Understanding Queerness:

*Sexuality, Gender and Family in Sense8*

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Abstract

Abstract - Nederlands

Abstract - English
This thesis explores our understanding of queerness in relation to the concepts of identity, community and the individual. It studies and reconstructs the theoretical insights from Judith Butler and Sara Ahmed and the philosophical and sociological ramifications of their conception of queerness. This thesis furthermore offers a framework for understanding and analyzing queerness that goes beyond identity politics and doesn’t reduce queerness to the ‘non-subject’. It places queerness in the centre as the (dis)connection between identity, community and the individual within normatively. This thesis then turns towards the Netflix series Sense8 and analyses its (representation of) queerness through the aforementioned framework. This analysis complicates our understanding of queerness and offers ways in which our normative context can be transformed. Further research can apply this framework on the analysis of other media and build on this understanding of queerness.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract 1  
Acknowledgements 2  
Table of contents 3  

Introduction 4  

1. Methodology 7  
  1.1 Methods 7  
    Theory 7  
    Analysis 8  
  1.2 Situating the Project and the Author 11  

2. Theoretical Analysis 14  
  2.1 Introduction to Important Theories: Sexuality, Gender & Family 14  
  2.2 Exploring Queerness 18  
    Butler on Queerness 19  
    Ahmed on Queerness 22  
  2.3 (Queering) Normativity 25  
    Discourse & Experience 26  
    Normativity and the Construction of Identity 27  
    Queering Normativity 30  
  2.4 Conclusions & Applications 34  

3. Analysis of Queerness in Sense8 36  
  3.1 Introduction to the source-material 36  
  3.2 Analysis Moment 1: (dis)connection in queerness 39  
  3.3 Analysis Moment 2: Identity – Community – Individual 47  
  3.4 Analysis Moment 3: Family – Connection. Beyond Identity 55  

Conclusion 58  

Bibliography 60  
Addendum I 63  
Addendum II 74  
Addendum III 90
INTRODUCTION

Recently, polarization has become more and more apparent in politics and beyond. Examples of this can be found in the election of Trump in the United States, the success of Dries Van Langenhove and the spike in neo-Nazi groups that appear in the public spheres of our society. In this context, being queer in one way or another comes with a set of risks and challenges. In Belgium, for example, lgbtq+ individuals are at risk to attempt suicide (22% for lesbian, gay and bi individuals and 38% for transgender individuals) than the general population (4.5% of individuals older than 15). In the United States “hate crimes against LGBTQ+ people re the highest in a decade”. This thesis isn’t a merely abstract philosophy, but rather a reaction to the current state of our western society. The current discourse is filled with the marginalization of what is other or queer. Queerness is actively pushed aside and contrasted against the normative, and this marginalization has detrimental effects.

It is in this sociopolitical context that I am drawn to the question: what is queerness? What does it mean to be alienated from the hegemonic community? What does it mean to stray from norms and face oppression? In an attempt to answer these questions, I turn towards the academic literature in the fields of philosophy and sociology. I am looking for an understanding of queerness and am invested in placing queerness at the center of more conversations. In this, I react against the failure of phenomenology, philosophy and the academy in general to consider otherness, reducing it to its relation to the ‘normal’ and normative. Following disciplines like phenomenology and the philosophical study of intersubjectivity, instead of looking at the I in relation to the other, I look at the I as other. I explore the queer I. In this, I attempt to explore queerness as subject, providing it space and centrality.

When queerness is marginalized, it often isn’t understood as anything but the negation of the normative. By making queerness a central philosophical category, it is allotted its appropriate intellectual space. We can, in this way, create room for queer hope. The importance of this, I argue, lies in the power of (and the absence of) hope within the discourse of queerness. Where creating space for queerness allows for hope, so too does the presence of hope allow queerness to claim space. Correspondingly, the absence of hope denies this claim and takes away the power to strive for a better context, a space in the world that isn’t marginalized. Hope, thus, can combat the marginalization of queerness.

1 Jana Missiaen and Heiderike Seynaeve, "Onderzoek naar het psychologisch welzijn van Vlaamse HOLEBI's en/of transgender personen: Bechsermende factoren in kaart gebracht voor lifetimeprevalentie van suicidedepogingen" (PhD diss., Universiteit Gent, 2016)
3 Mikelle Street, "Hate Crimes Against LGBTQ+ People Are the Highest in a Decade," Out.com, last modified August 1, 2019, accessed August 7, 2019, https://www.out.com/news/2019/8/01/hate-crimes-against-lgbtq-people-are-highest-decade?fbclid=IwAR1vtXVnMKr3WQ3H0sMq0YHdHsdrCv8ih9krKMK1WZBdnLYCU7TV8ewynk0.
In contemplating this space instantiated by hope, I turn towards fictional media. Fictional media has a discursive role as one of the means through which the (counter-)discourses of sexuality, gender and family are at play in the construction of queerness. The stories that are told through, for example, tv-series and movies, are part of the discourse shaping queerness in our current society. Power works through the media, using discursive mechanisms and rhetoric. For example, the prevalence of unhappy endings in movies that contain a main character who isn’t cisgender and/or straight builds on the construct of unhappy queerness. The stories that are told show the audience what is possible – in the case of this example, someone who is queer can’t possibly be happy. By telling different stories, different things can become possible.

The current landscape of the representation of queerness in fictional media, specifically tv, seems to be at a breaking point. While there still is a lack of diverse representation, the (slowly) growing representation of queerness on tv, comes with its own problems, one of which is the aforementioned lack of happy endings for queer individuals or couples. There is a prevalence of queer individuals dying in media, often without any satisfactory reasons. This trope is called ‘bury your gays’ and is for queer women in fictional media a non-accidental amount of times related to ‘stray bullets’.????? Think for example about Lexa from the show The 100, or Tara Maclay from Buffy the Vampire Slayer, caught in the crossfires of another character’s storyline. This is one way in which fictional media can provide representation of queerness without allowing the queer individuals to flourish in their Simultaneously, certain shows are realizing this and actively contradicting this narrative. Think for example about FX’s Pose, where queer happiness is constructed carefully, but radically, while accurately describing their hardships because of a society that is working against them. A recent episode, for example, revealed one of the characters had been violently killed, … Another example of a show actively working against this narrative is the Netflix-series Sense8. It is for that reason that I work towards an analysis of the (representation of) queerness in Sense8 in order to test my theoretical conception of queerness and expand on it further by analyzing specific scenes from the series.

In this thesis, I aim to answer the question ‘what is queerness?’ and explore our understanding of it. Since the scope of queerness can be defined broadly, pertaining to different norms, I will focus my analysis, here, to the concepts of sexuality, gender and family. Later research can move beyond these concepts and explore others. First, I will give a context to my methodological decisions and situate this work and myself in our current society. Then, I will start the theoretical exploration of the concept queerness, starting with defining the concepts of sexuality, gender and family and their relation to each other and to queerness. Afterwards, I will turn towards the question of queerness, itself. For this, I turn

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towards the insights and theories of Judith Butler and Sara Ahmed, studying these and defining the philosophical and sociological ramifications of their conception of queerness. Next, I turn my exploration towards normativity since it is the context for queerness. By analyzing queerness, I will expand on the creation of queerness and the ways in which it interacts with queerness. I will furthermore discuss the possibility of change in normativity through queerness and the queering of normative discourses. I will conclude the theoretical analysis by suggesting a framework through which to understand queerness. It is this framework that I will then apply in my analysis of three different moments of the Netflix-series sense8. First, I analyze a moment that focuses on connection and disconnection in art and love. Then I turn to a moment in which identity is central and its stability is questioned. Finally, I analyze a moment that focusses on family and offers an example of a specific form of connection. Through this analysis, I will keep testing and building my understanding of queerness to conclude with a theoretical framework that can be used in further analyses of the media or queerness in itself.
METHODOLOGY

This thesis aims to build a complex (theoretical) understanding of queerness and explore and expand on this understanding through an analysis of (the representation of) queerness in the Netflix-Series Sense8. First, I will explore the theoretical insights of Judith Butler and Sara Ahmed and propose a theoretical framework that can guide our understanding of queerness. Through this framework, I will then analyse and interpret certain scenes from Sense8. Because this thesis is limited in time and space, I had to make certain decisions and choices pertaining to the content and method. Because these choices are influenced by my context, interests, biases and oversights, I will discuss some of them below. This way, I can both show my reasoning and remind the reader that my own personal biases have influenced this project. I will offer a framework for these decisions by discussing the methods used in this thesis and situating myself and this project.

1.1 METHODS

Theory
For the theoretical analysis, I collected and read relevant literature on queerness and on sexuality, gender and family. I have studied a combination of primary and secondary sources. In exploring and trying to understand queerness, I was interested both in the structural level of othering and creating queerness in a normative context and in the individual experience of queerness. As my primary sources, I have focused on Sara Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* and Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Sara Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology* specifically explored queerness from a phenomenological perspective (and phenomenology from a queer perspective). When this book was published in 2006, she was a professor of Race and Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths College. Currently she describes her work as being “at the intersection of feminist, queer and race studies”8. Judith Butler works around critical theory, gender and sexuality studies and social and political thought, among others.9 In her work, *Gender Trouble*, which was published in 1990, she offered an understanding of queerness through her conception of the creation of gender, identity, the subject and ‘the other’. Additionally, Johanna Oksala’s *Feminist Experiences: Foucauldian and Phenomenological Investigations*10 is an important source for the integration of these

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two perspectives and broadening the analysis of queerness by combining insights from both a phenomenological and structural perspective. Oksala is a “philosopher working in the fields of political philosophy, feminist philosophy, environmental philosophy, Foucault, and phenomenology.”

Alongside these primary sources, I have studied secondary literature pertaining to the themes of sexuality, gender, family, normativity and queerness in general.

These sources and influences cover a variety of academic fields, like philosophy, sociology and media-science. I have chosen to read these texts through both a philosophical and sociological lens and reflect both sides in the theoretical framework. This way, I attempt to deepen our understanding of queerness in a way that shows both its ontological meaning in relation to other concepts and the way this practically takes place inside our society.

The content of this thesis has changed throughout the process of studying the literature, analysing and writing. Originally, I was focused on the concepts of sexuality, gender and family. As the project evolved, however, this focus became more and more on queerness itself. Now, these concepts of sexuality, gender and family are specific instances in which I study queerness. As I continued studying, it became more and more apparent that the concepts of identity, community and their relation to each other were essential in my understanding of queerness and the theoretical framework of this thesis. The final product is thus a result of a longer and moving process.

Analysis

For my analysis of queerness in Sense8 I started by watching the series, then selecting the moments to analyse, then transcribing them and finally doing the actual analysis. Closely watching Sense8 and paying attention to the (portrayal of) queerness in this show, furthermore helped me to articulate certain insights in building the final theoretical framework. Even though the actual analysis of the scenes was guided by the theoretical framework after it was completed, this framework was partially influenced by the show in general. In the analysis of Sense8, I took the series as a whole into account, but decided to focus on three different moments in the series. This way I didn’t get lost in the enormous amount of content and I was able to give an example of how to apply the theoretical framework to specific data. It furthermore allowed me to advance that theoretical framework and my understanding on the basis of concrete examples of queerness.

12 Throughout the process of writing this thesis I have furthermore been influenced by different themes, like the representation of diversity in the media, gender and politics in the context of religion and empathy in and through art. These influences have influenced my process without being direct sources. They will appear throughout this text as examples or as references to implications.
Moments

I refer to the elementary components of data that I have analysed as ‘moments’, because they are more than scenes. While trying to select the scenes to analyse in this thesis, it became apparent that certain scenes where echoed in later scenes, either in the explicit content or in the theme and argument embedded in the scene. On order to highlight this ‘conversation’ between the scenes, I decided to analyse the multiple scenes together within what I call one moment. A moment is thus a collection of scenes that ‘speak to each other’ and continue a specific theme, storyline or argument at different times within the series. By analysing these moments and not just the scenes, I am able to play into the way series develop their themes and storyline over a longer period of time and in this allow a more complex and stronger story. In my analysis this allowed for a more complex analysis, in which the multiple aspects of queerness are present.

In selecting which moments to analyse, I took in mind four different factors. First, I looked for moments that pertained to the theme of queerness in some way. In looking for these moments, I found myself focussing on one character in particular, namely Lito. He is the one character that plays a prominent role in the three moments I ended up selecting. Not accidentally, he is a gay actor, who over the course of these moments is outed and has to deal with the consequences of his (now) public queerness. A second factor in the decision on which moments to analyse was the way the moments leaned into and were able to advance the theoretical framework. Thirdly, I looked for an evolution throughout the moments. This is especially visible in Lito’s arch throughout the moments, since the moments evolve alongside his personal evolution. I thus chose moments that were able to show an evolution of queerness and queer experiences. A final factor in this choice of moments was whether the moment showed the strong connection between the main characters, since this is an important aspect of the series. It illustrates the importance of connection to the understanding of queerness. With these factors in mind, I selected three moments from the series to analyse more closely. I fully acknowledge, however, that this choice of moments influences the analysis as such. Different moments could have emphasised different aspects of the theory. The analysis is in no way a controlled study of how queerness is represented in media. More so, it is an analysis of specific scenes in Sense8 as to deepen our understanding of queerness through both theory and a particular representation of queerness in a popular piece of media.

Transcription

The next step was to transcribe these three moments. In my transcription I wrote down the dialogue verbatim. For the visual cues like context, emotion and movement, I wrote down simple commentary in between the lines of dialogue. Additionally, I have included more background information on both the content and the creation of each scene in order to sketch a broader context for the transcription.

13 The entirety of sense8 is more than 24 hours long.
Despite this, there will inevitably be information that is lost in the process of transcription. My analysis mainly focusses on the dialogue and when it doesn’t, I have tried to include a description of the (visual) context that is needed to understand my analysis. The ultimate source of my analysis, however, is the series itself as an audio-visual piece of media. The transcriptions are a way of helping the reader understand the analysis and reach the original data, without watching it.

Analysis

The final step of this process was the actual analysis of these moments: a close-reading of the source-material, interpreted through the lens of the theoretical framework. This was an unstructured qualitative social analysis, inspired by Foucauldian discourse analysis, insofar as it takes in mind the productive character of discourses:

These discursive practices are productive: they produce the specific semantics of the words in use, and they relate words to objects and to strategies of acting towards and thinking about things, persons etc. In this way, ontologizing categorizations and evaluations are integrated, and they appear as “natural” as opposed to “constructed” or as the contingent result of discursive practices.¹⁴

In order to take this construction through discourse into account, I focused in my analysis on the ways the source-material played a part in this construction, or alternatively on how it contrasted against it and showed the discursive practices, by offering an alternative. Through this analysis, I furthermore saw the source-material, a piece of (fictional) media, as a source for possible philosophical insights and as an example of my theoretical framework. In this, I am inspired by Butler who, for example, analysed Paris is Burning in the context of her theory on drag and gender.¹⁵ As mentioned earlier, I consider these moments as part of an audio-visual piece of media. This means I focused my analysis on the content of the story and on the series as an entity in our society. The analysis wasn’t just an example and application of the theoretical framework, but more so an additional channel through which to enrich the understanding of queerness, informed by the theoretical framework.

Content-wise, the analysis focused on how the moments understand and help us understand queerness, the theme that develops in the moment and the way it is connected to the theoretical framework. This isn’t a structured analysis and because of that is influenced by my own biases and context. Despite this, I have chosen to use this form of analysis because it allows the freedom that is essential in building and expanding a complex theoretical framework and understanding. Here, I have chosen for an open method to allow for the creativity that comes with building theories. Later work could use a more structured method to test the theoretical understanding of queerness in this thesis and point out possible flaws, biases, etc.

**Sense8**

The source of the moments I analysed is the fictional Netflix-series Sense8. I could have analysed news-sources, interviews, etc. but I decided to study art – and this series specifically – as a sociological and philosophical artefact of our time. I see art here as both a representation of our society and specific locus where there is freedom and reflection to critique society and imagine ways in which it could improve. I, furthermore, personally believe in the power of stories, when it comes to helping us understand others. In this thesis, thus, I have chosen to analyse art as a means to illustrate and expand our understanding of queerness.

I chose to specifically analyse the series Sense8, because of the way in which it explores the theme of connection in diversity. The eight main characters, who all live in different parts of the world, share a superhuman connection (and have telepathy-like abilities), which offers the opportunity to analyse the connections between a group of diverse characters. Some of these characters, furthermore, are explicitly gay and/or trans. The show, thus, offers a field of analysis for both queerness in its original and queerness in the broadest sense. I, furthermore, have an artistic admiration for this show on the and an appreciation because it makes me, speaking from my own queer sexuality, feel seen in the way it represents queerness. Finally, Sense8 is known for the authentic representation of the diversity of their characters. The show is, for example, mainly filmed on location working with a local crew and (supporting) actors. Nomi’s character, as a trans woman, is furthermore portrayed by a trans actress and creatively conceived by the Wachowski’s, who are trans as well. This indicates a certain level of authenticity in that aspect of her character and storyline, which is especially important when trans women characters are still often portrayed by cisgender men.16

**1.2 SITUATING THE PROJECT AND THE AUTHOR**

This text (the findings, the analysis, …) is influenced by the context it was created in. This is the case for any text, but in this case especially apparent because of the methods I used. Both the literature study and the (unstructured) qualitative analysis provided a lot of freedom in building a complex understanding of queerness, but – with this freedom – also allowed (unconscious) biases to influence this process and understanding. For this reason, I will give a description of the context of this project and of me in particular. This is the first step in acknowledging the ways in which this thesis is influenced by this context.

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16 It would be out of the scope of this thesis to get into the politics of cisgender men portraying trans women on screen. I do however want to state the societal importance of Nomi being portrayed by a trans. For an argument as to why this is important, see: “What It Says When Cis Actors Are Cast in Trans Roles,” variety.com, accessed August 7, 2019, https://variety.com/video/jen-richards-on-cis-actors-in-trans-roles/.
Temporally, this thesis, as a project from its earliest conception until the last change, has taken place between August of 2017 and August of 2019. Geographically the process took place partially while I was living in Belgium and partially while in the United States. This information allows us to sketch a broader sociological context to the project. A first important aspect of that context is that the project is limited to a current, Western society. Secondly, the project took place in a context where the case for marriage equality in the United States’ Supreme Court was only won a couple years earlier (June 2015). This gives an indication of the societal context insofar as it is a formal acknowledgement of queer sexualities (and families), and at the same time only a very recent development. Furthermore, the political landscape in which this project was created is one of increasing political polarization with a strong rise of the alt-right, met by a reaction from the left focussing on human rights and diversity.¹⁷

My personal context, as the author, influenced this thesis as well, because it influences my interests, biases and oversights. By offering a short description of my personal context, I aim to acknowledge this influence and to remind the reader to be aware of it throughout this thesis. Even though I aspire intersectionality and diversity in my analysis and thinking, I am (as an individual) still limited by my own circumstances. In regard to the concepts of sexuality, gender and family; I am a lesbian, cisgender woman who got married during the process of writing this thesis. In regard to other concepts and categories that are mentioned in this thesis; I am white, was born in Belgium, and have lived one year as an expat in the United States. Through this description I have attempted to include the relevant information, without being overly informal. Despite this, it is impossible to include all the ways in which this thesis is biased, because in many ways this bias an influence may be unconscious.

The decisions I have made in the context of this project and the methods I have chosen to use in my analysis of the source-material and the existing literature are informed by my aim in this thesis. In opting for rather open and unstructured methods of analysis – i.e. a close reading of the source material as analysis and a source of additional insights into queerness – allow me to take on a explorative role. The methods of analysis create the context in which I can build a theoretical framework and explore a deep and complex understanding of queerness, that goes beyond the current literature. The pitfall of these open methods is that the analysis is highly dependent on my interpretation and my selection of source-material. Because of this, the analysis is influenced by my personal situation and bias. This bias could be mitigated with additional research, like semi-structured interviews with queer individuals, or

a more structured discourse analysis of online platforms for queer communities. For now, I urge the reader to be mindful of these possible biases and will do so myself as well.
2 THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

2.1 INTRODUCTION TO IMPORTANT THEORIES: SEXUALITY, GENDER & FAMILY

There are multiple (sociological) theories that try to explain and understand sexuality, ranging from evolutionary and social learning to more integrated theories. An important concept in theorizing sexuality is sexual identity and the construction of homo- and hetero-sexual identities. In constructing a homosexual identity in contrast with a heterosexual one, behavior is seen as an indication of this identity and ‘the homosexual’ can be alienated from the hegemonic community. Foucault played an important role in theorizing this construction of sexuality as an identity and its influence on the perception of non-heterosexual behavior. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, he explored power and its effects on the level of discourse. Regarding homosexuality, he argued that the discourse on sexuality created the homosexual identity. Homosexuality thus became an essential part of an individual's identity (as opposed to a peripheral or contingent behavior exhibited by that individual): “The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.” (p. 43) According to Foucault, sodomy was merely a behavior and the individual that exhibited this behavior was not identified exclusively by that behavior. Now, however, “the homosexual” (i.e., the individual who engages in homosexual activity) is, unlike the sodomite, almost exclusively defined by this sexual behavior, which now constitutes the individual’s identity. The sodomite happens to engage in this behavior; the homosexual is precisely because of the behavior. This becomes problematic insofar as it equates identity with behavior. Homosexual individuals, for example, can be oppressed because the behavior now refers to an underlying identity that isn’t separable from the individual. This erroneous conflation of behavior and identity opens the individual up for an oppression that is directed at their identity, not just a behavior.

The importance of this distinction between sexual behavior and identity is emphasized as well in Alfred Kinsey’s research, where he recorded more non-heterosexual behavior than identities. The behavior, thus, doesn’t completely correspond with the identity. Studies of sexuality outside of western society furthermore show that the construction of the homosexual identity isn’t universal. The equation of behavior and identity isn’t encountered in the studied contexts outside of the Western word. The presence of a clear distinction between behavior and identity even goes hand-in-hand with less

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20 See for example the following study of intimate relationships between women in Ghana Serena Owusue Dankwa, "'It's a Silent Trade': Female Same-Sex Intimacies in Post-Colonial Ghana," *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 17, no. 3 (September 2009)
oppression of the behavior in non-Western contexts, given the absence of normative judgments surrounding it. This insight leads us to believe that (hetero-)normativity and the power and repression at play through the norms are dependent on the construction of the (homo-)sexual identity. For this reason, it is important to understand the way identity is constructed, in order to understand the way normativity relates to queerness.

The concept (and construction) of sexuality bears a complicated relationship to the concept of gender. Gender can be defined as “the behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex.” And sex is defined as “the sum of the structural, functional, and sometimes behavioral characteristics of organisms that [frequently] distinguish males from females.” (Merriam Webster) Though these definitions are contentious, gender is often conceptualized in relation to, and in distinction with, sex. Gender often corresponds to the social aspect of being a woman or a man, and sex often corresponds to the biological aspect of being a woman or a man. However, there is no clear consensus on this distinction or the concepts themselves. This question of gender and sex and their relationship is discussed by many feminist scholars, among which Judith Butler.22

Butler’s influential work contested this simplistic distinction between gender and sex. The concept of ’sex’ is itself troubled terrain, formed through a series of contestations over what ought to be decisive criterion for distinguishing between the two sexes; the concept of sex has a history that is covered over by the figure of the site or surface of inscription.23

Sex, as the ‘natural’ and the ‘biological’, is not a pure and unconstructed reality, according to Butler. It does not exist in-itself as an empirical phenomenon independent of our understanding. Our only way of accessing the ‘natural’ or ‘biological’ is through our cultural conception and context. If sex (as ‘natural’), is not understood as a product of society, it has no meaning or value at all. Sex as ‘natural’ (and thus opposed to the ‘societal’ or ‘cultural’) can only be understood as such in-and-through its production by culture. Butler argued against the existence of anything ‘real’ underneath constructed gender, thus describing sex as a fantasy. (p. 5) This complicates the distinction between sex and gender and the restriction of them to the solely biological or social sphere, respectively.

Alongside and intertwined with the (hetero-)normative construction of sexuality, gender, too, is often seen as socially constructed. Multiple theories note the complex connection between the construction of sexual and gender identity. It is namely through the construction of gender-roles and the difference between men and women that a strict heterosexual identity can be enforced.

23 Butler, Bodies that Matter, 5.
Homosexuality is furthermore often characterized as a ‘failure’ of adhering to gender-roles. Think for example about the stereotype of a feminine gay guy or a masculine lesbian.

There is, however, another concept related to gender and sexuality that is often only alluded to: the concept (and construction) of family. I include it here not only because it is intertwined with the construction of sexuality and gender, but also because it offers an additional perspective on queerness in relation to these concepts and to queer family itself.

Family can be defined as “a group of persons united by the ties of marriage, blood, or adoption, constituting a single household and interacting with each other in their respective social positions, usually those of spouses, parents, children, and siblings.” There is however a lot of diversity between families, which constitutes a debate on the definition of family and what it in-/excludes. Families can vary on different dimensions and different types can function effectively. One option is to include ties of choice in the definition, so that, for example, unmarried couples aren’t excluded from the notion of family. Still, a definition that is universally valid seems hard to find, because of both the cultural and historical diversity of families.

Family, sexuality, and gender are strongly intertwined. Firstly, one’s sexual orientation influences the kind of family one might create, since it influences one’s choice of partner(s). Secondly, the (often heteronormative) family forms one of the primary sites for gender differences and the imprint of gender roles onto children. Within families, the differences between men and women can become apparent and be reproduced. Finally, one’s sexual and gender identity can influence family-relationships (outside of one’s choice of partner). For instance, the process of coming out in a cis- and heteronormative context can (sometimes temporarily, sometimes permanently) put these relationships, and the acceptance and support of one’s family, into question. When families deny an individual due to that individual’s identity, then these individuals often find themselves gravitating towards their chosen ‘queer family’, more so than the family into which they were born. Support and strong ties in chosen families exist, in spite of the lack of biological connection.

From a feminist standpoint, the personal space of the family is often discussed as political. Family plays an important role in feminism and women’s situations, for instance in the way it situates

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26 The specifics of this process (and the ‘need’ for it) vary wildly depending on one’s family and context, but the existence of this process highlights at a moment where that acceptance isn’t a given but has to be made explicit.
27 And in these cases, in contrast with the lack of support from biological family.
women in society, the way it forms the first location for children to learn gender roles and the way the concept is used politically. The concept of family and specifically the ‘protection of the family’ are used as normative tools for discrimination. In Belgium, for example, the language of ‘protecting the traditional Flemish family’ is used in defending and arguing for racist, sexist and discriminatory statements and narratives by alt-right organizations and political parties like ‘Schild & Vrienden’. The protection of ‘traditional families’ is used as an umbrella for homophobic and sexist comments.

Another example is the American ‘Focus on the Family’, which advocates conservative (Christian) policies, like the use of therapy to ‘resist’ and ‘leave’ homosexuality, under the umbrella of the concept of family. Study, for example, the following sentence from a section on ‘leaving homosexuality’ on their website:

God established the family in which each father would teach his son what it means to be a man. We know that life hasn’t always worked out this way. Sin came into the world, and fatherhood, like everything else, became imperfect.

The concept of family is used here, alongside religious interpretations, to both construct the concept of masculinity and homosexuality. The concepts of family and masculinity are used as a political tool, emphasizing its role in the reproduction of norms and even ‘the nation’. It is a good example of how family (intertwined with gender and sexuality) is used and constructed within our normative society.

Sexuality, gender and family are all influenced by normativity and normative society and thus offer a site for exploring that which strays from the norms, that which is queer. Here, I use the word queer to mean a state of straying from the hegemonic community in general (not just the heteronormative community). In discussing these concepts, it is important to realize their interrelations and the way they affect each other. It is furthermore important to realize how they are influenced and formed by a person’s position and membership of certain (oppressed) groups. The concept of intersectionality addresses how one’s position on certain social dimensions interacts and forms one’s experience of these dimension and the discrimination one is suspect to. It is therefore important to keep intersectionality in mind in discussing these concepts and to not be exclusionary or perpetuate discrimination of others in critiquing the discrimination of one group. In discussing gender and women, for example, it is important not to lose sight of the experience and distinct discrimination of black lesbian women.

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28 There is the stereotype of the stay at home mom, which might in today’s society be less common, but even with women who work, the life/family-work balance is often problematic.
Therefore, keep in mind that particular instances of queerness vary in relation to these concepts of sexuality, gender and family, and these instances of queerness are influenced furthermore by factors such as race, able-bodiedness, class, etc. Throughout this thesis, I try to account for this individuality and intersectionality while trying to understand queerness in general. In this analysis, I turn specifically towards sexuality, gender and family as examples, because of the close connection between these concepts and the (origins of the) concept ‘queer’. Studying other categories such as race, class, and fields of normativity also provides valuable insights into the understanding of queerness, and these concepts allow for a complicated understanding of queerness. In this analysis, I will focus on queer sexuality, gender and family – taking into the account of connection between sexuality, gender, and the common fight of the LGBT+ movement. In what follows, when talking about queerness, I will focus on queer sexuality, queer gender and queer family, but I will furthermore discuss queerness as a more general state, characterized by straying from the norm, resulting in oppression.

2.2 EXPLORING QUEERNESS

So, let me now turn towards the subject of my investigation: queerness. In what follows, I will explore the concept of queerness and how it relates to (theories on) otherness. Queer is defined as “differing from what is usual or normal,” and refers in sexual politics and queer theory to falling outside and rejecting the heterosexual and binary cisgender norm of society. There has to be some caution in discussing this term, since there is still debate about how and whether to define the concept and in which context it is appropriate to use. It is closely related to otherness and the other, possibly defined as “a thing opposite to or excluded by something else” or “a different or additional one”. ‘The other’ has been a theme in multiple fields of social science and philosophy. Within phenomenology for example, the other is theorized differently by various philosophers: Sartre focused on the other objectifying the subject, Levinas on the demand of the other and Mearleau-Ponty on the stranger, or the alien other.

While these theories on otherness play a foundational role in my exploration of queerness, otherness and queerness are two distinct concepts. I argue that otherness is only one aspect of queerness and thus transcends it. Otherness merely refers to an individual or group’s position relative to a (hegemonic) group or culture, where they are not subject. The focus in discussing otherness is on the disconnection. I understand queerness, however, as a more dynamic concept that includes the way in

Understanding Queerness: Sexuality, Gender & Family in Sense

Barbara Revalk

which the queer subject deals with this disconnection and builds /finds a community. Resistance is an essential part of queerness, whereas it isn’t included in the concept of otherness itself, according to me. This distinction will become clearer as we move through this theoretical framework and the analysis.

Throughout this investigation, the concepts of community, identity and the individual will guide my thinking. In a broad sense, community can be defined as “a unified body of individuals”. Throughout this thesis, I will try to refine my interpretation of community (in relation to the individual), –along with queerness. Note that the particular type and direction of this relationship between community and queerness can vary. In the investigation of queerness, one can define queerness as that which is other than the community, i.e. a lesbian individual living in Brussels. Yet, communities can also be queer themselves. For example, the lesbian community in Brussels. This complexity should be kept in mind in order to avoid any false dichotomies between queerness and community. This allows us not only to look at how a queer individual, for example, relates to a (mainstream) community. It also allows us to explore the relationship between a queer individual and a queer community. In both cases, the central question is one of the relationship between an individual and a community, mitigated by shared or opposing identities. In my exploration of queerness below, the relationship between identity, individual and community will return as a guiding principle.

In exploring the concept of queerness, it becomes apparent that they encompass negative as well as a positive aspects. By ‘negative aspects,’ I mean the way in which queerness is disadvantageous. By ‘positive aspects,’ I mean the ways in which queerness can be advantageous. Both Butler and Ahmed described positive aspects of queerness, as in that which doesn’t follow the dominant norm. The queer position holds an epistemological advantage in discovering the construction of norms. Queerness can furthermore be used as a strategy in the re-orientation of norms and the creation of new discourses through the discomfort of queerness within normativity. I will explore both these negative and positive aspects in the theories of Butler and Ahmed.

Butler on Queerness

As mentioned before, Judith Butler claimed that sex as something ‘natural’ underneath the construction, is unintelligible. In works like Gender Trouble and Bodies That Matter, Judith Butler offered a complex critique of the way we understand sex, gender, sexuality and the relation between them. In this, she took on a structural perspective, pointing out the ways in which power and normative discourses construct

38 Note that this can be complicated even more, by looking at individuals that are marginalized within a queer community, like for example trans women in the lesbian community.
these ideals like gender-identity. Her book Gender Trouble, with its focus on the other and the construction of both gender and sex, is often seen as playing a foundational role in queer theory.39

Queer theory studies and discusses queer identities, people, experiences, cultures…40 It is an interdisciplinary study, closely related to queer politics and activism that builds on the notion of the social construction of sexuality, paying attention to the distinction between behavior and identity. Butler’s role in queer theory is informed by Foucault’s thinking in History of Sexuality and his idea that the homosexual identity is created. Queer theory has been applied on multiple fields, like queer anthropology for example, where “social systems, practices, and symbolic resources in contexts of sexual difference from the (presumed) norms of heterosexuality and gender ascription”41 are analyzed.

It is a theory that studies queerness on multiple levels and in multiple contexts.

Butler’s discussion of queerness is founded in her conception of the other, or ‘the abject’. Her understanding of ‘the abject’, first highlights the negative pole of otherness:

The abject designates here precisely those "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject […] In this sense, then, the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, "inside" the subject as its own founding repudiation.42

The abject, for her, is the otherness that is ‘unlivable’, that which is not subject, and that which is excluded. This process of ‘othering’, or ‘abjecting’, creates individuals that aren’t (allowed to be) subjects and thus are degraded and even made to be “the less "human," the inhuman, the humanly unthinkable” (p.8). Butler, however, also noted that this process of abjection doesn’t just exclude, it is furthermore the necessary and constitutive process for the creation of the subject itself. It is only through the exclusion that the subject arises. That which is considered the ‘outside’ – i.e. the not subject, not livable or not human – is actually a boundary and thus a (constitutive) part of the subject. With this in mind, Butler referred to this process of exclusion as “a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter.”43 Through exclusion, a boundary is produced, which makes the materialization of the subject possible. Keep in mind, however, that the necessity of this exclusion for the materialization of the subject does not erase the

43 Butler, Gender Trouble, 9.
‘dehumanizing’ effect of the exclusion. Otherness being part of the subject as a boundary does not make it less abject, unlivable or inhuman.44

On a more individual level, Butler described this process of materializing or constructing the subject as the production of an essence or identity, using the example of gender:

Acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance […] That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. This also suggests that if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse45

For the individual, the seemingly interior essence is completely produced by the exterior discourse, according to Butler. Any ‘real’ interiority or essence is thus a fantasy, a mere effect of the discourse. When it comes to gender, for example, Butler argued that a true interior gender-identity is a phantasmatic effect created by the discourse, more specifically the heterosexual matrix. This is the case both for individual identities and identity in general. In this sense, nothing can reach this goal of the ideal ‘normal’ because it is a fantasy. The production of essence never achieves the ideal, and the general process of materialization is always incomplete. It is here that otherness only differs from the subject insofar as this failing to achieve, or recreate, the ‘normal’, the ‘ideal’ is visible, noticeable. In the case of the subject, this failing is hidden and covered by the production of the phantasmatic essence itself. Gender for example is, according to Butler, “a construction that regularly conceals its genesis;” (p. 178) A queer gender, then, would be one that ‘fails’ to reproduce the ideal, in such a way, that this concealing gets undone. This marks the boundary of the subject, for which the concealing is still intact.

Butler, thus, first understands otherness as the exclusion necessary to materialize normality/the subject. Another form of otherness can be found in the so-called ‘normal’ but never achieves this ideal. It is here that we can find the power of queerness. In for example her discussion of the term ‘queer’, she noted both the exclusion inherent in the word when used as a slur46; and the potential power in reclaiming the word.47 For her, ‘queering’ should entail the questioning of both the construction of queerness and the ‘deformative’ power the term itself holds.48 In this way, queerness can lead to the questioning of power and the abject can become a site of resistance.

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44 This is a notion that will become more central as the framework shifts from structural to a more experiential level.
45 Butler, Gender Trouble, 173.
46 Butler, Bodies that Matter, 223.
47 Butler, Bodies that Matter, 231.
48 Butler, Bodies that Matter, 229.
Ahmed on Queerness

Sara Ahmed studied otherness and queerness in *Queer Phenomenology*⁴⁹, taking a phenomenological perspective on the queer subject and a queer perspective on phenomenology. Where feminist phenomenology critiques the othering of women within phenomenology, Ahmed extended this to a more general queer subject. Queer phenomenology seeks to address the experience of otherness where (the experience of) the ‘other’ is central.⁵⁰ In *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed asked the question: “What does it mean to be oriented?”⁵¹, mainly applied to the specific case of sexual orientation and informed by the queer experience. She furthermore put forward phenomenology as a way of studying queerness and the queer subject, without reducing its otherness to how it relates to the subject. This unreduced, unapologetic otherness is the start of her queer phenomenology.

Whereas Butler focused mostly on queerness as an identity and the structural level of power, Ahmed explored queerness through the level of queer individuals and queer experiences. Ahmed used the term queer both to describe (the practice of, or people who practice) non-normative sexualities; and to describe what is ‘other’ in a more general sense, what is ‘off line’. It is this general sense that I am interested in building a deeper understanding of, through understanding the first. Ahmed argued that this double usage “sustains the significance of “deviation” in what makes queer lives queer.”⁵² As a deviation, queerness disturbs the order of things, according to her. Whereas Butler argued queerness is a necessary part of the normative materialization of the subject, Ahmed theorized queerness as an effect of the normative process: “sex, gender, and sexual orientation […] are kept in line, often through force, such that any nonalignment produces a queer effect.”⁵³ Queerness, thus, emerges in the moments where normativity fails to keep everything in order. For Ahmed, queer means ‘out of line’. In the case of sexual orientation, for example, she described queer orientation as follows: “The queer orientation might not simply be directed toward the “same sex,” but would be seen as not following the straight line.”⁵⁴ The queerness of the orientation isn’t just in the object it’s directed towards, but more so in the norm it fails to follow and reproduce.

Ahmed too described both positive and negative aspects of queerness. One important negative characteristic can be found in the way she linked queerness to disorientation. Insofar as queerness is ‘out of line’, a failed reproduction of normativity, deviation… it is disorienting. Disorientation is uncomfortable; it pulls you out of ‘normal life’ and takes more effort than being able to follow an

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⁵⁴ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 70..
orientation shared by mainstream society. She furthermore argued that there is inequality in having to
deal with this discomfort and disorientation, since some people encounter disorientation way more often
than others. The world is unequal in its distribution of disorientation, because the world (i.e. its
orientation) is biased in favor of certain individuals and communities — namely white, cisgender,
heterosexual, able-bodied, etc.:

This shows us how the world itself is more “involved” in some bodies than in others, as it takes
such bodies as the contours of ordinary experience. It is not just that bodies are directed in
specific ways, but that the world is shaped by the directions taken by some bodies more than
others.\(^{55}\)

The uncomfortable disorientation of queerness happens more often for those who do not fit the norms.
Queerness, here, isn’t just relevant on an individual level, but refers back to a collective discriminatory
experience of a community of people who can’t or don’t fit into the general norm. The individual
experience of disorientation in a certain moment – like when a stranger on the phone assumes my
partner is a man – is also a shared disorientation, a disorientation that is more generally part of a (queer)
community’s experience – like heteronormativity for those who aren’t straight. The unequal distribution
of disorientation, furthermore means that for some people life is made harder by this (more frequent)
disorientation. Ahmed argued, for example that “the disorientation affected by racism diminishes
capacities for action.”\(^{56}\) In being disoriented, one is unable to do what those who aren’t stopped by this
disorientation – because they do fall ‘in line’ – do with ease.

Despite this relationship between an individual and a shared experience of disorientation, we
ought to keep in mind intersectionality and the limits of this shared experience. Insofar as the different
(queer) communities one belongs to interact, that shared experience isn’t identical throughout one
community. This limitation doesn’t however completely take away the shared experience of
disorientation within a queer community.

Note that in Ahmed’s theory, the experiences of a woman, for example, can be limited through
two different mechanisms. Women are subjected to a specific set of norms, a specific set of lines she
can and should follow. These norms, however, do not give her the same possibilities as those of men.
Women, for example, are not expected to be in leadership-positions. Her range of possible behaviors is
restricted by the norms she is expected to follow. When a woman does stray from that lines she is
expected to follow, she becomes disoriented. Women in leadership-positions, for example, don’t have
a lot of examples to follow and have to fight against the norms and expectations that are stacked against
them. Both the norms and the resulting disorientation are limiting.

Ahmed, however, also described multiple positive aspects of queerness. Firstly, queerness
entails a different perspective: “What is astray does not lead us back to the straight line, but shows us

\(^{55}\) Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 159.
\(^{56}\) Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 111.
what is lost by following that line.” This is the epistemological advantage of queerness. Through queerness, the lines and norms that guide and regulate our society are more visible, as are the exclusions they entail.

Ahmed furthermore described how the uncomfortable disorientation of queerness could lead to reorientation:

But when orientations fail, something happens. Things move. The double negative […] does not necessarily lead to depression. It can make other impressions. […] Failed orientations, when bodies inhabit spaces that do not extend their shape, means something happens other than the reproduction of matter.

It is from disorientation that a need to find one’s orientation again arises and this can be a new orientation, one that isn’t guided by and doesn’t reproduce the existing normative lines, but one that follows a new path: a reorientation. Disorientation, thus, could lead to reorientation, which could lead to new paths being followed.

Another positive aspect in Ahmed’s thinking on queerness is the usage of queer as a method. The most prominent example is the aim of Queer Phenomenology, where she didn’t just provide a phenomenological perspective on queerness, but also sought to *queer* phenomenology itself: “By bringing what is “behind” to the front, we might queer phenomenology by creating a new angle, […] to offer a different “slant” to the concept of orientation itself.” (p. 4) Queering, here is a valuable method that provides a way of both critiquing the biases and hidden norms in the existing phenomenology and building a phenomenology that takes into account who and what was previously left behind.

Through this discussion, it has become clear that queerness takes place inside the field of normativity. For Butler, queerness is created in the creation of the subject as a boundary to that subject. Ahmed theorized queerness as the effect of a normative process. According to her, queerness is the ‘failure’ to adhere to certain norms, which is then ostracized and discriminated against. Queerness, thus, cannot be understood without taking normativity into account. In what follows, I will therefore discuss normativity and its mechanisms, how queerness is created within normativity and the possibility of queering this normativity.

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57 Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 79.
58 I will explore this advantage more deeply in relation to the possibility of change later.
60 I will later discuss how this following of new paths, and because of that the creation of new paths, is one of the ways change is possible within our normative world.
Normativity has been discussed and investigated in different fields, including the social sciences, philosophy and ethics. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines norm as “a principle of right action binding upon the members of a group and serving to guide, control, or regulate proper and acceptable behavior.” Norms vary between groups and they are conditional and in relation with each other, despite their seemingly universal nature. Furthermore, society seems to “follow” them automatically, without making an active choice after having considered other options for how to be or behave. Following norms thus becomes a habit. There is a debate on whether norms only guard behavior, or whether they also guide beliefs, emotions, and thoughts. Furthermore, there are debates about how norms originate and how they are sustained. Different theories provide different answers to the question of how social norms emerge and under which conditions they are stable and govern behavior in groups and societies. Richard McAdams suggested, for instance, that norms continue to exist due to the negative consequences that emerge when an individual refuses to follow them: “[a norm] is a regularity sustained in part by the fact that individuals generally approve (and otherwise reward) conformity and/or disapprove (and otherwise punish) nonconformity.” Given that individuals who reject norms are often “punished” (i.e., socially ostracized), we can begin to see how discrimination of those who do not follow norms emerges.

Note however, that norms vary greatly in the kind of behavior they guide. In this thesis, I focus on norms that guide (and constrict) sexual behavior and gender expression for example. The extent to which these norms are restricting and discriminatory (for above mentioned reasons) however, depends on the kind of behavior they guide. Not killing other people, not eating with your hands, not using certain curse words around kids, not marrying someone of the same gender all vary in the discrimination that accompanies norms.

Throughout this thesis, I often write about the discrimination that accompanies the violation of certain sexual norms. However, in doing so, I want to be clear I am not arguing against normativity itself. Normativity is an essential part of society and guides all kinds of behaviors. Furthermore, when discussing an individual who doesn’t adhere to a certain norm, I am discussing only one norm in particular, not all of normativity in itself. Normativity doesn’t have to be inherently repressive, but it nevertheless is the context in which certain repressive norms are enforced.

In what follows, I will discuss normativity and its relation to queerness, based on the insights from both Judith Butler and Sara Ahmed. In this discussion, it is important to keep in mind that Butler took a structural focus, looking at normative structures and discourses in abstraction, while Ahmed focused on personal or individual experience. From these different perspectives, both Butler and Ahmed discuss normativity and queerness in relation to normativity. Following Johanna Oksala, I argue for the necessity of integrating these two levels of analysis (the local and general, the individual and societal, the concrete and the abstract), in order to get a complete understanding of normativity and queerness. For this, I explore this relationship between the individual or individual experiences and discourses. Moreover, I argue that each pole cannot be understood without the other.

**Discourse & Experience**

Experience always takes place in the context of discourse. As I will explore more deeply later, there is no way for experience to be completely outside of discourse – even when the experience doesn’t comply with the norms of the discourse. There are multiple ways the experience relates to discourse; experience can for example be seen as constructed, influenced, constituted, or made intelligible by discourse. Thus, when exploring experience, we shouldn’t lose sight of the influence of discourse. Similarly, discourse can’t exist without individuals and individual experiences, since they ultimately generate the structural level of discourse. In this sense, the structural level can’t exist without its building blocks, i.e. individuals. The repetition of individual events (which leads to habit-forming), furthermore, plays an important role in the construction (and preservation) of discourses. Think, for example, about how norms are created by repetition (by one and/or multiple individuals), like how the masculine norm of not wearing skirts, dresses, or heels is formed and maintained by men not wearing them. Discourse, thus too, can’t be understood without taking individuals and experiences into account.

So how can we understand individual experiences within the structure of discourses? When experiences are considered ‘normal’ within a discourse, we can understand them as constituted by – and simultaneously constitutive of – that discourse and its norms. The experience both validates, and is validated by, the norms of the discourse. Men wearing pants and flat shoes are validated by the norm, but they at the same time also validate it. Experiences that are considered ‘abnormal’ within a discourse aren’t validated by the norms of this discourse; they are disorienting for the individual inside that discourse. Paradoxically, ‘abnormal’ experiences can still validate the norms of the discourse when they

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66 This immediately shines light on how change is possible through repetition too. In the case of not wearing skirts, dresses or heels, we can see this is a norm that is very dependent on its historical and cultural context. Examples of context where these do fall into the masculine norms: men wearing heals in the 16th century royal circles, Scottish skirts and recent androgynous trends in the fashion-scene.
are called out as abnormal. Representation of a romantic relationship between two men in the media can reinforce the norms when they are called ‘abnormal’ or ‘perverse’.

Oksala explored the relation between experience and discourse, specifically in the case of women (and their disorientating experiences):

“Even though women’s sexual experiences, for example, are constructed through patriarchal discourses, these experiences are never wholly derivative of or reducible to them. It is possible, for example, that women have, if not a fully articulated feminist critique of their situation, at least a sense of disorientation and dissatisfaction with the dominant cultural and linguistic representations of their experience. It is exactly by this dissatisfaction, this gap between their personal experiences and the dominant cultural representation and linguistic descriptions that are available to them that can generate critique as well was create new discourses capable of contesting and contradicting the old ones.67

She argued that experience is constructed through the (dominant)68 discourse, but also irreducible to it. Experience, though restricted by discourse, isn’t completely constricted by it. The moments where this irreducibility of experience becomes evident are, according to Oksala, the moments where both critique of the discourse and new discourses can originate. When a non-binary individual is seen by their context as a woman and expected to conform to the norms of womanhood, there is a gap between their perceived gender (with its implied norms) and their (experienced) gender. This opens up a moment of critique on the existing gender-discourse – insofar as their experience offers a critique on a binary gender-discourse. It also engenders the possibility of a new discourse, in which gender can be understood as more than binary. Queerness is here thus both involved as a moment for critique of discourses and as a moment of the possible creation of a queer, or queered, discourse. More on this, later.

**Normativity and the Construction of Identity**

Taking into account this integrated understanding of experience and discourse, let us now turn towards normativity and how it (in)forms a framework for understanding queerness. As I have mentioned in my discussion on Foucault and Butler, a characteristic of normativity is that it creates subjects and identities. Butler described this from a structural standpoint as the construction of identity, gender and sexuality through regulatory practices. To show the constructed nature of identity, Butler elaborated on the distinction between representation and production. Where gender is often seen as merely represented, Butler stated that the acts that are often described as a portrayal of one’s gender (for example dress, posture, or even sexual behavior) actually produce gender. In this way she saw gender

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67 Oksala, Feminist Experiences, 45
68 Oksala made this specification on p. 59.
– and identity as a whole – as constructed by acts. Gender is thus performative: “acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body”\(^{70}\) There is no ‘true gender’ that exists outside of the acts with which one produces gender; gender does not exist outside the discursive means with which one constructs it and/or identity. Butler argued that these acts aren’t a mere representation and showed how the acts themselves construct gender inside the frame of a normative ideal. Identity, according to Butler, does not exist outside of the acts that perform it and is, in this way, always an ideal constructed within normativity. Normativity thus creates identity insofar as identity is only a collection of acts that are guided by norms and a normative performance, or conversely, the rejection thereof.

In Ahmed’s understanding of normativity, she, too, focused on this aspect of the creation of an identity, but she theorized it through the concept (and language) of orientation. It is through the concept of orientation that Ahmed understood how we are guided (and thus how normativity creates identity). According to Ahmed, we, as individuals, are oriented and this orientation isn’t casual: “orientations shape not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitance, as well as “who” and “what” we direct our energy and attention toward.”\(^{71}\) Orientation furthermore isn’t solely an individual issue. Ahmed spoke of a ‘collective direction’, an orientation that is shared by a society or community – a group of people – and shapes their context. She used the concept of lines or paths that can be and are followed. It is by repeating them, by following the lines multiple times and by multiple people in the community following them that these lines are created. Ahmed indicated that “Lines are both created by being followed, and are followed by being created.”\(^{72}\) In this way, we could say that these lines are performative. Their existence is dependent on being followed and in existing they provide a guideline, a norm.\(^{73}\) Our orientation thus shapes our collective context; it determines what is seen and experienced as familiar, and what as strange. This contrast between familiarity and strangeness plays an essential role in Ahmed’s conceptualization of normativity, since that which doesn’t adhere to the norms is considered strange. This means that, in accordance with Butler’s insights, orientation both creates ‘the normal’ – the subject – and ‘the queer’ – the abject. Normativity thus doesn’t just create the hegemonic identity of the subject; it also creates the queer identity.

\(^{69}\) This notion is also applicable to studies of representation in media. One could argue that ‘representing’ a character of a certain (minority) group in itself creates (the identity of) this group. When a certain group of people isn’t often represented, or better, portrayed in (the) media, one character plays a big role in this construction. It is therefore important to have a diversity and multiplicity in portraying characters from certain groups, to allow a diversified construction.

\(^{70}\) Butler, Gender Trouble, 173

\(^{71}\) Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology, 3

\(^{72}\) Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology, 16

\(^{73}\) I will later discuss how this relates to Butler’s conception of the performative and normative nature of identity.
We could argue Ahmed’s conception of normative lines are (similar to) what Butler called the normatively constructed identities. Ahmed related her concept of lines to habit; habits come into being by being repeated and are implicit. The repetition makes habits and lines invisible: “We follow the line that is followed by others: the repetition of the act of following makes the line disappear from view as the point from which “we” emerge.” There is no explicit awareness of the role these lines have in guiding and creating individuals. Ahmed noted the interaction between following the lines and creating the subject. Following lines can be seen as a discursive practice, which constructs certain types of identities and is simultaneously done as part of the identity. Ahmed argued “Gender is an effect of the kinds of work that bodies do, which in turn “directs” those bodies, affecting what they “can do.” Gender is the effect of what bodies do, the effect of practices: one’s actions, gestures, routines, expressions, etc. make up one’s gender, and in turn affect which practices are possible for a given individual.

According to both Butler and Ahmed, this process is concealed unless it happens against the current dominant culture. Ahmed argued that by not following the norms and lines of a community – by choosing not to or not being able to – these norms become explicit. The unquestioned repetition is broken, and following these lines (i.e., norms) can now be understood as an explicit choice. By having a queer sexuality, for instance, heterosexuality becomes an explicit sexual orientation among others. The same is true about being transgender, about not having biological children, etc. In not following the lines, one is disoriented and can see more clearly how gender and family are normatively oriented within our society. It is through disorientation that orientation becomes visible as one orientation among other possible orientations; it is shown to be contingent.

Similarly, Butler argued that the constructed nature of identity is only visible from a “self-consciously denaturalized position.” It is from this position that one can see the constructed nature of identity: “the strange, the incoherent, that which falls “outside,” gives us a way of understanding the taken-for-granted world of sexual categorization as a constructed one, indeed, as one that might well be constructed differently.” From the position of having a sexuality, gender, or family that isn’t part of the dominant culture, one can question the so-called “natural” core of these identities. One has to be not “natural” in order to question the purported “naturalness” of a given ideal. One who doesn’t

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74 Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology, 15
75 Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology, 60
76 Note that this idea of practices was taken less literal by Butler, insofar as she also included speaking acts and naming into what constructs identity.
77 How does this relate to Butler’s concept of certain performances of identity or gender like drag, that make the performative nature visible? (I will discuss this later.)
78 Butler, Gender Trouble, 140
79 Note that, according to Butler, there is however no way of being completely outside of normativity: “The “unthinkable” is thus fully within culture, but fully excluded from dominant culture.” One can’t escape normativity and even when one doesn’t follow the norms, one ‘copies’ them by confronting them. I will explore this more extensively later.
80 Butler, Gender Trouble, 140
(completely) follow norms can make the constructed nature of these identities visible. In seeing that norms, identity and gender are constructed, one can also see how they are changeable.

**Queering Normativity**

Discourses don’t completely constrict experiences and norms aren’t always reproduced. Thus, new experiences are possible. Yet, how are they possible? And how does change happen? In an attempt to answer these questions, let us first turn to the question of how we understand agency within structure. In discussing experience within discourse, I explained before how this was addressed by Johanna Oksala. Oksala’s argument shows the difference between construction and absolutely constricting determination. It is in this difference that agency within a constructing discourse becomes intelligible. Within the constructed structure, there is room for agency on an individual level.

Butler, too, argued that agency is only possible because of construction:

the reconceptualization of identity as an *effect*, that is, as *produced* or *generated*, opens up possibilities of “agency” that are insidiously foreclosed by positions that take identity categories as foundational and fixed. For an identity to be an effect means that it is neither fatally determined nor fully artificial and arbitrary.\(^{81}\)

It is only because identity is constructed, according to Butler, i.e. built by a repetition of individual reproductions of the norm, that agency is possible in those individual segments. Normativity is the allows for actual agency between determinism and that which is arbitrary. There are norms we should and can follow, but this isn’t a completely automated process. Even though, we are guided to reproduce the norm, it is possible to not do that. This is the location of agency within construction, which is only (first) available to those who cannot reproduce the norm.\(^{82}\) This, furthermore, gives us an idea of how to conceptualize individuality within community; the moment of agency within structured discourse is a moment of individuality within a community.

In recognizing identity as an effect, we also begin to see how any expression of gender is a performance. This concept of performativity, central in Butler’s theory of identity and gender can help clarify this issue.

[The subject is determined by] a regulated process of repetition that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects. In a sense, all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; “agency,” then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition.\(^{83}\)

\(^{81}\) Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 187

\(^{82}\) This conception of agency within the limits of construction is linked to an understanding of the relationship between autonomy and agency. Autonomy seems to be impossible, considering all contextual (subconscious) influences, but this does not mean agency isn’t possible either. Agency allows for a conception of relative freedom within a limiting context. Through the concept of agency it is possible to comprehend how individual are both restricted by context and to some extend free in their reaction to that context.

\(^{83}\) Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 187
Repetition produces identity. Agency is located in the disturbance of this repetition. Similarly, Ahmed’s notion of normative lines entails that they are not only followed because they exist, but also exist because they are followed. The lines are (re)produced by the individuals following them. Agency, then becomes possible in the ability to not follow and not (re)produce those lines.

Butler described a form of resistance against the normative construction of identity with the example of drag. She argued that drag, by displaying two different truths – a ‘man’ performing ‘womanhood’ or visa-versa – removes the concept of gender from the domain of ‘truth versus falsity’ altogether. In portraying two genders as true, the understanding of gender as a true “essence” is called into question; we are asked to question the idea that gender exists in-itself, apart from our creation of it. Butler argued, furthermore, that by explicitly performing and imitating the gender(norm)s, the performativity of gender is revealed. In this sense, Butler argued that drag both displaces the discourse (out of the realm of truth) and denaturalized the ‘normal’; drag reveals the fantasy of gender that is neither true nor false.\textsuperscript{84}

One possible origin of transformation is the ‘abnormal’ experiences of those who find themselves on the edges the normative discourses. The non-normative experiences of these ‘outsiders’ could, for example, be repeated until they become ‘normal’ and part of the dominant discourse, which is validated by the norms.

For Ahmed, this is the way queerness can lead to reorientation: “The hope that reproduction fails is the hope for new impressions, for new lines to emerge, new objects, or even new bodies” (p. 62). Queerness can lead to change, because it is an interruption of the usual reproduction of norms. For her, this interruption has the possibility of leading to a ‘rewriting of norms’: “The gap between the script and the body […] may involve discomfort and hence may ‘rework’ the script.” (Cultural politics of emotion, p. 152) She described how the gap between one’s experience and the dominant norm causes discomfort, which opens up the possibility of reworking those norms. This discomfort (and thus, reworking) is not always an active decision, however, since it is the result of not ‘fitting’ the norm. The discomfort is the result of being queer: “Queer lives remain shaped by that which they fail to reproduce. To turn this around, queer lives shape what gets reproduced: in the very failure to reproduce the norms through how they inhabit them, queer lives produce different effects.” (p. 152) In being queer, one does not reproduce norms, and this uncomfortable gap, lays the possibility of producing something else, i.e. a reworking of those norms. A lesbian couple that wants to start a family will have to – at least on a personal level – rework the script of the heteronormative family. Through this, they can also – on a more public level – contribute to the reworking of this norm and the discourse of family in itself. In \textit{Queer phenomenology}, Ahmed used the concepts of disorientation and re-orientation to describe this process of reworking. The result of such a re-orientation can be a queer orientation. This can signify

\textsuperscript{84} Butler, \textit{Gender Trouble}, 174-176
what I earlier referred to as a queer or queered discourse: a new discourse that takes queerness into account.85

Note, here, that disorientation, according to Ahmed, can be the result of one’s own queerness or the queerness of something or someone else.86 In that way, queerness can provide reorientation both for the queer individual and for the (mainstream) community in which this individual is queer. A lesbian can for example, reorient her own conception of an ideal partner, after the disorientation of not fitting in with the norm (i.e., of being attracted to men). Her existence as a lesbian can, however, also be disorienting for the people around her. Her existence could possibly even reorient her community’s heteronormative assumptions.

Ahmed argued that even on these new paths (of a queered discourse), one relies on mutual support and being able to follow others.87 This points to the importance and power of queer communities; as a community, supporting each other, reorientation (after the initial disorientation) becomes more achievable. This aspect of activism is important for Ahmed: “By accounting for the “I cannot,” for the body that is stopped or held up, we also attend the conditions of possibility for the emergence of a collective form of activism.”88 It is in coming together in these moments of disorientation that marginalized communities can work together on reorienting each other and the hegemonic culture from which they are excluded.

The use of identities, however, also entails exclusion within the community, insofar as any identity is exclusionary. According to Butler, even an abject identity is still normative and phantasmatic and will, in that way, exclude another ‘otherness’ in its production. Despite these cautions, however, Butler did not deny the political relevance of the use of these identities. She argued for a self-critical use of identity in activism or resistance, a use that questions the identity’s own (abjecting) power. An example of this is her critical view on the feminist ‘we’:

The feminist “we” is always and only a phantasmatic construction, one that has its purposes, but which denies the internal complexity and indeterminacy of the term and constitutes itself only through the exclusion of some part of the constituency that it simultaneously seeks to represent.89

Just like the hegemonic identity is phantasmatic, so is a queer collective identity (‘we’) phantasmatic and dependent on a process of exclusion. Politically, a feminist ‘we’ can have its uses, as long as, in using it, one is aware of its inherent exclusions and one is willing to keep critically revising it.

Activism can also be thought of as coming from ‘outside’ a specific discourse or community, such as when two discourses collide and lead to disorientation.90 As discussed earlier, a confrontation

85 I will later explore this possibility of a queered discourse.
86 Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology, 160.
87 Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology, 170.
88 Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology, 155.
89 Butler, Gender Trouble, 181.
90 I will discuss this concept of ‘outside’ later in more detail.
with ‘abnormality’ can be used to validate the existing norms of the discourse by calling out the ‘abnormality’ and positioning oneself against it. Two discourses could be in conflict but unchanged. There are also possible scenarios in which the conflict does lead to change, either within the discourses as they adapt to the other, or in the creation of a completely new discourse. Examples of these scenarios can be found in the difference between third-generation immigrants and their first-generation grandparents when it comes to discourses like family. The third-generation children grow up in the conflict/contact of two different discourses and can, because of that adapt or create new discourses.

The notion of being outside a discourse might prompt us to ask whether it is also possible to exist outside of normativity. The answer seems to be no. Butler emphasizes that it isn’t possible to fall completely outside of normativity. Normativity is the surrounding framework in which (sometimes competing) discourses, practices and identities take place. Ahmed, too, suggests something similar in stating that one is always ‘oriented.’ When one is disoriented it doesn’t mean they stop having an orientation, it just means that their orientation isn’t the dominant one.

From a structural standpoint, there doesn’t seem to be an absolute ‘out’. From the standpoint of the individual, however, there is, the experience of feeling like ‘an outsider’, or feeling ‘on the outside’. How do we interpret the ‘outside’ in this context? Ahmed’s notion of reworking the norms brings up the possibility of not following the normative line and/or creating a new line. Here, we can ask whether it is possible to not follow a line – and in that sense, be completely ‘outside’ of structure. Insofar as people ‘walk away’ from a line – and in doing so, walk on a ‘new path’ – they immediately create a new line. Yet, the creation of new lines and new identities thus seems to be temporary.91 Ahmed wrote:

Lesbian desires create spaces, often temporary spaces that come and go with the coming and going of the bodies that inhabit them. The points of this existence don’t easily accumulate as lines, or if they do, they might leave different impressions on the ground.92 Here, thus, Ahmed did recognize that queer lines – as in lines made by going astray from the norms – might not be the same as the normative lines guiding society, either because they are more temporary or because they leave ‘different impressions’. This can be interpreted as appointing a different kind of power to queer lines, because they aren’t the mainstream norm and are ‘less trodden’. A queer reproduction of norms could thus have different effects. The binary categories of ‘butch versus femme’ inside lesbian communities can, for example, be considered as normative, but still have a different effect than the binary gender norms. Not fitting in either category of butch or femme will be disorienting, but the exclusion isn’t as absolute as it is with gender. Within the queer community, there is more of an

91 This temporality might be the closest we can get to a concept of ‘outside’.
understanding of the experience of otherness and disorientation, which should theoretically make this community more accepting. Like Butler, Ahmed also noted that the experiences that don’t fit the norms don’t fall outside of normativity, since the norms make these experiences into a form of ‘disobedience’. Ahmed explored this through the example of the norm of heterosexuality:

Of course, one does not have to do what one is compelled to do: for something to be compulsory shows that it is not necessary. But to refuse to be compelled by the narratives of ideal heterosexuality in one’s orientation to others is still to be affected by those narratives; they work to script one’s orientation as a form of disobedience. The individual and their experiences are still influenced by the norms and normativity. In other words, not living a normative life does not mean living outside of normativity. The experience itself is thus not completely outside; it is still in the space of normativity and the specific community. However, since one is still inside normativity, reworking these norms becomes possible. As Ahmed wrote, “It is the non-transcendence of queer that allows queer to do its work.” When queerness cannot transcend certain normative discourses, disorientation will ensue. It is through the failed transcendence that change can happen, and a queered discourse can be created.

How do we relate these different theories, namely Ahmed’s analysis of individual queer experience and Butler’s analysis of queerness on a structural level? According to both thinkers, power and discourse are experienced as a grid of lines, narratives and norms. Resistance towards this context – is experienced as discomfort and possibly reorientation, which might transform the context.

2.4 CONCLUSIONS & APPLICATIONS

The foremost conclusion from this theoretical exploration of queerness is that queerness is embedded in normativity. Queerness arises in the normative construction of identity. As discussed above, the construction of identity connects individuals to this (phantasmatic) ideal, and, in this, connects them to a hegemonic community. That same construction, however, also disconnects individuals from the identity and that hegemonic community. Because of this, I argue that queerness takes place in the relation between these concepts of identity, community and the individual. I furthermore argue that this relation is one of connection and disconnection. Other examples of this relation are, for instance, the way a queer community connects queer individuals around this identity, as a reaction towards their disconnection from individuals in the hegemonic community. Or, the way in which different identities can disconnect different individuals or communities from each other. Queerness appears in this

93 There are, of course, exceptions to this, but going in to them here, would lead me too far from my point.
(dis)connection. More specifically, queerness is created in this (dis)connection: queerness originates in the failure of one individual to adhere to a community’s identity; and it creates the (dis)connection: queerness is met with discrimination, which constitutes the collective fight against that discrimination. Within normativity, queerness, can thus be found in the (dis)connection between community, identity and the individual. It is in studying this (dis)connection that we can understand queerness in its complexity.

Based on these insights, I propose to understand queerness as this (dis)connection between community, identity and the individual. So, in what follows, I will argue for a complex understanding of queerness through this framework, visually represented here below:

![Fig 1. Visualization of the theoretical framework in which queerness is the (dis)connection between identity, community and the individual within the context of normativity.](image)

In using this framework in my analysis, I aim to structurally guide my interpretation of the source-material through a framework that synthesizes the complex insights we have discussed above. In the analysis, I furthermore aim to continue this exploration and to build on this framework and our understanding of queerness. Some questions that are left unanswered in this framework are: How can we understand the transformative (or subversive) nature of queerness through this framework? What does it mean for queerness to be connection and disconnection? What is the exact relationship between queerness and normativity? As mentioned in my methodology, this is a relatively unstructured analysis in order to keep building the theoretical framework. Through the analysis, I thus aim to address these remaining questions and deepen our understanding of queerness.
3. ANALYSIS OF QUEERNESS IN SENSE8

3.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE SOURCE-MATERIAL

Sense8 is a Netflix-series created by J. Michael Straczynski, Lana Wachowski and Lilly Wachowski that was released between 2015 and 2018. It consists of 2 seasons and an additional 2-hour finale. In short, the series is described as follows: “A group of people around the world are suddenly linked mentally, and must find a way to survive being hunted by those who see them as a threat to the world's order.” The series starts with this group of eight people being ‘reborn’ with abilities that link them to each other and that give them this superhuman connection. A group of people with this connection is called a ‘cluster’ and they have their own ‘cluster-mother’, the person who was responsible for the ‘rebirth’ that linked them all to each other. In the universe of the show, multiple clusters with the same abilities exists and individuals who have these abilities are called ‘Sensates’. They are considered a variation of the homo sapiens sapiens, and the general population is not aware of their existence.

As a group, the cluster shares a telepathy-like connection, which allows them to ‘visit’ each other, without physically moving. This ‘visiting’ is thus a special ability that the cluster has be present to (in an instant) in a situation that one of the others is going through and to hear their thoughts, feel their feelings, etc. They are only visible to the member of the cluster and what they say or do is only noticed (heard, felt,…) by the member of the cluster. This ‘visiting’ happens in the show when one person for example shows up to give another member of the cluster advice in specific situations, or when two of them have a conversation. An alternative version of their ability to ‘visit’ each other is when they actually take the other’s place in the situation – inhabiting their body and position in the world. The actions they take when taking each other’s place are noticed by the outside world (i.e. people who aren’t members of the cluster) but are perceived to be stemming from the person whose place they are taking. In the show, certain members of the cluster, for example, take the place of another in a fight scene and fight their way out of a complicated situation. To the audience it is visible that it is someone else doing the fighting, but to the non-Sensates in the series it seems like the person themselves is fighting.

The main plot focuses on how the members of this cluster (and others like them) are hunted by a nefarious organization (BPO, or the Biological Preservation Organization), which wants to exterminate them. While this main storyline is transpiring, the series also presents a ‘B’ plot, which follows the connection between these 8 people who live in a variety of locations, cultures, and circumstances and who find themselves on differing intersections of identities. Nomi Marks, for example is a white trans lesbian who lives in San Francisco with her black girlfriend, Amanita. Lito

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97 Note here that the actress portraying Nomi is a trans woman herself, as are The Wachowski sisters who co-created (wrote and directed) the series. As I have mentioned in my methodology, this plays a role in the dedication to offering an authentic representation of (this specific instantiation of) queerness within fiction.
Rodriguez, on the other hand, is a cis gay man who lives in Mexico City with his boyfriend, Hernando. These identities both overlap in certain cases (here, both Nomi and Lito have a queer sexuality for example) and vary for others. Both the similarities and the differences between the cluster-members provide the basis for platonic and non-platonic intimacies between characters, which move the ‘B’ plot forward. However, we quickly discover that these identities do not solely define these characters or their storylines. Lito, for instance, is a very successful and sensitive actor and Nomi’s abilities as a hacker play a vital role in the group’s survival. The other six characters all live in different parts of the world, in differing contexts and with differing highs and lows in their personal life. Throughout the series, we see them grow closer and see how they influence one another’s lives through their different contexts and skills.

In the context of this thesis, this series is a valuable source for analysis, because it offers multiple examples of queerness pertaining to the categories of sexuality, gender and family. Through these examples we can explore and refine our understanding of queerness that I suggested in the theoretical framework. For Nomi, for example, we see how she is disrespected and harassed by the transphobic comments and behavior of her mother, but we also see her connection to her girlfriend and to the people who run the women’s shelter, for example. We see how Lito’s career is destroyed after he is forced out of the closet, but we also see the family he creates with his partner and one of his close friends. In this analysis, I am looking for an understanding of queerness as a general concept. At the same time, I am discussing specific instantiations of queerness, like queer sexualities, as a source of analysis for this understanding. Even though these specific instantiations form the beginning of my analysis, I do generalize towards a broader understanding of queerness that isn’t limited to these instantiations. My goal is to understand queerness as a relationship. This understanding is still growing throughout the analysis and should (for now) be seen as a concept that is still moving.\(^{98}\)

My main move in this analysis, is to deepen our understanding of queerness by analyzing the moments from Sense8 through the lens of the theoretical framework of (dis)connection between identity, community and the individual. In this, I aim to both expand that framework and offer examples of how it can help us complicate our understanding of queerness and transform the current normative discourse. In function of this goal, I will read the media as both a sociological source (in interaction with its own context and in relation to its audience) and through a philosophical lens that attempts to grasp an understanding of queerness in general through the instantiations portrayed in the source.

The goal of this analysis is to come to a clearer understanding of queerness that takes both the phenomenological and structural aspects into account. As articulated in the theoretical framework, I will explore queerness through the (dis)connection between the individual, identity and community

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\(^{98}\) My particular understanding of the other concepts of (dis)connection, identity, the individual and community are also still moving through this analysis and will thus only become solidified in the analysis itself.
within normativity. In what follows, I will analyze three moments in the series through this theoretical framework. As mentioned in my methodology, these moments are a collection of scenes that aren’t necessarily chronologically connected in the series, but continue a specific theme, storyline or argument. For each of these moments, there is an addendum in which I have provided a full source, the exact location of the scenes, additional background on the production and storyline of the episode, a list of the characters and a full transcription of the scenes.

The first moment\(^9^9\) consists out of one scene from the ninth episode of the first season (*Death Doesn’t Let You Say Goodbye*) and one scene from the first episode of the second season (*Happy F*cking New Year*). These two scenes are connected through the storyline of Lito being afraid of being outed (in the first scene) and him actually being outed (in the second one). Thematically, they both focus on the (dis)connection in art and love. The first scene takes place in a museum, where Lito and Nomi have a conversation about the way their queerness has affected them. Lito talks about how wonderful his first kiss with his boyfriend was, but also about his fear of being publicly queer as a famous actor. Nomi emphasizes and shares a memory from her childhood swimming club, where she was ostracized for being queer. Studying this moment allows us to explore this concept of (dis)connection, and to analyze queerness as (dis)connection.

The second moment\(^1^0^0\) consists out of one scene from the first episode of the second season (*Happy F*cking New Year*) and one scene from the second episode of the second season (*Who Am I*?). In both scenes, Lito is confronted with the consequences of him being outed. In the first scene, he arrives at his apartment to find it vandalized with ‘faggot’ in graffiti on the wall of his building. The other sensates live this moment with the ostracization embedded in this word. In the second scene, both Lito and Capheus are interviewed about their identity. Their answer complicates the question. In this moment, we find the complex relation between the individual, identity and community. Analyzing it, allows us to work out this relationship of (dis)connection as queerness through the relation between identity, community and the individual within the structure of normativity.

Finally, the third moment consists out of the final scenes of the first episode of the second season (*Happy F*cking New Year*). In a montage, we see the sensates celebrate the holidays each in their own way, guided by their own traditions. The scenes show different forms of family coming together and celebrating. Nomi and Amanita have a busy schedule with their friend and Amanita’s parents, Sun returns to her shared cell and is welcomed by her cellmates, Wolfgang celebrates with his friend(s), Capheus watches movies with his mother, Lito returns to his mom’s home with his boyfriend and friend, etc. By focusing on family and the concept of queer family, this moment offers an example of understanding community without relying on divisive identities. It is in analyzing this moment that we can see a possibility for transforming the current and repressing normative discourses.

\(^9^9\) For the source and a description and full transcription of this moment, see Addendum I.

\(^1^0^0\) For the source and a description and full transcription of this moment, see Addendum II.
3.2 ANALYSIS MOMENT 1: (DIS)CONNECTION IN QUEERNESS

The first scene of moment 1 is part of an episode centered around loss. Here, Lito and Nomi come together, both fearing they might have lost the life they used to have with their respective partners. They both share moments from their past; in which both connection and disconnection through their particular instantiations of queerness becomes visible. Queerness, here, is specifically applicable on sexuality and gender, since Lito is a gay man and Nomi a trans lesbian. During this scene, there is the (dis)connection within the stories Lito and Nomi tell each other, but additionally on a meta level, there is the connection between Lito and Nomi sharing stories. This sharing can be understood both as the telling of stories to each other and as a shared experience of being queer. The understanding between the two characters is heightened by the fact that they are Sensates, but even without this superhuman element, their understanding for each other’s stories, feelings… is informed by their shared experience of being queer. We can clearly see that they experience this queerness differently. Lito is still closeted and afraid to lose the career he built if he were to be out(ed). Nomi, on the other hand isn’t accepted by her mother and other family-members but has already come out and publicly acknowledges (and celebrates) her queer gender and sexuality. Lito and Nomi’s particular queerness (as instantiated in their sexuality and gender) in this scene, is a relationship of (dis)connection. This example isn’t out of the ordinary for queer individuals. They have often experienced a form of discrimination and disconnection (to differing extents) and are able to understand and connect to the discrimination others experience even when it differs from their own experience, because the queerness is the reason of the discrimination. Taking this particular instance between Lito and Nomi as an example, I will thus argue that we can understand queerness in general as (dis)connection. The scene furthermore shows how the queerness relates the individual experiences to the structural normative context, as I will point out below.

In the beginning of the scene, Lito is remembering his first date with Hernando in a museum. When Nomi visits him at the museum, he starts telling her about the date. The following fragment of conversation forms the end of his narration.

LITO: I was here listening to him for hours, and… and I couldn’t take it anymore. *(smiling)*

As Lito narrates the story to Nomi, we see Hernando and Lito on their date in the museum, passionately kissing in the bathroom.

LITO: Our first kiss was over there… in the bathroom. … It was for me a religious experience. … I went to my knees. … And took him into my mouth like… I was taking a Holy Communion.

NOMI: That kind of kiss… changes you.

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101 Again, their particular queerness is an example of queerness in general.
The way Lito describes the intimate connection with Hernando and the way Nomi responds to this description show us the connection in their particular queerness on multiple levels. First, Lito describes this intimate moment where he and Hernando first have sex as religious, even more specifically, as taking a Holy Communion. Without going into the complex religious symbolism of this, the comment indicates a sacred connection. This connection is both with one particular person (Jesus or Hernando) and with a bigger community (Christian or queer). In describing the moment as religious, the connection can be seen as something bigger, something transforming. Lito’s description offers a portrayal of this connection as sacred at least, transcendental at most.

Nomi’s reaction to Lito’s description reiterates the power a queer experience can hold in itself: it changes you. This reaction echoes Sara Ahmed’s argument that queerness plays an important role in the reorientation of certain given orientations – either on an individual or on a societal level. Here, Nomi emphasizes Lito’s individual level: that queer moment, a kiss between two men, changes Lito as an individual. This is one example of how queerness in general plays an active role in change; there is an active transitional power to the connection. In Nomi’s reaction, we can furthermore see how she understands on a deeper level what Lito is describing, she understands the experience, its intensity, its queerness and its power. Their shared experience strengthens their connection in this point. More so, their shared queerness in general connects them in this particular instance. As this example shows, queerness is connection sharing a specific experience – i.e. Lito and Hernando connecting; – and connection sharing the experience of queerness in general – i.e. Nomi’s understanding of Lito’s experience.

After the positive aspect of queerness, the scene however also shows the negativity, the discomfort (in Ahmed’s terms) that can be part of queerness and queer experiences, starting with discrimination. Here, the other part of queerness is shown: disconnection. This disconnection doesn’t originate within the queer individual but arises from a normative context where an (arbitrary) norm is enforced and coerced through discrimination. Despite this external point of origin, disconnection is essential to our understanding of queerness.

LITO: My whole life, all I wanted to be was an actor. But you can’t be an actor and get the parts I want… and be gay.

Lito expresses the way his possibilities are limited because of his queerness. It becomes apparent how his individuality interacts with the structural level in forming his (experience of his) queerness. Both Lito and Nomi encounter discrimination and ‘othering’ because of their particular instantiations of queerness. Lito, however, being an actor in Mexico City, is confronted with certain different structural forces than Nomi. Nomi as a hacker in San Francisco will likely face less discrimination in her job than Lito, for example. This shows the complexity of the shared nature of queer experiences. Normativity interacts with the specific context of the individual in creating a specific set of norms and the way these norms affect the individual. Both Lito and Nomi are affected by heteronormativity, but for Lito this has
different effects than for Nomi, because they live in different countries and subcultures and do different jobs. The shared experience of queerness is thus not a complete sameness, but more so a connection that acknowledges the ways in which normativity interacts differently with the particular individual and their particular queerness.

This is visible in the way Nomi can relate to Lito’s experience of ostracization, despite the differences between them. Nomi responds with a story of how she was assaulted when she was younger. Her queer gender and sexuality make her a target to her agemates. Note however that her agemates perceived her as a boy at the time, which made them think young Nomi was a gay boy. Even though their perception of her was wrong, she was still being attacked for being queer in general. The effect thus stays the same.102

NOMI: I love dolls. My father could never forgive me for that.

They are now both sitting on Nomi’s couch.

NOMI: When I was eight years old, my father made me join a swim club. He’d been on the same club and… he said that the things that he learned in that locker room were the things that made him the man he is today. … I hated that locker room. At that age, I was really uncomfortable with my body. I didn’t like to be naked, especially not in front of other boys. But you had to take a shower before you could go in the pool, so I would do it, but I would wear my suit and a tee shirt. And the boys would tease me, but I would try to hurry and… ignore them, and it—it worked for a while. And then one day it didn’t.

— Begin memory—

Nomi narrates as we see young Nomi, at that age still perceived as a boy, on that day in the common shower.

[ NOMI (older): I don’t know how it started, but I remember having this feeling that something bad was going to happen.]

BOY1: Hey Faggot! Why do you shower with your clothes on?

BOY2: Because he ain’t got a dick.

[NOMI (older): I made the mistake of standing up for myself.]

The boys surround the young Nomi

BOY1: You got wood in the packet?

Boys snickering.

BOY: Let’s strip him!

The boys take of Nomi’s tee shirt and push her under the shower.

YOUNG NOMI: No! no! no! no!

102 There isn’t a lot of difference between bullying a closeted trans gay girl and a gay boy. Both are based on and punish the queerness of the individual.
[NOMI (older): The hot water came from the same boiler that heated the radiator.]

Young Nomi is screaming, the boys are laughing while they keep her under the shower. The image shifts, and now the older Nomi is seen being held under the shower, her skin burning.

[NOMI (older): I still have scars on my stomach from the second-degree burns.]

The images of younger and older Nomi alternate. We see them both struggling against the laughing boys. They are clearly in pain.

The memory is stopped abruptly by Lito:

LITO: Stop it!

They are in Nomi’s apartment again. Nomi is crying.

LITO: Fucking Monsters. … (looking Nomi in the eyes:) I’m sorry.

This is a grueling scene, and now Lito is shown to feel Nomi’s pain – a pain so unbearable that he has to stop the memory. This scene also affects the audience, making them cringe, and, like Lito, incites a desire to say “Stop it!” to make the boys stop hurting Nomi. As the audience we get a taste of the connection between Nomi and Lito on the basis of their abilities as Sensates and on the basis of their ‘shared queerness’. The ‘shared queerness’, here, is the experience of pain. From the pain of discomfort – i.e. Nomi’s discomfort with her body at that age, – to the pain of an ‘othering’ that ends in assault. This pain is extremely individual and intimate, though at the same time completely effected by the structure in which the specific instance of queerness exists. The pain is directly related to the individual’s particular queerness. When one is attacked specifically because they are queer in some way, it feels like something that can happen again or sometimes something one ‘should get used to’ – in extreme cases: a part of their queer life. This is not the case when one is attacked for a reason that is unrelated to the person themselves, like in a robbery. Even though the pain is inflicted by others, the queerness becomes the cause of the pain, because it is used as a justification for the discrimination, for the inflicting of pain. Being queer thus holds a threat for a return of that pain, or worse, a continuous pain. Focusing on this perspective, queerness is disconnection powered by normativity and discrimination.103

Even after this portrayal of the pain connected to queerness, the scene goes on to end on a note that, again, re-orientates that disorientation – a note that rebuilds from that pain.

NOMI: That locker room might have made my father the man that he is, but it also made me the woman that I am. After that, I quit the swim club. I quit trying to fit in, trying to be one of them. I knew I never would be. … But more importantly, I didn’t want to be. Their violence… was petty and ignorant, but ultimately, it was true to who they were. … The real violence… the

103 In my analysis of the second moment I will elaborate on how this mechanism works within the relation between identity, community and the individual.
violence that I realized was unforgivable… is the violence that we do to ourselves, when we’re too afraid to be who we really are.

Nomi tells Lito that it was this experience that made her quit trying to fit in, quit trying to follow the normative line (in Ahmed’s words). In saying this, she is echoing her father saying that that swim-club made him the man he is, drawing a parallel between the ways the same context and normative power can both enforce the norm, in the case of her father, and inspire a reaction against that same norm. Through this experience where her queerness was completely alienating and disorienting, Nomi embraced her queerness and actively steps away from the normative line. She sees violence in this norm and the violence in trying to follow it. According to her, fear is what makes us do this violence to ourselves; the power of the norm enforces itself through fear. Reorienting away from this norm, then, is stepping away from fear and its power. As mentioned before, this reorientation, doesn’t mean that Nomi was completely outside of normativity. Throughout the series we can see how Nomi still has to deal with the transphobia that is persistent in the world around her and the discrimination and alienation stemming from this transphobia. Her own mother, for example, still misgenders her, uses her deadname, and thinks she is crazy. We even see how she is alienated within the queer community, when she is insulted by one of her girlfriend’s lesbian friends. Nomi, thus, both re-orient herself away from the norm and is still (negatively) affected by normativity; even in this reorientation the disconnection does not disappear.

The theme of this scene is echoed in a scene in the first episode of the second season104, when a picture of Lito and Hernando having sex is leaked on the internet while Hernando is teaching a university class. Hernando is speaking animatedly to a lecture hall full of students. He gestures with his laser pointer toward famous works of art that are being projected onto the blackboard when, all of a sudden, dozens of cellphones begin to vibrate around the hall. The students grow restless and distracted; some students begin to whisper. Others attempt to hide smirks or giggles. Hernando asks his students what is going on, and one brash student explains that a nude photo of Hernando (along with his partner Lito) has been leaked to the internet. As he says this, the student projects this photo onto the blackboard for the entire room to see, replacing – displacing – the work of art the class had been discussing. Hernando turn around to look at the picture showing him and Lito completely naked, having sex. He is worried. This picture leaking represents the disorientation of Lito’s queerness, because it will destroy his career. Hernando does eventually turn around and faces the class to respond to the student. Hernando, turning around and responding, is the voice of reorientation, showing his students – and us as an audience – the beauty/positivity in their queerness.

In the scene, love, and specifically this queer love, is compared to art. Physically, the image of Lito and Hernando displaces the famous works of art being discussed. Conceptually, queer love is either

104 For exact location, source and full transcription: See Addendum I.
displacing and/or being seen as a great work of art. For instance, one of Hernando’s students challenges him with the leaked picture, describing it as “shit-packer porn”, yet, Hernando subverts this student’s understanding of the photo:

HERNANDO: “Shit-packer porn.” That is… That is very interesting.

STUDENT (MR. VALLES): Yeah.

HERNANDO: ’Cause this is where the relationship between subject and object reverses. The proverbial shoe shifting to the other foot. And what was seen… now reveals the seer. Because the eyes of the beholder find not just beauty where they want, but also shallowness, ugliness, confusion… prejudice. Which is to say the beholder will always see what they want to see, suggesting that what you, Mr. Valles, want to see is in fact shit-packer porn.

Class chuckling. Mr. Valles looks angry.

HERNANDO: Whereas someone else, someone with a set of eyes capable of seeing beyond societal conventions, beyond their defining biases, such a beholder might see an image of… two men caught in an act of pleasure. Erotic to be sure, but also… vulnerable. Neither aware of the camera. Both of them connected to the moment, to each other. To love. … And as I have suggested before in this class… art… is love made public.

In this moment, we learn that Lito has been outed, which will, according to him, destroy his career.105 We also see Hernando point out the beauty of the queer moment captured in this picture. The student can only see this picture – which depicts a queer moment that deviates from the norm – as perverse. The queerness can only be understood as alienated and pushed aside – i.e. ‘shit-packer porn’. Hernando, however, highlights how societal conventions color prejudice in one’s interpretation of the picture. He asks his students to look beyond the normative context and see the connection, the love. He asks them to see queerness as something beautiful, as connection, even though it is so often perverted by normative forces. He asks us to reorient ourselves. This is a vulnerable position to be in, just like in the moment the picture was taken. It is a request to connect despite a context that punishes that connection.

In calling this picture art, as “love made public”, our attention is directed to Hernando’s earlier description of art: “Art is political. Never more so than when insisting it is not. […] Art is dialectic. It is enriched when shared and impoverished by ownership and commodification. It is the language of seeing and being seen.” The leaked picture, as queer love made public – thus art – is political, dialectic, enriched when shared, the language of seeing and being seen. The scene places queerness, and queer love explicitly, in the societal context as political and dialectical. The comparison between the picture (“love made public”) and art shows how queer love plays an important political and dialectical role. It is both influenced by its societal context, and it influences the normative structure that gives it its context. Or, in Ahmed’s words: it is both influenced by the normative path and creates a new path by not following the norms. Here, it becomes apparent, too, how this individual and intimate moment of

105 Later in the season we do actually see the consequences of him being outed when he is schooled by his team who all urge him to deny the pictures are real and when he is critiqued (and mocked by an interviewer).
connection—two men having sex—is intertwined with the structural levels of society as it constitutes them and the disconnection with their context.

The scene doesn’t deny the complexity of queerness. Hernando’s reorientation towards the beauty of their queerness isn’t just accepted without acknowledging the hardship of the situation.

HERNANDO: *(shakes his head)* I am sorry…

LITO: No.

HERNANDO: … about all this. I…

LITO: *looks at the picture still being projected and smiles.* It was worth it just to hear you describe it.

*They both chuckle.*

HERNANDO: *looking at Lito* So…

*Lito holds out his hand for Hernando to take. Hernando takes his hand, and Lito holds that hand now with both hands.*

LITO: Here we go.

*Hernando adds his hand to their hands and smiles.*

HERNANDO: Here we go.

*They hug and Lito looks into the classroom, scared.*

In this interaction between Lito and Hernando we see how they are both accepting the beauty of their love and queerness—Hernando in calling it art, Lito in saying it was worth it to hear Hernando describe it—and how they are both scared too—Hernando apologizing, Lito looking scared as they think about stepping into the world as publicly queer. Although it was worth it to Lito, although Lito and Hernando will go through this together, Lito is still scared. Being outed, straying from the norm won’t make Lito be completely outside of normativity. More so, he will be even more visible—and thus be subject to even more alienation. The beauty of the queerness does not erase the fear that works through the power of normativity and discrimination.

In analyzing this moment, I have shown how queerness is connection and disconnection. Let’s take this moment to clarify what this means for the ways in which we understand queerness. I argue for a triple understanding of queerness. As illustrated by Lito’s fear and Nomi’s childhood memory and in line with the insight from Butler and Ahmed, queerness can be seen as disconnection. Queerness is the abject, created in function of and in contrast with the subject. Queerness is straying from the normative line, which results in disorientation. Queerness is being ostracized and bullied by one’s peers and family. Queerness, in all of these insights, is a form or disconnection from the hegemonic community. Queerness isn’t just disconnection, however. As illustrated by the understanding between Nomi and
Lito, queerness is connection too. Queer individuals build a connection through the shared experience of being not-subject for understanding, a community and to organize against oppression. In recognizing queerness as both disconnection and connection, a third understanding of queerness becomes visible. By being disconnected, disoriented, at the sidelines of the community but at the same time connected to a shared experience and a shared fight, queerness is transformative. Queerness holds the possibility of transforming the normative context and the norms that oppress queer individuals and communities. This possibility is illustrated in Hernando’s lecture, where he transforms the norms and judgements of his students. This is in line with Ahmed’s conception of reorientation as turning the uncomfortable disorientation into a reorientation. Taking this into account, I suggest to add onto the theoretical framework of our understanding of queerness. Just as queerness is (dis)connection, so is it transformation, transformation of identity, community, the individual and the normative context:

![Diagram](image)

*Fig 2. Visualization of the theoretical framework in which queerness is the (dis)connection between and the transformation of identity, community and the individual this context of normativity.*

Throughout this analysis, I will focus more on this transformative understanding of queerness and show how it is present in the series.

The particular instantiations of Nomi’s and Lito’s queer sexuality and gender was an example of queerness in general and offered an empirical foundation for this generalization. As mentioned in the analysis, this (dis)connection happens on different levels, but where does this (dis)connection actually take place? How does this relation between the individual and normative level work? What is the exact mechanism of (dis)connection in the relation between identity, community and the individual? How does this relation produce queerness? These are the questions I will explore in the analysis of the next moment.
3.3 ANALYSIS MOMENT 2: IDENTITY – COMMUNITY – INDIVIDUAL

The second moment focuses on the complicated relationship between identity, community and the individual. As discussed in the theoretical framework, this ‘triangle’ produces queerness in the (dis)connection between them. Throughout the moment we see Lito, Kala and Capheus being confronted with the outside world having a specific attention on their life. This heightened attention in turn opens up the question of identity and what determines one’s identity. Identity is a complex term that has a variety of meanings and philosophical interpretations. Here, I understand identity foremost as the answer to the question ‘who am I?’ The individual is, in contrast, the person who answers that question. The moment resonates with Butler’s critique on identity and critiques the way in which identity and identifying labels create a ‘we-them divide’ instead of understanding individuals. Community, however, is often based on a shared identity, since the identity is what links the individuals to each other and to the community. How do we honor this role identity plays for the community and the individual, without being divisive? Through the particular instances of queerness in this moment, I will analyze this complicated relation between identity, community and the individual.

The first scene of the moment begins with a focus on Lito having beenouted and now being publicly queer.

START SCENE

Lito is ‘visiting’ Nomi. They are sitting on her bed.

NOMI: (concerned) Hey.

LITO: Why is it when I feel scared, I end up with you?

NOMI: I don’t know. I’m such a chicken compared to most of the others.

Lito smiles.

NOMI: I’m worried for you. I hope that what I said to you at the museum didn’t make you do something you didn’t want to do.

LITO: (shaking his head) No. No. What you said was important to me. I needed you to say it. But it doesn’t make what is going to happen any easier.

NOMI: If you need anything…

LITO: Thank you. I know I can be a bit… dramatic. But really, when you came out, did you have to deal with anything like this?

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106 For a full transcription, extra information and source: see Addendum II.
107 Here, she is referring to the other members of their cluster.
108 See: moment 1.
Nomi is now ‘visiting’ Lito. They are in the car with Hernando and Dani, arriving at Lito’s apartment. There are paparazzi running towards the car and surrounding them; an overwhelming amount of flashing cameras. Nomi is looking around her.

The word ‘Faggot’ is graffiti-sprayed on the wall of Lito’s building.

NOMI: (scared, disgusted) No.

This scene explicitly shows the disorientation, discomfort and alienation of queerness. Lito, who was adored by his fans and the press, now receives a completely different kind of attention from them. Again, like in the first moment, this scene allows for the complexity of this disorientation. In telling Nomi “what you said was important to me,” Lito acknowledges how important it was for him to recognize the beauty of his queerness and the power in publicly acknowledging that and letting himself live a queer life. Despite this, he is scared and the reaction of his context to him publicly being queer is hurtful and heightened because he is famous. Nomi’s disorientation when she visits him, helps convey the disorientation of this queer experience. The slur ‘faggot’ painted on the wall draws the divide that has now been made between Lito and the norm; it makes him ‘them’ instead of ‘we’; it alienates him; it is a disconnection. Nomi, who has gone through her own process of coming out, both recognizes the fear and acknowledges her experience wasn’t like Lito’s. Again, their individual contexts deeply influence how they both experienced this process. Lito lives in Mexico City, which is more conservative than San Francisco (Nomi’s home). Furthermore, being publicly queer is heightened for Lito as a famous actor, because he doesn’t only come out to his family and friends, but to the public as well. This adds a heightened focus on his particular queerness and a heightened response. For this analysis, this heightened attention makes the disconnection of queerness even more visible – it is written on the wall in graffiti, as cameras flash. Here, we can already see how identifying labels produce a disconnection between individuals and a hegemonic community. By calling Lito a faggot he is disconnected from the heterosexual and heteronormative community. In this case, Lito’s queerness is produced in that specific disconnection. As we will see in the rest of the analysis, this isn’t the only way queerness plays a role in the relation between identity, community and the individual.

Later in the scene we see the other Sensates visit. As they do, the graffiti changes into different derogatory terms.

LITO: Am I supposed to pretend this is okay?

HERNANDO: (back in the car): Hey. Hey, calm down. Okay?

KALA: (In Italy) I hate…

LITO: (In his car) … that word.

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109 I consider slurs like ‘faggot’ a form of identifying labels. They are hurtful and might be used with an intention to hurt more so than to identify. In this use of an identifying label, I consider the identity (as an ‘other’) to be an essential part of the way the hurt is enacted.
We again see other Sensates ‘visiting’ Lito and taking his place in the car. The graffitied word changes as the characters change: The word ‘FREAK’ is displayed for Nomi, the word ‘VIRGIN’ for Kala, the word ‘SLUT’ for Riley, …

RILEY: I hate that…

WILL: …word.

The word ‘PIG’ is displayed for Will, the word ‘N***** for Capheus, the word ‘NAZI’ for Wolfgang, the word ‘BITCH’ for Sun.

HERNANDO: They’re trying to provoke us. They want us to be upset by it.

KALA: (In Italy, with Lito right next to her): Of course I’m upset!

The scene shows us not only the disorientation, hurt and disconnection that the word ‘faggot’ entails for Lito, but also how the other Sensates – and in general, other individuals – can experience this and empathize with Lito. All the other Sensates have a word that they hate, which embodies their exclusion, their disconnection from the normative community. In taking this multitude of examples, we can begin to see how queerness in general can be constituted by the disconnection between an individual and a community. Through the use of identity, a ‘we-them divide’ is created between the individual and the community. Queerness, then, is the disconnection that is constructed in that divide. For example, through the use of ‘freak’ one creates a divide between ‘we’ – the non-freaks and ‘them’ – the freaks. Nomi’s queerness is the disconnection between herself and the hegemonic community. Because this example uses slurs, the use of identity could be contested. The example does, however, still hold when thinking about a different identity that isn’t a slur like transgender. Through the use of ‘transgender’ one creates a divide between ‘we’ – cisgender individuals – and ‘them’ – transgender individuals. Nomi’s queerness is the disconnection between herself and the hegemonic, cisgender community.111

These examples furthermore show that this exclusion seems more common than the actual norm. Here, Butler’s notion that identity is a phantasmatic ideal that inevitably excludes others comes to mind. Following her theory, every individual is disconnected from identity, because identity is an unachievable ideal. The disconnection in queerness, however, isn’t just like any other form of exclusion from identity. Every subject entails some form of inclusion and exclusion in order to be a distinguishable subject. For example, every understanding of day excludes night and vice versa. Similarly, in describing colors, one has to exclude certain other colors. This corresponds, furthermore, with Butler’s conception of the creation of the subject through the (creation and) exclusion of the abject.

110 Note how the we-identity is often a non-identity, being constructed in the divide itself.
111 This is still only one way of queerness being present in the relation between identity, community and the individual. In the further analysis, I will explore queerness as connection and queerness as the producing power as well.
When discussing queerness, however, this exclusion and disconnection isn’t just an exclusion from a definition, it is a normative exclusion. The disconnection is politically, discursively… enforced through the normative forces of society. Calling Lito a ‘faggot’, isn’t just a terminological exclusion, it’s a normative exclusion that pushes him into the margins of society. This exclusion is discrimination. The connection of queerness too isn’t just a terminological inclusion, it is a shared experience and in reaction to the disconnection. The connection only exists because of the alienation of the disconnection. A queer community, thus, isn’t an in- and exclusion based on identity, it is a connection through a shared experience of disconnection.

In this scene, the alienation of the slurs is contrasted against the connection between individuals who experience the exclusion and alienation. This connection can be found both within a marginalized community and between communities. This connection is then again heightened by the connection between the Sensates who find themselves explicitly in Lito’s situation, because of their superhuman abilities. Insofar as there is a disconnection between an individual and an identity or identifying label, this identity can feel limiting to the individual who is labeled by this identity.112 Earlier in the scene, Kala voices this feeling of being trapped in conjunction with feeling connected to others.113 As she explains this feeling, she is talking about the members of her cluster, but this superhuman ability only heightens a connection that might exist between individuals and communities who don’t have this ability. What becomes clear in Kala’s statements, is a translation of the exclusion and alienation into a connection. The different circumstances of these individuals connect them in the ways they are all trapped by the disconnection between the identity and themselves. Here, we can see queerness as both the disconnection and the connection, interacting with each other.

In the next episode there is a scene that directly builds on these themes and for that reason, I have included it in this moment. In the scene both Capheus and Lito are being interviewed. During these interviews the ‘we-them divide’ becomes explicit and in their answers both Capheus and Lito (and the other Sensates) critique this divide and the use of labels in understanding someone’s identity.

Cut to Mexico City, red carpet.

MARIANA: Are you denying the photos are real?

LITO: No, no, no. I… I did not say that.

MARIANA: So are you… a homosexual?

HERNANDO: It’s okay, it’s okay, it’s okay.

LITO: Can you explain to me why it matters?

112 In the second scene of this moment this idea of being trapped by an identifying label is explored more deeply.
113 For the transcription, see Addendum II.
MARIANA: It matters to your fans. If you are lying to them, they have the right to know.

*Cut to: Capheus in Nairobi, the bus terminal.*

ZAKIA: Tell our viewers why it is that you’re called Van Damme.

CAPHEUS: Have you ever seen ‘Lionheart’?

ZAKIA: No. I don’t watch movies like that.

CAPHEUS: *(chuckles)* Movies like what?

ZAKIA: Movies that glorify violence. Movies where the white man saves the world.

*Capheus and Jela are both shaking their heads.*

CAPHEUS: ‘Lionheart’ is not about any of those things.

Jela whispers something into Capheus’ ear.

CAPHEUS: It’s about courage.

JELA: *(while fistbumping with Capheus)* Courage.

*Cut to: Lito at the premiere*

LITO: Uh… I am very grateful to my fans. I know that, as an actor, all I tried to give them is something true, is something from my heart.

MARIANA: Then you were lying to them before?

HERNANDO: *(interfering)* Lito, come on. Let’s go.

MARIANA: *(As they start walking away)* Is this your lover then? Sorry, I didn’t recognize him with his clothes on.

LITO: *(turning around)* Do you… *(walking back towards Mariana)* Do you know what your problem is?

MARIANA: I don’t have a problem. I just want to understand—

LITO: You’re not trying to understand anything.

MARIANA: Are you admitting you’re gay or not?

LITO: No, you’re not trying to understand anything. Because…

At this point the other Sensates ‘visit’ both Lito and Capheus and help them answer the interviewer’s questions. They ‘take the place’ of both Lito and Capheus, starting with Nomi at Lito’s premiere.

NOMI: …labels are the opposite of understanding.

ZAKIA: *(in Nairobi)* But Van Damme is white.
In this scene, the interviewers push the division between a dominant ‘we’ and a queer ‘them’. Mariana, who interviews Lito, tries to make him into a ‘them’ – into one of them, – by asking him explicitly whether he is ‘a homosexual’. Lito, however, doesn’t play into this division and refuses to answer, asking instead why it matters. This refusal to answer isn’t a denial of his sexuality, but a critique on the division that is inherently made in Mariana’s question. Lito does not engage in this division between that ‘we’ and that ‘them’.

In Capheus’ situation, this divide is approached from a different perspective. From a structural standpoint in our current society where racism still prevails, both Zakia and Capheus are seen as a ‘them’ opposite from a white ‘we’. Zakia’s argument critiques the way movies like Lionheart creates this white subject (against an Other). Her response is to disengage: ‘I don’t watch movies like that’. Capheus, on the other hand, argues to move beyond the division: ‘what does courage have to do with the color of a man’s skin?’ In this way, the scene argues against the division, both from the standpoint of not wanting to be stuck into the category of a ‘them’ by a ‘we’, and from the standpoint of not wanting to limit yourself to that position of a ‘them’.

From these differing starting points, both Lito and Capheus turn away from this division between ‘we’ and ‘them’. The division brings an alienation with it. It reduces these individuals to their sexuality, to the color of their skin,… Mariana tells Lito it is essential for his fans to know his sexuality, Zakia tells Capheus he can’t be inspired by the courage of a white character. Both Lito and Capheus, however, question this limitation. In this way, the scene complicates the concept of identity and urges us to question our understanding of identity, specifically queer identities. In Lito’s case, the limits of identity for a queer individual in contrast with a dominant community are brought up. In other words, Lito questions the disconnection between the individual and their ‘them’-identity. Capheus questions the identity of a queer community (in contrast with a dominant community). In other words, Capheus questions the disconnection between a community and their ‘them’-identity. Identity, thus, doesn’t just relate to individuals, but to communities as well. It is through these identities that queerness as disconnection is produced on both the level of the community and the level of the individual. What does this mean for the identity of queer communities? One possible response to that question is to follow Butler in arguing that queer communities should be cautious when using an identity. More so, the

For the second standpoint, there are multiple strategies: either disengaging with the creation of the we-them (like in movies that glorify white heroes who use violence) or moving beyond the division and focusing on other aspects.
community should be aware of the ways that identity reproduces the power that ‘others’ the community and the ways that identity excludes others from the community (because the identity is unachievable and inevitably creates a disconnection).

In their reaction to the interviewers’ questions, the Sensates tell the interviewers (and the audience) that in order to understand an individual, one cannot stick to these socially constructed identities, which create disconnection: “Labels are the opposite of understanding.” Identifying labels are often used as slurs and alienating terms, as the previous scene illustrates. The terms furthermore reproduce the limit of the ‘we-them dived’; they limit queer individuals and communities to the realm of ‘them’, on the edges of society, they limit them to disconnection.

In talking about the movies they watched, Lito and Capheus explore the floating nature of identity.

*We see Capheus taking Lito’s place and Lito taking Capheus’ place.*

CAPHEUS: *(taking Lito’s place)* I was just a little kid…

LITO: *(Mexico City)* … who loved…

CAPHEUS: *(taking Lito’s place)* … movies. And the…

LITO: *(taking Capheus’ place)* …heroes I watched…

CAPHEUS: *(taking Lito’s place)* … made me feel like I was…

LITO: *(taking Capheus’ place)* … braver than I was.

CAPHEUS: *(taking Lito’s place)* Funnier.

LITO: *(Mexico City)* Smarter.

LITO: *(taking Capheus’ place)* They made me feel that I could do things that I…

CAPHEUS: *(taking Lito’s place)* … made me believe I could do things…

LITO: *(Mexico City)* … I didn’t think…

CAPHEUS: *(Nairobi)* … think I could do.

LITO: *(Mexico City)* But that boy who watched TV with his mama…

CAPHEUS: *(Nairobi)* … mama, and grandma, and aunties…

LITO: *(Mexico City)* … and aunties, is not the man who became an actor.

CAPHEUS: *(Nairobi)* … not the man who became a driver. And that driver is not the same…

LITO: *(Mexico City)* … person you see standing here.
Here, identity is shown to be transitional. The answer to ‘who am I?’ is something that changed over both Lito’s and Capheus’ life. Even when the individual connects with a certain identity, this connection is temporary and within bounds. The connection will break either by focusing on other aspects of the individual’s life, or by time. As the scene continues, it tries to unravel what it means to answer the question ‘who am I?’. In the montage that follows\(^{115}\), this question is translated into a multitude of questions: ‘Where I’m from?’, ‘What I one day might become?’, ‘What I dream?’, ‘What I do?’, ‘What I’ve done?’, ‘What you see?’, ‘What I’ve seen?’, ‘What I fear?’, ‘Who I love?’, ‘What I’ve lost?’. The question of identity, the question ‘who am I?’ can be understood in many different ways, as this montage shows. There is a multitude of individual circumstances, moments, characteristics… that could determine who we are. In seeing the transitional character of identity, we’re able to transform the way identity is used to disconnect individuals from a community. Identity is revealed to be contingent and temporary and, in this, doesn’t provide a stable base for a community.

The scene shows us that to understand individuals is not to ask for the identifying labels (in the ‘we-them division’), but instead to focus on connection. This is visible on a meta-level since we see all the Sensates take the place of Lito and Capheus and think about what it means to answer the question ‘who am I?’. More specifically, this focus on connection becomes apparent in Lito’s and Capheus’ final answer to the question:

\[
\text{CAPHEUS: (Nairobi) I guess who I am is…} \\
\text{LITO: (Mexico City) …exactly the same as who you are.} \\
\text{CAPHEUS: (taking Lito’s place) Not better than.} \\
\text{LITO: (taking Capheus’ place) Not less than.} \\
\text{CAPHEUS: (Nairobi) Because there is no one who has ever been (taking Lito’s place) or will ever be…} \\
\text{LITO: (taking Capheus’ place) …exactly the same as either you (Mexico City) or me.}
\]

Here, both the connection and the individuality between individuals becomes fully apparent. They are exactly the same (and in this connected), precisely because they are completely individual.\(^{116}\) This aspires to a connection that ultimately doesn’t entail an exclusion. Is this connection, however, strong enough to create and hold a community together? In the analysis of the next moment, I will explore how we can move beyond this (lonely) position of the completely unique individuals.

\[^{115}\text{For the full transcription, see Addendum II.}\]
\[^{116}\text{Here, it can be relevant to note too that Zakia only introduces herself by name after Capheus gives this response to her question. Before that she only introduced her television-station and Jela tells Capheus: “I don’t know her name. I don’t know who she is.” This indicates that before they knew her name, they could only see an identity, but couldn’t see her in her individuality.}\]
The third, and final, moment focuses on family. It consists of the last scenes of the Holiday Special, where we see the Sensates celebrate the holidays, specifically Christmas and New Year’s. The holiday season is often centered around family and traditions (influenced by one’s community). I have chosen to turn my attention to this moment and the theme of family, because it shows a way of moving beyond the normative creation of identity, without losing the strong connections within a community. Family is built on connection (which can become disconnections) and it inhabits the multiple forms of (dis)connection that are possible between identity and community. One could focus on the connection between one family-member to the family as a whole, as a community; or one could focus on the family itself in a broader community diverging from the normative conceptualization of family. This moment shows the different forms a (queer) family can take on, in showing Nomi and Amanita with their friend, Amanita’s mom and her three dads; Sun returning ‘home’ to her cellmates; and Lito and his family (Hernando en Dani) visiting Lito’s mother, Estella, for Christmas. All of these scenes show a powerful connection beyond normative identities and beyond the hegemonic conception of family.

Lito coming home for Christmas portrays a queer individual inside a (previously) normative family. First, we see a queer family: Lito and Hernando as a couple:

*Lito is standing outside of his mom’s house, carrying a pile of gifts, preparing to go inside. Hernando Approaches him and puts a hand on his shoulder.*

HERNANDO: Hey… whatever happens, I want you to know that I am here. Okay, come on.

*They walk towards the house together.*

As they prepare to enter Estella’s home, Hernando ensures Lito that he will be there, he will be Lito’s family, no matter what. This reassurance at the same time indicates the fear that is played out as the scene continues: will Lito still have this connection with his mama now that he is openly queer?

*Lito enters his mother’s house. The table is set for a party, but the house is empty.*

LITO: Mama? (As he puts down the gifts and enters the house even more) Mama? (looking around) Mama?

*On one of the tables a couple of magazines with pictures of Lito and Hernando on the front page are displayed. When he sees them, Lito looks worried. He sighs. His mama, Estella Rodriguez, enters the room and fills a glass of champagne.*

ESTELLA: I always save your clippings. The good, the bad and the inevitable.

LITO: Mama….

ESTELLA: This wasn’t the hard part. And it wasn’t the friends thrusting the pictures in my face with their sincerest condolences. I never had so many friends call. Who knew I was so popular? *(She laughs. Then addresses an imaginary crowd:)* Dear friends, dear colleagues, dear

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117 For more context, a full transcription and source: See Addendum III.
all: Now that my famous movie-star son is here, let me thank each and every one of you for showing me your true colors… during this dark and difficult period. (as she raises the glass:) Truly.

LITO: Mama, I’m… I’m sorry.

ESTELLA: No. You have nothing to apologize for. (she puts down the glass, opening her arms to Lito) Come here, my baby penguin. Come here.

_Lito walks towards her, his hands behind his back._

ESTELLA: Come here. Hey. (She holds his head in her hands, looking at him) I know you could have denied it all, like so many others. And you didn’t. And I have never been prouder of you.

LITO: Mama…

ESTELLA: Yes, I am your mama. And I always knew this day was coming.

LITO: (surprised) You knew?

ESTELLA: Of course. You were too good a dancer to be a straight boy.

She chuckles, so do Hernando and Dani who are standing close to the door, watching this conversation take place. Lito hugs his mama. She looks at Dani and Hernando, as they look back at her. Lito laughs and picks up his mama.

ESTELLA: Whoo! (she laughs and hugs Lito even tighter.)

LITO: I love you, mama.

Here, Lito comes home to his family after being outed as queer, unsure of whether he still has this family, this connection. Especially when he finds out the house is empty, and he can’t see his mama, this fear becomes really apparent. His queerness turns his family into something he can’t take for granted. When it becomes clear that he does indeed still have this connection with his mama, she explicitly says: “Yes, I am your mama.” The familial connection has to be explicitly acknowledged, since Lito’s queerness within the normative context pulled this connection into question. The disconnection from the hegemonic community makes someone question their connection to any individuals within that community. After explicitly acknowledging this familial bond, the connection is reinstated, and their family is _queered_ in a way. The connection despite disconnection from the larger community transforms the relationship slightly.

The next morning, this _queered_ family is shown again.

_Mexico. Morning. Lito and his family are having breakfast outside._

ESTELLA: You must stay for New Year’s.

LITO: Sorry, mama. New Year’s, it’s a bit complicated for us.

ESTELLA: Why?
LITO: Uhm…

HERNANDO: My parents were killed in a car accident on New Year’s.

ESTELLA: Oh. How terrible.

HERNANDO: They were beautiful people. I miss them. … On New Year’s, I like to think about… everything they gave me and how short it all can be.

_Hernando looks at Lito and Lito takes his hand on the table. Dani looks at their hands and almost starts crying._

LITO: Dani. (As he reaches over the table to hold her hand) Are you okay?

HERNANDO: Hey, Dani, what’s wrong?

DANI: My family is nothing like any of this. Every day you tip-toe around, hoping you don’t get in a fight. This was probably the best Christmas I have ever had. Is it horrible to think that it’s because it had nothing to do with my own family?

HERNANDO: Oh, no. Dani.

ESTELLA: You have been so kind to my son. You will always be welcome in my home.

Dani: Thank you. Thank you.

Dani has been living with Lito and Hernando. Even though she isn’t part of their monogamous relationship, she is part of their family. At breakfast, this is explicitly acknowledged by Lito’s mom in telling her she is always welcome in her home. This queer family-connection is contrasted against the disconnection and abuse of Dani’s biological (normative) family.118 For Dani, the connection of family is only achieved in this queer family. This scene, furthermore shows how family is transitional too. Because of Hernando’s connection in this family, the tradition has changed: they can’t stay for New Year’s because that day is now reserved for Hernando’s tradition of going to his parent’s grave. The connection, thus, changes and enriches the family and its traditions.

In this moment, we are shown an example of queer family and queerness being introduced into a normative family and queering family. This example of family emphasizes the way connections are constantly changing. The connection within these families isn’t dependent on an identity

118 Note that not every family succeeds in their connection.
Understanding Queerness: Sexuality, Gender & Family in Sense8

Barbara Revalk

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, my primary goal was to deepen and complicate our understanding of queerness. In exploring this general understanding, I focused mainly on the particular forms of queerness in sexuality, gender and family. These (normative) concepts provided me with a starting point from which to build a more general understanding. This understanding isn’t limited to the fields of sexuality, gender and family and can now be applied towards any form of repression caused by not following norms. Methodologically, I opted to work with a strong focus on theory, because I deemed the insights of other scholars on queerness extremely valuable in my exploration of queerness. In this, I aimed to bring together the structural and the individual perspective and to floss out the characteristics of queerness and (its relation to) normativity that persisted in both perspectives. The method I selected for my analysis of Sense8 was open and unstructured in order to be able to continue building the theoretical framework through the analysis. In my theoretical analysis, I explored the concepts of sexuality, gender and family and the way they relate to each other and queerness. I furthermore explored the insights of Judith Butler on Sara Ahmed on queerness, which made me to turn towards a closer study of normativity. I investigated the mechanisms of normativity, how queerness happens and what queerness can do within normativity. To conclude my theoretical analysis of the existing literature on queerness, I suggested a framework through which to understand queerness. Through this framework, I analyzed three moments from Sense8, focusing respectively on (dis)connection, identity in relation to community and the individual and family connections. In this analysis, I further developed the framework and suggested an updated version of it, to include the transformative characteristic of queerness.

Here, I want to recapitulate some of the important conclusions I’ve drawn throughout this thesis. A first important insight is that queerness is completely embedded in normativity. Both Butler and Ahmed placed queerness within normativity and the normative construction, respectively as an essential part of the materialization of identity and as an effect of the normative process. In this way, queerness isn’t just created in normativity, it is part of the normative construction. Finally, queerness creates the (possibility for) transformation. It can even become part of the normativity, as a queered normativity. Thus, queerness is in normativity from creation to transformation.

A second important conclusion is the framework for understanding I have suggested in the theoretical analysis and edited through insight from the analysis of Sense8. Guided by this framework, I understand queerness as connection, disconnection and transformation. This means, queerness isn’t an identity, it is a state, more so, a dynamic and complex state that moves between connection, disconnection and transformation. It is in this understanding that we can recognize the power and the hope of queerness.
Further research can test this framework through a more structured research method, like semi-structured qualitative interviews with queer individuals, or focus groups on queer communities. Here, it would be valuable to check whether the same concepts of identity, community and the individual arise and whether their relationship can be understood as (dis)connection. Another focus of these interviews could be the possibility of transformation and queering normativity and what a *queered* normativity can specifically entail.

Alternatively, further research can also apply the framework on other pieces of (fictional) media to analyze the (representation of) queerness in them and to build this understanding of queerness through different concepts. A good example of a tv-series to analyze through this framework would be FX’s Pose. “Pose is set in the world of 1987 and "looks at the juxtaposition of several segments of life and society in New York: the rise of the luxury universe, the downtown social and literary scene and the ball culture world."”¹¹⁹ The series focusses on race, gender and sexuality. In their portrayal of the ball culture world, they focus on queer family by showing the different ‘Houses’ that function as families, queer families sticking together and building together in the world of ball culture. Studying queerness as (dis)connection and as transformation in Pose could offer an illuminating perspective on the series, its role in our current society and queerness in itself.

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decade?fbclid=IwAR1vtXVnMKr3WQ3HOsMq0YHdHsdrCv8h9kxrKMk1WzbdnLYCU7TV8ewynk0.


ADDENDUM I

Moment 1: Art, Love & Connection

Scene 1: Season 1, Episode 9 “Death Doesn’t Let You Say Goodbye” (21min10-33min50)

Official Episode Synopsis:
“Riley learns about her new life and its dangers, Kala deals with the aftermath of the attack on Rajan's father, and Lito's world spins out of control.”

Technical Notes:
Directed by: Lana Wachowski (as The Wachowskis), Lilly Wachowski (as The Wachowskis)
Written by: Lilly Wachowski (as The Wachowskis) & Lana Wachowski (as The Wachowskis) & J. Michael Straczynski

List of characters (in order of appearance):
Lito Rodriguez: One of the Sensates, lives in Mexico city.
Hernando Fuentes: Lito’s boyfriend.
Nomi Marks: One of the Sensates, lives in san Francisco.
Sun Bak: One of the Sensates, lives in Seoul.
Kang-Dae Bak: Sun’s father.

Context storyline:
Lito’s boyfriend broke up with him, because he didn’t want to protect their friend (Dani) from her abusive ex at the cost of being outed to the public, because his acting career depends on him passing as straight.
Nomi is actively being pursued by the FBI, under direct orders from BPO. She had to leave her girlfriend, Amanita, behind at their last hiding place and has now returned to their apartment, hiding in plain sight.
Sun is in prison for embezzlement in her family’s company. She did not commit these crimes but is taking the fall for her brother.
The Sensates do not yet completely understand how their connection works, but they’re getting familiar with it.

Transcription:

120 Source: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3963682/?ref_=ttep_ep9
121 Source: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3963682/?ref_=ttep_ep9
START SCENE

Lito is sitting in a museum, in front of a painting.

LITO: *sighs*

He is thinking about a date he had with Hernando in this museum.

– Start memory –

They are both sitting in front of that same painting.

HERNANDO: There’s a line in your film, ‘The Passion of the Sinner’, that always makes me think of this museum. “My heart is not a clock.”

LITO: Yeah. My character was always late.

HERNANDO: Beautiful line… made sublime by your performance. An apology… that is also an anthem. *soft chuckle* Look… love is not something we wind up, something we set or control. Love… is just like art. Ah… A force that comes into our lives without any rules, expectations or limitations and… and every time I hear that line, I am reminded that… love, like art… must always be free.

Lito nods.

– end memory –

Lito is sitting alone in front of the painting.

Nomis is in her apartment. She is cleaning up the mess left by the FBI when they were searching her apartment.

She finds Lito ‘visiting’ and sitting on her couch.

She is ‘visiting’ Lito at the same time and sits down next to him in front of the painting.

NOMI: (softly) You’re Lito.

LITO: (Not amused by her presence) You’re Nomi. … This really is not the time for me.

NOMI: It’s not really a good time for me either.
LITO: Why are you here then?

NOMI: I don’t know. … I was almost killed. I didn’t know where to go, so I went home. I was worried about Amanita, and missing the life that we used to have, and I was wondering if I was ever gonna get it back. And the next thing I knew, I was here. *(looking around her in amazement)* What is this place?

LITO: It’s the Diego Rivera Museum.

NOMI: The painter?

LITO: Yeah.

NOMI: He was married to Frida Kahlo, right?

LITO: Yes. The day she died, he said, was the worst day of his life… because he realized too late that the best thing about his life…was his love for her.

NOMI: You have a boyfriend?

LITO: Not anymore. *(There are tears in his eyes.)*

NOMI: What happened?

LITO: I got scared. … I play heroes all the time, but in real life, I’m a coward.

*Sun is in her prison cell, reading.*

GUARD: Attention. 773?

The Guard opens the door. Sun stands up.

GUARD: You have a visitor.
Sun enters the visitation-room. Her father, Kang-Dae, is there. He stands up, they look at each other. The door closes. Sun averts her eyes. They both sit down.

KANG-DAE: Thank you. …

Sun exhaled sharply.

KANG-DAE: I have not slept… since you came here.

SUN: I’ve never slept so well.

KANG-DAE: I am not a good person.

SUN/ Father, you owe me nothing.

KANG-DAE: I am not a good person… but when your mother was alive… I was a better person. She made me better. When she died… I thought that part of me died with her. … But it didn’t. It is right here. My company, my wealth, even my reputation… is meaningless without my daughter. I am going to tell the truth.

Sun has tears in her eyes.

Nomi and Lito are still sitting next to each other in the museum.

LITO: Hernando brought me here on our first date. (smiles) He said this is the only place in Mexico City where you can really experience… Diego Rivera. These are studies done for a painting that was originally commissioned by John D. Rockefeller for his new center in New York. Diego changed the original design and added Lenin, united with workers. (Points towards the painting)

Nomi chuckles softly

LITO: Rockefeller told him to repaint it. Diego refused… So Rockefeller had it destroyed. Years later, Diego repainted it here in Mexico where he thought the painting would live free. But…

— Begin memory —
Understanding Queerness: Sexuality, Gender & Family in Sense8

Barbara Revalk

HERNANDO: …Sadly, the actual painting has been reduced to nothing but a whore pimped out by the Bank of Mexico and the Palacio. It is… controlled by censors who treat it exactly like Rockefeller treated it. (Shakes his head in disappointment.) Diego would be ashamed of it. Nothing about it is free.

– End memory –

LITO: All afternoon, he was telling me stories about the art in here. Hernando can talk about football, about wrestling, about paintings, with such a passionate love.

– Begin memory –

HERNANDO: “You fuck with art,” he says, “you’ll get fucked by art.”
Both are laughing.
HERNANDO: You see that sketch? That one? That’s Syphilis. Mm. He painted it over the head of Rockefeller’s father…

– End memory –

LITO: (to Nomi, pointing at the sketches) …drinking with a dance hall girl.

– Begin memory –

HERNANDO: That’s why I love it here. (looks Lito in the eyes) Here… you can feel the wild and reckless heart… (looks at his lips, sighs, back to his eyes)… of a Mexican artist… still beating.

Their faces are really close together and they are looking into each other’s eyes intensely.

– End memory –

LITO: I was here listening to him for hours, and… and I couldn’t take it anymore. (smiling)

As Lito narrates the story to Nomi, we see Hernando and Lito on their date in the museum, passionately kissing, in the bathroom.

LITO: Our first kiss was over there… in the bathroom. … It was for me a religious experience. … I went to my knees. … And took him into my mouth like… It was taking a Holy Communion.

NOMI: That kind of kiss… changes you.

LITO: I told Hernando from the beginning, I… I told him how it had to be.
NOMI: What went wrong?

LITO: I did. … I’m afraid I will lose everything… that I’ve worked for.

NOMI: I know how that feels. But at a certain point, I realized there’s a huge difference between what we work for and what we live for.

LITO: My whole life, all I wanted to be was an actor. But you can’t be an actor and get the parts I want… and be gay.

NOMI: I love dolls. My father could never forgive me for that.

They are now both sitting on Nomi’s couch.

NOMI: When I was eight years old, my father made me join a swim club. He’d been on the same club and… he said that the things that he learned in that locker room were the things that made him the man he is today. … I hated that locker room. At that age, I was really uncomfortable with my body. I didn’t like to be naked, especially not in front of other boys. But you had to take a shower before you could go in the pool, so I would do it, but I would wear my suit and a tee shirt. And the boys would tease me, but I would try to hurry and… ignore them, and it—it worked for a while. And then one day it didn’t.

— Begin memory—
Nomí narrates as we see young Nomi, at that age still perceived as a boy, on that day in the common shower.

NOMI (older): I don’t know how it started, but I remember having this feeling that something bad was going to happen.

BOY1: Hey Faggot! Why do you shower with your clothes on?

BOY2: Because he ain’t got a dick.

NOMI (older): I made the mistake of standing up for myself.

The boys surround the young Nomi
BOY1: You got wood in the packet?

*Boys snickering.*

BOY: Let’s strip him!

*The boys take of Nomi’s tee shirt and push her under the shower.*

YOUNG NOMI: No! no! no! no!

NOMI (older): The hot water came from the same boiler that heated the radiator.

*Young Nomi is screaming, the boys are laughing while they keep her under the shower. The image shifts, and now the older Nomi is seen being held under the shower, her skin burning.*

NOMI (older): I still have scares on my stomach from the second-degree burns.

*The images of younger and older Nomi alternate. We see them both struggling against the laughing boys. They are clearly in pain.*

– End memory –

*The memory is stopped abruptly by Lito:*

LITO: Stop it!

*They are in Nomi’s apartment again. Nomi is crying.*

LITO: Fucking Monsters. … *(looking Nomi in the eyes:) I’m sorry.*

*They are back in the museum. Lito extends his arm and takes Nomi’s hand in his hand.*

NOMI: That locker room might have made my father the man that he is, but it also made me the woman that I am. After that, I quit the swim club. I quit trying to fit in, trying to be one of them. I knew I never would be. … But more importantly, I didn’t want to be. Their violence… was petty and ignorant, but ultimately, it was true to who they were. … The real violence… the violence that I realized was unforgivable… is the violence that we do to ourselves, when we’re too afraid to be who we really are.
Lito and Nomi look at each other. It is clear that both of them have been crying, they’re eyes are watery and red. The scene ends as Lito is sitting alone in front of the painting again.

END SCENE

Scene 2: Season 2, Episode 1 “Happy F*cking New year.” (12min29-17min00)122

Official Episode Synopsis:
“The journey continues as these eight singular hearts and minds weave in and out of each other’s lives finding deeper connections, learning darker secrets about one another and struggling to identify with more than just oneself.”123

Technical Notes124:
Directed by: Lana Wachowski
Written by: Lana Wachowski & J. Michael Straczynski

List of characters (in order of appearance):
Hernando Fuentes: Professor/Lecturer, Lito’s boyfriend
Mr. Valles: One of Hernando’s students.
Lito Rodriguez: One of the Sensates, lives in Mexico city.

Context storyline:
Because Lito ended up defending Dani against her abusive ex and offered to late her stay at his home, her ex leaked a picture of Lito and Hernando having sex and hereby outing Lito.

Transcription:

START SCENE

Hernando is giving a Lecture in front of a class. He is projecting (pictures of) art on the screens in front of the classroom.

HERNANDO: Art is material. It is what attracted me to the real world, bound by matter and matters.

122 Reference
123 Source: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5031232/?ref_=ttep_ep1
124 Source: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5031232/fullcredits?ref_=tt_ov_wr#writers/
Phones start beeping as students all receive a certain message.

HERNANDO: Art is political. Never more so than when insisting it is not.

The students are all distracted by their phone.

HERNANDO: Art is dialectic. It is enriched when shared and impoverished by ownership and commodification. It is the language of seeing and being seen.

Students are showing each other the message on their phones and laughing at it. A murmur arises from the classroom.

HERNANDO: Uh, would someone care to fill me in on the joke here?

STUDENT (MR. VALLES): Yes. Totally.

A student in the front row sends a picture to the projector, projecting it on the screens in front of the classroom. It is the picture of Hernando and Lito having sex. The students laugh. Hernando turns towards the screens, looking at the picture.

STUDENT (MR. VALLES): Is this art, Mr. Fuentes?

The students chuckle. Hernando collects himself and turns towards the classroom.

HERNANDO: Is it art, Mr. Valles? What do you think? Why don’t you tell us what you see?

STUDENT (MR. VALLES): Looks like shit-packer porn.

HERNANDO: “Shit-packer porn.” That is… That is very interesting.

STUDENT (MR. VALLES): Yeah.

HERNANDO: ‘Cause this is where the relationship between subject and object reverses. The proverbial shoe shifting to the other foot. And what was seen… now reveals the seer. Because the eyes of the beholder find not just beauty where they want, but also shallowness, ugliness, confusion… prejudice.
Which is to say the beholder will always see what they want to see, suggesting that what you, Mr. Valles, want to see is in fact shit-packer porn.

*Class chuckling. Mr. Valles looks angry.*

HERNANDO: Whereas someone else, someone with a set of eyes capable of seeing beyond societal conventions, beyond their defining biases, such a beholder might see an image of… two men caught in an act of pleasure. Erotic to be sure, but also… vulnerable. Neither aware of the camera. Both of them connected to the moment, to each other. To love. … And as I have suggested before in this class… art… is love made public.

*School-bell rings. The students leave the classroom. Hernando turns around, takes of his glasses. He looks worried. Lito enters the classroom and walks up to Hernando.*

LITO: Joaquin kept his word. It’s… It’s all over the internet.

HERNANDO: *(shakes his head)* I am sorry…

LITO: No.

HERNANDO: … about all this. I…

LITO: *looks at the picture still being projected and smiles.* It was worth it just to hear you describe it.

*They both chuckle.*

HERNANDO: *looking at Lito* So…

*Lito holds out his hand for Hernando to take. Hernando takes his hand, and Lito holds that hand now with both hands.*

LITO: Here we go.

*Hernando adds his hand to their hands and smiles.*

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125 This is Dani’s abusive ex who leaked the picture.
HERNANDO: Here we go.

*They hug and Lito looks into the classroom, scared.*

**END SCENE**
ADDENDUM 2

Moment 2: Identity, Community and the Individual

Scene 1: Season 2, Episode 1 “Happy F*cking New Year.” (22min40-27min49)

Official Episode Synopsis:
“The journey continues as these eight singular hearts and minds weave in and out of each other's lives finding deeper connections, learning darker secrets about one another and struggling to identify with more than just oneself.”

Technical Notes:
Directed by: Lana Wachowski
Written by: Lilly Wachowski & J. Michael Straczynski

List of characters (in order of appearance):
Lito Rodriguez: One of the Sensates, lives in Mexico City.
Nomi Marks: One of the Sensates, lives in san Francisco.
Hernando Fuentes: Lito’s boyfriend
Dani(ela) Velazquez: Lito and Hernando’s friend, who is living with them at the moment.
Kala Dandekar: One of the Sensates, lives in Mumbai.
Rajan Rasal: Kala’s husband.
Riley Blue (born Gunnarsdóttir): One of the Sensates, born in Iceland.
Will Gorski: One of the Sensates, lives in Chicago.
Capheus Onyango: One of the Sensates, lives in Nairobi.
Wolfgang Bogdanow: One of the Sensates, lives in Berlin.
Sun Bak: One of the Sensates, lives in Seoul.

Context storyline:
The picture of Lito having sex with Hernando leaked, and he is now outed to the public.
Kala is on her honeymoon with Rajan. She had doubts before marrying him, but they eventually went through with the wedding. They have not had sex yet.

Transcription:

126 Source: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5031232/?ref_=ttep_ep1
127 Source: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3963682/?ref_=ttep_ep9
START SCENE

Lito is ‘visiting’ Nomi. They are sitting on her bed.

NOMI: (concerned) Hey.

LITO: Why is it when I feel scared, I end up with you?

NOMI: I don’t know. I’m such a chicken compared to most of the others.\(^{128}\)

*Lito smiles.*

NOMI: I’m worried for you. I hope that what I said to you at the museum didn’t make you do something you didn’t want to do.\(^{129}\)

LITO: (shaking his head) No. No. What you said was important to me. I needed you to say it. But it doesn’t make what is going to happen any easier.

NOMI: If you need anything…

LITO: Thank you. I know I can be a bit… dramatic. But really, when you came out, did you have to deal with anything like this?

*Nomie now ‘visiting’ Lito. They are in the car with Hernando and Dani, arriving at Lito’s apartment. There are paparazzi running towards the car and surrounding them; an overwhelming amount of flashing camera’s.*

*Nomi is looking around her.*

*The word ‘Faggot’ is graffiti-sprayed on the wall of his building.*

NOMI: (scared, disgusted) No.

*We now see Kala in the car, looking outside.*

\(^{128}\) Here she is referring to the other members of their cluster.

\(^{129}\) See: moment 1.
Kala is standing on the balcony of their honeymoon-villa, overlooking the Amalfi coast and sea.

RAJAN: I…I know something’s wrong.

KALA: I feel… trapped here.

Rajan is sitting in one of the chairs on the balcony.

RAJAN: Is it the villa, or is it Positano? We can go somewhere else.

Kala turns around, facing towards Rajan.

KALA: It’s not a place. … It’s a feeling.

RAJAN: Are you, uh… feeling trapped by me? By this marriage?

KALA: as she comes closer to Rajan and sits down in the chair next to him. No, I… No.

RAJAN: What’s trapping you?

KALA: If I were to try and explain it to you, you would think I’m actually crazier than I sound.

RAJAN: leaning back in his chair, crossing his legs, looking intently at Kala Try me.

As Kala explains, we see flashes of her ‘visiting’ Lito’s and sitting in his car.

KALA: Okay. Standing up Okay, fine. … For starters, there are people, people that I feel connected to all over the world that are innocent

We now see other sensates ‘visiting’ Lito and ‘taking his place’ in the car. We also see them in the specific circumstances Kala knows they have been in. We see Riley and Will in a lab while Kala is preparing medicine to wake Riley up as they try to escape from the organization that wants them dead. We see Nomi almost getting caught by the FBI. We see Sun in prison.

KALA: And, and, and they are trapped by circumstance…

We see young Capheus and his mother being threatened in their home.
We see young Wolfgang setting a car on fire, while his abusive father is inside.

KALA: And then there are people without the privilege that we have and they feel threatened because they love a person who the world has decided that they shouldn’t love.

We see Lito in his car, surrounded by the paparazzi and the slur sprayed on the wall.

KALA: (in Lito’s car) It’s wrong. Terrible.

RAJAN: (back in Italy) Kala, Kala… I think I know what’s going on.

KALA: (surprised) You do?

RAJAN: I, uh… talked to your mother.

KALA: You did not tell her that we haven’t had sex yet.

RAJAN: I did.

Kala gasps and takes a step back.

RAJAN: I mean, I needed some guidance.

KALA: You asked my mother if I was a…

We are back in Lito’s car, but the graffiti on the wall now reads: ‘VIRGIN’

RAJAN: Kala, I now recognize that this was inappropriate.

KALA: (getting upset) Inappropriate?

LITO: (In his car) So I’m supposed to pretend I’m not up.

Lito is now also ‘visting’ Kala and they are finishing each other’s sentences. Both upset.
KALA: (In Italy) …set?!

LITO: Am I supposed to pretend this is okay?

HERNANDO: (back in the car): Hey. Hey, calm down. Okay?

KALA: (In Italy) I hate…

LITO: (In his car) … that word.

_We again see other sensates ‘visiting’ Lito and ‘taking his place of’ in the car. The sprayed word/slur changes, as the character who is in the car changes: ‘FREAK’ for Nomi, ‘VIRGIN’ for Kala, ‘SLUT’ for Riley,…_

RILEY: I hate that…

WILL: …word.


HERNANDO: They’re trying to provoke us. They want us to be upset by it.

KALA: (In Italy, with Lito right next to her): Of course I’m upset!

LITO (In his car): And if you don’t mind, maybe you can explain one little thing to me. (Now taking Kala’s place in Italy) Why is it even news? Who gives a fuck (in the car) who I fuck?

KALA: (In Italy): This is the 21st century, people.

KALA & LITO: (In Italy, screaming) Get over it!

_We are back in the car in Mexico City, paparazzi still surrounding the car._

DANI: This is insane. You can’t go out there. Fuck these pirañas! Turning towards Hernando and Lito Come to my house. You took me in. Let me help you.
Kala is in Italy again, alone with Rajan.

KALA: Rajan, we may be married, but my body is mine. It is not a field of land to be purchased and plowed. It is not for you or my mother to gossip about.

RAJAN: Kala, God, woman, you’re a force of nature.

Kala is breathing heavily, hands to her head. She sits down.

RAJAN: I’ve been an ass. Please, just forgive me.

Kala is still taking deep breaths, not looking at Rajan.

RAJAN: (sitting down too) I was insecure. I know there were a lot of issues. The travel and other things. But I began to wonder that, if now that the wedding was over… youb were still having second thoughts.

KALA: (looking at Rajan) No. I told you they were done. And they are.

Kala and Rajan hug. (Wolfgang appears next to them. Kala diverts her eyes from both of the men.)

END SCENE
**Understanding Queerness: Sexuality, Gender & Family in Sense8**

Barbara Revalk

**Scene 2: Season 2, Episode 2 “Who Am I?” (07min06-13min14)**

Official Episode Synopsis:

“Will and Whispers each race to piece together the other's location, while Lito heads to his first movie premiere since the photos leaked.”

**Technical Notes**

Directed by: Lana Wachowski  
Written by: Lilly Wachowski & J. Michael Straczynski

**List of characters (in order of appearance):**

Capheus Onyango: One of the Sensates, lives in Nairobi.  
Jela: Capheus’ colleague and friend.  
Lito Rodriguez: One of the Sensates, lives in Mexico City.  
Zakia Asalache: Journalist from Nairobi.  
Dani(ela) Velazquez: Lito and Hernando’s friend, who is living with them at the moment.  
Hernando Fuentes: Lito’s boyfriend  
Mariana Lupe: Interviewer in Mexico City, who focusses on movies and popstars.  
Nomi Marks: One of the Sensates, lives in San Francisco.  
Kala Dandekar: One of the Sensates, lives in Mumbai.  
Riley Blue (born Gunnarsdóttir): One of the Sensates, born in Iceland.  
Will Gorski: One of the Sensates, is a cop in the Chicago PD.  
Wolfgang Bogdanow: One of the Sensates, lives in Berlin.  
Sun Bak: One of the Sensates, lives in Seoul.

**Context storyline:**

Capheus has a bus and drives it for a job, with the help of Jela. Recently he has defeated some criminals who robbed the bus (against all odds, and with the help of Sun). This made his bus more popular and has gotten him a lot of attention. Jean-Claude Van Damme and his movies are a big inspiration for Capheus and he has now received the nickname ‘Van Damme’, just like his bus.  
Lito is going to his first movie-premiere after he was outed.

**Transcription:**

START SCENE

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130 Source: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5362622/?ref_=tt_ep_nx
131 Source: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5362622/fullcredits?ref_=tt_ov_wr#writers/
Capheus is driving his bus, a movie with Jean-Claude Van Damme is playing on the screen. The bus is filled with people, Jela in the front. As they arrive at their destination, a journalist and camera crew are waiting for them.

Cut to: Lito arrives on the movie premiere in a limo. Both Dani and Hernando get out of the car. They all walk onto the red carpet, Hernando and Dani on either side of Lito.

A FAN: (trying to get Lito’s attention) Lito!

LITO: (approaches the fan, who is holding a big heart-balloon) Hello. How are you?

The fan tries to give the balloon to Lito, who isn’t accepting it.

LITO: Nice to see you guys.

Lito finally accepts the balloon.

LITO: okay.

THE FAN: Gracias.

As Lito turn back towards the rest of the red carpet, he sees the poster for the movie. His character has been moved towards the back of the poster, not in the center of attention.

Cut to: Nairobi, bus terminal with the journalist (Zakia).

ZAKIA: I am reporting for Kobi Kihara.

Jela sees the journalist and approaches her, buttoning the buttons of his shirt.

JELA: (looking at the camera) Hello. I’m Jela.

ZAKIA: Where can we find the man they call Van Damme?

JELA: (still looking at camera) The man they… (turns towards Zakia) You sure not Jela?

ZAKIA: Van Damme.
JELA: Okay, so I will, uh, call… Van Damme. Just…

_Jela runs towards the bus, towards the window at the driver’s seat._

JELA: Capheus! Someone’s looking for you.

CAPHEUS: Who is it?

JELA: I don’t know her name. I don’t know who she is.

_Cut to: Lito’s premiere. An interviewer (Mariana) is trying to get his attention._

MARIANA: Lito Rodriguez. Long time no see.

LITO: (approaches her, together with Hernando and Dani) Mariana, thank you for coming.

MARIANA: What have you been up to?

LITO: Well, I… I am very excited about the premiere of this film. It’s one of my favorites.

MARIANA: Would you care to comment on the scandalous photos of you that recently went viral in the Internet?

LITO: Wow, Mariana, no friendly chit-chat, just right for the jugular.

_Cut to: Capheus is coming out of the bus and goes towards Zakia._

ZAKIA: So you’re the famous Van Damme?

CAPHEUS: I am. My name is Capheus. And what is your name?

ZAKIA: (ignoring his question) And this is your matatu?

CAPHEUS: Oh, yes. Yeah.

_Capheus points towards the bus as Jela moves people out of the way, so the bus is visible for the camera._
JELA: Move. You’re blocking the bus.

*Cut to Mexico City, red carpet.*

MARIANA: Are you denying the photos are real?

LITO: No, no, no. I… I did not say that.

MARIANA: So are you… a homosexual?

HERNANDO: It’s okay, it’s okay, it’s okay.

LITO: Can you explain to me why it matters?

MARIANA: It matters to your fans. If you are lying to them, they have the right to know.

*Cut to: Capheus in Nairobi, the bus terminal.*

ZAKIA: Tell our viewers why it is that you’re called Van Damme.

CAPHEUS: Have you ever seen ‘Lionheart’?

ZAKIA: No. I don’t watch movies like that.

CAPHEUS: (*chuckles*) Movies like what?

ZAKIA: Movies that glorify violence. Movies where the white man saves the world.

*Capheus and Jela are both shaking their heads.*

CAPHEUS: ‘Lionheart’ is not about any of those things.

*Jela whispers something into Capheus’ ear.*

CAPHEUS: It’s about courage.

JELA: (*while fistbumping with Capheus*) Courage.
Cut to: Lito at the premiere

LITO: Uh… I am very grateful to my fans. I know that, as an actor, all I tried to give them is something true, is something from my heart.

MARIANA: Then you were lying to them before?

HERNANDO: (interfering) Lito, come on. Let’s go.

MARIANA: (As they start walking away from her) Is this your lover then? Sorry, I didn’t recognize him with his clothes on.

LITO: (turning around) Do you… (walking back towards Mariana) Do you know what your problem is?

MARIANA: I don’t have a problem. I just want to understand—

LITO: You’re not trying to understand anything.

MARIANA: Are you admitting you’re gay or not?

LITO: No, you’re not trying to understand anything. Because…

At this point the other sensates ‘visit’ both Lito and Capheus and help them answer the interviewer’s questions. They ‘take the place’ of both Lito and Capheus, starting with Nomi at Lito’s premiere.

NOMI: …labels are the opposite of understanding.

ZAKIA: (in Nairobi) But Van Damme is white.

CAPHEUS: Yes.

ZAKIA: So even if it’s about courage, it’s about white courage.

CAPHEUS: (shaking his head) I’m sorry. Maybe I’m not understanding, but what does courage have to do with…
SUN: (taking Capheus’ place) … the color of a man’s skin?

We see Capheus taking Lito’s place and Lito taking Capheus’ place.

CAPHEUS: (taking Lito’s place) I was just a little kid…

LITO: (Mexico City) … who loved…

CAPHEUS: (taking Lito’s place) … movies. And the…

LITO: (taking Capheus’ place) … heroes I watched…

CAPHEUS: (taking Lito’s place) … made me feel like I was…

LITO: (taking Capheus’ place) … braver than I was.

CAPHEUS: (taking Lito’s place) Funnier.

LITO: (Mexico City) Smarter.

LITO: (taking Capheus’ place) They made me feel that I could do things that I…

CAPHEUS: (taking Lito’s place) … made me believe I could do things…

LITO: (Mexico City) … I didn’t think…

CAPHEUS: (Nairobi) … think I could do.

LITO: (Mexico City) But that boy who watched TV with his mama…

CAPHEUS: (Nairobi) … mama, and grandma, and aunties…

LITO: (Mexico City) … and aunties, is not the man who became an actor.

CAPHEUS: (Nairobi) … not the man who became a driver. And that driver is not the same…

LITO: (Mexico City) … person you see standing here.
MARIANA: And who is standing here?

ZAKIA: …ing here?

LITO: *Mexico City* Who am I? *(takes a breath)*

CAPHEUS: *Nairobi* Who am I?

This is where the taking place of Lito and Capheus starts accelerating and the things that are being said are echoed by the other Sensates. We see all of them in taking their place, being interviewed by Mariana and Zakia.

LITO: *(Mexico City)* Do you mean…

CAPHEUS: *(taking Lito’s place)* …where I’m from?
We see Capheus and his mother make their journey through the woods after they had to flee their home. Capheus is carrying his newly-born sister in his arms.

ECHO: Where I’m from?

Riley: *(taking Capheus’ place)* Do you mean where I’m from?
We see Riley, both current and younger Riley, wander into a cave in Iceland.

ECHO: What I one day might become? Where I’m from.

*We see Kala praying in the temple. We see Sun in court, passing her brother and father.*

ECHO: What I dream?
*We see Lito watching movies in a livingroom filled with family-members, trying to steal the show.*


*We see Capheus defeat one of the men who wanted to kill him.*

ECHO: What I do? What I’ve done?

LITO: *(Mexico City)* Do you mean…What you see?
*We see Lito shooting a big action-scene for his last movie. We see Lito naked, kissing Hernando’s shoulder.*
Understanding Queerness: Sexuality, Gender & Family in Sense8
Barbara Revak

We see Nomi naked on Lito’s red carpet. We see Nomi, current and younger Nomi, walk into the shower of her swim-club. We see current Nomi on her date with Amanita, naked.

ECHO: What you see or what I’ve seen?

We see Will in police uniform on Lito’s red carpet, in hiding, as a young boy watching a doctor do illegal experiments.

ECHO: Do you mean…

We see young Wolfgang watching the car he set on fire burn.

WOLFGANG: (taking Lito’s place) …what I do? What I’ve done?

We see Wolfgang kill his uncle.

ECHO: What I fear? What I fear?

We see Riley prepare meth, to knock Will out, so he can’t be used to track them.¹³²

ECHO: What I dream? What I dream?

We see current Will (without uniform and unshaved) on Lito’s red carpet and in Nairobi.

WILL: What I one day might become?

LITO: (Mexico City) Do you mean who I love?

ECHO: Who I love?

We see Nomi, again, on Lito’s red carpet, on her date with Amanita.

ECHO: Do you mean who I love? Who I love?

We see Kala on her wedding, dancing with Rajan, happy. We see Kala almost kissing Wolfgang.

ECHO: Do you mean who I love? Who I love?

We see Will and Riley together.

ECHO: what I’ve lost? Do you mean what I’ve lost?

We see Wolfgang and Kala kissing.

ECHO: What I’ve lost? Do you mean what I’ve lost?

We see Sun and her father when he came to visit her in prison.¹³³

¹³² This is through a mechanisms too complex to explain here.
¹³³ Shortly after that, he was murdered by her brother, so he wouldn’t have to go to prison.
RILEY: (taking Capheus’ place) Do you mean what I’ve lost?

We see Riley in the mountains of Iceland with her newly-born baby, who will die shortly after his birth.

LITO: (Mexico City) Who am I?

ECHO: Who am I? Who am I? Who am I? Who am I?

We see Kala in an elevator. We see Capheus dancing with his mother, both healthy. We see Will in uniform on Lito’s red carpet. We see Riley while she is DJing. We see Will and Riley together in bed. We see Nomi and Amanita during pride. We see Sun in a martial arts competition. We see Wolfgang smoking.

CAPHEUS: (Nairobi) I guess who I am is…

LITO: (Mexico City) …exactly the same as who you are.

CAPHEUS: (taking Lito’s place) Not better than.

LITO: (taking Capheus’ place) Not less than.

CAPHEUS: (Nairobi) Because there is no one who has ever been (taking Lito’s place) or will ever be…

LITO: (taking Capheus’ place) …exactly the same as either you (Mexico City) or me.

Mariana looks surprised and holds back on any other question. Capheus’ is visiting Lito, they smile at each other.

Now, Lito is visiting Capheus, they hug and laugh.

In Nairobi, Zakia is taking aback by Capheus’ response as well. Jela is laughing.

ZAKIA: (towards the camera crew) Did you get that?

JELA: That was good.

LITO: (Mexico City) Have a great night.

Lito is smiling as he walks away with Hernando and Dani.

ZAKIA: (extends her hand towards Capheus) Zakia.
CAPHEUS: (takes her hand and shakes it) Uh.. what?

ZAKIA: My name is Zakia.

CAPHEUS: Pleased to meet you.

END SCENE
ADDENDUM III
Addendum III: Moment 3: Family

Scene 1: Season 2, Episode 1 “Happy F*cking New year.” (1 hour 36 min 40-2 hours)
Official Episode Synopsis:
“The journey continues as these eight singular hearts and minds weave in and out of each other's lives finding deeper connections, learning darker secrets about one another and struggling to identify with more than just oneself.”

Technical Notes:
Directed by: Lana Wachowski
Written by: Lilly Wachowski & J. Michael Straczynski

List of characters (in order of appearance):
Riley Blue (born Gunnarsdóttir): One of the Sensates, born in Iceland.
Will Gorski: One of the Sensates, lives in Chicago.
Kala Dandekar: One of the Sensates, lives in Mumbai.
Wolfgang Bogdanow: One of the Sensates, lives in Berlin.
Lito Rodriguez: One of the Sensates, lives in Mexico City.
Hernando Fuentes: Lito’s boyfriend
Dani(ela) Velazquez: Lito and Hernando’s friend, who is living with them at the moment.
Bug: Nomi’s friend. Her and Amanita are currently hiding out at his place, a boat.
Nomi Marks: One of the Sensates, lives in san Francisco.
Amanita Caplan: Nomi’s girlfriend.
Felix: Wolfgang’s best friend.
Volker Bohm: A powerful man in Berlin, running one of the ‘Kingdoms’.
Rajan Rasal: Kala’s husband.
Estella Rodriguez: Lito’s mother.
Capheus Onyango: One of the Sensates, lives in Nairobi.
Shiro: Capheus’ mother.
Sun Bak: One of the Sensates, lives in Seoul.
Min-Jung: One of Sun’s cellmates, the oldest one.
Amanita’s 3dads: Amanita has 3 dads (because her mother doesn’t know who eventually got her pregnant). The 3 of them live together.

Source: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5031232/?ref_=ttep_ep1
Source: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3963682/?ref_=ttep_ep9
Grace: Amanita’s mother.
Whispers (Milton Bailey Brandt): The headhunter from the organization that wants the Sensates dead. He has the same ‘powers’ as them, and has produced a connection to Will, where he can visit Will and Will can visit him.
Michael Gorski: Will’s dad.
Soo-Jin: One of Sun’s cellmates.
Lina: One of Sun’s cellmates.
Fischer: An associate of Wolfgang’s aunt, plays a role in the Bogdanow’s ‘Kingdom’ in Berlin.

**Context storyline:**
All the Sensates are celebrating the holidays in their own way. Nomi and Amanita are still in hiding from the FBI, staying at Nomi’s friend Bug’s place. Will has to protect the cluster from BPO, because one of their agents, Whispers, has connected with them and can now ‘visit’ him whenever he wants. As a detergent for Whispers visiting him, Will is trying to ‘shut off’ his mind by using drugs.

**Transcription:**

**START SCENE**

*The Holiday-season is now officially started. Riley and Will are walking in a park in the snow. Kala is preparing a dinner. Wolfgang is painting the store’s window. Lito is arriving at his mama’s home with Hernando and Dani. Bug is taking selfies in his Christmas-outfit on his boat, which is decorated for the season.*

**BUG:** Chuckles Check it out!

**NOMI:** (also in a Christmas outfit) Neets, come on! We’re gonna be late.

**AMANITA:** (not yet in scene) One sec!

**FELIX:** (As he comes outside of the store and sees Wolfgang’s painting) What is this?

**WOLFGANG:** Evil Santa.

**WILL:** (As he is walking blindfolded, tightly holding Riley’s arm) I don’t know about this, Riley.
RILEY: Oh, come on. He has a family. He won’t be looking for you tonight.

WILL: I would if I were him.

RILEY: Sighs We have to have one night that we’re not afraid of him.

Berlin. A car arrives at the store. Wolfgang looks surprised. Two women and Volker Bohm come out of the car.

WOLFGANG: Felix, you better go inside.

FELIX: Come on. I can’t get shot again. I just came out of the hospital. That would be terrible plotting.

BUG: Going to Grace’s?

NOMI: I love her to pieces, but her idea of Christmas is like a triathlon. Christmas Kitchen for the homeless, children’s hospital, then home for dinner. Finally, midnight Queer Choir.

BUG: Chuckles. Sounds intense.

DANI: (Getting out of the car) Oh, my God, Lito! This is beautiful! You bought this for your mother?

LITO: Yeah. She, more than anyone, always believed in me. With the check from my first big movie, I wanted to tell her thank you.

A box is opened and a golden watch is revealed inside. (It is in Berlin. Volker is giving it to Wolfgang and/or Felix)

FELIX: Woaw! What is this for?
VOLKER: A token of my respect and gratitude. You did this city a huge service and it was high time someone said thank you.

RILEY: Ready?

WILL: Yeah.

*Riley undoes Will’s blindfold and smiles as she shows him where they are: a small pond that has been frozen over. There are candles around the pond lighting it.*


RILEY: Yeah.

WILL: I don’t know how to ice-skate.

RILEY: Yes, you do. Because I do.

RAJAN: *(as he enters their balcony, seeing Kala has prepared a meal and the table is filled with candles and lights)* Wow! Kala, what’s all this?

KALA: I felt like celebrating. *(She laughs and hugs Rajan.)*

BUG: I usually just hang with the virts.

NOMI: Virts?

BUG: You know, virtual family, online community? We’re all pretty tight. Though we don’t actually know each other. Well, that’s not true. In some ways, they know more about me than anybody. But we’ve never actually met, you know, physically. Make sense?

NOMI: *(smiling)* Yeah.
Lito is standing outside of his mom’s house, carrying a pile of gifts, preparing to go inside. Hernando Approaches him and puts a hand on his shoulder.

HERNANDO: Hey… whatever happens, I want you to know that I am here. Okay, come on.

They walk towards the house together.

Amanita opens the curtains of their room on the boat, revealing her costume. Nomi gasps.

AMANITA: Let’s X-mas!

NOMI: You look amazing!

AMANITA: I know, right?

They both laugh excitedly as Bug watches them and his phone. He is looks sad.

AMANITA: (To Bug) You coming?

BUG: (positively surprised) Really?

AMANITA & NOMI: Yeah.

BUG: (now almost crying from joy) Okay.

Lito enters his mother’s house. The table is set for a party, but the house is empty.

LITO: Mama? (As he puts down the gifts and enters the house even more) Mama? (looking around) Mama?

On one of the tables a couple of magazines with pictures of Lito and Hernando on the front page are displayed. When he sees them, Lito looks worried. He sighs.
His mama, Estella Rodriguez, enters the room and fills a glass of champagne.

ESTELLA: I always save your clippings. The good, the bad and the inevitable.

LITO: Mama…

ESTELLA: This wasn’t the hard part. And it wasn’t the friends thrusting the pictures in my face with their sincerest condolences. I never had so many friends call. Who knew I was so popular? (She laughs. Then addresses an imaginary crowd:) Dear friends, dear colleagues, dear all: Now that my famous movie-star son is here, let me thank each and every one of you for showing me your true colors… during this dark and difficult period. (as she raises the glass:) Truly.

LITO: Mama, I’m… I’m sorry.

ESTELLA: No. You have nothing to apologize for. (she sets down the glass, opening her arms to Lito) Come here, my baby penguin. Come here.

Lito walks towards her, his hands behind his back.

ESTELLA: Come here. Hey. (She holds his head in her hands, looking at him) I know you could have denied it all, like so many others. And you didn’t. And I have never been prouder of you.

LITO: Mama…

ESTELLA: Yes, I am your mama. And I always knew this day was coming.

LITO: (surprised) You knew?

ESTELLA: Of course. You were too good a dancer to be a straight boy.

She chuckles, so do Hernando and Dani who are standing close to the door, watching this conversation take place. Lito hugs his mama. She looks at Dani and Hernando, as they look back at her. Lito laughs and picks up his mama.

ESTELLA: Whoo! (she laughs and hugs Lito even tighter.)

LITO: I love you, mama.
Caphues and his mother, Shiro, are watching a movie.

SHIRO: Why do you like watching this silly movie every year?

CAPHEUS: I don’t know. I guess I like what it believes in.

SHIRO: What does it believe in?

CAPHEUS: People.

‘Hallelujah starts playing as we see a montage of all the Sensates (celebrating). Riley and Will are ice-skating. Wolfgang is smoking outside. Sun is in her isolation-cell. Kala and Rajan are dancing on their balcony, surrounded by candles. One of Sun’s cellmates, Min-Jung, comes and gives her some candy. Amanita’s three dads come to her mom’s house. Lito is walking in a procession of lights with his mother, Hernando and Lito. Wolfgang is exchanging gifts with Felix and some girls. Nomi, Amanita, Bug, Amanita’s mother and her three dads are all having dinner together. Capheus is watching a movie with his mom, they are both smiling. (The montage keeps switching between them.)

WILL: Hello, woman in my head.

RILEY: (smiles) Hello, man in my head.

Cut to: The Midnight Queer choir singing ‘Hallelujah’. Nomi is there with her family. And the other Sensates all visit. As they are watching the choir, their cluster-mother, Angelica appears on top of the stairs the choir is one, looking down at them.

Will and Riley are ice-skating. As they kiss, Whispers appear.

WHISPERS: Merry Christmas, Will.

Will ducks down, trying to cover his eyes.
RILEY: What?

WILL: No! No!

RILEY: What is it? Are you okay?

WILL: He’s here.

*Will is trying to get to the side of the pond (where their bags with the sedative are) without showing too much of his surroundings to Whispers.*

WHISPERS: I’m less interested in where you are, and more interested in where you should be. Shouldn’t you be home? Shouldn’t you be with your dad? He’s a good man, your father. He misses you. Don’t you miss him?

*Will is now visiting Whispers, who is in Chicago with Will’s dad, Michael, on his front porch.*

WILL: Dad.

MICHAEL: *(he is standing on a stool on the front porch, hanging lights. He looks unstable, drunk.)* So normally these… these would all be up. Will’d come over, we’d do it together. Have eggnog. But Will’s not here. He ain’t fucking here.

WILL: Dad… Dad.

*His dad can’t hear him, because he’s only visiting Whispers.*

WHISPERS: Let me help you.

MICHAEL: No, no, no. Nah, fuck it, fuck it. Forget it.

WHISPERS: *(As he helps Michael down)* Come here. Be careful. Uh-hu.

MICHAEL: Thank you.

WHISPERS: I probably shouldn’t have come, but…
MICHAEL: It’s okay, it’s okay.

WHISPERS: It’s just when I heard your son was mixed up in all of this, I couldn’t help but think about that young girl and everything we went through.

MICHAEL: Well, you know what we say in AA: You’re as sick as your secrets. *(Takes us chug from the glass he has been holding.)*

WHISPERS: *(To Will)* He doesn’t look well, does he?

MICHAEL: My son… is a good cop. Way better cop than I ever was.

WHISPERS: I am sure that will got himself into all this trouble with the best of intentions.

MICHEAL: Damn, right. He got that, um… terrorist. Malaki.

WHISPERS: If it was intentional. I was told that, uh… Will probably was working with Jonas Maliki.

WILL: *(To his dad, who can’t hear him)* Dad, dad, don’t listen to him.

MICHAEL: That’s bullshit.

WHISPERS: Well, he did use unauthorized codes to break into classified files, he was suspended, he did fee the country to Iceland, where he terrorized one of our research facilities. It’s all on security footage. These are just the facts.

WILL: They’re lies! They’re lies!

MICHAEL: I don’t know what the fuck is going on. *(He takes another chug.)*

WILL: Dad…

WHISPERS: *(To Will)* Should a man in his condition really be drinking?

*Whispers fills up Michael’s glass.*

WILL: *(To Whispers, who can hear him)* I’m going to fucking kill you.
MICHAEL; I’ll let you in on a little secret. I don’t care what my son did. I just want him to come home.

Whispers fills his glass again.


RILEY: (In the park is trying to give Will the sedative, so the visting stops) Okay.

She gives him the drugs and Will turns towards her, back from visiting Whispers.

RILEY: What happened?

WILL: He’s with my dad.

RILEY: Oh, Will.

WILL: I don’t know, Riley. I don’t know if I can… keep this up. I don’t know if I can beat him.

RILEY: You don’t have to. We do. And we will.

San Francisco, evening, in Grace’s house.

DAD #1: Grace said you were in some kind of trouble.

AMANITA: We’re working it out.

DAD #2: You know you can always come home.

DAD #3: The Man won’t find you up with us.

GRACE: Neither will email.

DAD #1: You know we love you.

DAD #2: Yes, we do, baby.
All chuckle, and her dads get up to hug her and kiss her on her check.

AMANITA: Thanks, dads!

Mexico. Morning. Lito and his family are having breakfast outside.

ESTELLA: You must stay for New Year’s.

LITO: Sorry, mama. New Year’s, it’s a bit complicated for us.

ESTELLA: Why?

LITO: Uhm…

HERNANDO: My parents were killed in a car accident on New Year’s.

ESTELLA: Oh. How terrible.

HERNANDO: They were beautiful people. I miss them. … On New Year’s, I like to think about… everything they gave me and how short it all can be.

Hernando looks at Lito and Lito takes his hand on the table.
Dani looks at their hands and almost starts crying.

LITO: Dani. (As he reaches over the table to hold her hand) Are you okay?

HERNANDO: Hey, Dani, what’s wrong?

DANI: My family is nothing like any of this. Every day you tip-toe around, hoping you don’t get in a fight. This was probably the best Christmas I have ever had. Is it horrible to think that it’s because it had nothing to do with my own family?

HERNANDO: Oh, no. Dani.

ESTELLA: You have been so kind to my son. You will always be welcome in my home.
Dani: Thank you. Thank you.

The door of Sun’s communal prison cell is opened. Her cell-mates (Min-Jung, Soo-Jin and Lina) look up as Sun finally joins them again, after a long period in isolation. They are surprised and happy to see her again. Min-Jung takes Sun’s head in her hands.

MIN-JUNG: Welcome home.

The 4 of them hug. And Sun cries with a smile as they hold her.

Wolfgang and Felix are at a fancy new-year’s party looking over the crowd in front of a public open-air concert.

FELIX: Laughs What the fuck? Wolfie, check out the losers down there!

They both laugh. Volker approaches them. (It is his party.)

VOLKER: Hey. Welcome, Wolfie.

WOLFGANG: Hello, Volker.

FELIX: This place is amazing!

VOLKER: It was built on the site of the very first sector of the wall that was pulled down.

FELIX: The tooth, huh?

VOLKER: All those people down there believed the wall was dividing the world. That East and West were separating people into “us” or “them”. But the real division, the only one that has ever mattered, was never horizontal. It’s vertical. Laughs. Enjoy yourselves.

Hernando and Lito are cleaning the grave of Hernando’s parents.
LITO: Careful. Okay.

HERNANDO: I’ll do it.

Kala is looking out over the city in the morning and fireworks on her balcony.

LITO: (Holding two different bouquets of flowers) These or these?


Wolfgang and Felix are looking out over the fireworks in Berlin. They are happy.

RAJAN: Kala?

KALA: Yeah.

RAJAN: Are you al right?

KALA: I…I couldn’t sleep.

RAJAN: (comes over and hugs her) It’s New Year’s.

KALA: Mmm.

RAJAN: Our first as a married couple.

KALA: It is.

RAJAN: Chuckles. That’s a nice thought.

Hernando and Lito are standing at the grave, holding hands.
HERNANDO: Since you were both taken from my life… I have not felt so loved by another person as I do by this man.

*He looks over at Lito. Lito smiles and holds Hernando.*

HERNANDO: You would love him, too.

RAJAN: Mmm. Goodness. When I think of my life just a year ago and now… how different things would be if my father had died or you had said no instead of yes. How fast everything can change.

*Wolfgang notices Volker pushing one of his family-members associates, Fischer. (They are rivaling for power in Berlin).*

VOLKER: In my fucking house?!

*Volker makes a gun-symbol out of his hands and points it towards Fischer.*

FISCHER: You’ll start a war!

*Volker sees Wolfgang watching and smiles at him. Wolfgang leaves, taking Felix with him.*

They are now walking on the streets of Berlin, fireworks all around them.

FELIX: Happy New Year!

WOLFGANG: Happy New Year!

FELIX: *(shooting of portable fireworks)* Whooo! Whoo-hoo-hoo-hoo!

FISCHER: *(approaching them on the street, distressed)* Please! Help me! Wolfgang! *(He runs towards Wolfgang and grabs him)* Please! Help me! Help me!

WOLFGANG: Get off of me!

*As Wolfgang pushes Fischer to the side, Fischer is shot by multiple men.*
WOLFGANG: Come on!

_Wolfgang and Felix run away. The men follow them and are now shooting at them._

FELIX: Get out of the way! Move it! This way!

_They find cover in the parking of a building._

WOLFGANG: (To Felix) Okay, You go this way! Get the fuck out of here. Go!

FELIX: No! I’m not leaving you!

_The men are approaching them. They both duck behind a car._

FELIX: Hey! Take these rockets.

WOLFGANG: Go on the other side!

_A fight scene emerges, where Felix and Wolfgang use the portable fireworks against the men. As Wolfgang is being pushed against a car and it seems like he can’t get away, Sun visits._

SUN: Be calm.

_Wolfgang calms down and Sun takes his place. Together, they escape from the hold. And keep fighting the men. Will visits and tells them to watch out for another guy. The three of them are now fighting these men._

_When Wolfgang has knocked down all the men (with the help of Sun and Will) all the Sensates appear, looking at Wolfgang._

WOLFGANG: Happy fucking New Year.

_END SCENE_