

In the beginning, the two presumably heterosexual, young, white teenagers develop a relationship within a relatively traditional "boy meets girl" storyline. Much of their chemistry in the beginning relies on Finn and Clarke being leaders and champions of a non-violent, more understanding route of ambassador-like relations with the Grounders. The Grounders are the

native people who survived the nuclear apocalypse, led by Commander Lexa or “Heda.” As the story progresses, however, both characters do things “for survival” that bring them further and further away from the moral compass they initially shared. Although Finn and Clarke were growing steadily apart, they did not break up because Clarke was questioning her sexual identity. In trying to rescue Clarke from the Grounders, Finn killed innocent elderly, women, and children in a Grounder village and therefore the Grounders demanded his execution. In episode 8 in season 2, “Spacewalker,” Finn gives himself up to the Grounders to save the rest of his people and is supposed to be brutally executed and tortured, but Clarke shows the depth of her feelings for him when she kills him quickly herself and risks the tenuous alliance between the Arkers and the Grounders.⁶³ Clarke cries as she stabs and kills Finn to save him from a far more painful demise by “1,000 cuts.” She embraces him and they passionately kiss while she slides a knife in between his rib cage. “I love you too,” Clarke says. “I’m scared,” Finn says. “You’re going to be okay,” Clarke cries, and holds him close on the upright wooden pole he is bound tightly to. “Thanks princess,” Finn says as he fades away. Denying the Grounders the opportunity to execute Finn by their means defied the two groups’ agreement and could have upset the fragile peace they had worked to establish, yet Clarke did it anyway. This gives further validity to Clarke and Finn’s heterosexual relationship.

Valid representations like this help the “authenticity” of the narrative, or “quality of perceived believability” that helps audiences relate to the story despite knowing it is fiction.⁶⁴ Taking the time to establish Finn and Clarke’s feelings for each other helps validate Clarke’s

⁶³ Bruce Miller, writer. “Spacewalker.” In *The 100*. The CW. December 17, 2014.

⁶⁴ Katz, 77.

bisexual representation. Particularly for bisexual audience members establishing their own identities, one study notes that a lack of authentic representations in media that encourage bisexual erasure may lead to social, mental, and psychological identity issues.⁶⁵ Lexa, who is leader of the Grounders, chooses not to punish Clarke for her actions, which is one of the first signs of Lexa beginning to favor Clarke. This is significant because the Grounders live by the rule “blood must have blood” or, in other words, death can only be restituted by more death. Although Finn does die, it is not by the torture that the Grounders would have preferred. Lexa looks weak in front of her people by choosing not to punish Clarke for this action. Clarke and Finn had been positioned as potential love interests since almost the very beginning of season 1, ending with his death in season 2 episode 8. All of these small signs and inclinations show how carefully the beginning of Clarke and Lexa’s relationship after Finn’s death was built and is very important in describing Clarke’s transition from Finn to Lexa. It would take until season 2 episode 14, six episodes later for Lexa and Clarke to finally kiss. As I argue, there is no true “coming out” narrative that deals with conflicting ideas of sexual identity in the program. Clarke clearly shows emotion and love for Finn, so we cannot say she only identifies as a lesbian, or that her heterosexual relationship “failed” in the stereotypical manner of past lesbian or bisexual representations. This is significant because it offers a new way of representing bisexuality where a female bisexual protagonist can have a meaningful relationship with not just women, but men as well.

⁶⁵ Corey, 192.

Whiteness, Lesbian Appearances, and Race

This section examines ideas about lesbian appearances, whiteness, and race. The intersections of queer identity with appearance and race show some progressive representations that the CW has created, such as incorporating gay male characters that are not just white, and avoiding overtly aggressive or stereotypical representations of queer females that have been portrayed in previous representations. However, several narrative tropes include the overwhelming whiteness of the network's female bisexual characters more broadly, and the villainizing of some of the darker-skinned characters specifically on *The 100*.

Some literature on previous lesbian femininity notes the ways that representation typically alternates between flannel-wearing man-haters and high-class power-femmes; the negotiations shown in *The 100* sit somewhere between the two.⁶⁶ Although both Lexa and Clarke are leaders of their people, which grants them higher social statuses, they are never dramatically feminized in dress or in their mannerisms as some previous representations of queer women have been. They are also not overly portrayed with masculine traits that previous representations may have called drab or "butch." Although this is not to say that those representations do not have any validity within representations of queer identity, the way that *The 100* represents Clarke and Lexa progressively avoids extremes on either side. In episode 14 in season 2, "Bodyguard of Lies," six episodes after Finn's death, Clarke and Lexa have their iconic first kiss that would earn them the fan status to have a couple's name: "Clexa." Their appearances before and after they are established as queer characters lean toward more traditional representations of femininity, but again steer away from extremes and tropes. This

⁶⁶ Himberg, 23, 28.

episode is the first time you see Lexa's face without aggressive black war paint, portraying her with a more feminized representation. Lexa has long brunette hair and Clarke has long blonde hair. They are both thin and adhere to societal expectations of "traditional" beauty or attractiveness. Despite being in a post-apocalyptic society, they still manage to be dressed in form-fitting garb, and sometimes even elaborate tribal-like dresses. The upper-class, feminized representations here resemble Himberg's "lesbian chic" that have historically been meant to appeal to an imagined upscale target consumer demographic.⁶⁷ Although Clarke is admittedly a teenager, her mother is a doctor and Clarke has begun to be trained for medicine as well before she is made a leader of her people. Since there are a limited amount of resources and people in this fictional world, even when they all still live in space, it is clear that doctors are granted one of the highest statuses in the story world. Clarke and Lexa's leadership statuses and feminized representations show that their characters do fall into some tropes of conventional attractiveness surrounding queer women's appearances.

The CW's use of queer and bisexual female characters across several shows between approximately 2014 and 2017 offer representations that are overwhelmingly white. As scholar Melanie Kohnen explains, whiteness is one factor included in "the discourse of queer visibility that renders some queer identities, practices and communities visible while obscuring others."⁶⁸ This adherence to socially dominant racial identity inherently alters perceptions of queer identity. More recently, the CW has been consolidating its brand around "diversity," which I will examine further in my analysis of *Legacies* in Chapter 3. However, Clarke's portrayal

⁶⁷ Himberg, 28.

⁶⁸ Kohnen, 2.

as a blue eyed, blonde haired, very light-skinned woman can't help but be noted here, especially in relation to other important bisexual women across CW shows. *DC Legends of Tomorrow's* Sara Lance, who moonlights as vigilante/hero Black Canary and who began her bisexual storyline first with Oliver Queen and Nyssa Al Ghul in *Arrow* (2012 -), is also a blonde-haired, extremely light-skinned woman. Likewise, bisexual character Freya Michaelson in *The Originals* (2013-2018) was blonde-haired and light-skinned; these three together look as if they've never seen the sun before. Interestingly, their girlfriends in each show have slightly darker "exoticized" skin that hints at racial diversity, but again on the lighter side of "diverse." Although Lexa is the Commander of all twelve Grounder clans who all have brown skin in initial representations, she has just slightly darker skin than Clarke's porcelain complexion. Kohnen argues that, "Both society and televisual representations have supposedly progressed far enough that racial and sexual difference do not make a difference anymore. But this glossing over of difference crucially depends on precisely identifying on which side of the dividing line between gay/straight, and white/non-white one falls."⁶⁹ She is arguing that by portraying certain categorical types of queer visibility, other more diverse possibilities may be "screened" from view.⁷⁰ The tendency to whitewash queer characters here means that other negotiations of identity are lost within this representation and that audiences who may identify as non-white are not satisfied or cannot relate to these characters. A lack of representation of non-white queer women is also a problematic trope of the network, although the CW's addition of the DC superhero show *Black Lightning* in January of 2018 does introduce a black lesbian superhero Anissa Pierce, also known as Thunder.

⁶⁹ Kohnen, 31.

⁷⁰ Kohnen, 23.

Another way in which race factors into the representations of sexual identity in *The 100* is connected to the way characters are grouped into “nations” and “factions.” The show presents a diverse range of racial and ethnic backgrounds, while also reproducing some concerning stereotypes that villainize darker-skinned characters. Race and ethnicity are symbolically represented here by the twelve different factions of the Grounder population as well as the original twelve nations represented by each station of The Ark, and the identity conflicts and tensions among them. Before The Ark was one space station, twelve individual space stations represented nations such as the United States, Russia, Venezuela, etc. Again, the teens are initially at war with the enemy Grounders, who for the most part are darker-skinned, which suggests concerning racial stereotypes. The cast of the “Arkers” ranges from dark-skinned to light-skinned, yet the main turncoat villain, Charles Pike, is arguably the darkest-skinned black character on the show. *The 100* has a tendency to portray the more insidious or evil characters as darker-skinned, although there are an abundance of light-skinned villains as well. The “native” Grounders are initially presented as savages and vicious killers, and the “sky people” from the Ark are villainized as invaders and foreigners. Both groups are constantly killing one another and are fighting for their lives, so the representations of race within “good versus evil” here offer some progressive and some stereotypical negotiations of identity.

Although my focus is on female representations of queer identity, there are several noteworthy gay male characters in *The 100* that offer a progressive intersection of racial and sexual diversity. Nate Miller, a black teenager, has relationships with two other gay men in the show; Bryan and Eric Jackson. Bryan is a white teenager, which allows the program to depict a progressive, interracial relationship. Eric’s race is never explicitly identified, but he is a brown-

skinned man, which offers another representation of queer racial diversity. Despite the CW's portrayal of female bisexual characters through a lens of white identity across several different shows, the intersections of race and queer identity in *The 100* are diverse and progressive in other respects, making the program's stance on race as well as sexuality more multivocal than definitive.

Narrative Codes and Symbols of Queer Content

Embedding symbols, ideas, or metaphors within narratives that can be decoded by queer audiences as queer content—and that may not be explicitly defined by a straight audience as “queer”—has been an important strategy in television representations for around sixty years. Although television shows in the 2010s have often taken a more direct representational approach, *The 100* still uses symbols of queer identity that refer to “the closet” as the space in which viewers can experience queer identity as distinctly separated from heterosexual narratives. One very important symbol of the closet that is reoccurring in the first four to five times Clarke and Lexa encounter each other over the course of several episodes is Lexa's private war tent. The tent is a small area where only trusted advisors of Lexa are allowed. Clarke and Lexa are repeatedly shown sharing the space alone together as they begin to develop a friendship. The beginnings of their intimate interactions only occur at first within the confines of the tent. This tent can be seen as one of the only links to a hypothetical “closet” that physically divides their queer storyline from the rest of the characters. Up to and including their first kiss, this tent is the viewing space in which the audience can see their relationship.

After the kiss, the characters progress into other landscapes and into the “real” world of the narrative.

Underpinnings of “visibility” versus “invisibility” here speak to Kohnen’s arguments about “the closet.”⁷¹ On *The 100*, the tent/closet is where Clarke and Lexa’s relationship can be “comfortably examined” away from the rest of the narrative. Kohnen argues that it is “misleading to think of ‘coming out of the closet’—which we can understand as the moment of rendering one’s queerness visible-- as the singular moment of crossing-over from a state or place that is ‘hidden’ to one that is visible,” and that people who identify as LGBTQ are in fact in a never-ending process of coming out. This is due to the standard heterosexual assumption that people are straight until proven otherwise, putting the burden on the non-straight to repeatedly claim their identities.⁷² In previous LGBTQ representations, coming out of the closet has been used as a key narrative and oftentimes as the most important aspect of a queer character’s storyline. But *The 100* uses a metaphorical representation of the closet and coming out. This is an innovative way to give value to the “coming out” narrative while avoiding the stereotypical, dramatic coming out stories that have previously been portrayed. It gives value to the safe space of the closet that some queer characters need to develop their identities, while also avoiding making that process the key narrative focus.

Between season 2, episode 8, featuring Finn’s death, all the way through season 3, episode 7, when Lexa is eventually killed, the writers and producers seemingly take great care to legitimately establish Clarke and Lexa’s relationship. This is different from previous

⁷¹ Kohnen, 14.

⁷² Kohnen, 14

representations of queer relationships where characters are either thrown carelessly into relationships or are introduced simply to fill the token gay role. The initial interactions and conversations between the two, which are again mostly in Lexa's war tent until after their first kiss in episode fourteen of season two, show each other's aggression and hostility slowly turn to mutual admiration of leadership, and finally into clear sexual tension and attraction. Between the episodes featuring Finn's and Lexa's deaths, Lexa betrays Clarke in one instance and saves her from a strategic war attack, letting nearly everyone else die, in another. The complicated course of their relationship leaves room for queer interpretation, but is not explicitly defined as queer until episode 14 in season 2, "Bodyguard of Lies."

"Bodyguard of Lies" is the first episode where the representations finally move from coded narratives and conversations that may have been read as queer by audiences who were specifically looking for that content into an overt representation of queer identity with their first kiss. The "aggressive" tension that was once a stereotypical indicator of lesbianism in earlier television goes here from war tensions to more defensive personal tensions, and finally clearly indicated sexual tension. "You say having feelings makes me weak, but you're weak for hiding from them...You want everyone to think you're above it all but I see right through you," Clarke says to Lexa in her war tent.⁷³ This scene gives viewers the first real display of possible sexual desire between the two as Clarke gets in Lexa's face without actually touching her and backs her up against a table. The very subtle buildup of their relationship seemingly portrays the writers' and producers' commitment to the queer narrative. Rather than token queer characters of previous representations that come out of the blue and oftentimes are written off

⁷³ Kim Shumway, writer. "Bodyguard of Lies." In *The 100*. The CW. February 25, 2015.

just as quickly, it seems like they have taken care to foster the idea of this relationship slowly. In other examples of CW narratives such as the show *Riverdale* (2017-), bisexual characters Cheryl Blossom and Toni Topaz's relationship materializes almost out of nowhere with very little buildup, which seems like the network is trying hard to be diverse without giving proper attention to the authenticity of the representation. Finally, in another tent scene later in the "Bodyguard of Lies" episode, Clarke asks Lexa, "Maybe life should be about more than just surviving. Don't we deserve better than that?" and Lexa responds, "Maybe we do," and proceeds to kiss Clarke for the first time.⁷⁴ Clarke's face registers a brief moment of shock, and then reciprocates the kiss for a couple of seconds. This first kiss would be the cause for mass queer fan celebration, with audiences thrilled to be gifted a bisexual representation of a female protagonist.

Perhaps because this relationship was so meaningful to fans, their later reaction to the end to "Clexa" would be even more significant. The characters' relationship progresses between episodes 8 and 14 in season 2; seven episodes is a relatively short time for Clarke to shift from the boy she loved to this new, female love interest, especially given that up until this point the show hadn't given any indication that Clarke had been with a woman before. The only sign Clarke gives that may indicate a very small sign of conflicting feelings happens right after the first kiss. "I'm not ready to be with *anyone*, not yet," she says, indicating she is not quite over Finn. By emphasizing "anyone" she seems to be acknowledging the momentary surprise of her attraction to another woman, but that this isn't necessarily a problem. In the following episodes there are no conflicting ideas about Clarke's sexual identity. By validating her love for

⁷⁴ Javier Grillo-Marxuach, writer. "Thirteen." In *The 100*. The CW. March 3, 2016.

Finn, taking the time to properly set up Clarke and Lexa's relationship and Clarke's eventual love for Lexa, she is established as a bisexual character with valid and meaningful relationships with both a man and a woman. This narrative buildup is distinct from more typically coded representations of non-straight sexuality, where the writers do not take the time to authentically establish both sides of bisexual identity and/or throw in queer characters for the sake of "diversity."

Post-gay Television: Coming Out, Bisexual Identification and Erasure

This seamless transition for Clarke between her feelings for Finn and for Lexa is a marker of a progressive post-gay television representation. This section explores other meanings of post-gay television representations in *The 100*, such as the show's avoidance of both traditional coming out stories and traditional labels for queer identity. It also shows how representations can establish queer identity while avoiding specific categorizations of queerness such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Lexa and Clarke's relationship changes the perspective of how representations of queer identity can be established and defined. Finally, I look at how the show somewhat persists in the trope of bisexual erasure, or the tendency to neglect representation of the heterosexual side of bisexual identity, which may result in the invalidation of bisexuality as its own identity.

First, unlike many previous LGBT representations, the coming out narrative is completely avoided. There is no conflict when Clarke's sexuality is revealed. There is no parent, peer, or other telling her that her sexual identity is invalid or just a phase. Unlike some previous representations of the intersections of youth and queer identity that may have represented

adult authority as constraining or questioning those identities, the initially teen-run society premise of *The 100* allows young people to negotiate their identities outside those constraints. Also, the post-apocalyptic narrative prioritizes the teen characters simply trying to survive, which does not leave a lot of room for older, tired representations where characters have doubts about their queer identity. Life is short in this show so when the teens want to be with one another they rarely question circumstances of identity or any other factors, they simply “go for it.” Himberg’s interview with Meredith Kadlec, openly lesbian senior vice president of original programming and feature film development at Here Media, helps confirm that this idea is part of a “post-gay” perspective: “I’m not opposed to coming out stories, I would say I’m not doing them because I feel like there’s so much other stuff to be done...It’s not enough for me for it to be like ‘Now I know I’m gay’.”⁷⁵ On *The 100*, this post-gay narrative continues on with Lexa and Clarke strengthening their bond and also continually being at odds. Simply having a queer identity is not the narrative climax of their relationship’s storyline. In so doing, the program avoids the “token gay” character trope, which has characterized many television programs’ attempts at diversity. Clarke has multiple relationships, and Lexa also mentions her former female love, Costia. The additional queer characters, such as the men that date the gay Nate Miller, contribute to this broadened sensibility, as well. As with Clarke and Lexa, there is no noticeable coming-out moment for Nate; he simply begins dating another male character. This makes *The 100* distinct from previous representations where in order for queer characters to begin dating someone of the same sex, they have to first grapple with conflicting ideas about

⁷⁵ Himberg, 44.

their identities and inform the other characters and viewing audience that they are in fact queer.

In *The 100's* framing of post-gay television, I argue that the CW conscientiously avoids using labels for sexual identity, despite the assertion from some scholars such as Sarah Corey that, "Naming a sexual identity gives the identity credibility."⁷⁶ Instead, Clarke's on-screen intimacy with Lexa and also Niylah helps establish her bisexual identity and resist the trope or tendency to erase queer intimacy from view.⁷⁷ Other researchers have debated whether or not naming queer identities is the most inclusive or progressive way to represent people.⁷⁸ In *The 100*, the words bisexual, gay, and lesbian are never uttered. Scholar Ghaziani asserts that the use of these queer identity categories may encourage exclusion rather than inclusion between queer and non-queer audiences. Showrunner of *The 100* Jason Rothenberg confirms this point: "Sexual orientation fits in the same place that gender identity and racial identity fits within the world of our show. The characters in the show are not concerned with those things. They are only concerned with whether they are going to live and die. ... Nobody ever classifies anybody, as in, 'She's a woman leader,' or, 'He's a gay soldier.' It's just not in our show's vocabulary," Rothenberg claims.⁷⁹

As I will argue with representations of *Legacies* in the next chapter, and of other newer CW shows more broadly, avoiding definitive labels of queer sexual identity is a progressive way to be inclusive of a broader range of queer representations that do not necessarily fit into more

⁷⁶ Corey, 191.

⁷⁷ Meyer 238,239.

⁷⁸ Ghaziani, 103. N.G., 272.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

binary categories. If the showrunners do not want to name sexual identity in these representations, then they must use other narrative strategies to establish these identities. For example, *The 100* persists in representing Clarke's bisexuality in season three by including in the season premiere a sex scene between Clarke and Niylah, a woman who Clarke has been trading goods with to stay alive. They continue to have a casual sexual relationship throughout the show. Rothenberg has noted that he chose a female partner over a male partner for Clarke because he felt "like it needed to be clear that [Clarke] is bisexual."⁸⁰ This suggests that bisexuality can only be legitimized on television by visually depicting a character having sex with people of two different sexes. Rothenberg noted, "[Clarke] just wants to escape her pain...she's not feeling bad—she's feeling sexual, and that's a good thing."⁸¹ Rather than applying labels to sexual identity, Rothenberg uses Clarke and Niylah's on-screen intimacy to establish Clarke's bisexual identity with the audience, pushing against the way that queer on-screen intimacy is often erased from view.

Whereas the above examples show progressive representations of queer identity, some aspects of bisexual erasure persist. Through the end of the 2018 fifth season, Clarke never shows any romantic interest in men again. Finn is the only male partner she has had, which is a somewhat inauthentic representation of bisexuality. Bisexual erasure typically results in representations of bisexual characters as having a passing phase between gay and straight or failing to ever truly establish an authentic bisexual narrative. An example of this is Anna on *One*

⁸⁰ Maureen Ryan, "The 100 Showrunner Talks Clarke's Sexuality, Lexa's Return and Season 3 Stakes." *Variety*, January 21, 2016. As cited in Victoria Serafini, "Bisexual Erasure in Queer Sci-fi Utopias," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, (June 15, 2017).

⁸¹ Louis Peitzman, "The Show That's Breaking New Ground For Queer Representation." *Buzzfeed*, January 21, 2016. As cited in *Ibid*.

Tree Hill, the ultimate iteration of this trope because her character was written off the show with almost no narrative to accompany her exit.⁸² Her bisexual representations were left largely unresolved and her storyline was never really revisited. Other teen dramas have had female characters that dabble in homosexuality only to go back to the men they originally dated, such as Melissa Cooper in *The O.C.* (Fox 2003-2007). This “just a phase” representation is troubling as it undermines lesbianism as a valid sexual identity and erases bisexuality altogether. Clarke continues the role of protagonist in the show’s fifth season in 2018, but her interests do not extend back to any male characters, or in any serious way to female characters. While writers could arguably do more to avoid this erasure of bisexual identity, the showrunners seem to deprioritize romantic narratives in general, as the plot of *The 100* is often filled by the characters just trying to stay alive. There is no lack of queer characters and narratives to work with and, for the most part, the show exhibits innovative ways of representing queer identity without coming out stories, and avoids constricting categorizations of queer identity by establishing identity with displays of on-screen intimacy. This rise in the *quantity* of queer characters progressively reflects a rise in diverse queer representations. However, one specific representation of Clarke and Lexa’s on-screen intimacy falls into the arguably the worst queer narrative trope, that of “burying your gays.”

Queer Intimacy: Authenticity and Dead Lesbians

As I have discussed, one of the ways that post-gay representation can handle queer characters in new ways is through their depiction of intimacy. *The 100* accomplishes this in the intimate encounter between Clarke and Lexa in episode 7 of season 3, “Thirteen.” In this

⁸² Meyer, 248.

episode, Clarke is about to return to The Ark to lead her people, leaving Lexa behind at the Grounder city of Polis. Before they part, Clarke goes to say goodbye to her in her Commander's bed chamber. Lexa begins to tell Clarke she loves her and then falters. "Maybe someday, you and I will owe nothing more to our people," Clarke says. "I hope so, may we meet again," Lexa says as they lock hands. Along with this dialogue, which barely covers over the characters' feelings for one another, the intimacy of their exchange is highlighted by music, lighting, and set design. There is light but dramatized piano and string music playing in the background with soft rays of sunlight streaming in through the windows and candles lit as Clarke pulls Lexa toward her and kisses her passionately. This is only the second on-screen kiss they have shared. The power within this representation is found not within a declaration of sexual identity, but rather a shared sense of passion between the characters and the audience. This is distinct in that it offers what I argue is a more meaningful representation of on-screen queer intimacy than some previous representations, which queer audiences may have found not as relatable or authentic. For example, San Filippo assesses "sexploitation" films, where bisexuality or lesbianism depicted in "girl on girl" representations are generally lacking balanced or well thought-out narratives or are pandering to the male gaze.⁸³ In the adult television context, Meyer describes queer sexuality as often "erased" from sight completely. She argues that teen television often shows more authentic and progressively sexual narratives.⁸⁴

In the approximately three-minute parting scene between Clarke and Lexa, the authenticity of their relationship is evident. The program highlights this through close-ups of

⁸³ San Filippo, 96.

⁸⁴ Meyer, 238-239.

the searching look in Clark's eyes, a single tear rolling down Lexa's cheek, and the kiss that turns into more passionate making out. Clarke carefully takes off the top part of Lexa's armor and gently pushes her down on the bed. The scene then cuts to them lying in bed after the fact, both under the covers but presumably naked, with Clarke stroking Lexa's bare skin. This scene offers an authenticity of their intimacy that neither panders nor exploits while showing a level of on-screen lesbian sexuality that was fairly progressive for its time, taking into account that CW predecessor the WB network established its brand around teen-television narratives that regularly addressed issues of teen sexual identity.⁸⁵ *The 100's* representation was not designed or overly sexualized for the male gaze but instead offered a connection to and between the characters that respects their desires. The subtlety of this representation is an especially progressive example of the program's handling of lesbian/bisexual relationships, especially since the program also defines these relationships outside the stereotypical boundaries of coming out narratives or "titillating" gimmicks.

Despite the progress of the "Clexa" story in these ways, the conclusion of the relationship was more problematic. The showrunners had openly encouraged the progression of the relationship on social media, knowing full well that it would eventually have to end.⁸⁶ Although there was the extenuating circumstance of Alicia Debnam-Carey, who plays Lexa, leaving the show, showrunners fell into arguably the worst queer trope, called "bury your gays." "Bury your gays," also known as "Dead Lesbian Syndrome," is a fan-generated label that describe the abundance of gay and lesbian characters across television history that have been

⁸⁵Wee, 48.

⁸⁶McNutt, 2.

killed off far more frequently than have heterosexual characters. An example of this is Tara's death in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, where she is shot and killed by a stray bullet immediately after she and Willow are intimate on screen for the first time. Fans find this problematic because of the idea or trope of queerbaiting, where showrunners encourage queer relationships or imply potential for queer content but then fail to establish those storylines or narratives. This is especially irritating to fans as lesbian characters' storylines are often ended immediately after their first display of on-screen intimacy, which many would argue should signal the beginning rather than the end of relationship.

Shortly after Clarke and Lexa have sex, before viewers have even had a chance to appreciate this progressive representation, Lexa is shot by a stray bullet meant for Clarke.⁸⁷ The narrative makes a shockingly quick transition into the "Dead Lesbian" trope. Fans have made YouTube video compilations showing their reaction to the incident; some people yell and scream and others cry. The scene was only the second time that Clarke and Lexa interacted intimately, so the fact that Lexa was killed in this moment read to many fans as a clear gap in the writers' and producers' sensibilities about queer representations. As soon as true passion is realized, queer characters are killed off, *seemingly* as an afterthought in that random narrative circumstances bring about their demise.

#LexaDeservedBetter "LGBT Fans Deserved Better"

This section examines how the "bury your gays" trope is one way *The 100* played into problematic patterns rather than challenging them or creating innovative new representations.

⁸⁷ Javier Grillo-Marxuach writer. "Thirteen." In *The 100*. The CW. March 3, 2016.

However, I argue that the social media campaign that was a direct result of the troubling representation of Lexa's death, represented by the hashtag #LexaDeservedBetter, acted as a directive for change in the industry, contributing to the visibility of politics of representation and offering a way to talk about those politics. I also argue that the hashtag has become a tool for cohesion, linking queer audiences together on social media.

The relationship between television audiences and showrunners/writers has become more interactive with the rise of social media, especially Twitter. Producers have recognized the value of engaging with these audiences, however the expectations of this relationship are hard to define. "There are no formal rules on how social TV is supposed to work,"⁸⁸ one scholar who examined *The 100*, Myles McNutt argues. He attempts to help define the rules and implications of the "social contracts of social TV," where networks trying to foster active and engaged audiences sometimes break faith with those same audiences. Initiatives like #LexaDeservedBetter help to showcase what Navar-Gill and Stanfill call the intersection of "how production is a site of contestation by queer audiences advocating for queer texts."⁸⁹ The hashtag was used to further the "politics of visibility" for queer audiences and the website movement evolved into a set of guidelines that the group presented to television writers and producers.⁹⁰ After episode 7 in season 3, "Thirteen," aired on March 3, 2016, the outrage of the fan community was immense and rapidly reiterated across social media. Fans created an online movement, "LGBT Fans Deserved Better," stemming from the hashtag #LexaDeservedBetter. In a weekly episodic teen series like this one the discourse between writers, producers, and fans

⁸⁸ McNutt, 1.

⁸⁹ Navar-Gill, Stanfill, 85.

⁹⁰ Navar-Gill, Stanfill, 86.

engaging and interacting through social media are important in creating hype, loyalty, and a strong commitment to the show. The writers and producers, along with the actors who play Clarke and Lexa, Eliza Taylor and Alycia Debnam-Carey, “seemed genuinely invested in and excited about the relationship between the two characters.”⁹¹ The LGBT fan base accused the show of “queerbaiting” or positioning queer content in a production to draw in LGBT audiences, without ever actually furthering their storylines by writing Lexa’s character off.⁹²

This specific interaction between queer/allied fans of *The 100* and its showrunners helps define some of the implications about the relationship between the television industry and its obligations to minority audiences. Showrunners were shocked at the audience’s vehement response to the representation and apologetic in some regards, and yet they also defended their reasoning. In an interview with *Entertainment Weekly*, Rothenberg described his casting choices as “world building,” rather than catering to a specific audience or social movement.⁹³ The social responsibilities of producers toward marginalized audiences was showcased and then effectively blundered surrounding the representation of Lexa’s death in what seemed to be another blatant case of “bury your gays.” While there were extenuating circumstances behind Debnam-Carey leaving the show, most importantly that she was previously committed to another series, Jason Rothenberg publicly apologized in several forms of media for offending and disappointing the LGBT community. In a blog post he wrote:

⁹¹ Kira M. Deschler, “Not Another Dead Lesbian: The Bury Your Gays Trope, Queer Grief, and The 100.” *Honors Theses*, Whitman College: Accessible Research Materials in Digital Archives. (April 28, 2017). 35.

⁹² *Ibid*, 36.

⁹³ Shirley Li, “The 100: Why defining Clarke’s bisexuality marked a ‘turning point’ for the CW series.” *Entertainment Weekly*, Feb. 17, 2016.

The thinking behind having the ultimate tragedy follow the ultimate joy was to heighten the drama and underscore the universal fragility of life. But the end result became something else entirely — the perpetuation of the disturbing “Bury Your Gays” trope. Our aggressive promotion of the episode, and of this relationship, only fueled a feeling of betrayal. While I now understand why this criticism came our way, it leaves me heartbroken. I promise you burying, baiting or hurting anyone was never our intention. It’s not who I am.⁹⁴

He and the episode’s main writer, Javier Grillo-Marxuach, also defended the choice in furthering the overall storyline while simultaneously recognizing that they could be more sensitive to the needs of minority groups. It should also be noted that Clarke’s other love interest, Finn, was killed as well, but killing off the presumably straight male lead does not come with the same connotations as does killing off a gay or lesbian character, especially in a “deceptive” way.

The response to this representation helped spark a movement aimed toward educating the television industry about the implications of minority and queer representations. Although the overall success of the movement is hard to gauge, I argue that it was an important step in fighting for more progressive queer representations that helped publicly showcase the queer fan community’s goals for representation. The group LGBT Fans Deserve Better is a 501 (c)(3) volunteer non-profit organization dedicated to educating people about LGBTQ+ representations with advocacy, community support, and fundraising. The group was created as

⁹⁴ Jason Rothenberg, "The Life and Death of Lexa." Medium. March 24, 2016. <https://medium.com/@jrothenberg/the-life-and-death-of-lexa-e461224be1db>.

a direct response to the representation of Lexa's death.⁹⁵ "We aim to be a resource that enables the public to learn more about the issues facing the LGBTQ+ community in regards to media representation so they can become more critical viewers and creators, resulting in more creative, impactful, and positive stories in the future."⁹⁶

The internet document called "The Lexa Pledge" that was posted on the website lgbtfansdeservebetter.com, was signed by some but certainly not all writers and producers having to do with the show and even others outside of that production. It contained seven rules outlining promises to the LGBT community about not falling into stereotypical LGBT television tropes and representations. One key guideline in the case of Lexa, was "We refuse to kill a queer character solely to further the plot of a straight one."⁹⁷ Navar-Gill and Stanfill note that, "Regardless of the degree to which queer fan hashtag campaigns are successful in provoking industrial reflection, however, their careful coordination shows many fans are aware of industrial discourses about the value of social media, the affordances of the platforms they employ, and current best practices in social media marketing."⁹⁸ Although these questions about the effectiveness of these online initiatives, traits of (toxic) fandom and self-regulation, and social television contracts, have been examined by several scholars, what is interesting is how #LexaDeservedBetter has evolved to represent a common denotation of other queer representational social politics online and imbued into other queer issues, specifically on Twitter.

⁹⁵ Mar Guerrero-Pico, María-José Establés, Rafael Ventura. "Killing off Lexa: 'Dead Lesbian Syndrome' and intra-fandom management of toxic fan practices in an online queer community." *Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* (May, 2018): 312.

⁹⁶ LGBT Fans Deserve Better. Spring 2016. <https://lgbtfansdb.com/>.

⁹⁷ "A Pledge to the LGBT Fandom." LGBT Fans Deserve Better. <https://lgbtfansdeservebetter.com/pledge/>.

⁹⁸ Navar-Gill and Stanfill, 90.

The hashtag is being used to facilitate conversations about representation of queer identity far beyond the scope a single episode and its repercussions. I have examined the hashtag #LexaDeservedBetter to see how it is being used in social media in 2019, which is approximately three years after the representation of Lexa’s death, and argue that it is an important tool that helps bind queer audiences together, provides a space to negotiate representations, and to petition the television industry for change. Users engage with other users as well as with writers and producers. Although #LGBTFansDeserveBetter also evolved from the original hashtag, I am exploring the hashtag most specifically connected to *The 100* and its fans.



Figure 1 Tweets using #LexaDeservedBetter

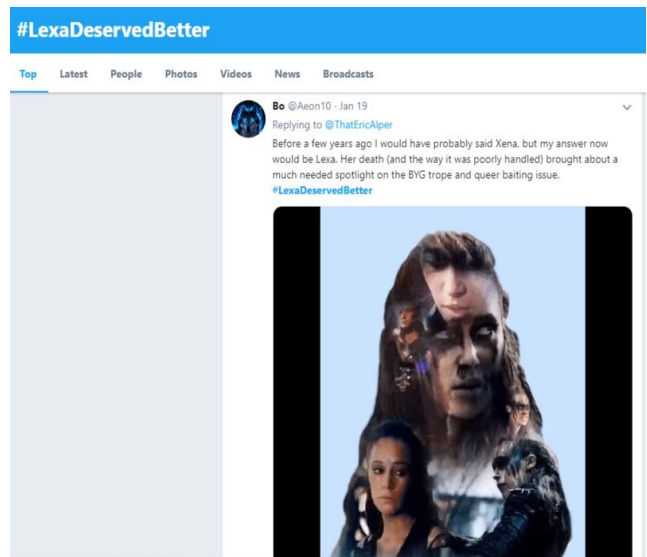


Figure 2 #LexaDeservedBetter Tweets cont.

This series of tweets from the users @ADCFrance, @Daalhajji, and @Xonyya1 in figure 1, and @Aeon10 in figure 2, help showcase several different uses of #LexaDeservedBetter in the beginning months of 2019, nearly three years after Lexa’s death and the initial social media reaction. I argue that it is still being used in meaningful ways to talk about queer representation

and helps to show the impact that the representation had on the audience. In episode sixteen in season three, “Perverse Instantiation-Part Two,” Lexa’s character does briefly return for one last episode and one last kiss with Clarke, but this hardly satisfied fans of the show.

@ADCFrance used the hashtag to directly petition Jason Rothenberg to bring back Lexa, which after all this time is still a somewhat common request from fans. “Come on @JRothenbergTV, you have one of the best female characters in your hands. And you have the opportunity to score 2019 and create a huge event. So please, bring us back Lexa.”⁹⁹

People regularly tweet directly to @JRothenbergTV and have pleaded, asked nicely, and angrily demanded Lexa’s return. The user @Daalhajji references the emotional attachment that is still clearly linked to Lexa’s death: “So I know it’s been like 3 years or whatever since Lexa was killed but her death still hits me at random times like that shit is still painful.”¹⁰⁰ Nearly three years after the fact, fans are still lamenting the loss of a protagonist lesbian narrative in their real everyday lives. @Xonyya1 applies a much more mundane usage to the hashtag and has imbued it into her day to day activities. “I’m supposed to be writing an essay but somehow I’m thinking about Alicia ear piercing and I find myself scrolling through her instagram looking at picture of her ears.”¹⁰¹ The ways in which users weave the fictional narrative and characters into real world references, such as mentioning the actress who plays Lexa, Debnam-Carey, by name, demonstrates a negotiation of meanings far beyond the original representation.

⁹⁹ ADC France, Twitter post. Jan. 31, 2019, 4:08. <https://twitter.com/ADCFrance/status/1091111030447632384>

¹⁰⁰ @dalalishere, Twitter post. Feb 11, 2019, 1:24 p.m. <https://twitter.com/dalalishere/status/1095055930134331395>

¹⁰¹ Nyya kom Trikru, Twitter post. Feb. 10, 2019, 9:30 p.m. <https://twitter.com/Xonyya1/status/1094816028507410437>

Users also use the hashtag to make connections between the Lexa representation and other significant queer representations from previous television shows. In figure 2, the user @AEON10 is responding to another user and drawing a link between the social and visibility implications of Lexa's death compared to Xena's in *Xena: Warrior Princess*, which aired in syndication from 1995 to 2001. Although the female warrior protagonist was never openly admitted as a lesbian on the show, the slash fan fiction surrounding her storyline was one of the first to be shared and circulated heavily online.¹⁰² Slash refers to same-sex relationships between show characters that are imagined by audiences. One author found that Xena fans, who participated in online discussion forums and create slash, or queer, readings of the show's female protagonists, use their relationship to rethink or challenge their own sexual identities in ways that provide "agency and empowerment."¹⁰³ Linking Lexa's death to Xena's draws an interesting connection to "bury your gays" tropes and queerbaiting perspective from 18 years ago. @Aeon10 responds to another user presumably about other memorable representations of the "bury your gays" trope: "Before a few years ago, I would have probably said Xena, but my answer now would be Lexa. Her death (and the way it was poorly handled) brought about a much needed spotlight on the BYG trope and queerbaiting issue."¹⁰⁴ This exchange helps show how lasting these representations can be and their meanings in different ways to audiences. If previous audiences could make meaningful negotiations about identity, it stands to reason that newer audiences can do so even more as access to and navigation of the internet has only expanded since then. Interestingly enough, the relationship between Clarke and Lexa seems

¹⁰² Rosalind Hanmer, "Internet Fandom, Queer Discourse, and Identities." In *LGBT Identity and Online New Media*, eds Christopher Pullen and Margaret Cooper. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), 148.

¹⁰³ Hanmer, 149, 153.

¹⁰⁴ Bo, Twitter post. Jan 19, 2019, 8:22 a.m. <https://twitter.com/Aeon10/status/1086644986639048705>

like a nod to the slash fan fiction relationship between Clarke Kent and his arch nemesis Lex Luthor. Researcher Kohnen assesses slash in *Smallville*, (WB, CW, 2001-2011), which focuses first on Superman's teen years where Clark and Lex are initially best friends and whose on-screen "longing looks and lasting touches" fueled queer slash fiction online and the couple name "Clex."¹⁰⁵ The similarity of names, as well as the fluctuation of the relationships between friend and enemy, of Clark and Lex and Clarke and Lexa seems too derivative for coincidence.

Audiences are also using the hashtag to continue to make meanings surrounding the original television representation by producing and sharing fan art. Drawings, memes, fan fiction, and fan-made videos where Clarke and Lexa are represented together allow fans a space to negotiate meanings where they may have been lacking in the original narratives. This claim is supported by author Eve Ng's argument that online slash fan videos of Bianca and Lena, one lesbian and one straight female character respectively from *All My Children*, (ABC, 1970-2011) helped show the "significance of fan cultural production with respect to the contours and stakes of queer representation."¹⁰⁶ The two never had a relationship, yet the slash fan videos from the storyline in the early 2000s show the audiences creating queer meanings beyond the original text. Two YouTube fan videos surrounding *The 100*, "The 100- Lexa and Clarke Kiss Scene 2x14" and "Every Clarke and Lexa Scene The 100," help show fans' discontent with the lack of quantity of representations that portray Clarke and Lexa's on-screen intimacy. Fans and audiences often negotiate meanings with these narratives outside of the texts themselves and

¹⁰⁵ Melanie Kohnen, "The Adventures of a Repressed Farm Boy and the Billionaire Who Loves Him: Queer Spectatorship in *Smallville* Fandom," In *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*, eds. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2008), 211.

¹⁰⁶ Eve Ng, "Reading the Romance of Fan Cultural Production: Music Videos of a Television Lesbian Couple." *International Journal of Media and Culture* 6, no 2. (March 31, 2008), 103.

the videos help them create a space where the implications of representations can continue to be discussed. The scene of their first kiss and a near four-hour compilation of all of their screen time together have more than 3.1 million and 2.7 million views respectively and thousands of audience comments.¹⁰⁷

The hashtag and extra-textual media created by fans, as well as the surrounding discourse, allow the audience to find other queer/ally users and connect, whether it is over issues of representation or simple conversation. One user, @littlespaceheda, linked a story from *Fandemonium* Magazine using #LexaDeservedBetter. Three years to the date after Lexa's on-screen death, Tara Donahue posted a story on this fan page that is indicative of the queer community's use of the hashtag and overall representation: "Her legacy continues to live on, too. In all of the trending that still happens on Twitter. The way everyone joins together at planned times and days to make our voices heard is inspiring... There's even a campaign for a spin-off with so much support that even some other characters that were part of Lexa's clans are willing to take part in if it happens."¹⁰⁸

This incident of social outrage indicates how powerful and important the representation of Clarke and Lexa's relationship was. I continue to argue that the show embodies a new representation of LGBT identity where bisexuality is used to move away from coming out narratives and also from the "pigeon-holing" of identities within the LGBT spectrum that are

¹⁰⁷ Daniel Pereira. "The 100 – Lexa and Clarke Kiss Scene (2x14)." YouTube video, Duration 2:26. Posted Feb. 25, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmy7c_gT1tw&t=72s Jackgilinskys. "Every Clarke & Lexa Scene The 100." YouTube video, Duration 3:50:56. Posted July 7, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWIMiIs3pCE&t=9s>

¹⁰⁸ Tara Donahue, "Three Years Later, Lexa's Legacy Still Lives On." *Fandemonium Magazine*. March 3, 2019. <https://fandemoniummagazine.com/lexas-legacy>.

ignored by the more typical emphasis on gay and lesbian “homonormative” identities.¹⁰⁹ This is not to negate the importance of identity struggles and conflict in other LGBT narratives, as oftentimes “coming out” is not a seamless flicking of an identity switch. However, the representation of Clarke Griffin in *The 100* may be signaling a new type of narrative that avoids stereotypical ideas of homosexuality, offering young viewers a place to negotiate their sexual identities without previous representations about the conflicts of coming out. This is not to say that this era of post-gay television representation sees questions of sexual identity as resolved. In this era, however, some programs are moving onto different ways to depict sexual identity and possibly presenting a broader range of identities that are more reflective of lived experiences. Post-gay ideology in this example chooses not to define sexual identity by name, but rather use progressive representations of on-screen queer intimacy to establish these identities.

¹⁰⁹ Kohnen, 26-27.

Chapter Three: *Legacies* is Open To All

In October 2018, CW network President Mark Pedowitz announced the network's new initiative, "CW Open To All," during the network's fall launch event. The initiative was centered around messages of diversity, inclusivity, and representation. "We think this campaign really captures the spirit and mission of the CW and why our fans come to us. We are committed to making sure our viewers see themselves represented on screen, and that we also have diverse voices being heard behind the camera," Pedowitz announced.¹¹⁰ Shortly after the announcement, the CW debuted its new series, *Legacies*, on October 25, 2018. The series would be one of the network's first tests to see if its on-air, digital, and social media campaign for diversity was fulfilling its promises. In this chapter, I use a textual analysis to assess what post-gay teen television looks like in this representation. How does the CW use bisexual or sexually fluid narratives to represent queer teen sexual identity? Do the writers and producers of the show fall prey to previous queer tropes? What does their target audience look like? What influence, if any, do the producers of the show have on the diversity of the representations?

I argue that, in this CW narrative, coming out stories are no longer the predominant queer storyline and are in fact absent from the content completely. Trends and characteristics of post-gay television narratives in this context do not define sexuality by name, using more inclusive, non-binary definitions of identity and self. Their target audience resembles Becker's slumpy demographic in that they exhibit socially liberal values about identity and

¹¹⁰ Danielle Turchiano, "The CW Launches #CWOpenToAll Campaign to Promote Inclusion (Watch)." *Variety*, Oct. 14, 2018. <https://variety.com/2018/tv/news/cw-open-to-all-campaign-launch-video-1202979608/>

representation.¹¹¹ I argue that higher quantities of queer representations on the CW network have resulted in more diverse representations of queer identity, and that bisexual representations are being used to highlight these progressive narratives. In the following sections, I use a textual analysis to look at the metaphor of the supernatural as a place for queer and Other identities. I also examine post-gay representations of queer identity in the characters Josie Saltzman and her off-and-on girlfriend Penelope Park. I will look at the character of Hope Mikaelson as a representation that defies tropes of monosexism, which at its core means favoring and valuing single categorical representations of identity over non-binary ones. Finally I will assess the CW's diversity campaign #CWOpenToAll and see how this industry marketing strategy shapes these representations.

The Salvatore School for the Young and Gifted: Supernatural as a Place for Queer and Other

The CW network has long used the television spinoff strategy borrowed from one of its original networks, the WB, to continue its narratives beyond the expiration date of a single series. Spinoffs occur when a character or a narrative idea from an original series becomes its own show. Arguably, the WB's most successful example was *Angel* (1999-2004), which was a spinoff of the wildly popular series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Here I examine the series *Legacies*, which is not the first but the second spinoff of *The Vampire Diaries*, which aired from 2009 to 2017.

CW series have a tendency not only to reference popular culture, but other CW shows or "universes" of characters that have related storylines. *The Vampire Diaries* and its first

¹¹¹ Becker, 95.

spinoff, *The Originals*, which aired between 2013 and 2018, are both centered around the existence of supernatural beings and their relationships and interference with humans. In *The Vampire Diaries*' narrative, which is set in the fictional town of Mystic Falls, Virginia, a vampire-werewolf hybrid named Niklaus (Klaus) Mikaelson becomes one of the main antagonists of the show. As the story progresses, Klaus is in an ongoing battle of morality in his choices as a generally wicked supernatural being, but also as an extremely protective and loyal advocate for his family, whose intriguing narrative earned the Mikaelsons *The Originals* spinoff. Also introduced in *The Vampire Diaries* are supernatural hunter Dr. Rick Saltzman and "good" vampire Caroline Forbes. Dr. Saltzman's witch daughters, Josie and Lizzie, were featured as toddlers on *The Originals*; Caroline Forbes is their surrogate mother. *Legacies* has become a narrative repository for all of these supernaturally associated beings' children. Although *The Originals* is largely set in New Orleans, the latest spinoff takes viewers back to Mystic Falls for what will be the tenth year of these interrelated storylines. Spinoffs also help the CW retain the audience of its old favorites. In *The Vampire Diaries*, the Salvatore School used to be the Salvatore Boarding House, which housed the shows' protagonist vampire brothers. Dr. Saltzman, who now runs the Salvatore Boarding School for the Young and Gifted, teaches juvenile werewolves, witches, vampires, and other "monsters" how to control their abilities and interact with the very mortal human environment within which they must try to live in harmony.

Previous scholarship has offered many assessments of supernatural representations as a place to negotiate queer identities and the Other.¹¹² *Legacies* is set entirely around the supernatural, and I argue that the Salvatore School for the Young and Gifted is an important symbol and metaphor for queer identity. Like Lexa's private war tent that operated as a similar space to examine identity in *The 100*, the Salvatore School was created to keep supernatural teenagers away from the "normal" humans outside of its gates in Mystic Falls. At the beginning of the first episode, Hope gives a voice-over introduction to help introduce the supernatural premise of the show: "When we're young we're taught the distinction between a hero and a villain, good and evil, a savior and a lost cause. But what if the only real difference is just who's telling the story? My name is Hope Mikaelson and I come from a long line of villains and the tales you've heard about vampires, werewolves, witches, and everything in between. The school behind these gates protects the secrets of people like me."¹¹³ This quote helps illustrate the link between queer identity and the supernatural. Immediately there is an association between the supernatural and the identity of villain, which in previous representations more broadly linked queer with deviant or other.

More than simply a representation that positions the school as a place for Othered identities, the premise of *Legacies* is a metaphor for the CW's stance on diversity. The school is a place that "protects" teenagers who might otherwise be ridiculed for their different identities. In the very episode of the series, Dr. Saltzman says, "Everyone here has something that makes them special in ways that the outside world wouldn't understand."¹¹⁴ In this case "special"

¹¹² Fuchs, 99. McCracken 117-118. Owens 351.

¹¹³ Julie Plec, writer. "This is the Part Where You Run." In *Legacies*. The CW. Oct. 25, 2018.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

signifies identities that are queer in the broader sense, alluding to different than the majority. In the school, the students' difference is encouraged and accepted but only when examined away from the "outside world" of a non-queer, human-dominant society. This helps show that while *Legacies* may avoid coming out narratives, the "struggle" of having a queer identity is not completely eliminated in these representations. The school—and the network—are safe places for young people to negotiate their identities. Placing these representations in a high school where the "teen condition," or inevitable struggles of agency and identity of the young, are already in constant negotiation makes the school an obvious space to examine representations of queer identity. Given their life stage, the characters have narrative space within which to grow.

Episode 1, "Now is the Part Where You Run," sets up the "mission" of the series by having the characters literally refer to the school's message of inclusivity and diversity. Lizzie and Josie welcome a new werewolf student, Rafael Waithe, into the school. They are both linked arm in arm with him, rather flirtatiously, as they give him a guided tour. The tour and dialogue firm up the values that the show has been alluding to up until this point. "Everybody gets along here for the most part," Josie says. "The werewolves are pretty cliquey, they like to hang with their own," Lizzie says. "In defiance to our school's commitment to inclusiveness," Josie adds.¹¹⁵ By using werewolves as an example of a specific identity, this exchange shows that staying within one's clique or group is against the school's overarching commitment to inclusivity. Josie's love interest Penelope Park is also introduced in this scene amidst early references to pop culture, another attempt to appeal to the liberal target audience the CW

¹¹⁵ Plec, "This is the Part Where You Run."

imagines. Lizzie, Josie, and Rafael peer into a classroom where young witches are being taught spells. Lizzie points out Penelope: “She who shall not be named,” Lizzie says disgustedly. “Who are you talking about?” Rafael asks. “Josie’s evil ex,” Lizzie replies.¹¹⁶ Lizzie refers to Penelope as “she who shall not be named,” which is a reference to Harry Potter, indicating how the program imagines the sensibilities of their target audience, as well as identifying Penelope as an evil or dubious character.

Josie Saltzman and Penelope Park: Non-binary Sexuality and the Bisexual Temptress

Josie Saltzman and Penelope Park offer two female representations of queer identity that defy previous tropes of limiting, stereotypical, or binary representations of sexuality. Josie’s fluctuation between male and female love interests lends legitimacy to a fluid bisexual narrative. Although Penelope’s representation can be linked back to older, more negatively connoted stereotypes of the bisexual temptress, the character’s embrace of sexual fluidity as an empowering part of her identity helps the representation expand beyond the scope of the labels gay or lesbian.

While Josie is represented as a very kind, innocent, and caring individual who always sacrifices her own interests for the good of others, Penelope is seemingly the opposite. She is bossy, mischievous, and generally serves only her own interests. More than that, she is represented as overtly sexual. Some of these stereotypical bisexual traits have been identified with promiscuity, capriciousness, exhibitionism, or even schizophrenia, wherein “female same-

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

sex desire is thought of as narcissistic or as substituted desire for the mother.”¹¹⁷ Although she may be a little narcissistic, her representation embraces her sexual fluidity in an empowering way and simultaneously refutes the binary stereotypes of queer identity that I argue the CW generally has come to avoid. Penelope tellingly refers to herself as an “equal opportunity temptress,” which shows her openness to her queer identity and also helps explain to the audience that she is queer through her actions and dialogue rather than by explicitly categorizing her as bisexual.

Examples of the bisexual vampire temptress that were common in earlier media representations were often villainized or Othered. In this representation Penelope is a witch whose supernatural abilities also resist the categorization of human or the “normal” dominant paradigm. However, rather than rejecting or marginalizing her queer and supernatural identities, they are valued in *Legacies* and integrated into the storyline in progressive ways. In the program’s first episode, her exchange with a male vampire student, while very sexualized, shows a representation that values fluid ideas about sexuality; making this clear early on in the series assists the network’s image of offering diverse and progressive representations. Vampire teen Milton Greasley, known as M.G., walks into the kitchen of the school and is greeted by Penelope. She is sitting on the counter and seductively sticks her leg out in front of him and offers him her neck to drink her blood. M.G. initially resists and says he thought she was more “into girls.” “I am an equal opportunity evil temptress, and your binary assumptions about sexuality are dated... Are you going to suck me dry or not?”¹¹⁸ Penelope replies as she walks

¹¹⁷ San Filippo, 113-114.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

across the room and moves closer to him, kissing him. M.G. runs out of arguments and with intense blood lust they start making out. Josie walks in on them at that moment before anything else can happen. Penelope smirks back at her, implying that Penelope was trying to make Josie jealous by kissing M.G..

There is no need for narrative coding here, the writers of this scene are very overt with their representations of sexual identity. Penelope is the epitome of a bisexual evil temptress and her clear rejection of M.G.'s "binary assumptions" not only dismiss that categorization but delegate it to the "outdated" past, where these previous stereotypical queer representations belong. This representation broadens that idea even further in that Penelope never outright says she is bisexual, which leaves room to potentially negotiate an even more fluid queer identity. This "stunt" with M.G., although not portrayed as a serious relationship, also resists the previous trope of bisexual erasure or reluctance for queer female characters to give attention to men after they have been identified as being attracted to women.

The bisexual representation of Josie throughout the first season shows a progressive narrative of queer identity where her attention goes back and forth between Penelope and Raphael, avoiding previous tropes of bisexual erasure, and/or failed heterosexual relationships. The storyline between Josie and Rafael helps give authenticity to the bisexual representation of identity. In the first three or four episodes, it is made clear that although Josie and Penelope still have feelings for each other, they are not getting back together anytime soon. In the meantime, Josie and werewolf Rafael begin to grow closer, despite her sister Lizzie's open obsession with him. Because the show is set in high school, "relationship" may be a strong label

for the interactions between these different romantic pairs, but the CW has also only had one season to develop these plotlines.

For example, in episode 1 in season 4, “Hope is Not the Goal,” Josie clearly has feelings for Raphael, which again resists the trope of bisexual erasure and offers what I argue are diverse representations of fluid queer sexual identity. Raphael and Josie are trapped by a spider monster’s web. Their hands are also stuck in the web, so the only way for them to escape is for Josie to borrow magic from werewolf-powered Rafael by kissing him. Josie leans over and kisses him passionately three times; each time their lips light up with red magic between them. She literally staggers backward from the force of their kiss. “Did it work?” Raphael asks. “I don’t know, the room is still spinning,” Josie whispers.¹¹⁹ Even Penelope and Josie--or “Posie”--shippers like myself could feel the connection between Josie and Rafael in this episode and the power of their kiss. This representation also helps show how the CW is normalizing queer narratives into the overall storylines. While previous television strategies may have been to highlight queer narratives, Josie’s interactions with Raphael are all about aspects of the teen condition and romance, not about her (bi)sexual identity. The CW continues to avoid representing queer sexual identity by calling out its differences, but rather offers progressive representations of romantic relationships between characters with fluid sexual identities.

One trope of bisexual representation that *Legacies* is on the verge of falling into this season is queerbaiting, similar to the pattern of “dead lesbian syndrome.” As the case of “Clexa” and *The 100* makes clear, fans can become extremely invested in the romantic relationships between queer characters. Penelope is clearly represented as queer, but when it

¹¹⁹ Brett Mathews, writer. “Hope is Not the Goal.” In *Legacies*. The CW. Nov. 15, 2018.

is revealed that she is moving to Belgium to attend an all-witch school, the potential erasure of her storyline borders upon the “dead lesbian” trope. Although we can hardly deny the lengths to which *Legacies* has gone to have progressive queer narrative content that exhibits authenticity and diversity, some fans have already threatened to discontinue watching the show if Penelope’s departure is permanent. In episode 14 in season 1, “Let’s Just Finish the Dance,” Penelope reveals two things. First, that all of the wrongdoing she has done was actually on behalf of Josie. She was trying to save her from a curse in which either Josie or her sister Lizzie would have to “merge” with the other one on their 22nd birthday, wherein the weaker twin would not survive. Penelope has been trying to force Josie to stand up for herself, rather than be the “nice” girl, so that she survives the merge rather than Lizzie. Second, Penelope reveals that her mother got a job in Belgium and that she is moving there to go to an all-witch school. This development launched the audience’s wariness about the program’s commitment to sexual diversity, given that the narrative justification for Penelope’s bad-girl behavior also suggested that fans should reconsider the pairing of Penelope and Josie.

As queer audiences have seen time and time again, at the very moment of gratification between queer couples, one of the characters is written off unceremoniously. The Lexa controversy from *The 100* after Lexa died was one of the more publicly visible incidents in terms of backlash, and was indicative of a longstanding trope that the television industry continues to fall into. Although this show and its predecessors, *The Vampire Diaries* and *The Originals*, are a space where supernatural beings die and are written off at a regularly alarming rate, there are more serious implications about audience reactions when queer characters are written off. As one fan, @sheenar1382, wrote on Twitter, “Well #Legacies it’s been a fun ride, but if Penelope

Park is leaving so am I... Let me know if you ever bring her back.”¹²⁰ As the case of Clarke and Lexa makes clear, fans and audience members have extremely vested interests in the plights of these characters and their romantic relationships. The network might have learned from the Clexa debacle to make better on their promises of authentic queer narratives. However, if audience members have learned anything from the histories of *The Vampire Diaries* and *The Originals*, there are very few characters who are written off permanently or who really die “forever.” The fate of Penelope and Josie, “Posie,” is yet to be determined.

Werewolves, Witches, Vampires, and Tribreds: Species as a Metaphor for Inclusivity

Although vampires were the obvious narrative focus of *The Vampire Diaries*, as the series progressed and extended to spinoffs, witches, werewolves, and other mystical creatures were integrated as important characters. The introduction of different “species” of supernatural beings creates a representation that supports multiple identities and inclusivity. One of the underlying storylines of *The Originals* and *Legacies* is that characters who are represented as villains within each species believe that their species is superior to the others. The three main species: witches, werewolves, and vampires, are generally positioned as mortal enemies to one another. Although these dynamics change as the shows progress and interspecies relationships become more common, the tension between these species never really goes away. For example, in *The Originals*, witches are initially controlled by the ruling faction of vampires in New Orleans, and are subject to horrible treatment because the vampires are stronger than them. The language that each group uses toward the other is often disdainful

¹²⁰ Gina Carbone, “Legacies Just Lost One Of Its Best Characters After Her Vampire Diaries Truth Bomb.” *Cinema Blend*, March 2019. <https://www.cinemablend.com/television/2468446/legacies-just-lost-one-of-its-best-characters-after-her-vampire-diaries-truth-bomb>

or derogatory such as the vampires referring to the werewolves as dogs or mutts and the wolves calling vampires filthy bloodsuckers. There are even factions of vampires warring amongst themselves because one “bloodline” believes it is purer and thus more dominant than another. However, time and time again the narrative rejects the idea that exclusively favoring one species over the other is ever the answer. To overcome great obstacles, the witches, werewolves, and vampires must work together. Inclusivity and understanding are represented as the keys to solving the characters’ problems. Although these ideas are posited throughout *The Vampire Diaries* and *The Originals*, the network’s message becomes much more overt by the time it gets to *Legacies*.

The character of Hope Mikaelson, who represents all three of the three main species, offers a metaphor for diversity and inclusivity. She was briefly introduced in *The Originals* first as a young child and then in the final season as a teenager played by the same actress who would play her in her reintroduction in *Legacies*. Her representation combats ideas about monosexism and other queer stereotypes. Monosexism, according to some scholars, “describes society’s belief that orientations such as heterosexuality or homosexuality – in which a person is attracted to a single gender – are more legitimate than plurisexual identities.”¹²¹ Although Hope is thus far not represented as queer in the traditional sense relating to sexual identity (she is in love with Landon who turns out to be a mythical phoenix), her character is a progressive representation of the broader queer struggle.

¹²¹ Corey Flanders, Cheryl Dobinson, and Carmen Logie, “I’m Never Really My Full Self”: Young Bisexual Women’s Perception of Their Mental Health,” *Journal of Bisexuality* 15, no 4. (Dec. 17, 2015). As cited in Corey, 191.

The representations of supernatural species being “superior” to one another can be seen as a metaphor for racial categories of human beings. While overt references to racism are largely avoided in the show, the constant warring between different categories of supernatural beings often stems from one groups’ belief of its supremacist status over another. Supernatural representations also help make a connection to ideas about monosexism. This idea mimics monosexism’s discrimination against identities that do not fit into one category of representation. Those categories are most often ones that fit neatly within heterosexual ideas of queer identity. The show’s narrative metaphorically rejects those stereotypes and values, both through the character of Hope and overtly within the dialogue. In one scene of “Now is the Part Where You Run,” Hope explains to Landon who and what she is. The scene reiterates some of the loneliness Hope feels being the only one of her kind and, metaphorically, the struggles of characters who are “queer” in the sense that they identify as Other or different than normal. This helps my argument that the CW is moving away from stereotypical representations of queer identity. “The blood that runs through my veins isn’t human. My dad was one of the earth’s original vampires... My mother was a werewolf alpha... My grandmother was a witch, so all of those things passed down make me” Hope says. “A unicorn?” Landon laughs. “A hybrid of three different creatures, a tribred...I’m the only one of my kind,” Hope says solemnly.¹²² Inclusivity here is not only about sexual identity, but also race and, more broadly, Othered identities. However, while Hope’s representation moves away from stereotypical depictions of queer identity, it does so at the expense of other intersections of racial diversity. After all, Hope is a young white female character whose socially dominant racial

¹²² Plec, “This is the Part Where You Run.”

identity means that other facets of queer identity and representations may be lost. For all of its metaphorical depictions of inclusivity, the *Legacies*' hero of "diversity" is filtered through a whitewashed lens.

Here the program shows that there is still a struggle for people with minority identities, yet it moves away from coming out narratives and other tired representations of queer struggle. From Hope's very conception, which was supposed to be impossible in the first place, her existence and very name were meant to represent an answer to the fighting between the supernatural species of witches, werewolves, and vampires. Her blood is often the cure to any ailment. Hope as the answer to division is the ultimate symbol of diversity and inclusivity that the CW network has been actively trying to represent, especially alongside its 2018 fall "CW Open To All" campaign. Her character helps show how the network has created narratives that are tailored to its promises of inclusivity and that put multiple identities at the center. The CW is taking full advantage of using a supernatural premise to negotiate ideas about queerness and the Other.

Showrunners, Target Audiences, and Diversity

The producers and show runners of the CW network and more specifically of *Legacies* make a conscientious effort to prioritize diversity not only of representation but within their production teams. The writers and showrunners openly advocate for this diversity and actively shape those representations. I argue that this diversity is meant to appeal to the values of a young, socially liberal target audience and also to older individuals with similar lifestyles and beliefs. This appeal to a target audience is shown through the CW's integration of social issues

into their narratives that the network presumably believes resonate with this audience, such as ideas surrounding gender, race, or sexual orientation.

Executive Producer Julie Plec had a lot to live up to with the successful dynasties of *The Vampire Diaries* and *The Originals* behind her. In *Legacies*, her new iteration of a supernatural teen narrative, Plec made it clear from the beginning that the show would offer representations that were innovative and with the times. The well-written, teen-oriented narratives continually tackle topics such as feminism, inclusion, sexual orientation, racism, and the teen condition in general, which are topics that may resonate with younger generations or socially liberal audiences.¹²³ For example, Lizzie Saltzman is constantly dramatizing the teen condition and debating ideas about feminism. The premise of the school is based on inclusion. There are several diverse representations of sexual orientation so far with Josie and Penelope. Racism can be seen metaphorically in some characters' beliefs that their distinct "species" (witch, werewolf, vampire, or other) is superior to the others. The creators also made choices of what *not* to include in service of its mission. For example, Plec removed romantic relationships between teenagers and vampires that were hundreds of years older than them, something that was sometimes an uncomfortable narrative for fans.¹²⁴ Again, this series has only had one season to develop and it has already posited these ideas early and often.

Though *The Vampire Diaries* and *Legacies* have shared a showrunner, narrative, and even common cast members, the narratives and ideas found in *Legacies* show the steps that

¹²³ Priyam Chhetri, "Legacies: Fans applaud CW for diversity on display but hope to see a trans character soon." *Media, Entertainment, Arts, Worldwide*, Dec. 6, 2018. <https://meaww.com/legacies-cw-fans-are-happy-with-diversity-on-the-show>

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

the CW has taken toward ideas promoting diversity in the ten years since *The Vampire Diaries* began in 2009. As a dedicated fan of the original series, the episodes of *The Vampire Diaries* that I regularly watched often centered around the broader narratives of good versus evil, and saving the “souls” of two attractive several-hundred year old vampire brothers, Damon and Stephan Salvatore, who owned the boarding house that would become The Salvatore School for the Young and Gifted in *Legacies*. The other reigning narrative in the older series was the theme of epic love, usually the relationships between character Elena Gilbert and both of the vampire Salvatore brothers. While there were arguably a racially and sexually diverse range of characters and themes in *The Vampire Diaries* and even throughout the sequel series *The Originals*, those representations are not nearly as overtly focused on ideas about identity, messages about diversity, or narratives with socially liberal ideas as are those of *Legacies*.

This shift in focus could be indicative of the current topics that the network imagines to appeal to its target audience. The network’s promotional material suggests that their audience, similar to Becker’s slumpy demographic, values television that negotiates ideas about race, gender, and sexuality. The CW has gone to great lengths to cater to those sensibilities and even define its network on that premise. A fan on social media echoed this idea:

I think that 'Legacies' is the result of a widening of the minds of the people in charge of making TV and it's beautiful to see this finally taking shape in what I think it's the best-represented cast on TV right now. Massive kudos to CW for finally getting things right creating a socially responsible show. It's taken a long time but we're finally there.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Ibid.

The diverse representations that this fan has found within *Legacies* seem to be geared toward being “socially responsible.”

These ideas seemingly have been shaped by representations in previous CW shows, as showrunners continued to push for broader or more progressive ideas about identity and diversity. Many producers and writers have contributed toward this push for progressive representations, beginning with the WB and UPN networks, which merged in 2006 to become the CW. One beginning for that journey can be traced back to one of the WB’s most notable hits, *Dawson’s Creek*, which aired between 1998 and 2003. Openly gay writer and showrunner Greg Berlanti threatened to quit if he was not allowed to show a romantic kiss between the show’s only openly gay character, Jack, and another boy. “There hadn’t been a gay kiss that was romantic on Primetime TV. There had been joke kisses, but never a romantic kiss between two characters, let alone two high-schoolers,” Berlanti said in an interview.¹²⁶ Even after Berlanti was rewarded with the on-screen kiss, the WB was specific with what was and was not allowed to be shown. Berlanti would later become the executive producer for popular CW shows such as those included in the “Arrowverse,” the self-referencing superhero shows with storylines that cross over between *Arrow*, *The Flash* (2014-), and *Supergirl* (CBS 2015, the CW 2016-) among others.

Since that first on-screen kiss in *Dawson’s Creek*, Berlanti has continued to spread these progressive representational values throughout his productions and that trend has continued within the CW network outside of his specific projects. According to a *Variety* article, the CW

¹²⁶ Thea Glassman, “Inside the Thrilling, Chaotic Writers’ Room of *Dawson’s Creek*.” *Variety*, Jan. 19, 2018. <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2018/01/dawsons-creek-20th-anniversary-writers-room>

was the most diverse network of the big five (CBS, NBC, ABC, and Fox) in all four categories of representation for the 2017-2018 season.¹²⁷ The categories were for the percentages of Hispanic or non-white lead actors, female leads, Hispanic or non-white showrunners, and female showrunners. The network had 33 percent non-white or Hispanic lead actors, followed by Fox with 30 percent, NBC with 18 percent, CBS with 13 percent, and ABC with 9 percent.¹²⁸ It was one of only two networks with a cast of lead actors that were a female majority, at 67 percent, alongside NBC with 55 percent. Fox, ABC, and CBS trailed with 30 percent, 27 percent, and 0 percent, respectively.¹²⁹ They were also the only network of the five to have a majority of female showrunners at 67 percent.¹³⁰ Heading into the 2018-2019 season, five of their noteworthy shows with female producers are *Charmed* (2018-), *Roswell: New Mexico* (2018-), *Legacies* (2018-), *All American* (2018-), and *In The Dark* (2019-).¹³¹ The smallest network continues to have the largest proportion of diverse representations. Its representations of race, gender, sexual orientations, and disabilities continue to push back against previous majority representations, ideas, and paradigms of mainstream identity. By aligning itself within the teen genre and thereby targeting those who may be considered a marginal population in and of themselves, the network can push the envelope further than they could if they were trying to cater to a more mainstream audience.

¹²⁷ Daniel Hollow, "New 2017-2018 TV Shows Are Mostly White and Male." *Variety*, May 19, 2017.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Caitlin Kelly, "The CW keeps diversifying, both in front of and behind the camera." *Hypable*, May 12, 2018. <https://www.hypable.com/the-cw-diversity/>

Value of Live Viewing vs. Streaming

While considering the sensibilities of this niche audience, the ratings among the 18-49-year-old demographic that overlap with those ideas are still important considerations for network revenue. In trying to reach this audience, the network combines traditional television broadcast with the use of streaming platforms to increase the value of its shows. When looking at ratings for prime time television shows, the higher the percentage of the key 18-49-year-old demographic in the audience, the higher the likelihood a show will succeed and return for a following season.¹³² Shows with higher ratings within that demographic are valued by advertisers, because some say the younger demographic is harder to reach through traditional television.¹³³ Figure 3 below shows roughly how many viewers the Nielsen ratings counted for each episode and also how many people fell within the key 18-49 target demographic of viewers tuning in to live, same-day viewing since *Legacies* aired in the fall.¹³⁴ For example, *Legacies*' 18-49 year old viewers fluctuated between 210,000- 390,000 throughout the duration of season one and its highest count of overall viewers was 1,127,000, for episode two, in which 370,000 viewers were 18-49.¹³⁵ Figure 4 shows how *Legacies* fares against other Thursday evening, 9 PM programs on March 28, 2019. ABC's *Station 19* comes in with the highest views

¹³² *Legacies*: Season One Ratings. TV Series Finale, March 29, 2019. <https://tvseriesfinale.com/tv-show/legacies-season-one-ratings/>

¹³³ CW 2017-18 Season Ratings. TV Series Finale, October 8, 2018. <https://tvseriesfinale.com/tv-show/cw-2017-18-season-ratings/>

¹³⁴ *Legacies*: Season One Ratings, 2019.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

at 5.4 million, followed by NBC's *Will and Grace* at 3.28 million, and Fox's *The Orville* at 1.31 million. *Legacies'* season finale commanded 940,000 viewers.¹³⁶

Air date	Episode	18-49 demo	demo change	Viewers (millions)	Viewers change
Thurs 10/25/2018	01-01	0.29		1.124	
Thurs 11/01/2018	01-02	0.37	24.91%	1.127	0.27%
Thurs 11/08/2018	01-03	0.27	-26.23%	1.094	-2.93%
Thurs 11/15/2018	01-04	0.34	26.30%	1.079	-1.37%
Thurs 11/29/2018	01-05	0.32	-6.45%	1.006	-6.77%
Thurs 12/06/2018	01-06	0.39	22.26%	1.180	17.30%
Thurs 12/13/2018	01-07	0.32	-17.44%	1.049	-11.10%
Thurs 01/24/2019	01-08	0.31	-3.73%	1.008	-3.91%
Th					
Thurs 02/07/2019	01-10	0.37	15.63%	1.150	13.97%
Thurs 02/21/2019	01-11	0.21	-43.24%	0.710	-38.26%
Th	1-12	0.30	42.86%	0.872	22.82%
Thurs 03/07/2019	01-13	0.24	-20.00%	0.814	-6.65%
Thurs 03/14/2019	01-14	0.30	25.00%	0.962	18.18%
Thurs 03/21/2019	01-15	0.29	-3.33%	1.002	4.16%
Thurs 03/28/2019	01-16	0.29	0.00%	0.925	-7.68%

Figure 3 Legacies season 1 Nielsen ratings¹³⁷

	Show	18-49 demo	% demo change	Viewers (mil)	% mil change
8:00 PM					
CBS	(s) 2019 NCAA Basketball Tournament	1.6		2.17	
ABC	(n) <i>Grey's Anatomy</i>	1.5	7.14%	7.30	4.20%
NBC	(n) <i>Superstore</i>	0.8	-11.11%	3.44	-10.87%
FOX	(r) <i>Gotham</i>	0.3		1.29	
8:30 PM					
NBC	(n) <i>AP Bio</i>	0.5	0.00%	2.36	5.83%
9:00 PM					
ABC	(n) <i>Station 19</i>	1.0	11.11%	5.47	-1.30%
NBC	(n) <i>Will & Grace</i>	0.7	0.00%	3.28	10.53%
FOX	(r) <i>The Orville</i>	0.3		1.31	
CW	(r) <i>Legacies</i>	0.3	0.00%	0.94	-6.49%

Figure 4 Nielsen ratings comparisons¹³⁸

Despite the CW having lower overall numbers, their 18-49 year old demographics are still in the hundreds of thousands and are still valuable in the eyes of the CW's parent owners, CBS and Warner Brothers. A *Forbes* article notes that then-CBS Corporation President Leslie Moonves said that Warner Brothers and CBS pay to keep the CW afloat because: "The CW as an entity may lose some money. However, CW is owned by two companies that produce the shows. The shows bring us more revenue than the losses do. So it's still valuable, and there's still a marketplace for it."¹³⁹ Since the CW is paying very little in licensing costs being produced

¹³⁶ Thursday TV Ratings: *Legacies*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *AP Bio*, *Gotham*, *NCAA Basketball*. March 29, 2019. <https://tvseriesfinale.com/tv-show/thursday-tv-ratings-legacies-greys-anatomy-ap-bio-gotham-ncaa-basketball/>

¹³⁷ *Legacies*: Season One Ratings, 2019.

¹³⁸ Thursday TV Ratings, 2019.

¹³⁹ Merrill Barr, "The CW Doesn't Care About Live Views Because The CW Doesn't Have a Major Stake In Its Programming," *Forbes*, January 11, 2016. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/merrillbarr/2016/01/11/the-cw-arrow-flash-legends-of-tomorrow-jane-the-virgin-supernatural/#482ba24c4fe9>

under the umbrella of two larger corporations, the “next-day buzz” and potential promotion for later viewing generated by continuing to produce these more niche shows benefits the network, and its conglomerate owners, in the long run.¹⁴⁰

Accounting for the streaming potential where this 18-49-year-old demographic is more likely to watch rather than through traditional television helps display the value of shows such as *Legacies*. This presumably younger, lucrative viewing demographic, at which teen-centric shows like *Legacies* are aimed, can be reached through streaming on Netflix and on the CW’s own streaming app/platform. In 2014, the CW announced at its annual “Upfront” event in New York that its digital streaming of programs was up sixty percent from the previous year.¹⁴¹ Its streaming strategies help distinguish it from other content producers in several ways, and are likely still commanding high numbers of viewers since their earlier estimates. First, the CW has a unique relationship with Netflix. The CW first began airing shows on Netflix in 2011 in a nearly \$1 billion deal.¹⁴² While CW shows are on air, the network maintains exclusive streaming rights on its own platforms. However, in an exclusive new deal signed in 2016, eight days after a season ends on live television, the entire season goes on Netflix.¹⁴³ That means that *Legacies* season one, with a season finale that aired on March 28, is already available to stream in April of the same year. In this relationship, the Netflix gets exclusive content very quickly after a CW show season ends on live television and becomes a repository for full seasons of CW shows,

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Samantha Bookman, “CW’s streaming audience may be up 60 percent,” *FierceOnlineVideo*, May 15, 2014. <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5C72-0KV1-JB6S-F0JW-00000-00&context=1516831>.

¹⁴² Emma Bazilian, “Netflix Pays \$1 Billion for CW Streaming Rights,” *Adweek*, October 14, 2011. <https://www.adweek.com/tv-video/netflix-pays-1-billion-cw-streaming-rights-135799/>

¹⁴³ Kayla Cobb, “The Netflix Bump is a Real Thing for the CW,” *Decider*, August 6, 2018. <https://decider.com/2018/08/06/cw-tca-2018/>

which broadens its audience. These streaming distributions help support the value of the programs themselves as products, which are owned by the CW's parent companies, as they bring viewers back to the original broadcast platforms which reconnect them with advertisers.

The CW also benefits from recent seasons of its programs quickly coming to Netflix which helps expand viewership of that key demographic that may favor non-linear viewing. Pedowitz said that the CW's relationship with Netflix is important in supporting lower-rated yet critically enjoyed shows such as *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* (2015-2019) or *Jane The Virgin* (2014-) that would probably not be renewed if only airing on live television.¹⁴⁴ He reiterated that newer, similarly niche shows such as *Riverdale* fared far better going into their second season due to the binge watching of the first season that occurred on Netflix.¹⁴⁵ He added that he pays attention to what even younger viewers, aged 12-to-17, say on social media as they can be very vocal about their preferences.¹⁴⁶ Social media discourse may help give producers an earlier indication of which shows are going to be popular. Increasing the buzz about and interest in their programs in this way also increases the CW's potential for generating advertising revenue.

The network sells ad time on its own streaming platform that can be accessed on devices or televisions connected to the internet such as Apple TV, or other streaming devices such as Roku. It offers next day viewing of shows and the app is free, however it continues to run advertising. Audiences have unlimited free access to these shows through the app (or at least the five most recent episodes that were aired) and can therefore be exposed to

¹⁴⁴ Liz Shannon Miller, "CW President: New Series Take Chances, But Netflix Deal Is Key," *Indiewire*, February 1, 2019. <https://www.indiewire.com/2019/02/cw-president-netflix-black-lightning-in-the-dark-1202040374/>

¹⁴⁵ Cobb, "The Netflix Bump Is a Real Thing for The CW," 2018.

¹⁴⁶ Elaine Low, "CW Chief Talks Streaming Marketplace, Fate of 'All American' and Salim Akil Allegations," *Variety*, January 31, 2019.

advertising during a show beyond its original air date, increasing the ads' viewing potential. Pedowitz commented on this expanded potential: "Despite the linear shortfall in ratings that you see, we're up year to year by three to five percent in the amount of impressions we serve for the advertisers when you go across all of those platforms."¹⁴⁷ With its multi-platform viewing strategy, the CW, which was once considered a struggling network, has managed to stay afloat against the other major networks. Although *Legacies* viewership does not lead in the ratings against other networks or even against other leading shows within the CW, its renewal for a second season helps show that the CW's multi-platform strategies can support less mainstream shows that embody its continued commitment to the sensibilities of its diverse, niche audience. This strategy helps retain the viewership of the network's younger target audience that likely favors non-linear forms of viewing such as streaming.

#CWOpenToAll

The CW makes more than a conscientious appeal to inclusion and diversity; it has established its entire image around that idea. I argue that it has made more progressive strides in queer representation than any other of the major networks by aligning its brand with diversity of representation, defying mainstream sensibilities, and aggressively pushing its message through its diversity media campaign. In 2016, amidst an extremely divided sociopolitical spectrum in the United States, the CW pushed its new slogan "Dare to Defy" on air, online, and in social media. The earlier visualizations of this slogan showed different CW characters all touting the line, "Dare to Defy," mostly through the on-air promotions. Although it was implied that the CW was defying ideas about diversity that were less inclusive or perhaps

¹⁴⁷ Miller, "CW President: New Series Take Chances, But Netflix Deal Is Key," 2019.

less progressive, the initiative didn't really go into specifics about exactly what it was against. The vagueness of "Dare to Defy" implies a general sense of rebellion, which may be an appealing ideology to young people or the target audience of those who share similar lifestyle values. The CW is also the smallest network of the big five, positioning its niche status against the "dominant" values of the larger networks that have the larger majority of viewers. This general appeal to defiance creates a connection to socially liberal notions that trend in line with the imagined target audience that resembles the ideals of Becker's slumpy demographic. While this term may apply to that audience, its indefinite use may also appeal to more socially conservative audiences who also embrace rebellion or defiance in their own ways. Since the network does not immediately elaborate on what this defiance means, it can be considered a "safe" slogan that doesn't risk alienating other potentially valued segments of the audience and applies to many interests. Defiance is often considered an appealing idea to youth in general. This was the beginning of the CW creating strong connections between the ideologies within their shows and the values of their network and audience.

While the content and representations of many shows obviously championed inclusion, the network began to showcase more overt examples of the values they were hoping to be known for through their promotional material. Between the vague beginnings of "Dare to Defy," and the still continuing 2018 #CWOpenToAll, the network has more strongly defined what values they are defying and who is included in those claims. The "Dare to Defy" slogan was developed and began being heavily used around the time in 2016 that the Clexa incident in *The 100* boiled over into a public conversation and PR disaster, which demonstrates that the network had far from insulated itself from representational flaws. The CW campaign

#CWOpenToAll, which was launched in the fall of 2018, is one of the network's latest iterations of its attempts to brand itself using claims to diversity. One of the original commercial promotions presented in 2018 consolidated most, if not all, of the network's most popular shows and characters into a little over a minute's worth of a voiceover of characters speaking about what this new initiative meant. Clips from different shows including, but not limited to, *Riverdale*, *Black Lightning*, *Arrow*, *Supergirl*, *Roswell New Mexico*, *iZombie*, *Supernatural*, *The Flash*, *The 100*, *In the Dark*, and *All American* were meshed together to create a familiar, action-packed background over which the characters could deliver the network's message. Voices of characters from the above-mentioned shows take turns with each line, taking care to highlight the word "we" toward the end of the narrative. This message is inviting the audience to be a part of something that seems exciting and "defiant":

When I defy assumptions, change happens. When I defy division, hope happens. When I defy judgements, love happens. We are open to all, all possibilities, and opportunities. All choices, and orientations. All kisses, and clashes. All hairstyles, and lifestyles. We are open to all, because that's when everything can happen. We are open to all because we believe in it. We are open to all because we deserve it. We are open to all because we, we, we, defy 'not to be.' The CW, dare to defy.¹⁴⁸

The CW reinforces its original slogan "Dare to Defy" within this newer "Open To All" promotion. The format for these promotions that have been produced since fall of 2018 have had similar compilations of scenes and characters that list off these "values" that the characters, and in

¹⁴⁸ Tv Promo 360. "2018 Fall CW Dare To Defy Extended Promo." YouTube video, Duration 1:25. Posted May 17, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9lgpK5sTG8>

turn the network, are promoting. They are being represented as in-line with the network's message and, even more than that, as ambassadors of that message. They are defying assumptions, judgements, and others that are not open: "not to be." The audience may be enticed by the message that being open to diverse identities and lifestyles is "when everything can happen."

The network does not hesitate to focus on the progressive representational strides they feel they have made in teen television. This diversity campaign goes to extra lengths to highlight the sexual diversity that some of their newer representations have offered. When the characters say that they are open to "All choices, all orientations," they directly zero in on a picture of Cheryl Blossom and Toni Topaz, the two bisexual characters from *Riverdale* who are in a relationship. When they mention "all lifestyles," they show a quick scene of Clarke Griffin from *The 100*. This promotion also uses the background song "Rescue Me" by the band 30 Seconds to Mars as the characters are delivering the message. The original music video on YouTube for this song is also making a direct appeal to diversity, as it makes a point to show people of different races, ages, ethnicities, disabilities, and presumably different sexual orientations on the same screen, which shows yet another layer of popular culture sensibility and relevance to the audience they are trying to reach. Tying the network's image to self-reflexive ideas surrounding popular culture has also been a successful strategy with the teen television industry, especially when it comes to popular music.¹⁴⁹ The song's name in and of

¹⁴⁹ Ben Aslinger, "Rocking Prime Time: Gender, The WB, and Teen Culture." In *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*, eds Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2008), 80.

itself, “Rescue Me” can be seen as a metaphor for the CW’s initiative to offer a safe place to negotiate these ideas; i.e. the CW can save you from yourself and the division around you.

A later reiteration of a promotion for #CWOpenToAll takes a slightly different and perhaps more direct approach in connecting the audience with the message. In this commercial, the actors and actresses represent their real selves on screen, with various accents and out of various costumes and written roles. This peels away another layer of the representation, bringing the message one step closer to people’s everyday lived experiences, and out of the context of the television shows and narratives themselves. These actors and actresses are set in more everyday and mundane scenery such as classrooms and hallways and regular rooms. They take turns speaking each line of the dialogue as the camera focuses on one person at a time, rather than a montage of action-oriented show representations. Everyone is more finely dressed and the tones of this promotion seem to invite more welcoming ideas of inclusivity or “Open to All” than the previously described promotion which seems to channel defiance in-line with the more general “Dare to Defy” slogan. The lines of dialogue are also displayed in bold text across the screen while the message is delivered. Although there are several shows that represent at least some level of Latino/a narratives, they also add a short line of Spanish to this commercial, “para representar,” or to represent, for one more layer of inclusivity. The montage begins with lead actress Gina Rodriguez from *Jane the Virgin*, followed by various others:

We are open. We are open to all. All choices, all orientations, all lifestyles, all possibilities. This is the time when anything can happen, and everyone, everyone is

invited. A time to represent, *para representar*, and defy the odds. Because when we defy assumptions, change happens. When we defy division, hope happens. When we defy judgement, love happens. We are open to all and defy anything that stands in our way.¹⁵⁰

This promotion is even more specific with its message, continuously highlighting key words, repeated by several actors and actresses, throughout the ad. The words “open to all,” “represent,” “change,” “love,” and “defy anything,” are all repeated three to four times throughout the narratives by different voices of the actors and actresses. These are the words that the network’s promoters have chosen to represent the inclusivity of their cast and programming. While the word “defy” is still reiterated, which can be seen as highlighting difference, the other words that were chosen here stand for inclusivity and integration of all identities into the collective “we.”

The network’s messages of inclusivity and diversity are more than clear. However, do these ideas go beyond the formation of their brand? While the overall intentions of a network that by all means still belongs to a profit-driven industry can be hard to discern, the CW does go at least one further step beyond brand-level value. At the end of this promo, they show text images for #CWOpenToAll, CW Seed (which is a streaming app and repository for the network’s cancelled series or older content that is not currently on air), and finally, CW Good. CW Good shows that the network is engaged with ideas about diversity more so than strictly representationally and within their brand image. CW Good is a website designed to showcase

¹⁵⁰ TV Promo 360. “2018 Fall CW Open To All Trailer.” YouTube video, Duration 1:00. Posted Oct. 17, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TA0X8tJQCSg>

causes and organizations linked with participation and activity among the shows' cast members as well as their audience. "The CW and its talent are passionate about and committed to raising awareness for a number of charitable causes. CW Good is the platform designed to spotlight those efforts and inspire YOU to get involved, as well. Together, we can make the world a better place."¹⁵¹

Two examples of initiatives and organizations that are linked on this platform are Guide Dogs of America, which seeks to provide guide dogs and instruction to visually impaired people for free, as well as the National Children's Alliance, which in this particular initiative seeks to empower victims of sexual abuse and assault. *Riverdale's* Madelaine Petsch is featured as teaming up with the National Children's Alliance and other cast members are featured on this page regarding other initiatives. Each dashboard links to the original website with ways to get involved or donate. In keeping with this activist theme and in line with their 2018 fall launch events, CW hosted "Powerful Programming, Powerful Women" in conjunction with #SeeHer and other sponsors. The event included panel discussions with the women of Shethority, "the global online collective focused on amplifying women's voices launched by the stars of The CW's superhero series, and the women showrunners and executive producers of The CW's hit primetimes series."¹⁵² These direct links to causes and organizations that pair the ideas about diversity and inclusivity embedded within the representations on CW shows, alongside the voices of the actors and actresses, help to engage with and petition the audience to participate in these initiatives as well.

¹⁵¹ The CW Good. <http://www.cwtv.com/thecw/cwgood>

¹⁵² Ibid.

The CW's branding initiative, which is portrayed by its slogan "Dare to Defy" and its 2018 campaign "CW Open to All," exemplifies this network's commitment to progressive and diverse representations of identity on and off screen. In line with its 2018-2019 key series, such as *Legacies* with its racially and sexually diverse cast as well as female showrunner, it is clear that the network is willing to defy previous boundaries of television industry norms to set itself apart from bigger, more powerful networks. It has largely avoided previous, stereotypical tropes of queer representation by using queer and bisexual characters that completely avoid coming out narratives and monosexist tropes that favor binary categorizations of identity. I argue that a higher quantity of queer representations within this network has resulted in a broader range of queer narratives that should only continue to grow if the network continues to dedicate itself to diversity in this substantive ways.

Chapter 4: Reasons to Celebrate in the Post-gay Television Era

The 2018-2019 season Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation report found that bisexual+ characters make up 27 percent of all LGBTQ characters across streaming, broadcast, and cable.¹⁵³ As bisexual characters and narratives continue to be explored across all platforms, examining the shifting trends within those representations can have many implications for the queer fan community. Whereas in previous television, queer content was often stereotypical or lacking in diverse ideas about sexual identity, my analysis of the CW network shows *The 100* and *Legacies* show more diverse and progressive meanings of sexual identity. The CW has had some notable stumbles in this representational effort, but I argue that that process has helped the network learn how to offer progressive representations as it offers more queer content and characters on its network than ever before.

The overarching narrative and message of *The 100* is that survival is only possible through inclusion of diverse people rather than divisions between them. The relationship between Clarke and Lexa is always portrayed through the premise of Clarke fighting to prove that her people from the Ark should be included in the Grounders' clans rather than being at war with them. The program as a whole rests on a message of inclusivity. As each character struggles with their individual issues, all "good" characters must come to the conclusion that acceptance and peace, rather than division and war, are the way forward. All of the character stumbles on the path to inclusivity are represented by rejections of those values. This is significant because it expands the idea of inclusion from being tied strictly to sexual identity into the basic fabric and premise of the show. Similarly in *Legacies*, the whole premise of the

¹⁵³ "Where We Are on TV 18'-19'," (Los Angeles, CA: GLAAD Media Institute, 2019), 26.

school that houses the supernatural teens is a metaphor for diversity. The intersections of queer and Othered identities in the show promote values of inclusion. Representations in teen television will never perfectly reflect identity struggles. However, they can incorporate progressive ideas in new ways that help queer and straight audiences alike negotiate meanings about diversity, identity, and even leadership. Clarke Griffin is not defined by a lesbian or bisexual identity, but by the leadership and choices she makes to defend her people. She is defined by her power and therefore defined by her enemies as “The Commander of Death.” Queer characters in *Legacies* are also devoid of such labels and are noted rather for their unique supernatural abilities.

The progression of Clarke’s relationships with Finn and Lexa and the establishment of her bisexual identity are important representations for the LGBT community and are extremely impactful because of their potential reach, given the lively fandom associated with the show. Clarke being the first lead bisexual female character also raised the stakes of this representation. *The 100* showrunner Rothenberg insists that while the show never utters the word bisexual, inclusion rather than division is the main message: “In our show, all relationships start with one question: ‘Can you help me survive today?’ It doesn’t matter what color you are, what gender identity you are, or whether you’re gay, bi or straight. The things that divide us as global citizens today don’t matter in this show. And that’s the beauty of science-fiction. We can make a point without preaching. We can say that race, sexuality, gender and disability should

not divide us.”¹⁵⁴ The show avoids using labels to categorize queer sexual identity and uses authentic representations of on-screen queer intimacy to do so instead.

The progression of characters and narratives from *The Vampire Diaries* to its latest spinoff *Legacies* helps show how far The CW has come in its commitment to diversity of representation. These shows have used the supernatural as a place to explore Othered identities, as previous television has done. By first introducing the audience to high school girls dating vampires, the show took a ten year journey to other more obvious queer representations such as girls dating girls, or vampire boys, or both. The Salvatore Boarding School for the Young and Gifted is a great metaphor for the show’s underlying premise of inclusion, but *Legacies* goes far beyond narrative codes and metaphors to deliver its messages of inclusivity. It offers progressive representations of teens embracing fluid sexual identities largely avoiding tired tropes of the past. Penelope Park, Josie Saltzman and Hope Mikaelson are strong, courageous women who embrace their identities proudly. However the school secluding the supernatural teens from the outside world, who may not understand their unique identities, helps show that the conflict or struggle surrounding minority identity is not completely solved.

I have argued that the CW’s representations as examples of a post-gay television era turn away from defining sexual identity in heteronormative terms. Both *The 100* and *Legacies* typically do not use coming-out narratives to define queer identity. This is important because of the ways in which the network is positioning bisexuality as a substitute narrative practice. Rather than coming out, characters simply begin moving between heterosexual and

¹⁵⁴ Rothenberg, Medium.

homosexual relationships. In *Legacies*, the problems of the bisexual characters revolve around common teen issues in general, not their (bi)sexual identities or more stereotypical representations about the fears of divulging their identity to heterosexual characters. Although writers have Penelope Park go out of her way to aggressively announce her non-binary sensibilities, narratives generally steer away from representations that have conflicting ideas about one's queer sexual identity. As I continue to notice the CW's increasing use of bisexual characters in its shows, this diversity also allows for the opening up of narrative possibilities. The potential romantic pairings of bisexual characters are essentially doubled and add a whole different facet to storylines. Other main characters on CW shows, such as Sara Lance on *Arrow* and *DC Legends of Tomorrow* (2016-), and Cheryl Blossom and Toni Topaz on *Riverdale*, are openly bisexual, though with varying degrees of "coming out." These female bisexual characters have meaningful relationships with men and with women, satisfying the sensibilities of straight and non-straight audiences.

The online fan practices such as the hashtag movement #LexaDeservedBetter are increasingly useful for social media campaigns and also for negotiating identity beyond original television representations. While the CW's opportunistic branding makes strong claims about inclusion and diversity, #LexaDeservedBetter helps to show that much of the social movement aspect following the representations are actually rooted in audience action. They help shape industry practices and show producers and writers what representational issues are important to their niche audience. Extra-textual audience-produced cultural objects, such as memes and online artwork surrounding the hashtag, also help bind the virtual queer fan community together. More than that, the representations from *The 100* and their implications evolved into

a broader queer social movement in the creation of a fan convention called Clexacon. Clexacon began March 3-5, 2017 in Las Vegas, exactly one year after episode “Thirteen” aired and Lexa died. The event is a media and entertainment convention for LGBTQ women and allies aimed at empowering media creators to produce more positive LGBTQ content, and provide educational resources to help guide the effort toward better representation.¹⁵⁵ A variety of writer and creator workshops and meet-and-greets with television industry professionals and queer TV actresses are presented alongside activities deemed just for fun. Now in its third year of operation, Clexacon helps signify the value of Clarke and Lexa’s relationship beyond its narrative world. The existence of this event supports my claim that the Clexa incident has helped guide the television industry and the CW toward more progressive representations of queer identity.

While I am satisfied with the arguments I have been able to make, this thesis also has some limitation. One is the specific scope of the two shows I examined in regard to broader claims about the network’s representations of diverse identities. The CW has added several other queer narratives into its newer shows. Without analyzing those as well, I may have missed other defining queer moments, progressive or stereotypical, in its teen-oriented television. Also, *Legacies* has only had one season to make its claims about diversity of representation alongside the network’s 2018 campaign “CW Open To ALL.” Initial seasons often take more time and care with character building and setting up the premise of the show, so without seeing how the plotlines continue to develop it is hard to tell how well the CW lives up to its promises. For one, we cannot yet tell if Penelope Park’s storyline is really being written off

¹⁵⁵ “Our Vision,” Clexacon. <https://clexa-con.com/about/vision/>.

and thus entering the domain of queerbaiting, or if the threat is merely a narrative twist. Other new shows introduced for the 2018-2019 season included *Charmed*, *Roswell: New Mexico*, *All American*, and *In the Dark*. These shows address many other intersections of diverse identities including disability and blindness in *In the Dark*, or the emphasis on dynamics of black identity on *All American*, both examples of minority representation that may have different implications for the network's branding toward inclusivity.

Whether or not the CW continues to live up to expectations about representational diversity, these narrative depictions can only go so far. While the network goes to great lengths to incorporate queer characters, other minority or contested representations remain largely unexamined. The pervasiveness of "post-racial" casting, where roles are filled by either white or racially ambiguous, young, and conventionally attractive actors and actresses, shows a sort of homogeneity that veers away from bolder representational "risks" that may alienate segments of their audience. This branding strategy allows the appearance of socially progressive ideas that are tempered by the more practical sensibilities of the CW network's advertising revenues and industry limits. While the CW's parent company CBS may be willing to let the smaller network push some representational boundaries, the limitations are shown by the media conglomerate's avoidance of more socially controversial issues.

This study is also centered around bisexual or fluid representations of female characters and does not investigate in depth the portrayals of those who identify as strictly lesbians, gay or bisexual men, or transgendered characters. There are several other specific representations that would warrant further analysis. The CW has broken ground in several categories, such as

introducing the first transgendered superhero in character Nia, a.k.a Dream Girl, who is played by transgender actress Nicole Maines. The actress asserts that it would have been inspiring to her if she had been able to see representations such as this when she was growing up: “If I had had a trans superhero, someone who looks like me wearing a cape, (while) growing up, that would have been an entire new level of validation in myself to think that I can be a superhero.”¹⁵⁶ Slated for a potential fall 2019 premiere, the CW is also preparing to introduce another DC superhero storyline in *Batgirl*, which would follow the storyline of character Kate Kane, who is described as an openly out lesbian.

As television researchers continue to examine representations of queer identity and its implications on young people’s negotiations of identity, this thesis helps prompt further areas of discussion. With a growing quantity of queer representations on screen, how does that compare with the number of queer actors and actresses who fill those roles? Is queer diversity behind the camera being considered as well? The most recent GLAAD report notes that bisexual representations heavily favor women over men across all platforms, with 84 women to 33 men.¹⁵⁷ Why are networks more willing to grapple with ideas about female bisexual identity over male? Does this relate to previous tropes about bisexual women that are meant to be titillating or pander to the male gaze? Season six of *The 100* also recently premiered on Tuesday, April 30, 2019. Will the showrunners ever reinvest time into any sort of romantic storyline for Clarke Griffin or will fear of audience backlash leave her prey to bisexual erasure? Up until this point, since Lexa’s death, writers have largely avoided any reference to Clarke’s

¹⁵⁶ Bill Keveney, “‘Supergirl’ Nicole Maines shows her power as TV’s first transgendered superhero,” *USA Today*, October 10, 2018. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/tv/2018/10/10/nicole-maines-plays-first-transgender-superhero-cws-supergirl/1583499002/>

¹⁵⁷ GLAAD 2018/19

romantic relationships aside from the occasional hook-up with character Niylah. Another question for consideration is if the narrative foci on queer identity no longer rest upon labels and coming-out stories, what issues *do* represent ideas about queer youth coming of age in a “straight” world? One thing that comes to mind is the depiction of queer sex education. While teen TV has previously been a place to offer ideas about sex education for straight teens, such as the multiple birth control-centric episodes on shows such as *One Tree Hill*, the same cannot be said for LGBTQ sex education. If the CW is taking a more liberally progressive stance on youth-and-sex as fun, as researcher Meyers argues, is it also offering authentic ideas about sex education to its queer viewers? Finally, other researchers may have differing viewpoints on how progressive these queer narratives are. Although I argue that coming-out narratives are no longer the main narrative focus of queer identities, others may feel that moving away from this identity “conflict” inaccurately implies that the struggles over queer identity have been solved.

I argue that the CW’s contributions to television in a “post-gay” era have resulted in a broader diversity of queer representations that specifically use female bisexual characters to avoid many previous stereotypical narratives. They use progressive methods to connect characters to queer identity, which I believe more accurately reflect the lived experiences of young people who may be questioning their own identities. Growing up a fan of teen-television shows on the WB, then the CW, and even The N, I was constantly searching for examples not only of strong women, but of sexually fluid women that would have helped validate my own feelings about sexuality. Older representations showed me that I was either gay or straight, with bisexuality either “just a phase” or not represented at all. Now, when I turn on the CW to any given show, I am not surprised to see bisexual, transgendered, or other non-binary

characters woven into the storylines with thought and care from showrunners, rather than the token gay roles of the past.

With a rising quantity of queer representations on the CW, the network's encouragement of social media discourse surrounding its shows also makes it easy to connect with others sympathetic to queer culture. Broader intersections of queer identity can be examined as the CW continues to emphasize and celebrate diversity. While the CW marketing strategy insists that it is open to all, all choices, all orientations, all lifestyles, its representations do not insist that identities are to be defined or restricted by labels. As depictions of non-straight identity begin to reflect a broader spectrum of the LGBTQ community, heterosexual audiences that are introduced to more progressive and diverse representations may also make useful negotiations about minority identities and how those are reflected in their own lives. I am reminded of how important making these connections are as I watch the eagerly awaited season six premiere of *The 100*. I had watched all the extended trailers and searched for pre-season spoilers as the last survivors of the earth's apocalypse set foot on a new and uncharted planet after 125 years of being cryo-frozen traveling through space. Lexa has been dead for more than three years, and I know that I am not the only one who waits on edge for any small reference to her and the epic relationship between her and Clarke. I am not the only one anxiously wondering whether or not Penelope Park will be written back into *Legacies*. I have had a "relationship" with some of these characters, such as those reoccurring from *The Vampire Diaries*, for ten years, negotiating with them their on-screen relationships, onslaught of teen identity crises, and coming of age stories in time with similar challenges presented to me in my own life. These diverse representations have been shaped in part by the advocacy of

CW showrunners as well as the queer fan community's continued pursuit for more accurate representation. However, they have also been shaped by the CW's marketing strategies that have undoubtedly tapped into a lucrative advertising market that appeals to an audience who is attracted to the idea of defiance. This niche network has gone out of its way to offer progressive representations of non-straight or queer identity in what I consider to be a celebration of the progress television has made in a post-gay era.

Bibliography

- @dalalishere, Twitter post. Feb 11, 2019, 1:24 p.m.
<https://twitter.com/dalalishere/status/1095055930134331395>.
- "2018-2019 Where We Are on TV," (Los Angeles, CA: GLAAD Media Institute, 2019), 1-36.
- "A Pledge to the LGBT Fandom." LGBT Fans Deserve Better.
<https://lgbtfansdeservebetter.com/pledge/>.
- "Heteronormative." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/heteronormative>.
- ADC France, Twitter post. Jan. 31, 2019, 4:08. <https://twitter.com/ADCFrance/status/>.
- Allen, Robert C. *Speaking of Soap Operas*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1985.
- Ben Aslinger, "Rocking Prime Time: Gender, The WB, and Teen Culture." In *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*, eds Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2008), 78-91.
- Barr, Merrill. "The CW Doesn't Care About Live Views Because The CW Doesn't Have a Major Stake In Its Programming." *Forbes*, January 11, 2016.
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/merrillbarr/2016/01/11/the-cw-arrow-flash-legends-of-tomorrow-jane-the-virgin-supernatural/#482ba24c4fe9>.
- Bazilian, Emma. "Netflix Pays \$1 Billion for CW Streaming Rights." *Adweek*, October 14, 2011.
<https://www.adweek.com/tv-video/netflix-pays-1-billion-cw-streaming-rights-135799/>.
- Becker, Ron. *Gay TV Straight America*. New Brunswick, New Jersey, London: Rutgers University Press, 2006.
- Beyers, Michele, editor. *Growing Up Degrassi: Television, Identity and Youth Cultures*. Toronto, Ontario: Sumach Press, 2005.
- Bo, Twitter post. Jan 19, 2019, 8:22 a.m.
<https://twitter.com/Aeon10/status/1086644986639048705>.
- Bolte, Caralyn. "Normal is the Watchword": Exiling Cultural Anxieties and Redefining Desire from the Margins." In *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*, edited by Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein, 93-113. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2008.
- Bookman, Samantha. "CW's streaming audience may be up 60 percent." *FierceOnlineVideo*. May 15, 2014. [https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5C72-0KV1-JB6S-FOJW-00000-00&context=1516831](https://advance.lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5C72-0KV1-JB6S-FOJW-00000-00&context=1516831).

- Brickman, Barbara. "The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Fan: Consumption and Queer Inspiration in *Six Feet Under*." In *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*, edited by Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein, 150-169. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2008.
- Carbone, Gina. "Legacies Just Lost One Of Its Best Characters After Her Vampire Diaries Truth Bomb." *Cinema Blend*, March 2019. <https://www.cinemablend.com/television/2468446/legacies-just-lost-one-of-its-best-characters-after-her-vampire-diaries-truth-bomb>.
- Chhetri, Priyam. "Legacies: Fans applaud CW for diversity on display but hope to see a trans character soon." *Media, Entertainment, Arts, Worldwide*, Dec. 6, 2018. <https://meaww.com/legacies-cw-fans-are-happy-with-diversity-on-the-show>.
- Cobb, Kayla. "The Netflix Bump is a Real Thing for the CW," *Decider*, August 6, 2018. <https://decider.com/2018/08/06/cw-tca-2018/>.
- Corey, Sarah. "All Bi Myself: Analyzing Television's Presentation of Female Bisexuality." *Journal of Bisexuality* 17, no. 2 (April 13, 2017): 190-205.
- CW 2017-18 Season Ratings. TV Series Finale, October 8, 2018. <https://tvseriesfinale.com/tv-show/cw-2017-18-season-ratings/>.
- Deschler, Kira. "Not Another Dead Lesbian: The Bury Your Gays Trope, Queer Grief, and The 100." *Honors Theses*, Whitman College: Accessible Research Materials in Digital Archives. (April 28, 2017). 1-89.
- Donahue, Tara. "Three Years Later, Lexa's Legacy Still Lives On." *Fandemonium Magazine*. March 3, 2019. <https://fandemoniummagazine.com/lexas-legacy>.
- Flanders, Corey, and Cheryl Dobinson, and Carmen Logie, "I'm Never Really My Full Self": Young Bisexual Women's Perception of Their Mental Health." *Journal of Bisexuality* 15, no 4. (Dec. 17, 2015).
- Fuchs, Cynthia. "Did Anyone Ever Explain to you What 'Secret Identity' Means?': Race and Displacement in *Buffy* and *Dark Angel*." In *Undead TV: Essays on Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, edited by Elana Levine and Lisa Parks, 96-115. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.
- Ghaziani, Amin. "Post-Gay Collective Identity Construction." *Social Problems* 58, no. 1 (February 1, 2011): 99-125.
- Glassman, Thea. "Inside the Thrilling, Chaotic Writers' Room of *Dawson's Creek*." *Vanity Fair*, Jan. 19, 2018. <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2018/01/dawsons-creek-20th-anniversary-writers-room>.

- Goldstein, Marilyn. "Strange Things Are Happening in the Occult." *The Washington Post*, July 25, 1971.
- Grillo-Marxuach, Javier, writer. "Thirteen." In *The 100*. The CW. March 3, 2016.
- Hall, Stuart ed. *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Vol. 2 London, ENG: Sage, 1997.
- Hart, Kylo-Patrick R, ed. *Queer TV in the 21st Century: Essays on Broadcasting from Taboo to Acceptance*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2016.
- Hanmer, Rosalind. "Internet Fandom, Queer Discourse, and Identities." In *LGBT Identity and Online New Media*, eds Christopher Pullen and Margaret Cooper. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), 147-158.
- Himberg, Julia. *The New Gay For Pay*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017.
- Hollow, Daniel. "New 2017-2018 TV Shows Are Mostly White and Male." *Variety*, May 19, 2017. <https://variety.com/2017/tv/news/new-2017-18-tv-shows-no-diversity-1202436493/>.
- Jackson, Stevi. "Gender, sexuality, and heterosexuality: the complexity and limits of heteronormativity." *Feminist Theory*, 7, no 1. (2006): 105-121.
- Johnson, Hannah J. "Bisexuality, Mental Health, and Media Representation." *Journal of Bisexuality* 5, no. 3 (May 9, 2016): 378-96.
- Katz, Sherri Jean. "Degrassi Then and Now: Teens, Authenticity and the Media." In *Growing Up Degrassi: Television, Identity and Youth Cultures*, edited by Michele Beyers, 77-95. Toronto, Ontario: Sumach Press, 2005.
- Kearney, Mary Celeste. "The Changing Face of Teen Television, or why we all Love Buffy." In *Undead TV: Essays on Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, edited by Elana Levine and Lisa Parks, 17-41. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.
- Kelly, Caitlin. "The CW keeps diversifying, both in front of and behind the camera." *Hypable*, May 12, 2018. <https://www.hypable.com/the-cw-diversity/>.
- Keveney, Bill. "'Supergirl' Nicole Maines shows her power as TV's first transgendered superhero." *USA Today*, October 10, 2018. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/tv/2018/10/10/nicole-maines-plays-first-transgender-superhero-cws-supergirl/1583499002/>.
- Kohnen, Melanie. *Queer Representation, Visibility, and Race in American Film and Television*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2015.
- Kohnen, Melanie. "The Adventures of a Repressed Farm Boy and the Billionaire Who Loves Him: Queer Spectatorship in *Smallville* Fandom." In *Teen Television: Essays on Programming*

- and Fandom*, eds. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2008), 207-223.
- Legacies*: Season One Ratings. TV Series Finale, March 29, 2019. <https://tvseriesfinale.com/tv-show/legacies-season-one-ratings/>.
- Levine, Elana, eds. and Lisa Parks. *Undead TV: Essays on Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.
- Li, Shirley. "The 100: Why defining Clarke's bisexuality marked a 'turning point' for the CW series." *Entertainment Weekly*, Feb. 17, 2016.
- Low, Elaine. "CW Chief Talks Streaming Marketplace, Fate of 'All American' and Salim Akil Allegations." *Variety*, January 31, 2019.
- Mathews, Brett. writer. "Hope is Not the Goal." In *Legacies*. The CW. Nov. 15, 2018.
- McCracken, Allison. "At Stake: Angel's Body, Fantasy Masculinity, and Queer Desire in Teen Television." In *Undead TV: Essays on Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, edited by Elana Levine and Lisa Parks, 116-144. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.
- Miller, Bruce, writer. "Spacewalker." In *The 100*. The CW. December 17, 2014.
- Miller, Liz Shannon. "CW President: New Series Take Chances, But Netflix Deal Is Key." *Indiewire*, February 1, 2019. <https://www.indiewire.com/2019/02/cw-president-netflix-black-lightning-in-the-dark-1202040374/>.
- Miller, Quinn. "Chapter 12 The Dick Van Dyke Show: Queer Meanings." In *How to Watch Television*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013.
- Meyer, Michaela D.E. "I'm Just Trying to Find My Way like Most Kids": Bisexuality, Adolescence, and the Drama of One Tree Hill." *Sexuality and Culture* 13, no. 4 (July 29, 2009): 237-51.
- Ng, Eve. "A 'Post-Gay' Era? Media Gaystreaming, Homonormativity, and the Politics of LGBT Integration." *Communication, Culture & Critique* (May 10, 2013): 258-283.
- Ng, Eve. "Reading the Romance of Fan Cultural Production: Music Videos of a Television Lesbian Couple." *International Journal of Media and Culture* 6, no 2. (March 31, 2008), 103-121.
- Nyya kom Trikru, Twitter post. Feb. 10, 2019, 9:30 p.m. <https://twitter.com/Xonyya1/status/1094816028507410437>.
- "Our Vision," Clexacon. <https://clexa-con.com/about/vision/>.
- Owens, Andrew. "Coming Out of the Coffin." *Television and New Media* 17, no. 4 (May 2016): 350-65.

- Peitzman, Louis. "The Show That's Breaking New Ground For Queer Representation." *Buzzfeed*, January 21, 2016.
- Pereira, Daniel. "The 100 – Lexa and Clarke Kiss Scene (2x14)." YouTube video, Duration 2:26. Posted Feb. 25, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmy7c_gT1tw&t=72s.
- Jackgilinskys. "Every Clarke & Lexa Scene The 100." YouTube video, Duration 3:50:56. Posted July 7, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWIMils3pCE&t=9s>.
- Plec, Julie, writer. "This is the Part Where You Run." In *Legacies*. The CW. October 25, 2018.
- Ross, Sharon Marie. "Defining Teen Culture: The N Network." In *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*, edited by Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein, 61-77. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2008.
- Ross, Sharon Marie, eds. and Louisa Ellen Stein. *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2008.
- Ryan, Maureen. "The 100 Showrunner Talks Clarke's Sexuality, Lexa's Return and Season 3 Stakes." *Variety*, January 21, 2016.
- San Filippo, Maria. *The B Word: Bisexuality in Contemporary Film and TV*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013.
- Serafini, Victoria. "Bisexual Erasure in Queer Sci-fi Utopias." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, (June 15, 2017).
- Shumway, Kim, writer. "Bodyguard of Lies." In *The 100*. The CW. February 25, 2015.
- The CW Good. <http://www.cwtv.com/thecw/cwgood>
- Thursday TV Ratings: *Legacies*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *AP Bio*, *Gotham*, *NCAA Basketball*. March 29, 2019. <https://tvseriesfinale.com/tv-show/thursday-tv-ratings-legacies-greys-anatomy-ap-bio-gotham-ncaa-basketball/>.
- Tresca, Don. "Skeletons in the Closet: The Contradictory Views of the Queer in the Works of Joss Whedon," In *Queer TV in the 21st Century: Essays on Broadcasting from Taboo to Acceptance*, edited by Kylo Patrick R. Hart, 26-40. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2016.
- Turchiano, Danielle. "The CW Launches #CWOpenToAll Campaign to Promote Inclusion (Watch)." *Variety*, Oct. 14, 2018. <https://variety.com/2018/tv/news/cw-open-to-all-campaign-launch-video-1202979608/>.
- Tv Promo 360. "2018 Fall CW Dare To Defy Extended Promo." YouTube video, Duration 1:25. Posted May 17, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9lgpK5sTG8>.
- Tv Promo 360. "2018 Fall CW Open To All Trailer." YouTube video, Duration 1:00. Posted Oct. 17, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TAOX8tJQCSg>.

Van Damme, Elke. "Gender and Sexual Scripts in Popular US Teen Series: A Study on the Gendered Discourses in *One Tree Hill* and *Gossip Girl*." *Catalan Journal of Communication and Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (June 1, 2010): 77-92.

Van Damme, Elke, and Sofie Van Bauwel. "'I Don't Wanna Be Anything Other than Me': A Case Study on Gender Representations of Teenagers in American Teen Drama Series *One Tree Hill*." *Interactions: Studies in Communications and Culture*, 1st ser., 2 (2010): 17-33.

Wee, Valerie. "Teen Television and the WB Network." In *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*, edited by Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein, 43-60. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2008.

"*Where We Are on TV 17'-18'* GLAAD's *Annual Report on LGBTQ Inclusion*," (Los Angeles, CA: GLAAD, 2017), 1-32.