

Is Political Correctness Killing Entertainment?

On August 3rd, 1966, stand-up comedian Lenny Bruce was found dead in his bathroom, seemingly of a drug overdose. Only 40 years old at the time, Bruce's untimely death followed a string of run-ins with the law, and a four-month period in a New York workhouse.

The crime that landed Bruce in hot-water towards the end of his life? Obscenity. His off-color, overtly sexual and vulgar humor and frequent use of expletives was deemed too much for 1960s America, leading to a slew of legal troubles now perceived to be gross violations of his freedom of speech.

Naturally, such a scenario would be unthinkable today; I'm sure the skits and sketches of many prominent modern comedians would shock even the most salacious comics of the mid-20th century. The idea that humor could land you in jail undoubtedly strikes many as synonymous with an archaic, authoritarian society.

Yet modern artists face similar opposition, albeit from a different perspective. To be "obscene" in 2018 is not to frequently use profanity or vulgarity, but to fail to conform to the worldview of the audience.

Take, for instance, the new series [*Insatiable*](#) on Netflix. The show's plot revolves around an overweight, unpopular teenage girl who becomes thin and attractive. She then plans to exact revenge on her former bullies.

Now, I haven't actually watched the show, so I won't try to comment on its content. But the subject matter of an overweight teen becoming beautiful via weight loss is, predictably, perceived by many to be a promotion of an unhealthy, "fat-shaming" standard.

Even before the show's release, petitions were created calling for the show to be banned as a result of its controversial subject matter. Like Lenny Bruce, the show was deemed by many to be too obscene, and calls were made for its removal.

Similar controversy has erupted around the casting choice of straight actor [Jack Whitehall](#) as a gay character in Disney's upcoming *Jungle Cruise*, as well as the rumors of black actor [Idris Elba](#) potentially being cast as James Bond. While some call the former casting choice an issue of ["Queer Erasure,"](#) the latter has infuriated many on the other side of the political spectrum as an example of [forced diversity](#).

These two examples, along with *Insatiable*, represent the modern yoke on artistic freedom. While the writers, filmmakers, and comedians of the 50s and 60s were yoked by an arbitrary definition of obscenity, the modern artist is similarly restricted by definitions of inclusivity and political correctness.

Ultimately, it's long past due that we understand that art is inherently subjective; what one person may find hilarious, another may be both shocked and appalled by. It's not the job of the artist to cater to the demands of every potential audience member, but to present their work to the public to be weighed on its artistic merit.

Some art, in this way, becomes widely popular. Other work becomes niche or culty. Some works are just plain bad. Yet all art appeals to some form of consumer base and should not be judged based on some arbitrarily-set societal definition of acceptable.

The fuss around *Jungle Cruise*, *Insatiable*, and *James Bond*, while coming from different sides of the political spectrum and for different reasons, all hark back to an age of repressed art. Do we need to consider that keeping art free and responding to bad art with poor reviews and low ticket sales

is a better course of action?

In the words of Lenny Bruce: “The ‘what should be’ never did exist, but people keep trying to live up to it. There is no ‘what should be,’ there is only what is.”

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[Image Credit: [Walterlan Papetti](#)]