

“Isn’t It Better To Be Who I Am?”

Research Into the Depiction of Eric’s Intersectional Character in *Sex Education*



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13 juni 2019
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Abstract

Intersectionality can be described as the different axes of someone's identity, such as gender, colour of the skin and sexuality, and how they all work together to define how a person is treated in this society, with each of these axes or categories being a privilege or an oppression. This term, that Kimberle Crenshaw coined, is what is used to make the experiences of the multiply-burdened visible, as they have often been forgotten. This research chooses to look into the representation of intersectionality by looking at a multiply-burdened or intersectionally diverse character in the series *Sex Education*. The character, Eric, is a gay, black, lower-class, unpopular, religious boy who dresses in drag. Through the queer theory approach, which aims to use textual analysis to analyse queer people of colour in an intersectional way, Eric has been put under close inspection. The analysis proves that *Sex Education* is a fore-runner for other series in how a character like Eric should be depicted, with his own storyline and situations that are appropriate depictions without concluding to stereotyping. The research question that was used to come to this conclusion is: *how does the Netflix series Sex Education depict the intersectionality of Eric's character?*

Introduction

A person, in any kind of social situation, is not only judged by the colour of their skin, how much money they have, what gender they perform or who they are attracted to. In our society, every individual is seen and judged through all those different aspects that define them. Together, these all form someone's intersectional identity. The term intersectionality describes how different axes of someone's identity, such as gender, colour of the skin and sexuality, work together, each being a privilege or an oppression, to define how a person is treated from a society's perspective depending on where in the social hierarchy of our patriarchal society each of these axes land.¹

These intersectional identities generally lack proper representation. Filmmakers tend to choose the same type of characters for most of the movies and series that come out of Hollywood, instead of having a diverse cast which would better represent society at large. Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach have researched the advantages and disadvantages of multiple subordinate-group identities

¹ Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1 (1989): 139-141.

and have found that the representations of intersectionally subordinate groups are particularly poor.² Therefore, an improvement of these representations is critical, as Brooks and Herbert put it: “media are central to what ultimately come to represent our social realities.”³ Within our society, one of the major ways through which we learn the general discourse around topics that do not surround us in everyday life, is through television series. Furthermore, seeing yourself represented on the screen if you belong to one of several minority groups is essential in a person’s development.⁴ The Netflix series *Sex Education*, directed by Laurie Nunn, does this particularly well (2019).⁵

This highly acclaimed Netflix tv series follows a group of high school students who are either thinking about, talking about or having sex. One of these students, Otis, the protagonist of the series and the son of a sex and relations therapist, starts out giving sex advice or ‘therapy’ to his A level peers. His best friend, Eric, longs to help him on this quest even though he is quickly made to feel that he cannot add anything of value. Consequently, Otis starts ignoring him in favour of being with Maeve, who handles the business side of the sex therapy. Nonetheless, the series does not use Eric as a heteronormative scapegoat, or as a stereotypical best friend to create some friction in the plot. Instead, *Sex Education* shines a light on an intersectionally diverse character. He is a black, gay, working class student who enjoys dressing up in drag and wearing make-up.

Eric is a focus point of the narrative, something which is not usual in these kinds of series, especially high school series.⁶ Since there is not enough of these representations, as Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach have argued, *Sex Education* provides the perfect case study to research how intersectionality should be represented and given a voice in modern day television.⁷ Therefore, through an analysis of the depiction of the intersectionality of Eric in *Sex Education*, I attempt to draw out what makes this series an example for others and perhaps also where it could still improve. The research question that will be handled in this analysis reads as follows: *how does the Netflix series Sex Education depict the intersectionality of Eric’s character?*

² Valerie Purdie-Vaughns & Richard Eibach, “Intersectional Invisibility: The Distinctive Advantages and Disadvantages of Multiple Subordinate-Group Identities,” *Sex Roles* 59 (April 2008): 384-385.

³ D.E. Brooks & L.P. Herbert, “Gender, Race and Media Representation,” in *Gender and Communication in Mediated Texts*, ed. B. Dow & J.T. Wood, (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2006), 297.

⁴ Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 1997), 6-9.

⁵ *Sex Education*, directed by Laurie Nunn, (2019).

⁶ Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, “Intersectional Invisibility,” 384-385.

⁷ Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, “Intersectional Invisibility,” 384-385.

Theoretical framework

There is a major difference between looking at one aspect of someone's identity on its own, or to look at their full intersectional identity. The former has been researched and analysed with plenitude, yet there is little work to be found on how these intersectional identities are, can or should be depicted. That gap is what this research aims to fill. Kimberle Crenshaw, a highly esteemed legal professor, civil rights advocate and leading scholar of critical race theory, was the first person to coin the term 'intersectionality' precisely because of the lack of understanding of the complex interluding mechanisms that constitute one's identity. Her findings were that the experience of the multiply-burdened were being ignored or forgotten. In her analysis she takes the black woman as central, as, in their identity, they have both their race and gender working against them in this contemporary western world.⁸

The term 'identity' is used here according to Stephanie Shields' definition. Shields specialises in emotional communication and gender studies, describes it as "social categories in which an individual claims membership as well as the personal meaning associated with those categories."⁹ The social categories are what can also be called the different axes of one's identity, which can either be a privilege or an oppression.

Thus, all these social categories work together to form someone's intersectionality. They are often socially constructed and held together by different social conditions and relations. Identities are not unified, there can be contradictions between them. Intersections create both oppression and opportunity, as each social category works differently. Most people experience at least one privilege and one prejudice in the forming of their identity. Moreover, someone's intersectional experience might be disadvantaged in one group and advantaged in another, says Shields.¹⁰ The way in which an identity is perceived, therefore, is completely interchangeable via numerous factors. An example of this in *Sex Education* pertaining Eric is in the form of two of his bullies in school. The first, Adam, is a closeted white boy who bullies him for being black and homosexual, whereas Anwar, a black homosexual male, does not see Eric as lesser because of the colour of his skin or his sexuality, but because of his unpopular status in school, he pushes him down in order to maintain his status.

The broad term to define the interlinking of all these social categories in one's identity is what has been coined intersectionality. Kathryn Woodward, in her explanation of identity, comes close to describing intersectionality, but she does not use the term. It is evident she is not talking about intersectionality when describing how one can look at identity through classificatory groups, giving the example of 'us' and 'them'.¹¹ The term intersectionality is a lot more complex and cannot be

⁸ Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," 139-141.

⁹ Stephanie Shields, "Gender: An Intersectionality Perspective," *Sex Roles* 59 (2008): 301.

¹⁰ Shields, "Gender: An Intersectionality Perspective," 302.

¹¹ Kathryn Woodward, *Identity and Difference*, (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 1997): 12.

classified in these terms. As Jennifer Nash has explained it, intersectionality “invited scholars to come to terms with the legacy of exclusions of multiply marginalized subjects from feminist and anti-racist work, and the impact of those absences on both theory and practice.”¹² Intersectionality is about more than ‘us’ and ‘them’, it is about how all the different aspects of ‘us’ come together.

Nash has critiqued Crenshaw’s conception of intersectionality because of its closeness to the definition of black feminism. Putting the black woman in the central role has the consequence that it has been used as a “theoretical wedge, designed to demonstrate the shortcomings of conventional feminist and anti-racist theory.”¹³ In reality, black women do not and cannot symbolize all the oppressed. Instead, it is important to refrain from looking at identities that have already been put together, such as a black woman, but instead work from the ground up to conceptualise the different ways that the social categories can work together to affect one’s life. Eric’s character clearly proves this because he does not represent the stereotypical character that is usually used as a scapegoat for when an ethnically diverse character is needed in a television series. It does not suffice to box all characters of a minority group into one analysis as their intersectional identity would never be the same. Instead, research into individual intersectional characters is what is missing.

Method

To analyse the depiction of Eric’s intersectionality in the series *Sex Education*, a method that was also used by Amber Johnson and Robin Boylorn, two professors specialising in intercultural communication, will be put into practice. They have done research into a YouTube series following the interconnected stories of ten black lesbian women.¹⁴ The method used to complete this research is based upon the method they used, which is the quare theory approach. This approach is a new type of textual analysis started by the chair of African American studies professor E. Patrick Johnson. Often the focus the LGBTQ+ community gets on television is almost exclusively based around the white race. Queer people of colour are often misrepresented because their widely varying identities are brought together into one frame, completely looking over their vastly different experiences. The quare approach essentially aims to “de-intersect” these identities, encouraging accurate depictions of LGBTQ+ people of colour by acknowledging the racial privilege of whiteness that has often been

¹² Jennifer Nash, “Re-Thinking Intersectionality,” *Feminist Review* 89 (2008): 3.

¹³ Nash, “Re-Thinking Intersectionality,” 8.

¹⁴ Amber Johnson & Robin Boylorn, “Digital Media and the Politics of Intersectional Queer Hyper/In/Visibility in *Between Women*,” *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 11, no. 1 (2015).

forgotten in their usual depictions, without forgetting to also include all the other social categories of someone's identity, such as gender and class.¹⁵

Analysing this depiction of Eric's intersectionality will be done with the use of three different lenses: visibility, hypervisibility and invisibility. This is the type of methodology that Johnson and Boylorn also used in their analysis. Visibility refers to what the series chooses to portray in relation to the issue or topic at hand, more specifically it is the scenarios that producers choose to shine a light on which, typically, in other series do not get any attention. Invisibility encompasses everything that has not been addressed in the series whilst a specific situation would have drawn that out in real life. Meaning there was a conscious decision made to not talk about a specific topic whilst it would have been important to include it. Lastly, hypervisibility is what indicates that there is, often untrue and almost always harmful, stereotyping in minority groups. This is a way for the story to not delve too deep into the character's personality and instead resort to stereotyping, often making the character act too over the top which in turn is harmful for the movement of that minority group as it hinders their plea for accurate representation.¹⁶

This method can be put into practice by focussing on three different things. The first is looking at Eric's emotions, what are his emotions in specific situations, and do they seem plausible, do they correlate with how a person with a similar intersectional identity would feel in real life. Secondly, the people around Eric are a great indicator if his intersectionality is depicted accurately. Either how they treat Eric or how they feel about Eric's situations. For example, his father would feel scared for Eric if he puts himself in what he thinks to be dangerous situations, yet his classmates could be the people putting him there. Lastly, it is also important to analyse what kinds of privileges and prejudices he experiences daily, this is more about the wider more systemic oppression he might experience, for instance if it is harder for him to get certain opportunities in comparison to his peers.

As intersectional characters such as Eric lack proper representation on screen, a proper approach to handle an analysis of such a minority character is crucial to properly be able to analyse the effects of his intersectionality. Thus, the queer theory approach is a suitable method for this research because it was designed specifically as a textual analysis that interprets how black queer characters, such as Eric, are represented in television series, with a specific focus on the intersectional part of the character. The three lenses have been introduced as a methodological guide as it refrains the focus from being too much on the positives of the depiction of Eric's intersectionality and ascertains that the different things the series can still improve on are also highlighted.

The first episode used for the analysis will be episode one, as it is the episode where the characters are introduced to the audience. The second chosen episode, episode five, is the complete story of when Eric goes to the show *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, dressed up as Hedwig. It includes all

¹⁵ E. Patrick Johnson, "'Quare' Studies, or (almost) everything I know about queer studies I learned from my grandmother," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (2010): 2-4.

¹⁶ Johnson & Boylorn, "Digital Media," 1-26.

the scenes from the moment he gets dressed until after he leaves Otis' house after returning from the show. The second is prom night, which is in episode seven. This starts at the scene where Eric is walking home with groceries and meets a black man dressed in drag. It ends when he leaves Otis' home after the event. These scenes and events have been chosen specifically because in each one they include different settings and/or people.

Meet Eric

At first glance, Eric seems to be portrayed in a stereotypical fashion. He is the gay, black best friend whose always on Otis' side without having much of a personal storyline. Consequently, the first episode has greater amount of examples in hypervisibility and invisibility than visibility, it seems to perfectly prove Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach's argument and point of critique that the multiply-burdened often do not get accurate representation, even if they are present in the series.¹⁷ An accurate description of his personality would be extravagant, in every sense of the word. He is always there for his best friend, does not seem to be taken aback for too long after being bullied, something which seems to happen constantly, and he even likes the only other gay person in the school, something which is also commented on by Otis: "you don't have to like him just because he's the only other gay person in the school." His own storyline is next to non-existent, apart from a few glances into his life at home. Overall, the impression one gets from watching the first episode is that Eric's story will be one of many seen before in series such as *Sex and the City* and *Will & Grace*, as the stereotypical diverse misrepresented gay, black best friend.¹⁸

Even though his behaviour is very stereotypical in the first episode, he immediately becomes a very likeable character. A lot of people, specifically teenagers, often look for and desire having a gay best friend and Eric fills this place. 'My gay best friend' being a phrase that is being used a lot among girls. Something which is again reinforced by a lot of series that dig into this stereotype. The gay best friend character is used as comic relief, with his witty comments and unending loyalty.¹⁹ Consequently, this part of Eric's portrayal falls into the hypervisibility lens as these stereotypes have been pushed onto audiences for a long time and that has proven to be harmful towards the general understanding of gay people but also people with a mostly prejudiced intersectional identity.

¹⁷ Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, "Intersectional Invisibility," 384-385.

¹⁸ Karin Quimby, "Will & Grace: Negotiating (Gay) Marriage on Prime-Time Television," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 38, no. 4 (2005): 716-718.

¹⁹ "Just Because I'm Gay Doesn't Mean I Want to be Your Sidekick," Man Repeller, accessed May 27, 2019, <https://www.manrepeller.com/2018/10/gay-best-friend-stereotype.html>.

Nevertheless, the audience does get a glance into Eric's life outside of the best friend role when he is putting on make-up in secret in his room. A suitcase and a chair serve as a lock in front of the door so that his family members will not walk in on him and see what he is doing. At this point in the series the audience has not yet seen his family, but this short scene gives a slight indication as to what kind of a family he has. Additionally, when his father calls him to help him and his mother downstairs, Eric immediately has to take off his make-up even though he was not finished yet. This is an indication that his family will not be accepting towards him if they find out that is one of his hobbies, he is hiding a part of this identity from his family for being afraid of what they might say or do. This is simply speculation in the first episode, however, it is one of the few parts of his story in the first episode that conform to the visibility lens as it is a common occurrence for gay, black boys that like to do drag to have to hide their full identity from their parents.

Evidently, Eric is a more diverse character than many of the other protagonists. The audience quickly learns about Eric being black, gay, lower class, hiding his full identity from his family and being the laughing matter in the school since a lot of his peers call him 'tromboner'. This is an almost complete opposite description to Otis, who is a white, straight, middle class boy who, even though he is not the most popular boy in the school, does not get bullied to the extent that Eric does. This is already an indication as to how the systemic prejudices against Eric are being portrayed in the series, especially in the form of Eric's biggest bully, Adam. There are several instances in the first episode where Eric is being bullied by Adam whilst standing next to Otis, yet Otis does not receive any of the abuse. Eric's different axes of his identity, as described by Shields, are working together so that the world sees him in a specific way, which is why Adam has chosen him as his bullying victim.²⁰ The prejudices against Eric already shimmer through in this way in the first episode, the series is trying to make these prejudices visible.

To further prove this point, as well as Otis, Anwar, the only other gay and coincidentally person of colour in the school does not get bullied by Adam, even though Eric's and Anwar's intersectional identities are very alike. Yet, it is not the same. Both Eric and Anwar possess different prejudices and privileges in different social categories, as Shields calls it, even though some might overlap their experiences are still completely different.²¹ Concluding, here it becomes evident why Nash has critiqued Crenshaw's definition of intersectionality, because there is not one specific type of an intersectional identity, everyone experiences every situation differently based on how the world sees them and what society judges them on.²²

²⁰ Shields, "Gender: An Intersectionality Perspective," 301.

²¹ Shields, "Gender: An Intersectionality Perspective," 301.

²² Nash, "Re-Thinking Intersectionality," 8.

Undergoing a transformation

The next episode that was chosen for this analysis, episode five, depicts a big transformation in Eric's character and storyline. In this episode the audience gets confronted with their own stereotyping and prejudices against how characters like Eric are being portrayed in the series. In episode five, when his narrative starts growing, it becomes evident that Eric has not just been written into the series as a diversity scapegoat. In the episode, it is Eric's birthday and Otis surprises him with tickets to go to the musical *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, which is a birthday tradition. They dress up in drag, wearing make-up and high heels and they are supposed to take the bus to the city centre together when Otis is delayed because of some things he has to handle for the sex therapy he gives at school. Instead, Eric has to go to the city by himself, but since his intersectional identity is not one that is commonly accepted by society, he gets scared. What follows is a series of experiences which each time bring Eric into a situation in which his fear gets worse.

First, he gets on the bus by himself dressed in drag; secondly, he gets told by Otis that he will not be joining Eric for a while longer and eventually at all; afterwards his jacket with his wallet and phone get stolen and nobody at the bus station is willing to help him; lastly, after he is forced to walk home because he does not have any money for the bus or a phone to call someone, he gets beaten up by two men after they verbally abuse him from their car. Throughout this episode, a new layer of his intersectional identity is added every time the episode returns to Eric's story. He begins as Otis' best friend, Eric's storyline has not been revealed to a great extent yet, he is mainly known to us as the gay, black best friend. As he gets his own storyline there are more categories of his identity that are revealed. The first one being dressing up in drag, the difference between how Otis has dressed up and how Eric is dressed proves that Eric does not only do this once a year but that it is in fact a bigger hobby or lifestyle choice. The next category that becomes evident to the audience is his lower-class status. Eric's coat with his wallet and phone inside are stolen at the bus station, nobody will help him because of his intersectional identity as a whole. It is also not an option for him to get a taxi to drive home and let his parents pay for the fare. He is forced to walk home alone in the dark. By the time Eric gets confronted by the two men in the car, the audience has been introduced to all the parts of his intersectional identity that play a role in how these men act towards Eric in that scene. Crenshaw was the first one to argue that all of these prejudices are working together against him to make these occurrences happen and get worse over the course of the day, which is exactly what can be seen here.²³ All these occurrences during the day have not only been a consequence of the drag that he is wearing, they have been a consequence of the drag together with all the other axes of his intersectional identity, with just one of them being switched his experience would have been very different.

²³ Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," 139-141.

A way to prove that these have all been working together is by looking at Otis' day, who has also been wearing drag. Even though Otis remains within the relatively safe bubble of his own town, meeting mainly his school peers, that does not take away from the fact that the experiences are still vastly different. Every time someone sees Otis, his way of dressing is either laughed off as a joke or it is perceived as normal. Otis only has one category of his intersectional identity, his drag, that is a prejudice against him at this time, apart from that all the other categories are all privileges, he is almost the complete opposite to Eric. This comparison shines a light on the fact that even though two boys from the same place are wearing exactly the same thing, their experiences throughout the day are vastly different because of their completely different intersectional identities.

On this trip to the city Eric experiences another level of discrimination, very different to the bullies he is used to from his high school. In this episode he realises what kind of a toll society puts on people with such diverse intersectional identities, identities with more prejudices than privileges. From this moment on in the series he undergoes a major transformation, due to his intersectional identity generally not being accepted by society he decides to change this. Since intersectionality is also about how someone is perceived in the world, changing someone's behaviour and look can change the way someone is treated. Being gay and black is not something that can be modified; however, Eric does choose to stop expressing his extravagant personality. He is no longer the excited homosexual, nor does he dress in drag anymore or wear any kind of colourful clothes. He is changing the way he is perceived so that some of the axes of his identity can pretend to fit in on the privileged side of the spectrum.

Noticeably, his narrative has developed a lot more at the end of this episode, with Eric no longer being just Otis' best friend. Instead, the way his character is being portrayed has already become an example for other series due to the fact that Eric actually has his own storyline away from the protagonist and is facing difficulties that all have to do with this intersectional identity. Instead of the series shying away from portraying the situations that often arise with people like Eric, they have looked at his specific identity, just as Nash argues it should be done since no two identities are the same so no two situations that would arise are the same either, and they have built a narrative for it.²⁴

Standing back up

These two episodes have showcased two different sides of the consequences of his intersectionality. On the one hand, the first episode has portrayed how his intersectionality has made him who he is and how he stands in life in general. On the other hand, in the second episode it is

²⁴ Nash, "Re-Thinking Intersectionality," 8.

shown how people outside of his day to day life and comfort zone react to his identity. In the third episode used for the analysis, episode seven, the transformation he undergoes following on from the events after *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* continues. He starts to find reconciliation and accepting who he truly is, even though the rest of society mostly does not, yet it takes a couple of people and experiences to bring him there. Yet again, this 're-finding' himself is portrayed with close resemblance to what could happen in real life, making this transformation a lot more visible than if Eric, for example, would have very suddenly gotten his confidence back.

Zooming in on the events that led to Eric feeling confident enough again to be himself, his complete self instead of a run-down version, the first noteworthy one is the fact that Eric meets another man in a car whose asking him for directions. This man is also dressed in drag, with make-up, nail polish and earrings. The moment the car stops the scepticism in Eric's body language and facial expressions are clear, understandable after the events that have happened when another car stopped for him in that same street. He approaches the car and is happily surprised by who he finds driving it. He meets someone with a very similar intersectional identity as himself, who has most likely also been through hard times, but who, despite the fears and struggles, chooses to be himself. After being confronted with someone so similar to himself, Eric realises he is not alone, there are other people like him. This scene here is a meta-comment, in this moment the series is showcasing it is aware of its position in society. The importance of being represented in tv series is crucial in someone's upbringing, as Hall has also argued.²⁵ Admittedly, the representation of these intersectional characters is a big part of the series storyline. This scene is particularly important because the series is commenting on its own role in society, as well as making clear the importance of even having such an intersectional identity represented. The man in the car shows Eric that he is not alone, there are people like him out there. *Sex Education* essentially wants to turn Eric into this man in the car, they want Eric to be the representative role-model to people watching the series with a similar identity, just like the man in the car was to Eric.

Another thing that brings Eric closer to accepting himself for who he is, is the fact that he re-found his faith in church. After having completely left church and the faith that comes with it behind him, continuing the horrible events in episode five he feels that going back to church would reignite some love towards himself that he thought he had lost. That does not mean that churches in general have been accepting of the LGBTQ+ community, there are plenty of examples in real life that showcase churches condemning people who identify as LGBTQ+, often people have to leave these communities for the sake of their well-being. Churches and Christianity still generally believe that two people of the same sex should not be together, only a man and a woman should marry, and no gendered lines should be crossed. *Sex Education*, on the other hand, seems to show another side of this story as the church and the people in it seem to be welcoming Eric back with open arms and

²⁵ Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations*, 6-9.

accepting him completely. However, one could also argue that the church is seeing a less extravagant version of Eric which might give out the wrong impression about him having changed. It is possible that the church and the priest now believe he has left some of his categorical axes behind him, such as being gay and wearing drag. It is not completely made clear in the series as either options are valid. The series could have focussed slightly more on the role of religion in Eric's life, as that is also a part of his intersectional identity that affects his day to day life. One important role of religion that has been covered in the series is how Eric uses Christianity to regain faith in himself. Having a loving community around him, a relative safe space, at least at that time, and somewhere to pray and feel loved is part of the reason why he felt confident enough to be himself again.

Moreover, in this episode the audience finds out that his father was never judgemental of him being gay or dressing in drag, he was just scared for his own son's safety. As an immigrant father who, because of his own completely unique intersectional identity, has experienced a lot of abuse in his life, which he does not want his son to go through. He even comments to him after bringing him to prom that Eric has made him a braver person. Once again, the storyline is taking a different turn to what is more usual with an intersectionally diverse character with a very religious family. The discrimination and neglect Eric felt in episode five is what his father has felt almost all his life, except for different reasons because he has different social categories making up his identity. This scene is a very powerful moment in the series for two reasons. Firstly, it stops religion from being bashed and solely blamed for a lot of problems that people like Eric experience. It is another way of combatting even more prejudices and stereotypes that the audience might have. Secondly, it is a way to showcase how someone's intersectionality might have a good lasting impact on the people around them, choosing to be yourself in this world, especially if yourself is someone different than the norm, is a brave move which can inspire others to be less scared and do the same. It is another comment from the series that representation is urgently needed to help others feel empowered to be themselves as well.

Conclusion

To be able to answer the research question, this analysis has utilized the queer theory approach with the use of three different lenses. It is the seriality of the series that has enabled Eric's accurate portrayal of his intersectional identity, as not only have effects of his identity been depicted but also the long-term consequences of the situations that come forth from these effects. Due to this the lens that the series can be most attributed to is visibility. The transformation Eric goes through is an important story to have represented in a television series. He is a person with a different kind of intersectional identity than is usually seen on screen, there has been no overwhelming stereotyping to

depict his character nor has he been portrayed in a negative way, giving minority groups someone to look up to.

Coherently, hypervisibility was also mentioned in this analysis. Mostly in the first episode where Eric's character is still being introduced to us. From the beginning the series has used this hypervisibility trait of stereotyping and has turned it on its head. Instead of giving in to the stereotypes, it has led the audience to believe that some kind of stereotyping was going to happen to Eric's character because of the expectations one has come to have through the unjust portrayal of minority groups in other series. The series itself, however, have gone completely the other way and have properly researched how Eric's character would feel, act and be treated in certain situations to make his intersectionality and how it has affected him as accurate as possible. This is why the series can be called a forerunner for others as it has complied with Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach's plea for better representation for more diverse characters, instead of putting them all onto one pile of diversity.²⁶

As Nash has argued, there are no two identities that are completely identical.²⁷ Seeing as it is not only the social categories that are important there but also the demographics of where one experiences this identity. Coming back to what Shields has argued, in some situations a person's social category might be a privilege whilst in other situations it might be an oppression.²⁸ Since there are no two equal intersectional identities it is crucial that minority groups are not analysed that way and put into the same box. A gay boy from a poor social economic background does not experience the same kind of discrimination as a middle-class gay boy, Eric and Anwar being the perfect example of this in the series.

Hence, further research into other characters that fall in specific minority groups should take this into account. As a matter of fact, more research into specific character's intersectionality and how it is portrayed is definitely needed. Nomi Marks in *Sense8* and Katherine J. Johnson in *Hidden Figures* are two examples of these characters that could be researched, yet any type of character would be interesting as well as it is not only important to highlight the series that do this depiction well, but also highlight those that do not to showcase what can be improved.²⁹

²⁶ Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, "Intersectional Invisibility," 384-385.

²⁷ Nash, "Re-Thinking Intersectionality," 8.

²⁸ Shields, "Gender: An Intersectionality Perspective," 302.

²⁹ *Sense8*, directed by Lana Wachowski, Lily Wachowski & J. Michael Straczynski, (2015-2018). *Hidden Figures*, directed by Theodore Melfi, (2016).

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