



# “I HAVE ZERO LIFE EXPERIENCE; I AM JUST A LESBIAN”

Anne’s lesbian identity and self-acceptance in her  
relationship with Sara in the Dutch television show  
ANNE+

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Supervisor: Dr. Magdalena Górska  
Second reader: Dr. Mikki Stelder

Jasmijn Huls - 6437486

## **Abstract**

This thesis is about the representation and constitution of the lesbian identity and lesbian self-acceptance of Anne in the Dutch television show *ANNE+*. In this thesis, I especially focus on Anne, a white, Dutch woman in her twenties and the main character of the show, in relation to her partner Sara, a Middle Eastern woman also in her twenties. The definition of 'lesbian identity' I work with in this thesis is the identity of a person who is not a cisgender man and is romantically and/or sexually attracted to people who are not cisgender men. The definition is inclusive of trans identities and asexuality. For '(lesbian) self-acceptance', I work with the following definition: self-acceptance is a state where a person accepts their own sexuality and identity and has little or no internalized homophobia or is in the process of accepting themselves and/or accepting and/or reducing internalized homophobia. Self-acceptance is thus more of a process than a trait. To analyse my research question, i.e., "In what way is Anne's lesbian identity and lesbian self-acceptance represented and constituted in *ANNE+*, in relation to her partner Sara?", I first provide a thick description of four selected scenes in which Anne and Sara are present. I do this to not only describe the scenes in terms of what can be seen, but also what is meant by what is portrayed and what the consequences of this are. After doing thick description, I do a feminist media analysis. I first focus on what is implicitly and explicitly said and shown about the lesbian identity and lesbian self-acceptance. Furthermore, I analyse what the meaning is of what is portrayed and how this meaning is constituted. I also study why is done what is done and provide criticism about the show when necessary. The conclusions of this study are that Anne's lesbian identity is formed around claiming lesbian labels and her expectation that others also claim labels, and thereby being inconsiderate of other's boundaries. Her self-acceptance is formed around being affectionate in public with her partner and disclosing her sexuality to others, and thereby, again, ignoring boundaries of her partner.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis is about how the Dutch television series *ANNE+* (2018-2020) portrays and constitutes the concepts of ‘lesbian identity’ and ‘lesbian self-acceptance’. I focus specifically on the lesbian identity and lesbian self-acceptance of Anne, who is the protagonist of the series, and I study the concepts of ‘lesbian identity’ and ‘lesbian self-acceptance’ through Anne’s relationship with Sara. I do this by doing thick description of four selected scenes and doing feminist media analysis, in which I link my observations from the show to existing literature and research, to draw my own conclusions.

The Dutch television series *ANNE+* (2018-2020) is all about Anne (Hanna van Vliet), a twenty-something lesbian who lives in Amsterdam. In the first season, which consists of six episodes each around ten minutes, the show portrays the (love) life of Anne and her relationships during her the time she was a student. The second season, that consists of eight episodes of around twenty minutes, starts where the first season ended. Anne has a new girlfriend, a job, a house in Amsterdam and a group of friends. However, she does not feel so good at all. She struggles with giving direction to her life, she has issues with some of her ex-girlfriends, her parents are divorcing, and her friends do not always have time and space for Anne either. For Anne, her adult life is going differently than she expected, because how does she find balance in her friends, her job, and her relationships? Besides on Anne, the focus in season 2 is also on Anne’s friends and family, and each couple has their own episode (*ANNE+* n.d.). The show aired in 2018 as a series on YouTube and can nowadays be watched on NPO Start, the video-on-demand service from the Dutch public broadcasting company. Besides, the show was on the Dutch and Belgian Netflix since March 2021, but it was taken off Netflix on March 4, 2023.

The series is created by screenwriter Maud Wiemeijer, director Valerie Bisscheroux and actor Hanna van Vliet. Wiemeijer came up with the character Anne who is mostly a young woman, a typical girl-next-door, and she just happens to be a lesbian. After some time, actor Hanna van Vliet was chosen as the perfect Anne, after which Bisscheroux, Wiemeijer, and Van Vliet started creating the show together (Schipper 2020). The show started as a web series, which is not uncommon for lesbian shows, although a Dutch variant was not yet made. Even though it might have been a niche, the series is partly made possible by crowdfunding, especially with donations of people who recognised the lack of lesbian representation in the media, and by the Amsterdam Fund for the Arts (AFK) (Snijders 2018). Later, *ANNE+* got picked up by Millstreet Films, a Dutch production company and the Dutch broadcasting association BNNVARA. The first season premiered on the Dutch Film Festival on September

30, 2018, and the first two episodes also premiered on YouTube that day. After that, the episodes were released on YouTube weekly and were also broadcasted on national television. In March 2020, season 2 premiered and, again, episodes were on TV weekly. Later, in October 2021, *ANNE+: The Film* premiered, which is built on the cinematic universe of the series and picks up on where season 2 of the series ended. Since February 2022, the film can also be watched on Netflix, meaning people in 190 countries can watch the film and it has subtitles in 32 languages (Geels 2022).

### ***1.1 Heteronormativity in the media***

Research by Daalmans and ter Horst (2014) that focussed on the representation of gender, age, ethnicity, and sexual orientation in prime time television<sup>1</sup> in the Netherlands found that in Dutch television there is “an overrepresentation of men, middle-aged persons, and heterosexuals compared to their proportion in society” (263) and “women, the elderly and sexual minorities<sup>2</sup> were significantly underrepresented” (263). Daalmans and ter Horst also discuss that portrayal of sexual minorities is often stereotypical, such as the gay best friend, and that the storylines of sexual minorities are often linked to private issues, such as friendship or romance, instead of “the reality of the remaining societal homonegative attitudes that pervades the private as well as the public sphere” (255). This results in sexual minorities not being associated with public themes (255-256). Heteronormativity in the Dutch media is relevant to this thesis since *ANNE+* is a Dutch show that especially represents women and sexual minorities, which are usually underrepresented in the Dutch media. *ANNE+* is thus different from other Dutch media on that front. However, since the research by Daalmans and ter Horst (2014) also found that portrayal of sexual minorities is often stereotypical, it is important to be aware of this while watching and analysing *ANNE+*.

### ***1.2 LGB(Q) + in the media***

Media in which lesbian, gay, and/or bisexual (LGB<sup>3+</sup>) people are portrayed can have an influence on the viewers. For example, through identifying with LGB+ characters, viewers can come to the realisation they are LGB+ as well. Besides, LGB+ media figures, including fictional characters, are often seen as role models for LGB+ individuals and role models are often

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Cambridge Dictionary, prime time in television is “the time when the largest number of people are watching” (n.d., a).

<sup>2</sup> “Sexual minorities are a group whose sexual identity, orientation, or practices differ from the majority of the surrounding society” (Math and Seshadri 2013, 4). Thus, in this thesis, I use the term ‘sexual minority/minorities’ to describe people whose identity, orientation, or practices are not heterosexual.

<sup>3</sup> In this thesis, I speak of LGB+ and LGBQ+ and not LGBTQ+, since the focus is on non-heterosexuality and not on being cis- or transgender.

influential on people's identities. These role models can inspire others, for example the viewers, and can provide a source of pride and comfort, for example by showing one is comfortable with one's identity. Not only the presence of LGB+ people in the media can influence people's identity, but also the absence as well as the negative portrayal of LGB+ people can make LGB+ individuals feel limited in expressing their LGB+ identities and it can make them feel excluded from society (Gomillion and Giuliano 2011, 342-348). Furthermore, portrayal of lesbians in the media has not been studied a lot. Often this is linked to the position of lesbians being less economically powerful and their relation to feminist anti-capitalism (Nölke 2018, 226). Furthermore, Nölke, who researched LGBQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer<sup>4</sup>) representation in advertisements, found that portrayals of lesbians in advertisements are "characterized by the objectification of hypersexualized "lipstick lesbians" as a tool to appeal to the straight male gaze" (226) by portraying lesbians as those in pornography (Reichert et al. 1999, 124). The lack of research to lesbian portrayal makes that this current study can be an addition to the field, since this thesis is focussing on the portrayal and constitution of 'lesbian identity' and 'lesbian self-acceptance' in a television show that explicitly has a lesbian main character. In this thesis, I thus hope to find how the portrayal of (a) lesbian(s) is done in the television series.

### ***1.3 LGBQ+ self-acceptance in the media***

I have chosen to focus on self-acceptance, since self-acceptance can influence mental health. Higher self-acceptance of sexuality is "associated with lower psychological distress and greater well-being" (Camp, Vitoratou, and Rimes 2020, 2365) and sexuality self-acceptance can also be a buffer for the negative impact of heterosexism (2365). Furthermore, LGBQ+ individuals often have lower levels of self-acceptance than their heterosexual peers. This "suggests that the exposure to minority stressors leaves LGBQ+ individuals more vulnerable to difficulties with mental health and well-being—including difficulties with processes such as self-acceptance" (2366). Therefore, I am interested in how self-acceptance is portrayed in the media, and if it relates to the findings from real life.

Despite the influence of self-acceptance in real life, the portrayal of LGBQ+ self-acceptance in the media has not been studied a lot. Yet, LGBQ+ self-acceptance has been studied in the television show *Glee*. The findings of this study say that *Glee* portrays "gay identity formation as a staged process – from sexual confusion to self-acceptance" (Dhaenens 2013, 309) and, governed by heteronormativity, the queer subject "is demanded to assume and accept an identity that is fixed and hierarchically inferior to a heterosexual identity" (309). Thus,

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<sup>4</sup> In this thesis, I use the term queer to describe any non-heterosexual identity.



*Glee* reinforces the notion that queer persons must learn to accept non-heterosexual desires and suggest that these desires must be demonstrated in a fixed identity (309). Since this is how the makers of *Glee* represents self-acceptance in the show, the question occurs to me how self-acceptance is represented and constituted in *ANNE+*. Therefore, the goal of this thesis to analyse how self-acceptance is constituted and represented in *ANNE+*. By doing this, I hope that this thesis can create new insights in the field of self-acceptance in the media.

On the other hand, the effects of representations of LGBTQ+ people in the media on (self-)acceptance of viewers have been studied more often. For example, Nölke found that including LGBTQ+ people in marketing and media can positively influence an LGBTQ+ person's feeling of social acceptance (2018, 227). Furthermore, Levy (1981) argued that people learn about socially accepted behaviours and learn how to manage stigmatized identities through cultural texts, such as advertisements and media (as cited in Nölke 2018, 227). According to Gomillion and Giuliano, people can influence their self-fulfilment and lived identities through this use of cultural texts (as cited in Nölke 2018, 227). In advertising, "sexual orientation is used merely as an identifiable "descriptor" for market segmentation" (227), which creates and favours a stereotypical and negative presentation of being gay (227). Thus, the presence of LGBTQ+ people in the media does have an impact on the viewer/consumer and internalizing stereotypical portrayal of LGBTQ+ people is seen as a concern by scholars such as Peñaloza (1996) and Tsai (2012) (as cited in Nölke 2018, 228). Therefore, the way how the makers of *ANNE+* constitute and represents self-acceptance, as well as the lesbian identity, does not only influence their characters, but the show can also have an influence on the audience. It is thus important to study how this representation and constitution is done, since it could lead to internalized stereotypical ideas about LGBTQ+ people.

#### ***1.4 Positionality***

When I position myself in relation to *ANNE+*, I can mostly say that I am a fan, but I am also thankful for the makers for creating a show like this. Especially in forming my own lesbian identity, the show *ANNE+* has been important to me. When I was 15 years old, in 2015, I realised I was queer. Even though I was never really interested in boys, I blamed it on my age and thought the interest in boys would come when I was getting older. Where first I identified as bisexual, I almost knew for sure that I was never going to like boys/men. Despite this realisation, I was afraid and almost ashamed to identify as a lesbian. I circled around identifying as a lesbian by calling myself queer or gay. Not wanting to use the word lesbian to label yourself is common within the lesbian community. For example, the website AfterEllen.com, which is

mainly about lesbian/bi pop culture, wrote that the word 'lesbian' is not used often and is even consistently erased, so one cannot become comfortable with a word one does not see often. Furthermore, the word 'lesbian' is the most searched porn category and thus it can be said that 'lesbian' is being fetishized. (AJ, 2022).

It was in 2017 that I heard about *ANNE+* for the first time and little did I know that this show would be so special to me, even to this day. When the series was released in 2018, I just started studying in Utrecht and my 'adult-life' just started. I visited a viewing event of the series in the first week of the release, during which all episodes of the show were shown before them being online on YouTube. Even though I did not have so much experience with relationships, I really recognised myself in *ANNE+* and for the first time ever, I could see myself identifying with the word/label 'lesbian'. When the second season came out, I was a totally different person than I was in 2018. I was a relationship with a woman, which is still ongoing, I was a bit more experienced in the "adult-life" and, most importantly, I accepted my lesbian identity. With certainty, I can say that *ANNE+* has been the largest influence on me finding and accepting my own identity and, especially, my lesbian identity.

Thus, my relation to *ANNE+* has influenced my view on the show, since I perceive the show as portraying recognisable aspects of my own life, as a lesbian. I can therefore only analyse the show from a lesbian perspective and might miss aspects that non-lesbians would see. Furthermore, the show was created by and includes mainly white people. I am white too, which makes it easier for me to relate to the show and I might not be able to see issues of ethnicity and/or race within the show. The show is also created from a Dutch perspective, and I identify as Dutch too, so my study of *ANNE+* is also from a Dutch perspective and therefore I might miss aspects that other cultures/countries would notice. Lastly, this thesis is written for a Master in Gender Studies, which makes that I am taught to see patterns of, for example, inequality and hierarchy. I do not have any knowledge about film theory, for example, and therefore I am not able to say much about film techniques that have been used in the show and what this means.

### ***1.5 Research questions***

Regarding my positionality, I believe that the portrayal of the lesbian identity and lesbian self-acceptance in *ANNE+* is done in such a way that I recognise myself in it and one goal of the show is that people who are not lesbians or not even queer recognise themselves in it too. Mainly because the focus of the show is on portraying the life of a person in their mid-twenties, who just happens to be a lesbian, instead of specifically focussing on the fact that the main

character is a lesbian. However, it has not been studied yet in what way ‘lesbian identity’ and ‘lesbian self-acceptance’ are constituted and represented in the show. Therefore, I will study the following research question: *In what way is Anne’s lesbian identity and lesbian self-acceptance constituted and represented in the Dutch TV show ANNE+, in relation to Sara*<sup>5</sup>? To answer this question, I first start with a thick description of four scenes I selected in which Anne and Sara are present. By doing thick description, I introduce the scenes and problems within the scenes. I also conduct a (feminist) media analysis of those four scenes in which I analyse the way how the lesbian identity and lesbian self-acceptance is constituted and represented by the main character, Anne, in relation to her partner Sara. I have chosen to focus on Anne and Sara, since their relationship form the main storyline in season 2, which is also continued in the film<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, Anne and Sara seem different regarding their identities and (levels of) self-acceptance, which is also what I study in this thesis. Lastly, I divided my research question into four smaller sub-questions, namely: *How is Anne’s lesbian identity constituted and represented in ANNE+ in relation to Sara?* From this question comes another sub-question, namely: *How is Sara’s identity constituted and represented in ANNE+?* The third sub-question is: *How is Anne’s (lesbian) self-acceptance constituted and represented in ANNE+, in relation to Sara?* From this question the last sub-question follows: *How is Sara’s self-acceptance constituted and represented in ANNE+?* However, these questions often intersect which I consider while doing the analysis.

## **1.6 Content**

The second chapter of this thesis provides a theoretical framework of the terms lesbian identity and (lesbian) self-acceptance, as well as related terms. Then, the third chapter provides the methodology I used for this research, i.e., an explanation of the (feminist) media analysis and thick description. After that, in chapter 4, the media analysis, thick description and their results are shown. In these chapters I answer the question: *How is Anne’s lesbian identity constituted and represented in ANNE+ in relation to Sara?* Besides, I will answer the questions: *How is Anne’s (lesbian) self-acceptance constituted and represented in ANNE+, in relation to Sara?* Lastly, in chapter 5, conclusions are given, and thus the answers to my research question. I also provide insights on limitations and give recommendations for future research.

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<sup>5</sup> Sara’s role is portrayed by Jouman Fattal.

<sup>6</sup> I will not discuss the film in this thesis, but it is important to mention that the film is the sequel of the series.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework**

In this chapter, I discuss the main terms of this thesis, namely the constitution of the category 'lesbian', lesbian identity, (lesbian/queer) self-acceptance and representation. Besides, I discuss how these terms are related. In short, these terms form the theoretical framework this thesis is built around. Note: In this thesis I work with Western approaches and research, so topics such as 'coming out' or the meaning of 'lesbian' can be different in other cultures. For example, coming out "is criticized for being bound to Western notions of reproduction and capitalism and the self-realizable and liberated subject" (Luibhéid 2008, as cited in Barglowski, Amelina, and Bilecen 2017, 2).

### ***2.1 The term 'lesbian'***

In this thesis, I talk about the term 'lesbian', which is a term "generally used as a self-identification of sexual or romantic orientation" (Stonewall 2020). According to Hilton-Morrow and Battles, the term lesbian refers to "women who identify themselves through their attraction to other women" (2013, 11). Another definition of the word lesbian that is used is "a woman who is emotionally, intellectually, and sexually attracted to other women" (Tate 2012, 18). However, nowadays, the meaning of the lesbian identity is also related to other gender identities than only (cis) women. With the becoming undone of the men/women gender binary, what it means to be a woman, and thus, womanhood, and the meaning of lesbian identity shift. Both concepts become separate from (biological) sex and gender (Ben Hagai 2023, 2). Besides, the terms "woman" and "man" appear to be not as simple as they might seem at first glance, says, for example, the field of trans studies. People can experience their gender identity in multiple ways, such as cis gender, trans gender, non-binary gender, and gender-diverse. Cis gender means that someone is comfortable with and identifies themselves with the sex and gender they were assigned with at birth. Transgender means that one does not identify with the sex and/or gender they were assigned with at birth, and thus identifies with another gender and/or has a different understanding of gender. For example, trans men, trans women, but also non-binary and genderqueer<sup>7</sup> identities can fall under the term trans (Tate 2012, 18-19; Spizzirri et al. 2021, 1). However, not all who do not identify as cis gender identify as trans gender. Therefore, in this thesis, the terms non-binary and gender-diverse are also used. Non-binary gender refers to an experience of gender that is "outside or in between male and female identities" (Spizzirri et al. 2021, 1) whereas gender-diverse is an umbrella term for all non-cis-

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<sup>7</sup> "Identities [that] describe someone whose gender expression is, or seems to be, different from their assigned gender role" (The Trevor Project 2021a).

gender identities (1).

Identities such as butch (masculine lesbian), andro (androgynous), stud (dominant lesbian) and others have always been part of lesbian communities and gender identities do not have to link to the sex that was assigned at birth anymore. Some lesbians, that identify as women, develop relationships with people who do not fit the gender binary which leads to them assessing the term 'lesbian' as limiting whereupon they identify as queer or pansexual, for example. Furthermore, people who were assigned female at birth that have also spent a part of their life identifying as a woman and as a lesbian that now identify as trans<sup>8</sup> men, may still perceive the time they identified as lesbian important to their identity (Ben Hagai 2023, 2). Therefore, psychologists have agreed that the term lesbian does not exclusively means cis<sup>9</sup> women being attracted to cis women, but it refers to "a gender-expansive identity that includes people who at some point in their lives identified as women attracted to other women" (2-3).

In my opinion, the definition of lesbian goes a bit beyond that. Personally, I see lesbian more as 'non-cis man that is attracted to other non- cis men', since, besides (cis and trans) women, non-binary people and other gender-diverse people, trans men can identify as lesbians too<sup>10</sup>. This is especially the case when these trans men identified as lesbians pre-transitioning and are still active in the lesbian community (Cromwell 2000, 776). Moreover, in my opinion, everyone has the freedom to identify the way they want to identify, but regarding the category 'lesbian' I exclude cis men. The definition of lesbian I use, mainly to define myself but also when speaking about 'lesbians', is a person that identifies as a (trans or cis) woman, non-binary, other gender-nonconforming identity, or trans man, and the person identifying as a lesbian is not specifically exclusively attracted to women, but also non-binary people, other gender-nonconforming people and trans men. However, this definition does not take preferences into account that can always be there. Therefore, this definition is a more general definition that can be adapted in the way an individual would want to.

The definition of the category 'lesbian' partly relates to the term *sapphic*, which "includes lesbian, bisexual, and pansexual trans femmes, mascs, nonbinary folks, and cis women" (Hamou 2022). However, bisexual, and pansexual people can still be attracted to cis men, which is not the case for lesbians.

Also, I prefer the term lesbian over 'women who love women' (WLW), since this term

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<sup>8</sup> Not identifying with the sex and/or gender one was assigned with at birth.

<sup>9</sup> Identifying with the sex and/or gender one was assigned with at birth.

<sup>10</sup> Not all trans men (who are attracted to non-cis men) identify as lesbians, and therefore stating that trans men are actually just lesbians is ignoring their trans identity and is thus a transphobic statement (Kiss 2018).

can be defined as “a woman born woman who identifies as a non-heterosexual and does not identify as asexual” (Julian 2012, 14). Again, I evaluate this term as limiting, especially regarding the ‘a woman born woman’ part, since it does not take other gender identities or even trans women into account. Besides, asexual does not always mean ‘lacks sexual attraction’. Asexuality is an umbrella term, and asexuality is a spectrum. On the spectrum, identities such as demisexual<sup>11</sup> and grey asexuality<sup>12</sup> can be found and these can be combined with, for example, identifying as lesbian (The Trevor Project, n.d.; Young Scot, 2019).

In conclusion, the definition of lesbian that I work with is a person that does not identify as a cis man that is romantically and, in a way, sexually attracted to others that are not cis men. In this definition, there is room for trans identities and asexuality.

## ***2.2 Lesbian identity***

Lesbian identity and the definition of the term ‘lesbian’ are closely related, but also different in a way. Where the term lesbian refers to a romantic or sexual orientation, lesbian identity is a broader concept. The meaning of lesbian identity has changed over time. For example, in the 1970s, in which ‘becoming a lesbian’ was an act of political resistance. Especially Adrienne Rich and Monique Wittig defined being a lesbian more as a political identity to fight against patriarchy and the patriarchal society in which bodies and desires of women are controlled (Ben Hagai and Seymour 2022, 2; Ben Hagai 2023, 2). Since the 90s, the lesbian identity has been more defined through “born this way”, which means an “early, consistent, and stable desire toward other women” (Ben Hagai 2023, 2). Currently, sexual desire is often described as fluid, and thus changing, but it is mostly not perceived as a choice and according to Ben Hagai “For lesbian women who understand their lesbian identity as fluid, lesbian desire is focused on the person to who they are attracted who is currently a woman but whose gender identity can be in a state of fluctuation across time and context” (2).

In this thesis, I use the term ‘lesbian identity’ to describe the identity of a lesbian person. I do not define lesbian identity as a political choice, but as a combination between the “born this way” narrative and the “fluidity” narrative. However, it is a choice to act on lesbian desires, for example, but being a lesbian is more a biological, inherent case (Fairington 2010, 7). Furthermore, I also do not completely agree with what, for example, the Dutch radical feminist group ‘Paarse September’ says about being a lesbian as they say that becoming a lesbian is the

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<sup>11</sup> “People who only experience sexual attraction once they form a strong emotional connection with another person” (The Trevor Project 2021b).

<sup>12</sup> “People who identify somewhere between sexual and asexual” (The Trevor Project 2021b) and only occasionally experience sexual attraction.

only way for women to free themselves from men (Doomen 1972). Yet, I believe that some lesbians might have explicitly chosen for the lesbian identity, for example to free themselves from men, but for this thesis my focus is on people who feel that they are lesbians and choose to act on the corresponding desires instead of people who chose to become a lesbian to free themselves from men. In my opinion, some lesbians have this “early, consistent, and stable desire toward other women” (Ben Hagai 2023, 2), other lesbians figured out their (lesbian) identity after having had relationships with men<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, I see the lesbian identity as the identity of people who have defined themselves as lesbians, or who show behaviour that fits with my definition of the term lesbian, but this sense of relating to the term ‘lesbian’ comes from an inherent feeling instead of a (political) choice.

### ***2.3 (Lesbian) self-acceptance***

Sexuality self-acceptance refers to “accepting one’s sexuality as it is and being comfortable with this part of the self” (Camp, Vitoratou, and Rimes 2020a, 2354). In forming one’s sexual identity, self-acceptance is considered important. According to Cass’s model, before self-acceptance comes self-tolerance, which is built on becoming aware and acknowledging one’s sexuality. To achieve self-acceptance, internal conflicts that are related to being LGBQ+<sup>14</sup> in a heteronormative<sup>15</sup> society have to be solved, which can result in pride and positive feelings towards the self (Cass 1979, 220) and “successfully integrating and valuing one’s sexuality as a part of one’s identity” (Camp, Vitoratou, and Rimes 2020a, 2354). However, critique says this model suggest a linear process of identity development and other processes and difficulties are not considered (2354). In 2001, the model by Cass was improved by Elizur and Mintzer, as was described in Camp, Vitoratou, and Rimes (2020a). Elizur and Mintzer suggest that self-acceptance is one of the three major identity tasks undertaken in concert by LGBQ+ individuals”, next to coming out and building a self-definition (as cited in Camp, Vitoratou, and Rimes 2020a, 2354). In this theory, sexuality self-acceptance is achieved through “depathologizing one’s sexuality by rejecting internalized negative attitudes, improving one’s positive sense of self, increasing disclosure of sexuality to others and developing greater participation and connectedness within the sexual minority community” (Camp, Vitoratou, and Rimes 2020a, 2354). Besides, they suggest that having LGBQ+ peers available who are

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<sup>13</sup> When I talk about men, I refer to both cis men and trans men, unless specified otherwise.

<sup>14</sup> I use LGBQ+ instead of LGBTQ+ since I am not focussing on the transgender identity (T in LGBTQ+) in this thesis.

<sup>15</sup> “Relating to or based on the attitude that heterosexuality is the only normal and natural expression of sexuality” (Merriam-Webster 2019a). Will be further explained in 2.2.1.

accepting themselves can nurture the process of developing self-acceptance (2354). In addition, self-acceptance can also be defined through the inverse of internalized heterosexism and heteronormativity or negative societal attitudes, such as internalized homophobia or lesbophobia<sup>16</sup> (Camp, Vitoratou, and Rimes 2020a, 2354). Self-acceptance processes can be disrupted or complicated by “chronic exposure to negative and heterosexist attitudes, prejudice, and discrimination” (Camp, Vitoratou, and Rimes 2020b, 4).

In this thesis I will approach self-acceptance as accepting one’s own sexuality and identity, but also having no or few feelings of internalized homophobia or having, partly or (if possible) fully accepted these feelings or being in a process of accepting these feelings. This means that (feelings of) internalized homophobia can still exist, but one is aware of this and (tries to) accept it as a part of their identity. The same processes are relevant for (feelings) of internalized heterosexuality and/or heteronormativity. Furthermore, self-acceptance is related to neutral or positive judgements of one’s sexuality, identity and/or sexual identity (Camp, Vitoratou, and Rimes 2020b, 4).

#### ***2.4 Heteronormativity***

According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), heteronormativity is an assumption of one’s heterosexuality. It is the assumption that everyone is inherently heterosexual, and that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality or bisexuality. Besides, heterosexuality is an ideal. Heteronormativity “is what makes heterosexuality seem coherent, natural and privileged” (EIGE 2016).

Prior to the development of the theory of heteronormativity comes compulsory heterosexuality, which is a term that is coined by Adrienne Rich (Jackson 2006, 105). Compulsory heterosexuality is defined as “a social system which regulates sexual desire and romantic attachment: it mandates heterosexuality and punishes, penalises, or renders invisible those who violate its norms” (Fraser 2018, 2). With compulsory heterosexuality, Rich refers to two things. The first being the assumption that women are naturally sexually oriented toward men, which comes from Alice Rossi, and the second being that ‘choosing to be a lesbian’ comes from bitterness toward men, which is said by Doris Lessing (Rich 1980, 632). What Rich thus means here is that the norm is that women are oriented toward (cis) men and women should not deviate from that norm. Women who choose to be a lesbian are not not attracted to (cis) men but experience a bitterness toward men and therefore they choose to be with people who are not (cis) men.

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<sup>16</sup> “Irrational fear of, and aversion to, lesbians” (EIGE n.d.). Will be further elaborated on in 2.2.3.



In this thesis, I use both heteronormativity as well as compulsory heterosexuality. In the way I perceive it, heteronormativity is an assumption, while compulsory heterosexuality is the system in which heteronormativity is happening. Therefore, heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality are not separable and can reinforce each other.

### ***2.5 Internalized heterosexism, internalized homophobia and internalized homonegativity***

Continuing on heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality, people can internalize and incorporate these beliefs regarding heterosexuality and non-heterosexual people into their worldview, i.e., heterosexuality is natural and an ideal, and anything other than heterosexuality is not okay. When this happens, internalized heterosexism develops. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, heterosexism means “discrimination or prejudice against non-heterosexual people based on the belief that heterosexuality is the only normal and natural expression of sexuality” (Merriam-Webster n.d., b) and when this becomes a part of the self, either conscious or unconscious, it is called internalized heterosexism. Internalized heterosexism can be defined as “a set of negative attitudes and affects toward homosexuality in other persons and toward homosexual features in oneself” (Shidlo 1994, 178), which expands the definition of heterosexism by highlighting the evaluation of others and the self. The definition of internalized heterosexism is similar to the definition of internalized homonegativity and internalized homophobia<sup>17</sup> (McLaren and Castillo 2021, 2).

For example, the meaning of internalized homonegativity is described as the process in which societal messages about gender and sex are, often unconsciously, internalized by LGBTQ+ people. When one’s own homosexuality or bisexuality is recognized, this internalization can result in negative feelings towards the self, which can lead to a dilemma between romantic and sexual desires and the evaluation of the self. Sometimes internalized homonegativity is also called internalized homophobia (Berg, Munthe-Kaas, and Ross 2016, 541).

Lastly, internalized homophobia is defined as “the gay person’s direction of negative social attitudes toward the self” (Meyer and Dean 1998, 161) and is also characterized by “an intrapsychic conflict between experiences of same-sex affection or desire and feeling a need to be heterosexual” (Frost and Meyer 2009, 97). Internalized homophobia is a common experience for LGBTQ+ people, especially in their identity development, and to reach a healthy self-concept, overcoming of internalized homophobia is thought to be essential. However, research says that LGBTQ+ people may not (completely) overcome internalized homophobia (Frost and Meyer

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<sup>17</sup> Homophobia is the “irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuality or gay people” (Merriam-Webster 2019b)

2009, 97).

To conclude, in this thesis I use the term internalized homophobia, internalized homonegativity, and internalized heterosexism interchangeably, despite (internalized) homonegativity being suggested to be more multidimensional and inclusive (Pepper and Sand 2015, 657). Importantly, all three terms are about having negative feelings towards LGBQ+ people, including one's self. These feelings often come from heteronormativity and/or compulsory heterosexuality, since LGBQ+ people do not meet the norm of being heterosexual.

## ***2.6 (Internalized) lesbophobia***

Next to (internalized) homophobia, there is also a term specifically for lesbians, namely (internalized) lesbophobia. According to EIGE, lesbophobia is “the irrational fear of, and aversion to, lesbians” (EIGE 2019), and it falls under the broader term ‘homophobia’ (EIGE 2019), however, lesbophobia also includes “a side-order of sexism<sup>18</sup>” (Czyzselska 2013). The EuroCentralAsian Lesbian\* Community (EL\*C) wrote a report about lesbophobia, and found that, over the past years, violence against lesbians has increased. Assumably this violence stems from lesbophobia (EL\*C 2021, 6). The authors argue: “Lesbophobia is a specific form of bias that encompasses misogyny<sup>19</sup>, sexism and stigma on non-conforming sexual orientation” (EL\*C 2021, 6). Lesbophobia and hate against lesbians are specifically based around three social norms: 1) The social expectations and stereotypes that come with traditional male and female gender roles are not met by lesbians, by their sexuality and/or gender expression. 2) The expectation that women are at the disposal of men, that mostly exists because of the objectification of women's sexuality, is disrupted by lesbians. And lastly, 3) Taboos regarding female sexuality and non-heterosexual orientations are compelled by lesbians to be faced by society (EL\*C 2021, 6). Therefore, in this thesis, I use the term ‘lesbophobia’ to refer to the hate and aversion of lesbians based on the social norms that specifically relate to traditional gender roles of men and women and heterosexism. Internalized lesbophobia refers to having this hate and aversion incorporated in one's own beliefs, regarding others and oneself.

## ***2.7 Representation***

In this thesis I address the representation of the lesbian identity and lesbian self-acceptance in the TV show *ANNE+*. Therefore, it is important to understand what representation means. According to Stuart Hall, representation simply means “the production of meaning through

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<sup>18</sup> “Prejudice or discrimination based on sex, especially discrimination against women. Or behaviour, conditions, or attitudes that foster stereotypes of social roles based on sex” (Merriam-Webster 2019c).

<sup>19</sup> “Hatred of, aversion to, or prejudice against women” (Merriam-Webster 2018).

language” (Hall 2013, 2). Language here not only refers to the spoken system or writing system, but also to visual images that are used to convey meaning (4). Visual signs<sup>20</sup> must be interpreted by using a conceptual map, i.e., mental representations, and “a language system which in visual language, bears some resemblance to the real thing or ‘looks like it’ in some way” (5). Thus, a visual sign should correlate with the concept of that what is visualized and needs a (shared) linguistic system “to be certain we are all ‘reading’ the sign in the same way” (5). Visual signs are also called iconic signs, which means that they, in a way, resemble what they refer to (6). Yet, interpretation of meaning is always based on one’s personal conceptual map and linguistic system, and therefore meaning is often uncertain.

There are three approaches to representation of language<sup>21</sup>, i.e., reflective, intentional, and constructionist. The reflective approach approaches representation as language reflecting a meaning that already exists in the material world and language acts like a mirror. For example, the word ‘dog’ refers just to the animal ‘dog’. Then, the intentional approach sees representation as expressing what the actor, for example the writer, wants to say and what they mean (Hall 2013, 11). For example, in paintings, a dog is often used to represent loyalty (Sidelnikova 2020). Lastly, the constructionist approach questions whether meaning is constructed in and through language. So, by using concepts and signs, we construct meaning for what we sense (Hall 2013, 11). Hall argues that “we must not confuse the material world [...] and the symbolic practices through which representation, meaning and language operate” (11). According to the constructionist approach, the material world does not convey meaning, but, for example, the language system that is used to represent concepts. Social actors use these conceptual systems of their culture and representational systems “to construct meaning, to make the world meaningful and to communicate about that world meaningfully to others” (Hall 2013, 11).

In this thesis, I am looking at the representation of the lesbian identity and lesbian self-acceptance in *ANNE+*. To do this, I use all three types of representation. I use the reflexive approach to describe what is happening in the scenes from *ANNE+* I selected and I thus mirror what is going on in the scene. Moreover, I also question what meaning the makers of *ANNE+* are expressing in the scenes, which thus relates to the intentional approach. Lastly, I use the constructionist approach to discuss what meaning is created by what the makers of *ANNE+* are doing.

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<sup>20</sup> Signs refers to “words, sounds or images which carry meaning” (Hall 2013, 4).

<sup>21</sup> Again, visual images and spoken/written language.

## ***2.8 Representation in the media***

When talking about representation in the media, such as shows on television, it refers more to the portrayal of something in the media. An example of something that could be represented in the media is LGBTQ+ individuals (Thomson 2021, 1). According to the The Arab Film & Media Institute, “Representation in the media simply is how media [...] portray certain types of people or communities” (Tawil 2017). Richard Dyer discusses the effects of representation and says:

How a group is represented, presented over again in cultural forms, how an image of a member of a group is taken as representative of that group, how that group is represented in the sense of spoken for and on behalf of (whether they represent, speak for themselves or not), these all have to do with how members of groups see themselves and others like themselves, how they see their place in society, their right to the rights of society claims to ensure its citizens (Dyer 1993, 1).

Thus, in my interpretation, when representing one’s own group, this representation is always influenced by how this group, or a member of this group sees themselves and others and how their place in society is scene. For example, *ANNE+* is written by a lesbian screenwriter and thus, according to Dyer, how the group ‘lesbians’ is represented is influenced by how the screenwriter sees the group ‘lesbians’ and how the writer places lesbians in society. Additionally, representations do not only have effects for the groups that are represented. According to Dyer,

Equally representation, representativeness, representing have to do also with how others see members of a group and their place and rights, others who have the power to affect that place and those rights. How we are seen determines in part how we are treated; how we treat others is based on how we see them; such seeing comes from representation (Dyer 1993, 1).

So, representation is influenced by the ‘creator’ of the representation, but also affects the audience that is, for example, watching the representation. In relation to *ANNE+*, the way the show represents lesbians, for example, could thus influence how lesbians are seen and are treated.

Representation can be an accurate and/or harmless portrayal of, for example, gender or sexuality. However, representation is not always accurate and can be harmful, which can be called misrepresentation. The content of these misrepresentations are often stereotypes, which

are generalizations “made and depicted of individuals due to their racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, religious, or other identities” (Huang 2021). A similar definition is by Long and Wall, who say “Stereotyping is a process involving the expression of an exaggerated belief about a group that serves to qualify or justify the conduct towards that group of those who hold and express that belief” (Long and Wall 2012, 107). I speak of misrepresentation and stereotyping because *ANNE+* is a show that represents lesbians and, in general, queer experiences, behaviours, and people. Despite the show being created by lesbian/queer makers, this does not mean the show is free from misrepresentation and/or stereotypes. Therefore, it is important to be aware of potential misrepresentation and/or stereotypes that are present in *ANNE+*.

In this thesis, when I talk about (lesbian) representation in the media, I talk about both representations and misrepresentations in the media. I look at how the media, the show *ANNE+*, presents and represents lesbians, the lesbian sexuality, the lesbian identity, and lesbian self-acceptance. Even though I am not specifically looking at (lesbian) stereotypes in *ANNE+*, during my research these may appear, so I considered it important to be covered in the theoretical framework as well.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, I discuss the methodology I use to analyse scenes from the Dutch TV show *ANNE+* in which Anne and Sara are portrayed. Furthermore, I explain how I use the methodology and provide arguments on why I have chosen the methodology I use.

### 3.1 Feminist Media Studies

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the ways in which the lesbian identity and lesbian self-acceptance are constituted and represented in the TV show *ANNE+*. In this thesis, the method I use for answering my research question is feminist media analysis, which is part of feminist media studies, which in turn can be seen as a form of critical media studies (Harvey 2019, 10). Critical media studies is about the social and cultural consequences of (mass) media's capacity to address "large audiences in remote locations with relative efficiency" (Ott and Mack 2014, 2). The word media refers to a range of technologies of communication, among which, speech, books, radio, television, and video games. Mass media, however, are different from individual media, that are based on closeness in location, since it refers to communication with a remote audience. It is not specifically about the size of the audience, but the question whether there is a distance between, for example, the artist and the audience (Ott and Mack 2014, 3).

Feminist media studies relies on feminist media theory and thus applies, for example, philosophies and logics that express feminist principles, such as intersectionality<sup>22</sup> and standpoint theory<sup>23</sup>, to processes in the media, among which production and distribution. Besides, these feminist philosophies, concepts, and logics are also applied to representation in news and entertainment outlets, as well as to reception (Steiner 2014, 359).<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, feminist media theory "takes gender seriously – as a factor that structures identity and experiences – without permanent or static gender differences" (Steiner 2014, 359). According to Steiner, feminist media theory states that there is intersectionality of gender and other aspects of identity, among which sexual orientation, ability and race, as well as intersection with "relations of subordination or domination that these categories carry along" (Steiner 2014, 359). So, feminist media studies use feminist media theory to research media processes and

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<sup>22</sup> A term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to describe that Black women can experience discrimination because they are at the intersection of being Black and being a woman (149) but is used to refer to how "different aspects of a person's identity can expose them to overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalisation (Victorian Government 2019).

<sup>23</sup> A term coined by Sandra Harding to describe a feminist theoretical perspective "that argues that knowledge stems from social position" (Borland 2014).

<sup>24</sup> Reception theory by Stuart Hall refers to the fact that audiences have to decode the message of the producer, the one that sends out the message, for example on television. The meanings of the message that is sent, encoded, and that is received, decoded, are not always the same (Hall 1973, 4).

organizations, and it does not matter whether there is a feminist ethos<sup>25</sup> expressed in the media content (Steiner 2012, 359).

Furthermore, in feminist media studies, or more broadly: critical media studies, gender and other categories of identity are understood as a subjectivity. A subjectivity “refers to how our sense of self is situated within relations of power that normalize some behaviours while framing other ways of being as ‘unnatural’” (Harvey 2019, 10). In this process of subjectification, the media play a key role, according to poststructuralism<sup>26</sup>. Moreover, the media also play a key role in the process of signification, in other words, what social meaning is constructed from images, symbols, and words. The key role of the media is that, in the media, ideologies are circulated as well as represented and reproduced, mainly by adopting dominant assumptions and drawing on common worldviews everyone knows and understands (Harvey 2019, 10; Croteau and Hoynes 2015, 168). Despite these stories and discourses being powerful, for example about how gender should be performed, they are not determining the actions of the audience and are open to be resisted and contested (Harvey 2019, 10). For example, before *ANNE+* there was no television show in the Netherlands with a lesbian main character (BNNVARA 2020). When the makers of *ANNE+* watched those heteronormative series, and thus series without or with little lesbian representation, they showed resistance by creating a show with lesbian characters themselves.

Moreover, Heather McIntosh and Lisa Cuklanz’s argue that feminist media research “draws on the insights of feminist theories about media, and these theories differ according to what form of mediated text is under examination” (McIntosh and Cuklanz 2013, 266). The authors argue “all feminist media theories share the basic underlying tenet that mainstream mass media function through the dissemination, repetition, and support of central ideas that are accepted by the culture in which the medium under examination is produced” (McIntosh and Cuklanz 2013, 266). This means that the ideologies of a culture, for example about gender, can be reflected in mass mediated texts originating from that culture, which also means that when dominant ideas are changing, the media content also changes.

### **3.2 Ideology**

When media scholars use the term ‘ideology’ and to uncover ideologies in media products, they

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<sup>25</sup> Ethos is “the set of beliefs, ideas, etc. about the social behaviour and relationships of a person or group” (Cambridge Dictionary 2019a)

<sup>26</sup> “Poststructuralism represents a set of attitudes and a style of critique that developed in critical response to the growth and identification of the logic of structural relations that underlie social institutions—whether they exist in terms of politics, economics, education, medicine, literature, or the sciences” (Crick 2016).

refer to “underlying images of society” (Croteau and Hoynes 2015, 159) and it is thus “a system of meaning that helps define and explain the world and that makes value judgments about that world” (159-160). When examining the ideology of media, the interest does not lay in specific actions portrayed in single forms of media, such as one film or magazine, but in “the broader system of meaning of which these depictions are a part” (160). According to Davison Hunter, the media provide visibility of and discussion on cultural topics, such as homosexuality, as well as the media provide people to promote their positions and opinions and spread them to a larger audience (as cited in Croteau and Hoynes 2015, 161-162). Besides, the ‘culture wars’ are also about the “acceptability of the images that the mass media disseminate” (Croteau and Hoynes 2015, 162) as well as about the implications of images in the media and what can be learned from these images about our society (as cited in Croteau and Hoynes 2015, 161-162).

One standpoint about ideology of media is that media texts are the key place where basic social norms are presented. By displaying social interactions and social institutions and repeating these daily, social definitions can be shaped. So, in the media it can be presented what is perceived as ‘normal’ and what is not. Routinely including specific ideas and attitudes in the media, results in these ideas and attitudes becoming part of the public debate. So, when ideas and attitudes are excluded from the media, they become outside the range of acceptability. For example, the media can choose to leave out marginalized groups or other groups that deviate from the norm, which will result in those groups being perceived as ‘abnormal’. Thus, ideology in the media is mostly based in the inclusion and exclusion of certain ideas, attitudes, and people, but also in the content of the messages the media spread. However, people who work in the media argue that their media products only reflect the ideas and norms that are already present in the public debate (Croteau and Hoynes 2015, 163-164). In my opinion, it can be both at the same time, like a vicious circle. When the media reflects the norms, ideas, and attitudes that are already present in society, the ideas of the public will not change, since they will watch, read, etc., what they already know. On the other hand, when new ideologies are brought into the media, they may change the ideas of the public, which then can become the general idea in society. Then again, those ideas will be reflected in newer forms of media.

In feminist media research, ideas about gender in media are often studied and those dominant ideas or ideologies are attempted to be deconstructed, by uncovering these ideologies. This is important, since these ideas can be adapted by the audience, which will cause more differences and distance between people (Croteau and Hoynes 2015, 163-164). In addition, feminist media research is interested in the process of change of cultural ideas about gender that is displayed in the media. Lastly, the authors discuss the commitment feminist media research



has to social justice and to contributing an understanding of how power is operated in mediated texts. Furthermore, the goal of feminist media research is to make muted voices, or marginalized and underrepresented voices, get heard and to critique patterns of dominant ideologies of gender. By putting forward the dominant ideas about gender, the power structures, and muted voices, feminist media researchers try to deconstruct existing ideologies (McIntosh and Cuklanz 2013, 266). Linda Steiner argues that gender structures identity and experiences and states that gender differences are not permanent or static. Gender intersects “with other dimensions of identity such as race, class, [...] and sexual orientation, as well as with the relations of subordination or domination that these categories carry along” (Steiner 2014, 359). Therefore, I do not use gender or gender ideologies as a separate construct in my analysis, but I use intersections with gender, for example with the lesbian identity and lesbian self-acceptance. Therefore, I believe that feminist media research fits with my project. Additionally, McIntosh and Cuklanz state that (any group of) texts can be suitable for feminist media research, if it is related to gender or intersections of gender with, for example, sexuality, race, or class (2013, 266), which can be seen in *ANNE+*.

### ***3.3 Television***

McIntosh and Cuklanz also specify feminist media research to television, which fits with *ANNE+*, that is a TV show. In television, the focus of feminist media research has often been on stereotypes and behavioural and interactive patterns. Furthermore, in feminist television theory elements of identity are more likely to be examined, the focus is often more on relationships between characters or on patterns of, for example, objectification (McIntosh and Cuklanz 2013, 275-276). In this thesis, I also study the intersections of gender, sexuality, and/or race and the meaning of lesbian identity and lesbian self-acceptance. I do this by making sure that I do not characterize characters by their gender, sexuality, and/or race separately, but by analysing how these identities also influence each other. Again, the patterns that are discovered in television are often related to culture-specific dominant ideologies (277) and therefore I relate my findings to the specific culture, and corresponding ideologies, in which *ANNE+* is created.

### ***3.4 Feminist media analysis: Step-by-step plan***

To do a feminist media analysis, McIntosh and Cuklanz created a step-by-step plan that can be followed. The first step is choosing a text for the analysis, which can be anything including television shows, films, and newspapers, as well as governmental documents and personal items. The text I chose for the analysis is scenes from the Dutch television show *ANNE+*. This was foremostly a personal choice, since the show has helped me forming my lesbian identity

and helped me gain more self-acceptance. Furthermore, I also checked whether McIntosh and Cuklanz would consider *ANNE+* a useful text for feminist media analysis. When researching, I found that there was very little research on the show. Moreover, the content of *ANNE+* mainly focusses on story lines, viewpoints, and issues surrounding women, as well as non-binary and trans characters. Combining these issues with the fact that there are almost no cis, heterosexual male characters, it makes that *ANNE+* can be considered a good text for feminist media analysis. Additionally, *ANNE+* approaches women and gender, as well as, sexuality, in a new way, i.e., by deconstructing normative ideas of gender and sexuality and portraying intersections of gender, sexuality, and race as mentioned in McIntosh and Cuklanz (2013, 291). As aforementioned, there is almost no academic research on *ANNE+*, which makes that this thesis can be an addition to the existing research. Lastly, *ANNE+* was the first show on Dutch television with a lesbian main character. Importantly, queer stories are often focussed on coming out processes, and after that, the character was not important anymore. *ANNE+* changes this narrative by portraying the daily life of a lesbian that is already 'out' and has other queer friends who have their own life (Geels 2022). Therefore *ANNE+* changes the usual televisual representations of gender and sexuality, which makes that *ANNE+* would be a useful text to analyse.

The next step in the step-by-step plan is identifying and developing new themes. However, I have already chosen the themes for my analysis beforehand, namely the lesbian identity and lesbian self-acceptance. For this, I have combined previous research of other authors researching the lesbian identity and (lesbian) self-acceptance and during my analysis, these themes will be expanded and complemented, and/or contradicted and reduced, which is in line with McIntosh and Cuklanz (2013, 285). To analyse these themes, specifically in Anne and Sara's relationship, I have chosen four scenes in total, two from season 1 and two from season 2. Before analysing the themes in the scenes, I give a description of the characters that are present in those scenes and describe them in terms of gender, sexuality, age, and race/ethnicity to understand the basics of what and who is portrayed in these scenes. To define this, I use information provided in the show, on the website of the show and/or the social media of the show and/or the actors. This is important to note, since sexual identity milestones, for example, the age of self-identification as a sexual minority, can be dependent on age. Besides, race and/or ethnicity can also influence these sexual identity milestones, for example, the moment of coming out can differ for white people and people of colour (Martos, Nezhad, and Meyer 2015, 2-3).

Then, the step is to determine the key themes of the analysis, which, in this analysis, are

the lesbian identity and lesbian self-acceptance. The operationalization and definition of these themes I use in this thesis are explained in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Besides, I study how, in my interpretation, these themes are represented, which here means portrayed<sup>27</sup>, and constructed in *ANNE+*, and thus how the show defines the themes. Construction here refers to how meaning is created through language, which can be signs, or imaginary and abstract ideas. The language is not reflecting or imitating the material world, but meaning is produced through language (Hall 2013, 13-14). Thus, for *ANNE+*, I look at both ‘What can be seen/heard, or more broadly: What can be perceived’ and then ‘What does that mean’.

Furthermore, I have chosen to analyse both scenes from season 1 and scenes from season 2. I do this since Anne and Sara’s relationship develops over time, which is visible in season 1 and season 2.

### **3.5 Thick description**

To describe and present the scenes from *ANNE+*, I use the method ‘thick description’, which was coined by Clifford Geertz by elaborating on Gilbert Ryle’s notion of ‘thick description’. According to Geertz, ethnography<sup>28</sup> is thick description and ethnographers are faced with “a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render” (Geertz 1973, 314). In this thesis, I do visual ethnography of scenes from *ANNE+* and, thus, give a thick description of these scenes.

According to Norman Denzin (1989), a thick description contains the following components: 1) It provides the context of an action, 2) it asserts the motives and meanings that arrange the action, 3) it tracks the development and evolution of the action, and 4) it displays the action as a text that can then be depicted. Compared to a thin description that only reports facts or circumstances surrounding the action (as cited in Thompson 2001, 66).

I use this technique to give a more in-depth analysis of *ANNE+* and not just a basic description of the scenes. So that the description does not only include facts and circumstances, but also intentions, contexts, motives, meanings, and development.

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<sup>27</sup> According to the Cambridge Dictionary, representation means “the way that someone or something is shown or described” (Cambridge Dictionary 2019b).

<sup>28</sup> “a scientific description of the culture of a society by someone who has lived in it, or a book containing this” (Cambridge Dictionary 2019c)

### ***3.6 Feminist Media Analysis***

Before doing thick description and interpreting the scenes I selected, I ask myself the following questions and provide the answers to the following questions:

1. What is explicitly said by the characters about the lesbian identity and/or lesbian self-acceptance and what does that mean?

This question relates to spoken language in *ANNE+*, so textual language. The words “lesbian” (as a noun), “identity” and/or “acceptance” or related words such as “accepting”, or “lesbian” (as an adjective) should be said in the scene to classify as ‘explicit’.

2. What is implicitly said by the characters about the lesbian identity and/or lesbian self-acceptance?

This question also relates to spoken, and thus textual language, in *ANNE+*, but here the scene does not have to include the literal words “lesbian”, “identity” and/or “acceptance”. Words such as “pride/proud” (Camp, Vitoratou, and Rimes 2016, 2354), “being okay with who I am”, or “women loving women” can refer to the themes here and the meaning is analysed.

3. What explicit behaviour is shown regarding the lesbian identity and/or lesbian self-acceptance?

This question relates to the portrayed behaviour and thus what is visually presented about the lesbian identity and/or lesbian self-acceptance.

4. What implicit behaviour is shown regarding the lesbian identity and/or lesbian self-acceptance?

This question relates to the behaviour that is shown but does not directly imply the lesbian identity and/or lesbian self-acceptance.

When I have answered the questions, I do a thick description, after which I interpret the meaning of the (passages in) the scenes. I do this by relating my interpretations to the definitions of the lesbian identity and lesbian self-acceptance. I also relate my interpretations to theory I have gathered from other research. Lastly, I give conclusions about what I have found and how that relates to my research question, i.e., in what way the lesbian identity and lesbian self-acceptance of Anne in her relationship with Sara are represented and constituted in the television show *ANNE+*.

### **3.7 Scene selection**

For my analysis, I have chosen four scenes of *ANNE+*. My selection is based on rewatching *ANNE+* and noting the scenes, in which Anne and Sara are present, that stood out to me, especially regarding being a lesbian, the lesbian identity, and (lesbian) self-acceptance. I have collected the following scenes for the analysis, of which I name the season, the number of the episode, a short description of what is happening in the scene, and why the scene is relevant for my analysis.

The first scene I selected is:

*Season 1, episode 5, 2:09-3:45. In this scene, Anne says and jokes that she wants to have a live together with Sara, just like ‘real lesbians’ do. Sara is doubting about whether she wants that and whether she is a lesbian.*

There is a joke that goes “What does a lesbian bring to a second date?” and the answer is “A U-Haul”. U-Haul is a company from the USA, that rents out vans and trucks for, for example, moving furniture. The joke refers to the stereotype that lesbians often move in together quickly (Bing and Heller 2003, 166). In this scene, Anne and Sara talk about moving in together, because that is what ‘real lesbians’ do. I chose this scene for the analysis since it touches upon lesbian stereotypes and the question whether someone identifies as a lesbian or not. Furthermore, the scene also presents questioning one’s sexuality/identity and being in a relationship with someone who has found their identity. In my analysis of this scene, in which differences between Anne and Sara are shown, I focus on what being a lesbian means and what questioning one’s sexuality/identity means.

*Season 1, episode 5, 8:01-9:03: Anne and Sara have a fight on a marketplace. Anne wants to be affectionate in public with Sara, but Sara does not want that. Anne openly shouts that she is a lesbian, on which Sara responds using a slur.*

In this scene, the difference between Anne and Sara in showing public displays of affection and labelling oneself lesbian becomes clear. Where Anne wants to show her love for Sara in public, Sara is not ready for that yet. Public displays of affection (PDA), such as kissing or holding hands are negatively correlated with perceived danger, fear of heterosexism, and internalized homonegativity (Stammwitz and Wessler 2021, 3). Since, especially, homonegativity is related to self-acceptance (Camp, Vitoratou, and Rimes 2020a, 2354), Sara not wanting to hold Anne’s hand, could be a sign of lower self-acceptance, which is, amongst others, what I test during the analysis. Anne then shouts that she is a lesbian and loves boobs and having sex with women, which makes Sara madder, which then results in Sara calling Anne ‘pot’, which is a Dutch

derogatory slur used against lesbians<sup>29</sup>. This scene is relevant because it, again, emphasizes the differences between Anne and Sara. Anne is labelling herself a lesbian, both in private as in public spaces, whereas Sara does not. Moreover, Sara does not want to show PDA with Anne, whereas Anne wants to. In my analysis, I discuss the meaning of these issues and the meaning of their differences.

*Season 2, episode 4, 21:35-22:18: Sara visits Anne for the first time after she came back from travelling. They discuss how to pursue their relationship.*

I have selected this scene since it, again, portrays the differences between Anne and Sara. Anne likes to label herself and others, whereas Sara avoids using labels to describe her identity. In my analysis I focus on what it means to (not) label oneself and how this relates to the lesbian identity and (lesbian) self-acceptance.

*Season 2, episode 7, 6:10-6:53: Anne and Sara kiss, which is initiated by Sara, during a walk in the park. A stranger wolfwhistles at them. They stop kissing for a while, look around and at each other and then continue kissing.*

This scene is relevant for my analysis, since Anne and Sara are both showing PDA in this scene. Thus, this scene shows Sara's development from not wanting to show PDA, to initiate PDA. In my analysis I explain what this means and how it is related to the lesbian identity and (lesbian) self-acceptance.

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<sup>29</sup> The Dutch equivalent of 'dyke'.

## **Chapter 4: Analysis of four scenes from ANNE+**

In this chapter, I provide an analysis of four scenes from the Dutch television show *ANNE+* in which the characters Anne and Sara are portrayed. The analysis is focused on the question how the lesbian identity and lesbian/queer self-acceptance of Anne is represented in relation to Sara and what meaning *ANNE+* constitutes for the concepts of lesbian identity and lesbian/queer self-acceptance. Therefore, I chose scenes in which both conversations and behaviour can indicate the lesbian identity and/or lesbian/queer self-acceptance of Anne, and hence also Sara, both explicitly and implicitly. Before analysing the scenes in *ANNE+*, I transcribed the scenes and translated the Dutch text to English.

### ***4.1 Lesbian jokes and questioning one's identity***

In the first scene I selected for the analysis, from season 1 episode 5, Anne (Hanna van Vliet) and Sara (Jouman Fattal) can be seen in the kitchen of Anne's house. Both Anne and Sara are cis women. Anne identifies as a lesbian, for example specified when she says to Sara "I have zero life experience. I'm just a lesbian" (1:36), and is a Dutch, white woman. Sara is born in the Netherlands but has a non-Dutch background (1:26). The actor who plays the role of Sara is born in Syria, so it can be assumed that Sara's background is also Middle Eastern. This scene is relevant because it specifically touches upon being sure about one's identity and doubting one's identity.

The scene starts with Anne and Sara sitting on wooden chairs at a wooden table. On the table items such as butter, orange juice, a cucumber, a bowl with eggs, and hagelslag can be found. Anne is peeling an egg and Sara is peeling a tangerine. Sara asks if Anne wants more coffee, which Anne wants, so Sara stands up and walks to the kitchen counter and Anne is preparing a slice of bread with hagelslag. She opens a kitchen cabinet and takes a pack of ground coffee beans. Sara's back is turned to Anne, and she is facing the blue kitchen tiles. On the kitchen counter items such as a bottle of detergent, hand soap, and a kettle can be seen.

While Sara is preparing her and Anne's coffee, Anne looks up to Sara and smiles. Anne then asks, "Shall we live together?" (2:09). At first, Sara does not reply verbally. It can be seen and heard that Sara drops a spoon in the coffee press. Sara slowly turns around and looks at Anne with wide eyes, which makes her appear astonished. Sara replies by saying "What?" (2:13) and is stretching the 'a' in 'what'. Anne looks at Sara expectantly, waiting for Sara's answer. Sara then says: "We only know each other for two months" (2:15). While Sara is saying this, the viewer cannot see her face, but Anne can be seen. Anne first looks at Sara, but then she turns her face down to the table. Her face, including her eyes and mouth, is in a neutral

position. When Anne is looking down, she reacts to Sara by saying: “Yes that’s why. We’re lesbians, we’re actually a month too late” (2:17). The view switches back to Sara, whose mouth falls open and Sara scrunches her eyebrows. This makes her look even more astonished and confused. After this, Anne looks away from Sara, while Sara stays in the same position, almost if Anne’s question made her frozen. Anne looks back at Sara, starts laughing and says “Saar. It’s a joke!” (2:25), to which Sara replies “Oh, okay! Yeah” (2:28). While Sara says this, Sara cannot be seen since the focus is still on Anne. The image switches and Sara can be seen again. Again, Sara’s face cannot be seen but her back, arms, and hands can be seen. Sara is continuing making coffee and she is scooping the ground coffee beans into the coffee press as if nothing happened. Avoiding eye-contact, which Sara does by showing her back, or avoidance in general, “includes the fear of being seen, the fear of revealing inner states, and the fear of seeing the rejecting responses of others” (Argyle and Dean 1965, 293). Thus, one reason the makers of *ANNE+* could have done this, is to show Sara’s avoidance of Anne, and more specifically, the confrontation with Anne or Anne’s rejecting response, which can happen if she reveals her inner states.

In this scene, Anne jokes to Sara about living together after knowing each other for two months, since that is what lesbians do. The word “lesbian(s)” is therefore used multiple times during the scene. The first time in this scene the word lesbian(s) is used, is when Anne answers Sara, who is surprised that Anne already asks if they should live together. Anne says “We’re lesbians, that’s why. We’re actually a month too late.” (2:17). Here, Anne calls both herself and Sara a lesbian and states that they should have lived together already. With Anne calling both herself and Sara lesbians, Anne is ignorant of Sara’s identity that might not be lesbian. She thus ignores other non-heterosexual identities, such as bisexuality. Sara has never told Anne that she identifies as a lesbian too, so Anne makes this assumption about Sara. For example, later in the episode, at 5:52 minutes, Sara tells Anne that Anne is her first girlfriend ever. Sara also asks Anne who her first girlfriend was, which was a girl from Anne’s high school. Sara asks if Anne already knew in high school that she was attracted to women and exclaims that she herself is not sure about that yet. According to Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell, it is not uncommon that identities, such as bisexuality, are ignored by people in the LGBTQ+ community. In the LGBTQ+ community, bisexuals are often invisible because they are perceived not homosexual enough to be queer. On the other hand, heterosexuals perceive bisexuality as too queer to be heterosexual, and thus bisexuals are ignored by both parties (2009, 298). When Sara says that she is not sure whether she is a lesbian, the viewer sees her back, which could mean that Anne’s question made Sara feel uncomfortable and that Sara does not want to show Anne her face,



again for example out of fear as argued by Argyle and Dean (1965, 293). Based on this, my argument is that Anne's (lesbian) identity is more visible in *ANNE+*, whereas Sara's identity is less visible and, by showing her back, her identity is turned away from the lesbian identity Anne imposes.

Later in the scene, Anne checks with Sara if she understood that her previous remark about living together was a joke. What Anne could refer to is the joke that lesbians bring a moving truck on the second date (Gordon 2006, 171). Anne says "Did you seriously think that I wanted to live together already? Because we're lesbians?" (2:30). Here, Anne is again calling both herself and Sara lesbians. This time, however, Sara replies saying "I'm not sure actually, uhm, yes. Whether I am that. A lesbian" and after that she says, "It's just, all those lesbian jokes, I don't feel connected to them". In this passage, it becomes clear that Sara doubts whether she identifies as a lesbian, whereas Anne is clearly calling herself a lesbian and evaluating Sara as a lesbian. Moreover, when Sara says "I am not sure actually. Whether I am that. A lesbian" (2:40), she emphasizes the "that" and "a lesbian". This could mean that Sara may experience distance between herself and lesbianism and that she may be afraid to exclaim the word "lesbian" and therefore uses the word "that". Moreover, the word 'lesbian' is still often perceived as a dirty word, which could also be what Sara is feeling and therefore, she does not want to say it at first (Stephenson 2020). Furthermore, Sara might have heteronormative ideas and beliefs and is unaware that she is part of the system of compulsory heterosexuality as described by Adrienne Rich (Fraser 2018, 2). For example, Sara experiencing distance between herself and the word lesbian and/or lesbianism is facilitated by her having heteronormative ideas of being supposed to be only attracted to men. Anne, on the other hand, is past the stage of believing she should be heterosexual or fit within a heterosexual system and does not create distance between herself and the word 'lesbian'. For both Anne and Sara, it does not become clear that they chose attraction to women as a result of bitterness toward men, which is also described in Rich's text as a component of compulsory heterosexuality (1980, 632).

Sara's answer can be interpreted as that Sara questions whether she is a lesbian and that she does not identify with lesbian jokes. Sara highlights that she is not sure whether she is a lesbian, and questioning one's sexual identity is a common experience for sexual minorities. According to Rosario et al. (1996), before identifying as a sexual minority, a person that later identifies as a sexual minority first falls in love with someone of the same gender. For Sara, Anne is the first girl she ever fell in love with. This experience of falling in love with someone of the same gender is often followed by questioning one's sexual orientation. After questioning, one may start identifying as a sexual minority (as cited in Katz-Wise and Hyde 2017, 142).

Identifying as a sexual minority is also related to (non-)whiteness, since Western same-gender attraction is often associated with whiteness. In addition, in Middle Eastern and/or Arab cultures gay stigma is common and therefore Middle Eastern and/or Arab people often experience fear of coming out (Ikizler and Szymanski 2014, 236) or do not come out as a strategic choice. According to Moradi, DeBlaere, and Huang (2010), Middle Eastern and/or Arab sexual minorities are often invisible in society and research because the ethnic and/or racial community suppresses sexual minorities due to heterosexism as well as invisibility because a lack of research of the racial and/or ethnic sexual minority communities or cultures (as cited in Ikizler and Szymanski 2014, 236). Thus, Sara is not at the stage of identifying as a sexual minority, since she has just fallen in love with Anne, who has the same gender as Sara. Furthermore, Sara could experience oppression from her ethnic and/or racial community that is based in heterosexism and/or she has not connected her queerness to her non-whiteness. Furthermore, according to Rahman, queer identities are often perceived as only possible in the West, since Eastern cultures are defined as against modernity (2014, 279). Queerness is thus also more seen as a Western concept, which could be unrelatable for Sara.

Thus, Sara is still in the questioning stage whether she is a sexual minority and/or identifies as a sexual minority, while Anne already identifies herself as a lesbian and thus as a sexual minority. However, Sara does not have to define herself as a sexual minority such as Anne does. Yet, in my interpretation, by putting Sara next to Anne, who is labelling herself as a lesbian, *ANNE+* creates the expectation that Sara will also define herself as a sexual minority at a later point in time. Thus, in my opinion, the creators of *ANNE+* could have expanded on not labelling oneself and what it means to be questioning one's identity more. Furthermore, since Sara is a Middle Eastern character, likely by choice of the makers, the makers could have elaborated more on Anne and Sara's different experiences regarding, for example, queerness and coming out and thus not putting Sara in a Western framework and thereby reproducing the idea that queerness could only exist in Western cultures.

#### ***4.1.1 Lesbian jokes***

Moreover, lesbian jokes have always been around in lesbian communities. Research by Bing and Heller (2003) shows that lesbians saw themselves as a homogeneous culture who shared similar experiences and jokes where also based on these experiences. These jokes "mitigate against the isolation and invisibility that lesbians experience in a homophobic culture that has [...] denied their presence and perpetuated an image of them as moral and social deviants" (Bing and Heller 2003, 158). Lesbian jokes, which come from the lesbian community, provide

a community that is grounded in resistance, change, and survival and enables lesbians who may be closeted to feel like they belong in the community too. Additionally, lesbian jokes, as a part of lesbian humor, cover many different topics that range from politics and sexuality to food and fashion and are, often, universal and not uniquely ‘lesbian’. Lesbian humor is also existing within and outside the heteronormative society and mainstream culture. Lesbian jokes may use the lesbian as an object of humor, which shows the differences between a lesbian and (hetero)normativity and use the lesbian as ‘the other’. On the other hand, in lesbian jokes, the lesbian can also be made the subject, which rejects the position of the lesbian as the ‘other’ and judges societal standards of (hetero)normativity to be artificial and irrelevant. These lesbian jokes are the opposite of the images the homophobic cultures propose of lesbians (158-159).

An example of a well-known ‘lesbian joke’ is “What does a lesbian bring on the second date? A U-Haul” (Bing and Heller 2003, 166). U-Haul is a company from the USA that rents out moving vans (U-Haul 2019) and the joke refers thus to the idea that lesbians “tend to disregard bourgeois courtship rituals<sup>30</sup> and jump into “marriages” quickly and impulsively, acting on passion rather than reason” (166). The question in the joke is often evaluated to lead to sexual-related answers, for example, referring to bringing sex toys. However, this joke is not about anything sexual, but it evaluates lesbianism as being aimed towards establishing a household. Yet even lesbians themselves do not always understand that the joke refers to establishing a household, because lesbians are “conditioned to expect certain kinds of responses based on homophobic or sexist stereotypes in a society that refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of the families and partnerships that lesbians form with one another” (167).

#### ***4.1.2 Lesbian jokes in ANNE+***

Relating this to Anne and Sara’s case, Anne is the one who is joking about living together, which is similar to the U-Haul joke, while Sara does not understand and/or relates to the joke. Here, Anne may show, by joking that she wants to live with Sara so soon because they are lesbians, that she wants to establish a household with Sara. Sara may not expect this type of question from Anne, because she might not have thought about living together and/or does not (yet) have the goal of sharing a home with Anne. By expressing that she does not relate to the joke, whether she identifies as a lesbian or not, she makes her ideas and wishes clear. Furthermore, Sara could also have internalized, negative ideas about lesbians forming households together and therefore she does not think the joke was funny and/or does not relate to the joke. Internalized, negative ideas could be part of experiencing internalized homophobia and (partly) overcoming

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<sup>30</sup> Rituals of middle-class couples regarding developing a romantic relationship before getting married.

internalized homophobia is an important aspect of self-acceptance. Thus, if Sara has those negative ideas about lesbianism, Sara might not (fully) self-accepting yet, since Camp, Vitoratou, and Rimes stated that overcoming internalized homophobia is a part of the self-acceptance process (2020, 2354). Yet, in this scene, it is unclear whether Sara identifies herself as a lesbian or will do so in the future, but, still, she could have internalized, negative attitudes towards non-heterosexuality. Despite the fact that lesbian jokes can also be relatable for closeted lesbians and Sara says that she does not relate to these jokes, it does not have to mean she is not a (closeted) lesbian, since (closeted) lesbians also have the right and ability to just not relate to the joke or perceive the joke as not funny, or even homophobic and stereotypical. Sara could also simply just not like the joke, or she does not relate to the joke because she senses that she is not a lesbian and/or that she will not identify as a lesbian in the future. Additionally, Sara could experience (internalized) lesbophobia, which is, amongst others, based in the social expectations and stereotypes of traditional male and female gender roles that lesbians do not meet (EL\*C 2021, 6). Examples could be that starting a heterosexually constituted family is the ultimate goal (Rich 1980, 657), and therefore, Sara does not expect Anne to form a household with her. However, it is not becoming clear in *ANNE+* what the reason is behind Sara's reasoning. Sara could find it too early to start a household with Anne, which could be influenced by (internalized) lesbophobia and/or compulsory heterosexuality, but it could also just be a preference that is not influenced by these concepts. Therefore, this scene would need more depth, for example by a more elaborate conversation between Anne and Sara discussing why Anne made the joke and why Sara does not relate to the joke.

Focussing on Anne, she is openly identifying herself as a lesbian, which she mentions to Sara in the beginning of the episode (1:36) and is also using these jokes as if they were made for her. This could mean that Anne has low levels of (internalized) homophobia and (internalized) lesbophobia, and that she has no or few negative ideas about starting households as lesbians. On the other hand, it could also mean that Anne does not see the harm of reproducing the lesbian stereotype that is expressed by this joke, namely that lesbians are often acting on passion instead of reason (Bing and Heller 2003, 166).

#### ***4.1.3 Preliminary conclusions***

In this scene, it can be seen that Anne, as a lesbian, evaluates her partner to be a lesbian too. She is already past the stages of falling in love with someone of the same gender for the first time and questioning her sexuality, since she already defines herself as a sexual minority. Sara is the opposite of Anne, since she has just started exploring her sexual (minority) identity. Anne

projects herself onto Sara and does not give Sara enough space for exploring her feelings. Anne knows this, as she says in a voice-over “Should I have listened more carefully? I actually didn’t pay enough attention to Sara’s struggles. I was just in love” (3:30). In my opinion, by letting Anne say this, the makers summarize Anne’s character. Anne is constituted as a person who loves people very deeply, in a way that she does not have eyes and ears for her partner. Furthermore, in my interpretation, Anne is portrayed as showing more self-acceptance by claiming the lesbian identity and lesbian jokes, whereas Sara portrayed as less self-accepting by rejecting the lesbian identity and not relating to lesbian jokes. Self-acceptance is thus treated more as a trait of which one has a specific amount. I critique this portrayal done by the makers of *ANNE+*, since self-acceptance is more a process than a trait. This process is not shown, and Anne and Sara are put on a line of no self-acceptance to full self-acceptance, instead of seeing self-acceptance as a spectrum, which can, but does not have to be, be influenced by, amongst others, internalized homophobia and race/ethnicity.

#### ***4.2 Public displays of affection on a market***

In a later scene, also in episode 5 of season 1, Anne and Sara can be seen again. Anne is still struggling with the fact that she is dating someone who has not found their identity yet. This time, Anne and Sara are walking on a busy marketplace in Amsterdam. There are multiple stalls, for example with fur rugs, vegetables, and there is a butcher. The marketplace is on a square and next to a road, where cars and bikes ride. Anne and Sara are also surrounded by other people who are visiting the market. Thus, this scene takes place in a public space, as opposed to the previous scene that took place in Anne’s house.

The first thing that happens in this scene is that Anne takes Sara’s hand, but Sara lets go of it. Holding hands is a form of physical affection, as defined by Gullledge, Gullledge, and Stahmann (2003, 234-235). Thus, what can be seen here is that Anne wants to show Sara her love for Sara and/or wants to make herself experience more feelings of love through Sara. Sara does not want to show affection on the marketplace and thus in a public space. Not wanting to show public displays of affection (PDA) is often a result of the idea that PDA of queer couples is correlated with perceived danger, fear of heterosexism, and internalized homonegativity (Stammwitz and Wessler 2021, 3). Internalized homonegativity means that one has negative feelings towards one’s own or other’s non-heterosexuality, which can be seen as negatively influencing one’s LGBTQ+ self-acceptance and, partly, overcoming internalized homonegativity is important for self-acceptance (Berg, Munthe-Kaas, and Ross 2016, 541; Camp, Vitoratou, and Rimes 2020a, 2354; Frost and Meyer 2009, 97). Perceived danger refers to fearing one will

be physically attacked after displaying physical affection in public, whereas fear of heterosexism refers to fearing acts of discrimination that are nonviolent (Stammwitz and Wessler 2021, 3; Brady 2017, 3-4). So, based on this part of the scene, the makers of *ANNE+* could have tried to define self-acceptance of Anne and Sara through PDA. Thus, people who want to show PDA, such as Anne who wants to hold hands and kiss Sara in public, experience less or no feelings of internalized homonegativity, fear of heterosexism and/or perceived danger, as stated by Stammwitz and Wessler (2021, 3). Since especially internalized homonegativity is connected to one's self-acceptance, it is likely that people who do not want to show PDA because of internalized homonegativity also have lower levels of self-acceptance. Feelings of fear of heterosexism and/or perceived danger could still happen at the same time as having low levels of internalized homonegativity. Therefore, both Anne and Sara could have low levels of internalized homonegativity, but Anne could have less feelings of fear of heterosexism and/or perceived danger or is less aware of this. Sara is more hesitant in showing PDA and therefore she might have more feelings of fear of heterosexism and/or perceived danger or is more aware of possible danger and heterosexism. Furthermore, personal preferences also always play a role, but the reasoning behind these preferences does not become clear within the show. Therefore, it is remarkable that the makers of *ANNE+* decided to portray Anne and Sara this way, i.e., Anne who wants and insists PDA, and Sara who avoids and refuses PDA.

These findings are also confirmed by the conversation between Anne and Sara, in which Sara says, "You know I don't like that" (8:06), referring to holding hands. She also asks Anne "Why do you have to walk hand in hand?" (8:11). Anne says "Saar, you're my girlfriend. I just want to be able to take your hand. I just want to be able to kiss you" (8:14). In this part of the conversation, Anne clarifies that she sees Sara as her girlfriend which indicates that they are in a relationship. She also clarifies that she wants to have physical (public) affection with Sara. Again, this indicates that Anne's intention is to experience love herself, to make Sara experience feelings of love, or both. However, again, Anne does not take Sara's feelings into account. Anne does not recognise Sara's feelings of not wanting to show PDA and focusses mostly on herself, especially by emphasizing what she expects and wants from Sara. Sara replies, "I like you too" while nodding. By nodding, she reinforces the idea that she does like Anne. However, there is a difference between calling someone your girlfriend or your partner and liking someone. Liking someone is more casual affection, whereas calling someone your partner or love is based in more passionate and intimate love (Lamm and Wiesmann 1997, 272) After Sara has said this, she walks away from Anne towards the road, leaving Anne behind on the marketplace. After

that, by using an imperative, Anne almost forces Sara to prove her that Sara likes her. Anne says, “Show it” (8:22) and then Sara turns around and says “What?” (8:25) but looks away from Anne. Anne, however, is directly looking at Sara when she says “Do you like me? Show it then! Kiss me! Kiss me on my lips!” (8:26). When she is saying this, she brings her fingers to her mouth to point to Sara where she has to kiss Anne. In my interpretation, Anne is being inconsiderate of Sara’s boundaries who has clearly stated that she does not want to kiss Anne or hold hands with Anne in public. In the scene, Sara is looking around and scanning the environment, which could mean that she is looking for possible danger. This type of behaviour could be called hypervigilance (Burgess and Legg 2017). Homophobic violence has increased and, often, lesbians and gay men are also aware of potential violence related to their identity (Mason 2001, 26). Despite Sara not identifying as a lesbian, she could still be aware of possible homophobic violence.

Moreover, the viewer first does not see Anne and Sara in one shot, which is creating a distance between the characters. This adds onto the distance Anne and Sara are experiencing between each other and their differences in how a relationship should be shaped. However, when Anne and Sara can be seen in one shot again, there is not a lot of distance between them, probably approximately one meter. Anne specifies that she wants Sara to kiss her because she likes and loves Sara. Sara says “Stop” (8:44) which shows that she does not like Anne’s behaviour. However, Anne does not listen to Sara and goes on. Again, Anne is inconsiderate of Sara’s boundaries. Sara tells Anne to stop, but Anne does not listen. In my interpretation, Anne deems her feelings to be more important than Sara’s. She raises her voice and says “Yes, I like you because I am a lesbian” (8:45) and when she says that she is still directly looking at Sara. Then, Sara’s reaction can be seen. She is frowning and her mouth is opened a little, which makes her look mad and confused at the same time. The camera goes back to Anne, and she goes on “Yes. I am a lesbian. I love boobs and I love having sex with women” (8:50).

By my argumentation, it could be expressed here by the makers of *ANNE+* that, because Anne is defining herself as a lesbian and she evaluates her relationship with Sara important, Anne assesses her wishes to be the ones that need to be fulfilled, instead of Sara’s wishes that come from doubt and liking Anne. While saying this, Anne looks around, nods, and moves her arms while talking. By doing this, she is grabbing people’s, not only Sara’s, attention, which could mean that she is not afraid to express herself, including her lesbian identity, in public and thus as little fear of homo-/lesbophobic reactions, including her own. On the other hand, Anne looking around could also be a sign of alertness, anxiety, and checking her surroundings for danger (Burgess and Legg 2017), such as homo-/lesbophobia and/or homophobic violence.

(Mason 2001, 26).

My argument here is that Anne is constructed as a selfish and inconsiderate character, who also wants to have dominance over Sara, just because Anne identifies as a lesbian. Sara, on the other hand, is constructed as a character that is doubting about her identity, but has clear boundaries, which are based in a realistic possibility of violence, and has the ability to express her boundaries to Anne. Still, I interpret Sara as constructed as a character who is easily walked all over, which mostly lays in the fact that she does not label herself. This can be seen as a problematic aspect of *ANNE+*, since it reproduces the ideology that one has to identify with a sexual minority label to be heard and/or seen. Anne could be seen as a character that has shortcomings, because Anne is constituted as a lesbian who expects that her partners, including those who have not (yet) labelled themselves, want to do the exact same as her. However, the question rises whether Anne's inconsiderate personality was a choice of the makers, or that it did not happen purposely. Either way, this constitution of Anne could give other lesbians, who are watching this scene, the message that they can be dominant and inconsiderate too, as well as the idea that partners of lesbians, which do not (yet) identify themselves as a lesbian, should be submissive to their lesbian partner. *ANNE+* also reinforces the idea that people who do not label themselves are less dominant than people who identify as a lesbian, which can be considered problematic because, in my opinion, identity labels do not define who you are and what your personality is.

Where Anne is openly stating that she is a lesbian and wants to be able to show PDA with Sara, Sara replies to Anne's exclamation saying "An, stop it. I'm not ready for it, okay. I don't want to hold your fucking hand" (8:53) and she ends with "Rot op, pot" (8:59) which could translate to "Fuck off, dyke". However, for the word 'pot' there is no literal English translation, but pot, as well as dyke, is used as a derogatory slur against lesbians (De Coster 2020). In Sara's answer, again, it becomes clear that Sara does not want to hold Anne's hand, and thus show physical affection in public, which could come from experiencing feelings of perceived danger, fear of heterosexism, and/or internalized homonegativity. It does not become clear in the scene what the reason is for Sara not being ready to hold hands or kiss Anne in public, but it is likely that it is one or a combination of the aforementioned reasons.

Moreover, Sara uses a derogatory, lesbophobic slur against Anne. Internalized homophobia is often related to negative and emotional language, and to the reflection of "shame, guilt, hate, disgust, and fear" in tone of speech (Li and Samp 2019, 18) and could thus be the reason of Sara using a slur. The scene ends with a shot of Anne, who is frowning, looking around her and pressing her lips together. This could mean she is hurt and is trying not to cry.



### ***4.2.1 Preliminary conclusions***

Here, again Anne and Sara have different experiences. Anne wants to show public displays of affection, for example by holding hands with Sara or kissing Sara. Sara does not want to do this, because she is not ready for this yet. Anne's lesbian identity and self-acceptance is defined through wanting to show physical affection in public to her girlfriend and being able to do so, even if that means being inconsiderate of the other's boundaries. In addition, Anne is not afraid of exclaiming her lesbian identity in public, whereas Sara refrains from mentioning and labelling her sexuality. There are multiple reasons why Sara might not want to show PDA with Anne. For example, she could experience internalized homophobia, fear of heterosexism and/or perceived danger or it could just be a personal preference. Yet, Anne wanting to show PDA does not mean she does not have these feelings, but since Anne is insisting on showing PDA, it is unlikely that she experiences those feelings in that specific moment. This representation of a lesbian and an unlabelled person can be considered problematic, since it creates the idea that lesbians are inconsiderate people and/or that they are allowed to be inconsiderate, as well as that their wishes are more important. For the unlabelled person's it can create the idea that their boundaries are not valid and can be crossed and/or that they also need to label themselves for their wishes to be taken seriously.

At the end of the episode, it also becomes clear that Anne and Sara's relationship did not last, because Anne wants to go faster than Sara can and wants to go. Sara is going to travel, and Anne is staying in the Netherlands.

### **Season 2**

In the beginning of season 2, Sara comes back from her travels and visits Anne again. Sara wants to start over again with Anne, but Anne is not so sure yet. Anne was in a relationship of six months with a girl she did not feel enough for, so she does not trust herself with relationships. Additionally, she remembers the way her relationship with Sara ended. Sara, however, has no doubts that she wants to be with Anne again. At the end of episode four, Anne's friend Jip (Jade Olieberg) arranges an appointment between Anne and Sara so that they can talk and stop avoiding each other.

### ***4.3 Conversation about labels and labelling***

In this scene, season 2 episode 4, Anne and Sara are in Anne's living room, which has, amongst others, a couch, a dining table, and a bookcase. The lights are dimmed, and the curtains are closed, which indicates that it is evening. Anne is wearing a white t-shirt with an abstract drawing of a pink vulva on it, while Sara is wearing a dark top with a V-neck. In the beginning

of the scene, Sara is sitting on the couch that is filled with cushions, and Anne is standing while holding a wine glass. Immediately, Anne and Sara's postures could reveal structures of dominance and submission in their relationship. Sara is sitting with her legs close to each other and holds her hands in her lap, which makes her look small, which is also called postural constriction. Anne, on the other hand, is standing and slowly walking around, while moving her arms and legs. Here, Anne is expanding her posture. Posture expansion, and thus taking up a lot of space, is often linked to dominance, while posture constriction and taking up little space is linked to submission (Tiedens and Fragale 2003, 558). Furthermore, behaviours that cause differences in height, such as standing versus sitting, are also seen as dominant behaviours (Burgoon and Dunbar 2006, 291). Therefore, what *ANNE+* could describe here is that, at least in this scene, Anne is more dominant than Sara in their relationship. Note: this does not specifically refer to their romantic and/or sexual relationship.

Anne and Sara discuss what has happened between them. Anne starts by describing their past, and tells that they were in love, however, Anne wanted to go fast in their relationship, but Sara wanted to take it slow because she was not ready for it yet. They broke up and Sara left to travel while Anne stayed in the Netherlands. Now, Sara is back and both Anne and Sara are single. Anne then asks whether Sara came out yet and Sara answers "Uh, well, I feel okay with who I am. I'm into girls, I'm into boys, everything in between" (21:59) to which Anne says, "So you are, let's say, pansexual" (22:04). Right after Anne has said this, Sara is pictured. Sara closes her eyes and laughs while saying "An, don't try to fit me into a box again" (22:05). Anne excuses herself. However, this time, Sara says "If you have to name it, yes" (22:10). However, Sara avoids using labels, such as pansexual, for herself, which makes it likely that she is unlabelled<sup>31</sup>. Anne says she is sorry, and that Sara is right that she should not label Sara. This is different from the first time that Anne tried to fit Sara in a box, namely in episode five of season one, in which Anne wrongly defines Sara as a lesbian and almost acts as if she feels attacked by Sara's rebuttal. Despite Anne being sorry in that scene as well, Anne comes across more sincere in this scene.

Furthermore, Sara says clearly here that she is okay with who she is, which I stated to be a way of mentioning self-acceptance. Therefore, what Sara could be mentioning here is that she has accepted herself, at least for the bigger part.

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<sup>31</sup> Unlabelled is eventually also a label, but it goes against labels such as 'lesbian', 'bisexual', 'pansexual', or 'queer'.

### ***4.3.1 Preliminary conclusions***

Here, *ANNE+* shows that Anne has learned that it is not okay to put people into boxes and to speak for them. Anne likes to label herself and to identify herself with a label, in her case 'lesbian'. Sara on the other hand refrains from labelling herself and describes her identity in terms of who she is attracted to, instead of identity labels. Thus, Anne's (lesbian) is grounded in identifying with the label and word 'lesbian' and also labelling others, whereas for others, such as Sara, this does not have to be the case. Sara, for example, defines herself through not using labels. Sara's self-acceptance, for example, is here constituted as Sara's ability to openly talk about her identity, instead of her avoidance of discussing her identity. Anne's self-acceptance, however, is consistent over the scenes, she always talks openly about her identity and sexuality, but can go too far in expecting the same thing from others, especially with naming one's identity and/or sexuality. It can be argued that Anne, because she is at a different moment in the process of self-acceptance, is constituted as a more dominant persona, whereas Sara is still more submissive. This can be seen as problematic, because self-acceptance does not have to influence one's dominance or how open one is, since this could also be a preference. Therefore, the makers of *ANNE+* could have shown Sara's side of the story more and thus elaborate on what it means to not label oneself and why Sara is open to Anne, but rather takes up a submissive role. Also, Anne's perspective on why she wants to use labels for herself and others, and why she takes up a more dominant role could have been elaborated upon.

### ***4.4 Kissing in the park***

In the last scene I selected, from season 2 episode 7, again, Anne and Sara can be seen. They are taking a walk in a park and talking about their futures. Anne wants to write a book and Sara wants to work as an architect. They are wearing shorts, which indicates that it is warm outside. The trees have green leaves, and the grass is green, so the scene takes place in late spring or (late) summer.

In this scene, Anne and Sara are walking when Anne puts her right arm around Sara's shoulder and her left arm around Sara's stomach. Sara does the same thing to Anne and their faces touch, which means that they are hugging. Anne lets go of Sara's stomach, but Sara is still holding Anne. They keep walking and talking about their plans for the future, when they both let go of the hug. Sara is now holding Anne's right arm with her left hand. They stop walking and are now facing each other. Sara now holds Anne's hand or wrist, and they are making eye contact.

Sara smiles at Anne, which makes Anne confused so she asks "What?", which is short

for something among the lines of “What’s up?”. Sara says there is nothing, and that she just like seeing Anne “like this”, which confuses Anne as well. What Sara means is that she likes seeing Anne talk so passionately about her aspirations to write a book. After this, Sara starts holding Anne’s right cheek and she moves her head towards Anne. Anne also moves her head towards Sara, and they start kissing. When they are kissing, both Anne and Sara are holding each other’s faces.

During their kissing, after around five seconds, a whistle can be heard that is aimed at them. This whistle is called a wolf-whistle and it sounds like ‘fiu fiu’. It is unclear whether this whistle comes from a man, but it is often used by men in the same context as they use, for example, catcalls<sup>32</sup> or winks. Often these remarks are to comment on a woman’s physical appearance or her presence and often have a sexual intention (Kissling and Kramarae 1991, 75). Street-based public harassment is often experienced by LGBTQ+ individuals (UC San Diego Center on Gender Equity and Health 2019, 10) and is suggested to be “a punishment for deviation outside a heterosexist society (Whitfield et al. 2019, 251). Lesbians, or those perceived as a lesbian, “are often attacked in everyday spaces” (Logan 2015, 203) and they are attacked by one (cis) male stranger, while the lesbian who is attacked is often together with another or more than one other woman, or someone who is perceived as a woman by the attacker (203). Another common experience when two women<sup>33</sup> kiss in public is that men shout at them and use phrases such as ‘Can I join’, as explained by Layton (2014) and Keating and Xiao (2015). Therefore, Anne and Sara experiencing a wolf whistle that is aimed at them is not an uncommon experience when being in a non-heterosexual relationship, and in Anne and Sara’s case, a relationship of two women.

In my opinion, the makers of *ANNE+* do two things with this scene. First, the makers show that experiences of street harassment of, in this case, queer women happen and are real experiences. However, since television shows can have influence on people’s behaviour (Gomillion and Giuliano 2011, 342-348), *ANNE+* might scare people by showing that being queer makes you an easy victim, and on the other hand, it normalizes queer people being harassed. Personally, I think this scene is still important to include in *ANNE+* since it is part of queer people’s real experiences, and leaving out the negative parts of being queer would show an unrealistic view. When Sara and Anne hear this whistle sound, they stop kissing and look up

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<sup>32</sup> Catcalling is usually defined as a rude, derogatory or unwelcome comment, whistle, kissing sound– or maybe even a literal meow (Plan International n.d.).

<sup>33</sup> Here, I use the word women, meaning both trans and cis women, instead of more inclusive terms as Anne and Sara identify as (cis) women.

to see where or whom the whistle was coming from. However, this time Sara looks back at Anne before Anne looks back at her. Sara puts her left hand on Anne's right cheek again and moves her face close to Anne's face. Only then, Anne looks back at Sara and Anne notices Sara wants to continue kissing, which is what they do. Again, Sara holds Anne's face with both of her hands. They stop to give each other small kisses with pursed lips, kiss again, stop and smile at each other. They continue their walk in the park holding hands and Anne smiles at Sara.

Sara wants to kiss Anne in public and does so, and vice versa. Kissing is a form of physical affection, and showing physical affection in public is related to three minority stressors, namely "perceived danger, fear of heterosexism, and internalized homonegativity" (Stammwitz and Wessler 2021, 3). Where Sara in season 1 did not want to be affectionate in public, for example, she did not want to hold hands or kiss Anne in public, in this scene she wants to and does so. Even when someone wolf-whistles at Anne and Sara, which could be considered nonviolent harassment and, thus relate to fear of heterosexism (Stammwitz and Wessler 2021, 3; Brady 2017, 3-4), they continue with kissing. Moreover, in the first season, Sara did not want to be affectionate with Anne in public, which could be linked to her experiencing feelings of perceived danger, fear of heterosexism, and/or internalized heteronegativity and/or personal preference at that moment. However, in this scene, these issues seem resolved or reduced, or at least are not covered, which results in Sara being able to kiss Anne in public.

#### ***4.4.1 Preliminary conclusions***

By portraying Sara as a character that now wants to show affection to her partner, even in public spaces, *ANNE+* could create the narrative that Sara's feelings about PDA have changed, which could indicate a change in Sara's self-acceptance because of the relation of internalized homophobia and self-acceptance with PDA. In my interpretation, the goal of *ANNE+* by showing that Sara is now comfortable with PDA is showing that Sara now wants to show her queerness (with Anne) in public, and thus that she has (partly) accepted this part of herself. This storyline of Sara could be interpreted as a personal development, but the audience does not see much of this. Even though I do not think that the makers of *ANNE+* wanted to create this idea that Sara conforms herself to Anne's existing wishes of being able to be affectionate in public, this could be interpreted from the show, since Sara was at first very hesitant of PDA. Despite Anne being the main character, Sara's storyline deserved more attention and explanation.

Anne's behaviour about showing physical affection in public remained the same. However, Anne could be experiencing more freedom in expressing her own lesbian identity,

both to Sara and in public now that Sara is also more open about her own identity.

Therefore, *ANNE+* defines lesbian or queer self-acceptance here as being able to openly express affection, with a resolved or reduced feeling of perceived danger, fear of heterosexism, and internalized homonegativity. Moreover, Anne's lesbian identity is formed in being open about her identity, which includes public displays of affection with her parents. For Sara, it does not become fully clear whether her identity is defined through PDA, but it is likely that the makers of *ANNE+* wanted to show that Sara's idea of her identity is stronger and that she now also dares and/or wants to express this identity.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this thesis, the main research question was: In what way is Anne's lesbian identity and lesbian self-acceptance constituted and represented in the Dutch TV show *ANNE+*, in relation to Sara? Furthermore, I have used sub-questions, namely: 1) In what way is Anne's lesbian identity constituted and represented, in relation to Sara? 2) In what way is Anne's lesbian self-acceptance constituted and represented, in relation to Sara? 3) In what way is Sara's identity constituted and represented? 4) In what way is Sara's self-acceptance constituted and represented? Since I have already answered these questions per scene during the analysis, I keep my answer brief and focus more on the general answer, instead of the answers per scene.

First, Anne is constituted around her identifying as a lesbian and she mentions multiple times that she identifies as a lesbian. However, Anne projects her own lesbian identity on others, such as Sara. Anne is even portrayed as a character who finds it hard to understand other ways of identification, such as not labelling oneself, or not relating to lesbian jokes. Anne's character is also constituted as knowing that she should listen to others more, such as Sara in this case, but she is often too caught up in her own feelings to really listen to Sara's feelings and wishes. Furthermore, Anne's identity is also formed by the makers of *ANNE+* around the fact that she deems public displays of affection important. For example, she wants to hold Sara's hand or kiss her in public. Again, her ideas about these public displays of affection are fixed and make her invalidate and violate other's boundaries. Therefore, Anne can be evaluated as a multi-layered constructed and portrayed character, who has shortcomings, for example not listening to her partner who does not identify themselves, who is not a lesbian, and who does not want to do PDA because she is not ready for it. So, the message that *ANNE+* could be spreading is that a lesbian's wishes and ideas are more important than those of another non-heterosexual person, who does not label themselves. Moreover, the message that is reinforced in *ANNE+* is that identifying with a label, makes one more valid and dominant within the queer community. I critique this aspect of *ANNE+* since it could be very harmful queer people watching this, and maybe also for heterosexual people who, for example, struggle with expressing their boundaries in their relationship(s). Despite the show making Anne say that she knows it is not okay to label people, the show could have touched more upon why this is not okay. Conversations about why or why not to label oneself, for example between Anne and Sara, would have been valuable to reduce the focus on and importance of labelling as a part of queerness that is present in the show as it is now. This is important in relation to this thesis, because the analysis was formed around identity and being unlabelled is an identity too, but is not covered as much in the show, as for example the lesbian identity is.

Furthermore, in the first season, Sara is questioning her sexuality and her identity. Unlike Anne, she is not sure whether she is a lesbian. In season 2, it becomes clear that Sara is constituted as a character that does not want to be labelled and that she is attracted to all genders, which emphasizes that she is not a lesbian. However, my analysis shows that Sara's identity has not been portrayed that much and the focus has been more on Anne's labelled identity. In my opinion, this is a lacking aspect of *ANNE+*, because it, again, can reinforce the idea that labelled identities are more important or, at least, deserve more screentime on television. On the other hand, I think that unlabelled identities have not been represented a lot, and thus, with *ANNE+* portraying an unlabelled character, they could have opened new possibilities for other makers.

Moreover, Sara's character identity is also formed around not being ready to be affectionate in public with Anne in the first season. She expresses her boundaries, i.e. that she does not want to hold hands with Anne and that she does not want to kiss Anne in public. This could mean that she just does not like to be affectionate in public or she needs more time, but it could also mean she is aware of possible danger and/or has internalized negative ideas about queer public affection. The exact reason that Sara does not want to show PDA does not become clear in the show. Therefore, the makers of *ANNE+* could have elaborated more on the possible reasons to not show PDA, which would have given Sara's character more body and would have made it easier for the audience to understand her choices. The same applies for Anne, since now both Anne and Sara have very rigid ideas and wishes and there is no room for nuances. Yet, this opposition of preferences of Anne and Sara could have been a choice by the makers, to emphasize differences within a relationship. Thus, my argument here is that in *ANNE+* there is a lot of focus on PDA but that the reason the characters are built around this does not become fully clear.

Regarding (lesbian) self-acceptance, it is harder to give concrete conclusions. Since I have found that self-acceptance is (often) more a process than a state, the depictions of (lesbian) self-acceptance are less visible in *ANNE+* than, for example, (lesbian) identity. For example, it does not become clear whether Anne has internalized homophobia, which is seen as (a part of) the inverse of self-acceptance. Since internalized homophobia, for example, is something that is mostly happening inside of someone, one has to show it or talk about it, explicitly or implicitly, to become clear. This does not happen clearly in *ANNE+*. However, Anne is open about her identity/sexuality in public, is not afraid of receiving attention when expressing herself. This fits with the definition of self-acceptance I worked with, which also included revealing one's sexuality to others. By making eye contact with Sara and being in a standing position she seems more dominant than Sara, which is important because it could be the way in



which *ANNE+* tries to highlight self-confidence as a part of self-acceptance. Furthermore, making eye-contact, as a form of not-avoiding, *ANNE+* can show that Anne does not experience fear of being seen, rejected, and/or revealing her inner states. As mentioned before, Anne also wants to show public displays of affection with Sara, while, for queer people, this is often linked to internalized homonegativity. By Anne wanting to be affectionate in public, it could mean she has no or low levels of internalized homonegativity regarding PDA and thus higher levels of self-acceptance. However, Anne's constituted preference for PDA can also be seen separately from, amongst others, internalized homonegativity or perceived danger. It might just be a preference, or she might experience internalized homonegativity in other aspects of her life but not about PDA. Yet, by putting the character Anne next to Sara's character, who, in the first season, is not ready for PDA, the makers of *ANNE+* create this binary of more ready and less ready, which, in my interpretation, also creates a binary of more self-accepting and wanting to show oneself in public to less self-accepting and not wanting to show oneself in public. This can be considered problematic, since PDA and internalized homonegativity is not the only aspect that influences self-acceptance, and one can also be more or less self-accepting on different parts of self-acceptance.

Sara, on the other hand, shows signs that she could have (internalized) negative ideas about homosexuality, for example that she tries to avoid saying the word 'lesbian' or the use of a slur as well as that she does not want to be affectionate in public. However, the latter can also be a personal preference, which could still be based in internalized homonegativity, or perceived danger and/or fear of heterosexism, or a combination between the three. Besides Sara saying she is not ready for being affectionate in public with Anne yet, it does not become clear what the reason for this is. Despite 'not being ready' is enough of a reason for Anne and Sara to not be affectionate in public, the show could have elaborated more on where both Anne and Sara are coming from. However, it could also have been a choice of the makers to create two characters that are rigid and stuck in their own ideas. It also does not become clear whether Sara has disclosed her sexuality to others, which Anne does do, even in public with strangers surrounding her. On the other hand, in season 2, Sara is initiating a kiss with Anne while taking a walk in a public park. According to my analysis, this could mean that her previous reasons of not wanting or not being ready to be affectionate with Anne in public have changed. Therefore, *ANNE+* has constructed Sara as a character who is in development, namely from avoiding public displays of affection to initiating affection in public, which could mean that she is more self-accepting in season 2 than she was in season 1.

Thus, my analysis showed that in *ANNE+* self-acceptance is not clearly constituted, only

through PDA and a little through sexuality disclosure to others, and thus it could have been emphasized and elaborated more. Anne does not mention the word ‘self-acceptance’, or related words such as ‘accepting’, while Sara explicitly says that she is okay with who she is. However, this does not mean that Anne is not okay with herself. Still, *ANNE+* does not portray more clear clues about self-acceptance, in the scenes that I selected, and since self-acceptance is an internal process, the show would have needed more information coming from Anne and Sara’s internal states directly to constitute a clearer understanding of Anne and Sara’s self-acceptance. However, it is still likely that the show wants to tell that Anne is more self-accepting than Sara, by constituting her as a character that is claiming identity labels, wanting to be affectionate in public as well as publicly coming out for her identity, and taking up a more dominant personality. Sara is constituted as a more submissive character, who does show a development in her preferences regarding public displays of affection. Thus, according to my analysis, *ANNE+* has constituted self-acceptance mostly in public displays of affection and the reasoning why to do or not do it, and it misses processes of overcoming and/or accepting internalized homophobia and creating neutral or positive judgements of oneself while these processes are also part of self-acceptance. This raises questions such as ‘Do Anne and Sara have a positive sense of self?’ and ‘Do Anne and Sara feel connected with the LGB(T)Q+ community?’.

Concludingly, in *ANNE+* Anne and Sara’s (lesbian) identities are mostly constructed and represented by labelling or not labelling oneself, whether or not relating to lesbian jokes and showing one’s identity in public, for example by displays of affection or coming out to strangers. Self-acceptance in *ANNE+* is mostly constructed and represented by whether or not showing public displays of affection, being open about one’s identity, and by self-confidence shown through dominance and submission. Anne is portrayed as a someone who identifies with the word ‘lesbian’ and relates to lesbian jokes. She is portrayed as (mostly) self-accepting, especially by her dominance, which is likely done to show self-confidence, and is not afraid to show herself in public. Sara is still more questioning about her identity at first and later expressing that she does not want to be labelled, who is constituted as less self-accepting, based on her more submissive characters, and is not ready and not willing to show herself in public in the first season.

### ***5.1 Limitations and recommendations for future research***

The first limitation is that I have never had an unbiased view on *ANNE+*, since it has been one of my favourite series since the release in 2018. So, when selecting the scenes, I already had a biased vision on which scenes I wanted to analyse, instead of the vision of a first-time viewer

and/or someone who does not relate as much to the show. Therefore, my analysis might have been influenced by what I already knew about the series. Furthermore, while doing the analysis, I was struggling with confirmation bias. I was caught up in finding results regarding the lesbian identity and self-acceptance, instead of looking for interesting (other) signs I could discuss. Additionally, by choosing to focus on two concepts, I feel like I might have missed depth. It would have been easier to focus on one concept and do a more in-depth analysis, than two less deep analyses of two concepts. Furthermore, the concepts I have chosen to analyse are still broad, and the results would have been better and/or deeper when I focussed on more narrow themes, such as ‘internalized homophobia’. Lastly, I chose to focus on Anne and Sara, because their storyline is the most important one in the series, but I did not take other characters into account while doing my analysis.

Future research could thus focus on more specific concepts and should offer a deeper analysis than I have done in this thesis. Furthermore, when continuing this research, other scenes in which Anne and Sara are present should be analysed too. In addition, *ANNE+*’s other characters have not been analysed yet, and, since these characters are queer as well, they could offer new and/or different insights on concepts such as the lesbian/queer identity and/or (lesbian/queer) self-acceptance. I also think that because *ANNE+* is the first television show in the Netherlands that has a lesbian main character, it can offer interesting insights on lesbian representation in television (in the Netherlands) and therefore I would recommend other researchers to consider using *ANNE+* as an object of study.

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