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Forget the *Story of the Stones* and Focus on the Crystal Gems: Educating Students
About Queerness and Developing Their Empathy with *Steven Universe*

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Abstract

Restrictions and censorship of queer media withhold important learning opportunities from students, transforming the classroom into a hostile environment. This thesis investigates the use of a children's animated series with positive queer representation, namely *Steven Universe*, to openly discuss queerness in the classroom. By incorporating information from previous literature, conducting a close watching as well as a multimodal content analysis of selected *Steven Universe* episodes, and designing exemplary lesson plans for the Austrian EFL classroom, this study shows that teachers can use *Steven Universe* to educate students about queerness and develop their empathy towards queer individuals, thereby fostering a safe classroom environment for everyone, especially queer students. In particular, the connection of fictional examples of queerness in *Steven Universe* with real problems in our contemporary society allows students to challenge gender stereotypes and critically reflect on previously held beliefs. Furthermore, several *Steven Universe* characters can serve as positive role models for the empathetic development of students, due to their kindness and respect towards others.

Keywords: *Steven Universe*, Education, Queerness, Empathy, The Other, Gender Performativity, Intersectionality, Queer Pedagogy

Zusammenfassung

Einschränkungen und Zensur von queeren Medien führen dazu, dass Schüler*innen wichtige Lernmöglichkeiten vorenthalten werden und sich das Klassenzimmer in ein feindseliges Umfeld verwandelt. Diese Masterarbeit erforscht die Verwendung einer animierten Kinderserie mit positiver queerer Repräsentation, nämlich *Steven Universe*, um Queerness offen im Unterricht zu besprechen. Mithilfe von Informationen aus bisheriger Forschung, einem Close Watching sowie einer multimodalen Inhaltsanalyse von ausgewählten *Steven Universe* Folgen und einem Entwurf von exemplarischen Stundenplänen für den Englischunterricht in Österreich, zeigt diese Studie, dass Lehrpersonen *Steven Universe* nutzen können, um Schüler*innen über Queerness zu unterrichten und deren Empathie gegenüber queeren Personen zu entwickeln, wodurch ein sicheres Schulumfeld für alle, vor allem queere Schüler*innen, geschaffen werden kann. Insbesondere die Verbindung von fiktiven Beispielen

von Queerness in *Steven Universe* mit realen Problemen in unserer zeitgenössischen Gesellschaft erlaubt es Schüler*innen, Geschlechterstereotype zu hinterfragen und bisherige Überzeugungen kritisch zu reflektieren. Des Weiteren können einige *Steven Universe* Charaktere als positive Vorbilder für die Entwicklung von Empathie von Schüler*innen dienen, auf Grund von ihrer Güte und Respekt gegenüber anderen.

Schlagwörter: *Steven Universe*, Bildung, Queerness, Empathie, der*die Andere, Geschlechterperformativität, Intersektionalität, Queere Pädagogik

Dedication

To Zoey, my little angel.

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1 Introduction

There is an unwarranted hostility towards queer individuals in the world, made visible by the banning and censoring of queer media in the United States of America¹ (PEN America; Collins 105; Blodgett and Salter 144-145). The spread of misinformation, deeming queerness “inappropriate”, is used as a justification to debar people from consuming queer narratives. By preventing an imagined harm, the legislature allows tremendous damage to be inflicted through the exclusion of queer voices. Consequently, students are denied valuable learning opportunities, and the classroom ceases to be a safe space, as queerness can no longer be openly discussed (Butler, *Who's Afraid of Gender* 99; Pollock et al. “Education Restriction” 60, 66; Pollock et al. “Florida Restrictions” 5-6). Nevertheless, this unfortunate development can be counteracted by educators in countries that do not impose restrictions on queer education. Unlike a number of American or Russian teachers, who may dread fines or the termination of their employment for addressing queerness in class (Pollock et al. “Education Restriction” 44; Queeramnesty), these educators are free to utilise narratives with positive queer representation in their lessons to teach students about queerness, encouraging them to reconsider queerphobic convictions, and develop their empathy for queer individuals. Austrian teachers, for instance, are encouraged to provide students with opportunities to challenge gender stereotypes and reflect on previously held beliefs, developing their critical thinking skills and establishing a classroom environment imbued with respect and appreciation for diversity. The children’s animated series *Steven Universe* serves as an exemplary teaching material to achieve these aims, as it features inclusive language, diverse depictions of genders, and counterstereotypes (BMB, *Lehrplan AHS* “Dritter Teil”, “Vierter Teil”; BMB, *Grundsatzlerlass* 5-7; BMB, *Unterrichtsmittel*, 13).

Steven Universe was created by Rebecca Sugar and aired from 2013 until 2019 on Cartoon Network. It centres around the experiences of the eponymous boy, who is half-human and half-Gem², a magical being of light. This coming-of-age story incorporates science-fiction as well as fantasy elements and is set in an alternate reality, the fictional town of Beach City, where Steven lives with his caretakers Garnet, Amethyst and Pearl. They belong to the Crystal Gems, a rebel group that protects Earth from the colonising efforts of the Great Diamond Authority,

¹ This focus on the United States of America stems from the impact U.S. books and series have on the global market. Austrians consuming media produced in the U.S. would therefore be affected by potential media censorship and cancellations.

² The term „Gem“ (capitalised) will be used to refer to a person, and “gem” to a body part.

the leaders of Homeworld³. The series features a diverse cast of characters as well as themes ranging from addressing one's emotions to long-term effects of traumatic experiences. While earlier episodes depict Steven going on little adventures with his family and friends, eventually the show focuses more on the horrendous nature of war. The series' queer undertones as well as messages of peace, love, and acceptance make it suitable for teaching about queerness and helping students develop empathy. Similar to other children's animated series, such as *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* or *The Owl House*, *Steven Universe* offers viewers positive queer representation. Moreover, these series are suitable for students, as they explore gender identity and sexuality, among other topics, using child-friendly language and no sexually explicit scenes. However, unlike *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* or *The Owl House*, in which queerness is normalised and remains unquestioned, *Steven Universe* also addresses punitive consequences of nonconformity, in connection with societal norms on Homeworld⁴. In addition to this, Steven is kinder and more empathetic than the main characters of the other animated series, providing students with a better role model.

Previous studies about *Steven Universe* have focused on the series' challenge of gender norms by portraying the female-presenting characters as strong fighters and the male main character as empathetic and kind (Barai; Barr et al.; Valentín). While Aneesh Barai analysed the series from an environmental perspective, in particular its teachings of empathy for non-human lifeforms, Julian Barr et al. examined the masculine superhero genre, exploring care as a superpower, and Al Valentín investigated the intersecting societal categories gender, race, and disability in *Steven Universe*. Other scholars have researched depictions of queerness in children's media and the censorship thereof (Collins; Yadav and Kalia; Juffer; M. Moore; Blodgett and Salter; Kennedy). Corinne E. Collins, for example, investigated non-normative portrayals of life and the normalisation of queerness in *Steven Universe*. Similarly, Bridget Blodgett and Anastasia Salter studied the problem of queerbaiting and the use of fantasy in *Steven Universe* to depict queerness. Moreover, the research of Komal Yadav and Nipun Kalia as well as Mandy E. Moore has shown that queerness is not an "adult topic" and children should be included in queer activism. Lastly, Fen Kennedy as well as Jane Juffer examined the

³ Homeworld is the planet of origin of the Gems.

⁴ The norms on Homeworld dictate that a Gem may fuse with another Gem of the same kind, as a battle strategy, to enhance their power. However, Gems of different types are not allowed to fuse, as their fusion serves no greater societal merit. Gems are made to serve a purpose, from which they should not stray; for instance, Diamonds are leaders, Rubys are soldiers, and so forth. Hence, fusions across Gem types defy societal norms, as they exist out of their own volition.

possibility of circumventing censorship with visual portrayals of queerness, such as cross-gem fusions, in *Steven Universe*. It is also worth noting that several of these *Steven Universe* scholars have connected the series to concepts that this thesis also applies. For instance, Barai mentions Emmanuel Levinas' conception of the Other and Barr et al., Collins, as well as Valentín refer to Judith Butler's understanding of gender performativity in their studies. However, none of these studies have investigated how *Steven Universe* can be used in an educational context, to provide students with visual examples of queerness and diversity.

Therefore, in this study, I aspire to answer the question of how teachers can use the animated series *Steven Universe* to foster a safe and inclusive classroom environment. In particular, I aim to investigate how this series can be used to educate students about queerness and develop their empathy towards queer individuals. I surmise that students can gain new insights about queerness by watching *Steven Universe*, as the series actively reverses gender stereotypes, for instance, by portraying Connie as Steven's knight and Steven as compassionate as well as pacifist. Additionally, *Steven Universe* uses verbal, visual, and auditive elements to implicitly address queerness. For example, discussions and depictions of Garnet as a cross-gem fusion, coupled with the recurring melody of the love song "Stronger Than You", provide a number of scenes with queer undertones. Due to the indirect manner, in which queer topics are explored in the series, it is of utmost importance that students do not merely watch the episodes but also discuss them in the plenary, making these queer instances more tangible. Furthermore, I expect students to be able to develop empathy towards queer individuals by watching *Steven Universe*. Indeed, students may learn from Steven's empathetic behaviour towards family and friends, as well as strangers, antagonists, and "monsters"⁵. Similar to the character development of Lars in the fifth and last season of the show, students may be positively influenced by Steven's pacifism and kindness. In addition to this, I assume that by educating students on queerness and developing their empathy towards queer individuals, the classroom can be transformed into a safe and inclusive learning environment. This safe space will be free of censorship, allowing open discussions of queer topics, positive and authentic queer representation that normalises queerness, and inclusive language, thereby showing that diversity is valued.

This thesis begins with an explanation of relevant philosophical theories, including Judith Butler's conception of gender performativity, Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, Emanuel Levinas' notion of the Other, and Deborah P. Britzman's Queer

⁵ Gems on Earth were corrupted by Yellow, Blue, and White Diamond's powers, making them lose themselves and turn into corrupted Gems or "monsters".

Pedagogy framework. The description of the theory and concepts will be followed by a cultural contextualisation of this study, regarding the censorship of queer media in the United States of America. Thereafter, the children's animated series *Steven Universe* will be analysed. First, a close watching as well as a multimodal content analysis of five preselected episodes – “Alone Together” (Season 1 Episode 36), “The Answer” (Season 2 Episode 21), “Off Colors” (Season 5 Episode 3), “Reunited” (Season 5 Episode 23), and “Change Your Mind” (Season 5 Episode 29-32) – will be conducted. Subsequently, three exemplary lesson plans for the Austrian EFL classroom, which can potentially be used by teachers worldwide to educate students about queerness and develop their empathy for the queer Other, will be proposed. Lastly, the findings will be discussed, noting the limitations of this study as well as opportunities for further research. I hope to show that *Steven Universe* can be used to transform the classroom into a safe space for everyone, especially queer students, where queerness can be openly discussed and diversity is valued as well as respected.

2 Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity and Kimberlé Crenshaw's coinage of intersectionality, focusing on the changeability of social norms as well as the multifacetedness of individuals, which demands an authentic portrayal of queerness in media. This is followed by diverse conceptualisations of the Other, highlighting Emmanuel Levinas' understanding of the Other as a respected teacher. Adapting these theoretical understandings for the Austrian classroom, educating students on queerness and developing their empathy for the queer Other can be achieved by learning *from* the Other through Deborah P. Britzman's Queer Pedagogy framework and guidelines from the Austrian curricula as well as other legal frameworks.

2.1 Gender Performativity

In their⁶ writings, Judith Butler posits that an essentialist or natural gender does not exist; there is no true way to live as a woman or man: gender is a social construct. Hence, there should be no true notion of gender, no instance of a right or wrong way to present one's gender

⁶ In accordance with the “about the Author” section in their latest book (*Who's Afraid of Gender?*), the pronouns they/theym will be used to refer to Judith Butler.

(“Performative Acts” 528; *Gender Trouble* 11, 180). However, people possess naturalised knowledge in connection with the appearances and behaviours of women and men (*Gender Trouble* xxii). For instance, it is considered normal for women to wear dresses and for men to dress in a suit (Kinney 24, 26); during a formal event, such as a wedding, it would be unusual to observe the inverse. Moreover, in relation to female- and male-coded behaviour, scholars have provided lists of stereotypical attributes present in media, such as the depiction of women as affectionate, emotional (sensitive and prone to crying), and submissive (weak, well-behaved, and unknowledgeable with regard to science), in comparison to the portrayal of men as aggressive, leading (intelligent and analytical), and insensitive (not allowed to show emotions) (Reinhard and Olson 254; Aubrey and Harrison 116, 127, 135; Thompson and Zerbinos 655, 668; Baker and Raney 28-29, 36-38; Kinney 24, 26, 28; Vonguru and Menon 553-556).

This implicit knowledge stems from historically and culturally contingent societal norms, which people conform to, in order to be perceived as a woman or man (“Performative Acts” 522). These norms can foster a sense of belonging to a select community, but, due to their restrictive nature, they might also cause discomfort (*Undoing Gender* 95). As Butler remarks, the gender binary only allows for people to be placed in either a feminine or masculine category, and heterosexual conventions do not allow for queer identities (*Gender Trouble* 84, 41). Consequently, people whose gender identities and sexual orientations do not fit into these societal norms might be dehumanised, their lives said to be worth less than those of others, and violence against them might not be recognised as such (*Gender Trouble* 142; *Undoing Gender* 24-25, 30). Although Butler terms essentialist and stable conceptions of gender as “social fictions” (“Performative Acts” 524; *Gender Trouble* 178), they also emphasize that not adhering to current prescriptive gender norms may lead to punitive consequences, such as harassment and violence (“Performative Acts” 522, 528; *Gender Trouble* 178; *Undoing Gender* 55). Intentional misgendering, the use of epithets, refusal of service (for instance, in healthcare), or physical attacks due to a person’s gender identity or nonconformity to gender norms, would be examples of gender-based violence (Kinney, 65-66, 73).

However, gender norms and the socially constructed naturalised knowledge they entail can be reworked (*Gender Trouble* xxiii; *Undoing Gender* 218). Butler’s concept of gender performativity is invaluable for discussing the transformative nature of societal conventions pertaining to gender (Kirby 228), even though they might consider it to be somewhat outdated (*Who’s Afraid of Gender* 23). Building on Simone de Beauvoir’s (273) notion that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”, Butler postulates a person is not born with a gender but

acquires it (*Gender Trouble* 142). Influenced by John Langshaw Austin's conception of performatives – utterances, in which the speaker does something, such as getting married by pronouncing the words “I do” (Austin 12-13) – Butler conceptualises gender as a doing (*Gender Trouble* 33; *Undoing Gender* 1). They suggest that gender performances are both individual as well as collective experiences (“Performative Acts” 525; *Gender Trouble* 178-179). Specifically, Butler defines gender performativity as “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (*Gender Trouble* 43-44). Hence, gender identity is constructed through repeated movements and gestures that are constantly renewed and revised. Due to this iterative element of gender performativity, gender norms can either be reproduced or altered (“Performative Acts” 519, 523; *Gender Trouble* 178-179; *Undoing Gender* 52, 126). For instance, if men continue to wear a suit to formal events, the norm that this is an acceptable piece of clothing for men is upheld; however, if a number of men repeatedly decide to don dresses instead, the norm may change, allowing men to choose between wearing a suit or a dress.

Moreover, understanding gender identity as constructed through repeated acts, combats essentialist notions of a “true” gender, showing that gender is fluid and susceptible to change (“Performative Acts” 520; *Gender Trouble* 176, 179). A person may do their gender in accordance with societal norms, in defiance of them – for instance, through drag or cross-dressing – or use fantasy to imagine identities beyond the restrictive gender binary (*Gender Trouble* 143, 174-175; *Undoing Gender* 28-29, 126). Butler posits that “man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one” (*Gender Trouble* 10). Indeed, women may have masculine traits, such as being highly intelligent or aggressive, and men may embody the feminine by showing their emotions and being submissive. Nevertheless, a woman with masculine traits should not be regarded as less of a woman (*Gender Trouble* 32). Terms such as “masculine” and “feminine” reveal the exclusionary nature of gender categories, as there are diverse ways of being a woman, a man, or someone beyond the gender binary. To promote inclusivity, the current gender categories need to be reworked and expanded (*Gender Trouble* 143, 162; *Undoing Gender* 223-224). However, gender is not the only aspect that constitutes a person; identities are intersectional, and other categories such as ethnicity or class ought to be considered as well (*Gender Trouble* 6).

2.2 Intersectionality and Positive Queer Representation

Although the concept of intersectionality has existed for quite some time, for instance, in the “twoness” William Edward Burghardt Du Bois wrote about when trying to explain his self as a being constituted by both his Blackness and his American citizenship in 1903 (Du Bois 9-10), the term itself first appeared in 1989, used by Kimberlé Crenshaw to highlight the specific oppression that Black women face (Carbado et al. 303; Chhimwal, “Intersectionality” 102). With the analogy of a four-way intersection, where one street represents sexism, and another serves as a stand-in for racism, Crenshaw states that considering an accident on this intersection from the perspective of sexism or racism alone would be insufficient (“Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex” 149). She explains that when issues of discrimination are discussed, the focus lies primarily on the most privileged individuals of a certain group, for instance, white women or Black men, with regard to sexism or racism, respectively. The concerns of more marginalised members, such as Black women, will often only be acknowledged if they coincide with those of the more privileged members (Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex” 139-140, 143, 149-151; Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins” 1244, 1252, 1298). If there is an issue of intersectional discrimination that specifically concerns Black women but not white women or Black men, these types of cases cannot be dealt with as the sum of sexism and racism; the focus needs to be on Black women in particular (Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex” 140, 149). For instance, if an establishment were to forbid entry to Black women but not white women or Black men, this oppressive decision is neither sexist nor racist, but an intersectional issue, specifically targeting Black women. Intersectional frameworks can then be used to make the experiences of intersectionally oppressed people understandable. In feminism, these frameworks can be used to emphasise the experiences of women of Colour, queer women, and women with disabilities, among others, and activist movements such as Black Lives Matter or LGBTQIA* rights protests use them to highlight the intersecting oppressions that marginalised people face (Chhimwal, “Intersectionality” 102-104).

More than three decades after her first publication on intersectionality, Crenshaw et al. reframed the concept with regard to Critical Race Theory (Crenshaw et al. 14). Intersectional frameworks have been used by scholars of diverse disciplines (Carbado et al. 304), for instance, Girish Chhimwal, who has found that intersectionality can be useful for challenging stereotypes in media, as it promotes diversity and the portrayal of marginalised perspectives (“Intersectionality” 103). Sharing insights on intersectional oppressions across disciplines is

greatly encouraged, as it promotes empathy towards other marginalised people as well as collaboration in the fight against oppression (Cho et al. 792-794, 804, 807; Chhimwal, “Intersectionality” 105). However, Crenshaw et al. also note that the concept has not always been applied correctly. Intersectionality should not be understood as an addition of axes of oppressions, nor should different intersectional experiences be equated; for instance, the experiences of a queer disabled poor white woman are not comparable to those of a Black woman (1, 4). Indeed, the interplay between privilege and discrimination is complex, as exemplified by, for instance, a queer white woman, who might experience both simultaneously (Chhimwal, “Intersectionality” 104). Moreover, categories, such as hair colour, are irrelevant to intersectionality, as they do not “shed light on the nature of institutional oppressions” (Crenshaw et al. 4, 14). A question has also surfaced, regarding the static or dynamic nature of the intersectional subject (Cho et al. 785-787). Categories such as gender, sex, class, body size, etc., may change, and with them the privilege or oppression that is experienced; however, people cannot change the colour of their skin, the intersectional subject will remain static in that respect. Having addressed these issues, Crenshaw et al. conclude that intersectionality should not be separated from its Black feminist origin, as racism is omnipresent in society (2, 5-6, 16) and, thus, race will continue to be an essential characteristic of a person’s identity, connected to privilege or discrimination. Nevertheless, the concept of intersectionality can continue to be used in diverse disciplines to analyse the individual experiences of a person, for instance, in an analysis of the portrayal of queerness in media.

Television networks in the United States were forbidden from featuring queer characters until the late 1960s (Edwards 29). Once this ban was lifted and queer characters slowly began appearing on television, they were oftentimes ridiculed, killed off, or portrayed as villains (Edwards 26, 30; Gross 27). This can be exemplified by Carmilla in *Carmilla*, Frank-N-Furter in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, or Herbert in *Tanz der Vampire*. To avoid on-screen depictions of romantic or sexual queer love, queer characters would sometimes also be killed after their relationship to another queer character was canonised (Gross 32; Moritz 128, 136); Joanne Lambert in *Hotel* or Villanelle in *Killing Eve* are exemplary of this trend. In addition to this, flat characters were (and occasionally still are) common. Stereotypical tropes include the flamboyant gay (Chhimwal, “Challenging Stereotypes” 86), the gay best friend (Bittner 39), or the greedy bisexual, who is unsatisfied with one partner (Corey 199). They are exemplified by Enrique Salvatore in *Legally Blonde*, Damian Leigh in *Mean Girls*, and Piper Chapman in *Orange is the New Black*, respectively. These stereotypical portrayals of queerness can

negatively influence people's attitudes and behaviours towards queer individuals as well as their own self-worth (Chhimwal, "Challenging Stereotypes" 84-85).

However, in recent years, there have also been more positive, multifaceted portrayals of queer characters, potentially due to increased diversity among media creators (Chhimwal, "Challenging Stereotypes" 85). For instance, Abby McEnany in *Work in Progress*, who is a lesbian struggling with body image issues and her mental health (Corey 40-41), Aaron Baker in *The Fosters*, who is portrayed as a happy and complete transgender person in a healthy relationship, with his gender identity being accepted and not much discussed (Thomson 6), and Nick Nelson in *Heartstopper*, who clarifies that he is bisexual, when people mislabel him as gay, and subverts the harmful tropes of the hypersexual and unfaithful bisexual with his kind nature (Allen 199, 214, 220). Instead of having queerness as their one defining trait, these characters are depicted with intersectional identities, illustrating their unique personalities. Furthermore, all of these shows do not only feature one queer character to simulate diversity, but a range of positive and accurate portrayals of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (Corey 44; Thomson 3; Allen 222). Authentic depictions of the multifaceted experiences of queerness are of utmost importance, as they counter prevalent stereotypes and misconceptions, reassuring queer individuals that their identities are valid. They also promote empathy as well as understanding among allies, which may positively influence social change (Chhimwal, "Challenging Stereotypes" 86-87; Bittner 39-40, 44).

2.3 Learning *from* the Other

There are several conceptions of the Other. Researchers Nikola Doubková et al. differentiate between an internal and external otherness, specifying that the Other has been theorised to exist in a person's mind or materialise as an entity outside oneself. They proceed to classify the conceptions of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel as well as those of psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan as examples of an internal Otherness. The writings of Emmanuel Levinas, on the other hand, are deemed to be exemplary of an external Other, according to the scholars (Doubková et al. 1416).

Hegel presents one of the first notions of otherness, using it to explain the formation of the self by discerning one's own existence from that of an Other. He creates a master-slave dialectic to illustrate the relationship between the self and the Other, denoting a power asymmetry, in terms of recognition; the master dominates the slave (Pinkard 70-71). Following Hegel's narrative of domination, Simone De Beauvoir exemplifies the Other as women in their subordinate

relationship to men (De Beauvoir 16) and Edward Said focuses on the power asymmetry between the Occident and Orient (Said 1-2). These conceptions of the Other have lain the groundwork for what is contemporarily understood as Othering (Ellis and Meyer 1-2; Doubková et al. 1416). Othering may occur, for instance, in education, when a group of people are presented as “different”, whereby an asymmetrical “us” versus “them” dynamic is formed (Pickering 48, 71).

Lacan, building on Freud’s early work (Fink xii), introduced the term otherness into psychoanalysis (Doubková et al. 1419). In his early writings, Freud is said to distinguish between the ego – the I, the consciousness, the reason – and the unconscious or id (Storr 60-63; Allison 1063-1064, 1066-1067, 1069). Lacan also proposed an opposition between the ego or self and the unconscious or Other. In his theories on the Other as language, he postulates that when we utter unintentional words, such as slips of the tongue, it is the Other speaking to us via our unconscious (Fink 3-4). These linguistic blunders are described by Lacan as “chains of quasi-mathematical inscriptions” (Fink 21) that need to be deciphered, as they stem from what has been passively registered by us, appearing anew in our speech (Fink 9-10, 23). For instance, asking “Could you hand me the remote?”, but meaning “phone”, could happen due to an absentminded glance to the television.

Levinas, on the other hand, focuses on an external relation between the I and the Other, denoting a relationship between a conscious individual and another person. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas describes the I or the same as having an identity that is not fixed; it changes, necessitating the I to re-identify itself. At first, the I exists oblivious to the Other, in a world of enjoyment and egoism, where it first defines itself. It does not create its identity as a negation of the Other, the so-called not-Other, but in its egoism (Levinas 36, 38, 62, 134). This differs from Said’s conception of the Other, in which the I uses the Other to define itself (Said 1-2); the relationship between the I and the Other in Levinas’ text is more complex. Levinas pictures the Other as “the stranger, the widow, and the orphan, to whom I am obligated” (215, 251). The Other manifests in speech as someone gentle and new, a being that is more than what I can ever imagine them⁷ to be. Furthermore, the Other appears with an absolute alterity, incomparable to the self, and is addressed with the formal “vous” instead of the familiar “tu” (Levinas 75, 87, 96, 101-102, 150, 219).

⁷ They/them pronouns will be used for the Other. Levinas uses both he/him and she/her pronouns for the Other at different points in *Totality and Infinity* (Large 66; Levinas 39, 258). While other scholars (eg. Fink, Todd, Crowe) decided to use feminine pronouns, I chose a more neutral option.

Indeed, the relationship between the I and the Other is shaped by asymmetry; the Other dominates the I as its master and teacher (Levinas 51, 53, 180, 215, 251). Although this power asymmetry may be interpreted as similar to that present in Hegel's master-slave dialectic (Pinkard 70-71), De Beauvoir's conception of the woman Other (16), or Said's understanding of the West as the not-East (1-2), in Levinas' conceptualisation, the Other is the superior one, not the one who is dominated. In addition to this, Levinas' Other does not exploit their supremacy by oppressing the I as a master would a slave.

In conversation, which Levinas sees as an ethical relation, the Other appears as a teacher, giving the I knowledge that the I cannot gain from within itself; therein it differs from Socrates' maieutics, in which the knowledge was already present in the student. The I learns from the Other. As soon as the I welcomes the Other, the Other calls into question the I and its freedom, its "joyous possession of the world"; Levinas terms this "ethics" (43, 51, 75-76, 84-85, 180, 295). By welcoming the Other, the I begins to feel morally conscious and feelings of shame and guilt drive it to take responsibility, an action that Levinas describes as an apology to the Other. This does not limit the freedom of the I but promotes it. Thus, Levinas characterises the relationship between the I and the Other as one of hospitality and service (84, 86, 200, 252, 300). Overall, I have interpreted Levinas' conception of the Other as one that begins with a person living a privileged life, oblivious to those left marginalised, due to various circumstances, but by coming into contact with the Other, these privileged people feel shame for their previous ignorance, deciding to take responsibility and help the Other.

In connection with learning from the Other, I would like to highlight three aspects: the possibility of the I being an Other to the Other, the distinction between learning *about* and learning *from* the Other, and the requirement of the Other's (physical) presence. Levinas has designated the Other as teacher and the I as learner (51, 180). Due to their asymmetrical relationship as well as the absolute alterity of the Other, William Large posits that these roles are immutable, writing "I am not the other to the other, and the other is not an I to me" (35); accordingly, it can be inferred that the Other would remain the teacher and the I the learner. However, other scholars have understood Levinas differently, proposing that the I can, in fact, be an Other to the Other (Treanor 23) and that teachers may assume the role of learners (Todd 31). This is reminiscent of Paulo Freire's categories of the teacher-student and the student-teacher, which describe a learning process based on communication, in which teaching and learning occur both through the students and the teacher (80). Therefore, I believe that the I can

be an Other from the perspective of the Other and assume the role of teacher; nevertheless, both the I and the Other retain their absolute difference in terms of their identity.

Learning from the Other further requires a semantic clarification, as there is a fundamental difference between learning *about* and learning *from*. According to Sharon Todd, learning *about* the Other would mean reducing an irreducibly complex individual (Goodman and Freeman 9) with language that I have at my disposal, effectively de-Othering them, by making them into an “object of *my* comprehension” (Todd 8-9, 15). When teachers speak for another group of people, a learning *about* takes place, which may essentialise characteristics of the Other, effectively misrepresenting them by leaving their voices unheard (Welply 88; Pickering 69, 73, 78). Learning *from* the Other, on the other hand, exposes me to the unknowable Other; their absolute difference is upheld, as they teach me about their suffering, which can affect me and “bring me more than I contain” (Levinas 51; Todd 15, 30). Todd proposes that students can develop responsibility towards the Other, prior to understanding them, by listening to the Other and experiencing love as well as guilt – both understood as feelings of concern – from hearing their stories (62, 66-67, 113, 135). Other scholars have also stressed the importance of giving the Other a voice, learning from them by listening to them speak, without rationalising their stories, and giving them undivided attention, to show that they are welcome and respected (Todd 121-122, 131; Alexakos and Pierwola 41; Crowe 458).

Regarding the development of empathy for the Other, Todd writes that empathy as “putting ourselves in the other’s shoes” would mean rationalising the Other, learning *about* them (51, 53, 62). I propose a different conception of empathy, based on the concept of personhood. Although everyone’s stories are different and intersectional oppressions are incomparable (Crenshaw et al. 4), I am convinced that we can feel empathy for the Other because they are a person; we are connected through our humanity. Hence, I would define empathy as feelings of *philoxenia* – the love towards a stranger – coupled with grief, in terms of anger and sadness, about injustices happening to people. To exemplify, when a trans man is hurt due to his sexuality, I need not compare his existence to mine, as a cis woman, to feel empathy; he keeps his alterity and I develop responsibility, wanting to end these injustices and protect the Other. By listening to the Other’s stories of injustice and learning *from* them, I believe that students can develop empathy.

Lastly, learning from the Other through conversation can take different forms. Although Levinas speaks of face-to-face encounters with the Other (13), both Large and Todd assert that conversations with the Other are possible without their physical presence. Indeed, the Other

may appear as an “enigmatic presence” (Large 34) or “through the narratives of texts or films” (Todd 145). These encounters with difference, whether in reality or mediated through books or series, can teach students to think differently and change their attitudes by learning *from* the Other (Todd 3, 20, 27, 29). Thus, as alluded to in the previous section, positive depictions of the queer Other, for instance, in books or television series, can teach readers and viewers empathy and understanding (Chhimwal, “Challenging Stereotypes” 86; Bittner 44). Nevertheless, in order for learning to occur, an encounter with the Other ought to be discussed in the plenary as well.

2.4 Queer Pedagogy and Austrian Teaching Guidelines

Educating students on queerness can be conceptualised as a learning *from* the queer Other. To connect this theoretical knowledge of the Other as our teacher with practical pedagogical insights, Deborah P. Britzman’s conception of Queer Pedagogy is particularly useful. Britzman proposes a Queer Pedagogy that focuses on reconceptualising what is understood as “normal” and “different”, questioning and deconstructing normalcy (“Stop Reading Straight” 227; Neto 591; Luhmann 117). Thinking of *queer* as a verb, meaning “to challenge [the] core meaning [of something]” (Mayo 144), Britzman can be said to queer the hitherto unquestioned normalcy. Thus, instead of integrating new knowledge into pre-existing categories, old certainties are being rethought in a process she terms “unlearning” (“Stop Reading Straight” 220; “Strange Techniques” 293, 297).

Normalcy can be characterised by heteronormativity, which is omnipresent in school curricula and coursebooks, encouraging binaries and excluding queerness. By assuming that everyone is heterosexual and conforming to the gender binary, queerness, as well as possibilities of gender nonconformity, are erased. Hence, teachers ought to be aware of this heterocentric worldview and problematise it (Neto 589, 600; Mayo 139; Atay and Pensoneau-Conway 3). For instance, categories such as “feminine” and “masculine” can be queered, inviting a contemplation of identity beyond binary systems (Britzman, “Stop Reading Straight” 212, 226; Britzman, “Strange Techniques” 305). Furthermore, this “teaching against-the-grain” (Bryson and de Castell 288) may encompass the use of inclusive language – avoiding phrases such as “girls and boys”, as they render gender nonconforming students invisible – or critically examining textbooks on heteronormativity, supplementing them with self-made materials. These classroom practices greatly promote inclusivity, creating a safe space for *all* students (Mayo 145; Neto 590, 595, 600-601).

Another way in which heteronormativity can be challenged is by including marginalised voices (Atay and Pensoneau-Conway 7; Neto 598; Mayo 142; Todd 39). Although it is certainly important to make queerness visible in the classroom, for instance, by giving examples of famous queer people or reading stories written by queer authors, representation alone is not enough. Indeed, stereotypical depictions ought to be rejected in favour of authentic and positive portrayals of queer individuals (Britzman, “Stop Reading Straight” 213, 219; Bittner 44; Luhmann 111). Moreover, it is crucial to include diverse depictions of queerness to avoid generalisations; an autobiography of a queer person, for instance, offers only one insight into a queer life, and should not be understood as a universalising narrative (Bittner 38, 41; Bryson and de Castell 289; Mayo 145). In addition to this, the binary of “the normal and the queer” ought to be challenged; the queer Other should not be portrayed as abnormal. Subsequently, the conception of normalcy can be expanded, encompassing the queer Other (Britzman, “Stop Reading Straight” 217, 226; Britzman, “Strange Techniques” 294, 305; Luhmann 111-112).

In relation to the normal – queer binary, Britzman has also expressed a dislike for the term “tolerance”, to which she attributes an exclusionary us-versus-them dynamic. She explains that if the queer Other is presented as someone different, who ought to be tolerated, this can create “the tolerant normal and the tolerated subaltern”, a relation in which the Other would be oppressed. Consequently, Britzman advocates for this binary to be exceeded and the queer Other to be regarded as normal and not merely tolerated (“Stop Reading Straight” 221, 226-227; “Strange Techniques” 298, 305; Atay and Pensoneau-Conway 2). It is important to note that difference, as conceptualised here, has a negative connotation, indicative of Othering. This differs from Levinas’ conception of the Other, in which alterity is valued (Levinas 200). Nevertheless, it would not be a laudable endeavour to merely tolerate the Other, even when they are conceptualised more positively. Thus, instead of pursuing tolerance as an educational objective, it would be worthwhile to consider respect or my conception of empathy as a teleological goal. Cris Mayo (133, 139, 145) asserts that teaching respect is profitable for everyone, adding that teaching students about intersectionality can advance their appreciation of individuality, which may help normalise queerness.

Another aspect that needs to be addressed is queerphobia in school. The incessant bullying of queer students due to their sexual orientations or gender nonconformity prevents the classroom from being a safe learning environment (Mayo 133). Indeed, when educating students on queerness, the teacher may be faced with hostility and what Susanne Luhmann terms “ignorance”, denoting a resistance to knowledge. Even the most positive and authentic

portrayals of the queer Other may not change the negative attitudes of these “ignorant” students (Luhmann 116). Nonetheless, educators should not be dissuaded from teaching queer subject matters. There are myriad topics that students may dislike, and whether they actively resist or simply let their minds wander, teachers will never know how much of their teachings will be retained (Todd 39). Although Queer Pedagogy is not a remedy for queerphobia (Luhmann 119), students might revise their previously hostile attitudes towards queer individuals after engaging in dialogue with the queer Other (in person or through a text), if they do not resist this encounter (Todd 20, 29). Therefore, educators should try to teach respect and empathy, for instance, by having students learn *from* the queer Other, in case they have a change of heart.

Queer Pedagogy is doubtlessly a valuable concept for teaching queerness and learning respect as well as empathy. However, in order to implement this theoretical concept in Austrian EFL classrooms, teachers would need to consult laws and regulations to discern the possibilities and limitations of queer pedagogical teaching practices in Austria. It is my belief that the general decree (Grundsatzterlass) “Reflective Gender Education and Equality” (“Reflexive Geschlechterpädagogik⁸ und Gleichstellung”) most closely resembles the features of Queer Pedagogy. It comprises policies regarding the promotion of gender equality, which may also be understood as preventative measures against queerphobia, inspiring students to actively oppose discriminatory practices and respect others. Overall, students should learn that gender norms and the inequalities they permit are socially constructed and, therefore, changeable. They should also be given the opportunity to challenge stereotypical depictions of gender and think critically about previously held beliefs, reflecting on their own (prejudicial) values (BMB, *Grundsatzterlass* 4-7, 9). These topics can be discussed in all subjects and with all age groups, using age-appropriate language. While teaching, it is important to avoid indoctrinating students, presenting one’s own worldview as the only correct one. Instead, students have to be permitted to form their own opinions, which should not be discredited – for instance, on the basis of being conservative – as long as they can be justified (BMB, *Grundsatzterlass* 4, 8-9). There are several similarities to the concept of Queer Pedagogy. For instance, the contemplating of old certainties, in the form of students’ own values, the queering of gender norms as well as stereotypes, and the fact that respect is valued over tolerance, the latter of which is not mentioned once in this

⁸ While the curriculum appears to distinguish between the term “Geschlecht” as in “Geschlechtergleichstellung” or “Geschlechterstereotype”, and “Gender” as in “Genderkompetenz” or “Gendernormen”, the general decree does not. Indeed, the term “Geschlecht” is used throughout the decree, translated as “gender” in the English version. In this thesis the term “Geschlecht” will be treated as synonymous to “Gender”.

decree. Although there is no explicit reference to queerness in the text, educating students on queerness is interconnected with, for instance, discussions about gender norms and prejudices.

The legal framework this decree is embedded in, encompasses the UN Conventions for Human Rights, Women's Rights, and Children's Rights, the Austrian Federal Constitution, the Istanbul Convention, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity (BMB, *Grundsatzterlass* 4, 15-16). Focusing on the articles concerning education, I would like to highlight certain passages of these legal documents. In the Austrian Federal Constitution, article 7 promotes gender equality and article 14 (5a) denotes "democracy, humanity, solidarity, peace and justice as well as openness and tolerance towards the people" as core values of education ("Bundes-Verfassungsgesetz"). Article 26 (2) of the Human Rights Convention insists on education "promot[ing] understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups" (UN, "Human Rights"). The fourth Sustainable Development Goal of the United Nations requests the promotion of human rights, peace, and an appreciation of diversity, among other things, in education (UN, "Sustainable Development Goals"). In article 4 of the UNESCO Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity the protection of cultural diversity and human dignity, which is deemed only achievable by adhering to human rights, is asserted (UN, "Cultural Diversity"). Article 10 (c) of the Women's Rights Convention demands the revision of textbooks and teaching methods to remove gender stereotypical content (UN, "Women's Rights"). In article 14 of the Istanbul Convention, a convention for preventing as well as combatting violent behaviour towards women, ratified by the Council of Europe, the use of "teaching material on issues such as equality between women and men, non-stereotyped gender roles, mutual respect", among other topics, is advocated (Council of Europe, "Violence Against Women"). Lastly, article 29 (1d) of the Children's Rights Convention names "the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin" as an educational goal (UN, "Children's Rights"). Notably, notions of gender equality, friendship and tolerance appear to be recurrent.

After the decree "Reflective Gender Education and Equality" was issued by the Federal Ministry of Education, it was also incorporated into the Austrian school curricula⁹. Similar to the conventions mentioned above, a general educational goal of the AHS curriculum is to discuss and dismantle gender inequality and stereotypes, foster appreciation towards others,

⁹ My focus is on the curriculum of the Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schule (AHS), especially the upper secondary level.

and teach “humanity, solidarity, tolerance, peace, justice, gender equality and environmental awareness”, in accordance with human rights and democratic principles (BMB, *Lehrplan AHS* “Erster Teil”, [my translation]). Furthermore, inclusive education should be ensured by valuing heterogeneity as well as diversity, perceiving them as resources. Teachers ought to create a non-discriminatory learning environment, replete with appreciation, respect, and mutual support, which allows students to critically reflect on their own identity (BMB, *Lehrplan AHS* “Dritter Teil”). In addition to this, the curriculum features overarching topics to be discussed in all subjects, with lower as well as upper secondary students. One of these cross-curricular topics is Reflective Gender Education and Equality. Here, aspects from the general decree, such as queering gender stereotypes and promoting equality, are reiterated, alongside a request for a “gender-reflective teaching methodology” (BMB, *Lehrplan AHS* “Vierter Teil”, [my translation]). Overall, I am of the opinion that the AHS curriculum can be used to justify teaching decisions in accordance with Queer Pedagogy, for instance, regarding the topics “me and my surroundings”, “life planning”, “attitudes and values”, and “living together” in upper-secondary English, or “social relations: forms of family, partnership, and friendship” and “love and sexuality: sex and gender, moral dimensions of love and sexuality” in Ethics (BMB, *Lehrplan AHS* “Achter Teil”, [my translation]).

Aside from the curricular framework for teaching gender education, guidelines for constructing teaching materials should also be considered. Indeed, an ordinance on teaching materials has decreed that stereotypical depictions of gender roles ought to be avoided, in order to respect diverse living conditions, gender equality, and anti-discrimination (Polaschek 5). In accordance with this ordinance, as well as the general decree for “Reflective Gender Education and Equality”, guidelines for the creation of teaching materials have been published. These guidelines emphasise the importance of using inclusive as well as non-discriminatory language and illustrations, unbiased depictions of diverse genders, and creating opportunities for reflecting stereotypical portrayals in teaching materials. Moreover, they offer criteria for analysing such materials, for instance, whether they address gender stereotypes or inequalities, use gender-appropriate and non-discriminatory language, or feature diverse and non-stereotypical representations (BMB, *Unterrichtsmittel* 9-13). Additional guidelines from the City of Vienna and Federal Ministry of Education reiterate the importance of using inclusive language and critically reflecting on gender-stereotypical depictions, adding that it may be beneficial to use movies for discussing gender-related topics, allowing students to adopt a characters’ point of view (Grassl et al. 2-3; Leeb et al. 13-69; Verein Amazone 23-47, 56-64, 80, 66-121, 123).

To conclude this chapter, it would be advisable for teachers to employ a gender-sensitive pedagogy, by using inclusive language and accurate, diverse representations of queerness in teaching materials (BMB, *Unterrichtsmittel* 13). Furthermore, students should be given opportunities to queer normalcy, so that gender inequalities and discrimination can be addressed, learning that gender categories and norms are socially constructed, performative, and revisable (Britzman, “Stop Reading Straight” 227; Butler, “Performative Acts” 520, 523). By giving a voice to the queer Other, students can learn *from* them, instead of *about* them, developing critical thinking in a process of unlearning previously held beliefs (Todd 8-9, 15-16, 122; Britzman, “Strange Techniques” 293). Lastly, shifting the focus from achieving tolerance to developing respect and empathy normalises queerness and teaches students to value diversity, even though the intersectional identity of others is impossible to understand in its entirety (Britzman, “Strange Techniques” 298; Mayo 139; Crenshaw et al. 4).

3 Cultural Contextualisation

This chapter begins by considering reasons for fearing the presence of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities and the justification for censorship (Butler, *Who's Afraid of Gender* 6). Subsequently, the censorship of United States media will be addressed, in terms of book restrictions and bans in schools, following recent legislation, as well as the suppression of queer content in children's media (Tolliver Giles 1-2, 5-6; M. Moore 1; Blodgett and Salter 144-145). Thereafter, the positive impact of Rebecca Sugar on queerness in children's animated series, with a focus on the ongoing fight for positive queer representation, will be discussed (Sugar and Stevenson qtd. in Moen).

3.1 Censorship of Queer Media in the United States

Educating students on queerness becomes difficult when people deem this teaching abusive and liken queer texts to pornography. The members of the anti-gender movement claim to be saving children from harm, disregarding the damage they are thereby causing (Butler, *Who's Afraid of Gender* 101, 249-250). Butler writes that there is a general sense of enigmatic fear experienced in everyday life, connected to destructive phenomena, such as climate change, capitalism, incurable illnesses, and nuclear catastrophes. Political actors may intensify these uncanny anxieties by creating an external source, a phantasm to be feared. To exemplify, gender can be phantasmatically distorted, being described as a “threat to humanity” that needs to be destroyed.

As a result, other more pressing issues are being deflected. The anti-gender movement uses fearmongering, claiming that people will be stripped of their rights and status as men and women, fathers and mothers, and that once homosexuality is deemed acceptable, pederasty or bestiality may also be permitted. With the promise to restore heteronormative order, people who are incapable of thinking critically may thereby be frightened into accepting censorship or the abrogation of anti-discrimination laws (Butler, *Who's Afraid of Gender* 6, 19, 247-249, 251-256). Censorship is one of the key strategies of the anti-gender movement. Proponents of this drastic measure claim that words have dangerous transformative potential, indoctrinating children simply through exposure to a text. Once again, the prevention of imagined harm is given as a justification for censoring queer texts, disregarding the blight of censorship itself (Butler, *Who's Afraid of Gender* 42, 95, 98-99).

In the United States of America, censorship of queer media is exacerbated by state-wide Bills as well as President Donald Trump's Executive Orders. Notably, Bills in Arkansas and Idaho had been passed in 2023 and 2024, respectively, banning texts deemed "obscene" and, thereby "harmful to minors", from schools. A text may be harmful to minors if it contains "sexual conduct", one definition of which is "any act of [...] homosexuality" (Sullivan 2-3; Hunter 2; Little 1). Thus, a same-sex couple holding hands or kissing can be considered obscene, which may lead to media, such as Alice Oseman's *Heartstopper* or Dana Terrace's *The Owl House*, being banned in schools. In addition to this, Trump's Executive Orders 14168 and 14190, passed in January of 2025, legitimised the refusal to acknowledge gender identification that does not correspond to a person's biological sex (Trump, 2025a, 8615-8616), prohibited teachers from calling students by their preferred name and pronouns (Trump, 2025b, 8854-8855), and rescinded materials from the Department of Education, such as informative toolkits on queerness and inclusive teaching (Trump, 2025a, pp. 8615-8617). Furthermore, Trump terminated all federal funding and support of teachings regarding "gender ideology" and "Anti-American ideologies", on the grounds that students are being indoctrinated (Trump, 2025b, p. 8853-8854). These Executive Orders are tremendously harmful to queer individuals – especially non-binary, transgender or intersex youth – as they spread misinformation, such as calling transitioning "mutilation" (Trump, 2025b, p. 8853), and restrict access to valuable information. Following the implementation of these Executive Orders, in the form of book removals from school libraries and curricular changes, twelve students from five DoDEA (Department of Defense Education Activity) schools filed a Complaint and a Motion for Preliminary Injunction, pleading a restriction of their First Amendment right to receive information (Tolliver Giles 1-2, 5-6, 10). The Court has granted the Plaintiff's Preliminary

Injunction at their schools, demanding immediate restoration of books and curricula to their former state (Tolliver Giles 44). Nevertheless, the Executive Orders remain intact, potentially serving as justification for banning queer material in other K-12 schools.

In the school year of 2024-2025, PEN America has recorded 6,719 instances of (un-)limited book restrictions and bans in school districts throughout the United States. To exemplify, access to novels, such as Alice Oseman's *Heartstopper*, Adam Silvera's *What if it's Us*, or Casey McQuiston's *Red, White, and Royal Blue* was restricted or removed; even nonfiction books, for instance, James Dawson's *This Book is Gay* or Monika Gupta Mehta and Asha Lily Mehta's *It's Totally Normal: An LGBTQIA+ Guide to Puberty, Sex, and Gender*, were banned (PEN America). Banning queer books leaves the voice of the queer Other unheard and their stories, with which a number of students might identify, unread. These restrictions and removals of educational material hinder students' learning, development of critical thinking, and empathy (Meehan et al.; Laine 48; Pollock et al. "Education Restriction" 66). By deeming certain information, for instance, sexual orientation and gender identity, "inappropriate", warranting a limitation of the curriculum, instruction, or in-class discussions, educational opportunities to interact, learn, and belong are being denied to all students; instead of protecting students, collective harm is being done (Pollock et al. "Education Restriction" 10, 60; Pollock et al. "Florida Restrictions" 4-6). Furthermore, when teachers are pressured to exclude the voices of marginalised communities, the classroom ceases to be a safe space, instead becoming a hostile environment (Pollock et al. "Education Restriction" 64, 66).

Since such legislation, banning queer media in public schools and libraries, was passed in the United States, other countries might follow suit. If similar guidelines were to be implemented in Austria, it would be crucial for teachers, students, and parents to challenge them. As Butler would say, it is important for (marginalised) communities to ally, fighting harmful phantasms together (Butler, *Who's Afraid of Gender* 248-249). As made evident from the abovementioned court case (Tolliver Giles), contesting educational restrictions can be a fruitful endeavour.

3.2 Rebecca Sugar's Influence on Positive Queer Representation in Children's Animated Series

Censorship is prevalent in children's television as well. Similar to the world of books, where publishers can limit story possibilities, requiring an author to alter their work by rewriting or removing content deemed "objectionable" (Bittner 41, 45; Laine 11), topics not affirming heteronormativity, such as sexual orientation and gender identity, may be deemed

“inappropriate for children” and censored in children’s animated series (Collins 105; M. Moore 1; Yadav and Kalia 1; Blodgett and Salter 144-145, 154). The censorship of queerness in children’s media might appear through an alteration of a series – for instance, through content removal or translation changes – queerbaiting, or the cancellation of a series. To exemplify, the English version of *Sailor Moon* (1992-1997) turned the homosexual relationship between season one villains Zoisite and Malachite¹⁰ into a heterosexual one, by supplying the former with a female voice actress, and denied the canonised lesbian relationship between Sailor Scouts Amara and Michelle, referring to them as “very close cousins”. Furthermore, the entire last season, which features genderqueer characters, was never televised in the United States (Ballenger). Queerbaiting, denoting queer relationships being suggested but not confirmed (Thomas 6), is also not uncommon in children’s animated series. For instance, in *Adventure Time* (2010-2018) as well as *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* (2018-2020) the relationships between two female major characters were continuously implied but not canonised until the series’ finale, with the characters being branded as “friends” and “sisters”, respectively (Hadley 43, 48-50; Holmes 67; Moen). Similarly, the show *Voltron: Legendary Defender* (2016-2018) teased the past homosexual relationship of one of the male main characters, but killed his fiancé offscreen, and showed an image of him married to another man in the series’ finale (Romano). Although these characters were eventually confirmed to be queer, their relationships were barely visible.

Rebecca Sugar played a significant part in promoting queer visibility in children’s animated series. Storyboarding the season three episode “What Was Missing” in *Adventure Time* together with Adam Munto, Sugar pitched the idea of a romantic past relationship between Marceline and Princess Bubblegum, which eventually led to their kiss in the final episode. This pitch positively impacted subsequent shows’ queer representation (Hadley 45; Adam Munto qtd. in Frank; Rebecca Sugar qtd. in Moen; Holmes 67). Indeed, while *Adventure Time* was subtly queering gender norms, hinting at queer love and identities, *Steven Universe* centres queerness, depicting it earlier and more openly in the narrative (Holmes 59, 65; Moen). For instance, most of the main characters in *Steven Universe* are female-presenting non-binary individuals, mirroring Rebecca Sugar’s own identity (Kennedy 233; Barai 122). The series also presents gender expressions as fluid, allowing characters to shapeshift and change their pronouns. Moreover, categories such as masculinity and femininity, are queered by depicting the male main character as a caring and empathetic pacifist, and the female cast as intelligent and strong

¹⁰ The English versions of the characters’ names are used, instead of their original Japanese names.

fighters (Barr et al. 81-85, 90, 92; Collins 105-106; Valentín 204-205). In addition to this, *Steven Universe* challenges queerphobia, using visual portrayals of queer relationships called “fusions” – for instance, Garnet as a queer¹¹ love, Stevonnie as a non-binary friendship, or Fluorite as a polycule – making it possible to somewhat circumvent censorship as sexual orientations and gender diversity are shown instead of discussed (Kennedy 233, 238-239; Juffer 174). Thus, with a diverse cast of characters, presenting manifold gender expressions in a non-stereotypical way, *Steven Universe* manages to normalise queerness (Collins 107; Valentín 206-207), laying the groundwork for more positive and authentic queer representation in children’s animated series (Kennedy 235; Stevenson qtd. in Moen). Indeed, *She-Ra*’s inclusion of recurring married lesbian and gay couples, and Disney’s *The Owl House* (2020-2023), featuring confirmed bisexual and lesbian main characters in an onscreen relationship, is attributable to Sugar’s legacy, for which Noelle Stevenson, the creator of *She-Ra*, highly commends her (Holmes 66; Jones; Hadley 45; Stevenson qtd. in Moen).

However, providing viewers with queer representation in children’s animated series was not simple. Rebecca Sugar discloses that she was strongly advised against including the romantic relationship between two of her female-presenting characters, and that she was even threatened with the show’s potential cancellation. As a matter of fact, *Steven Universe* was discontinued in South Africa, and scenes of characters dancing or a non-binary character shaving were removed in several other countries. Sugar attributes the fact that the show was censored but not cancelled in certain countries to the vigorous fan support it received worldwide (Romano; Kennedy 247; Sugar qtd. in Moen). The cancellation and drastically shortened last season of *The Owl House*, the removal of a trans character’s storyline in Disney’s *Win or Lose* (2025), and the permanent as well as global erasure of the Netflix Original *She-Ra* from said platform in 2026 (Jones; Riedel; K. Moore), further demonstrate that the fight for queer representation is ongoing. With the media industry largely denying queer visibility, oftentimes using queerbaiting as a compromise between positive queer representation and censorship, profiting from straight and queer audiences alike (Blodgett and Salter 145, 153-154), online fan communities might be able to instigate a change. Social media platforms allow viewers to directly communicate with producers and publicly address issues, such as queerbaiting, which may encourage advertisers to cease supporting shows with unsatisfactory queer representation (Waggoner 1877-1878,

¹¹ Although several *Steven Universe* scholars refer to Garnet as the embodiment of a lesbian romance (Juffer 190; Blodgett and Salter 152; Kennedy 235), I would like to emphasise that both Ruby and Sapphire identify as non-binary women (Kennedy 233). Hence, “queer” instead of “lesbian” will be used to describe their romantic relationship.

1888-1889). Furthermore, fans can financially support series of independent creators, such as Vivienne Medrano's *Helluva Boss* (2019-), Gooseworx' *The Amazing Digital Circus* (2023-), or Dana Terrace's upcoming *Knights of Guinevere*, all of which feature queer characters. Even though these series were made for an adult audience, it would be possible to endorse the creation of independent children's animation in a similar manner. Overall, it is important to continue to support series with positive queer representation, showing queer children that they belong, and involving them in the fight for a better and queerer future (Sugar qtd. in Romano; M. Moore 14; Yadav and Kalia 7).

4 Analysis of Selected *Steven Universe* Episodes

In this chapter, the portrayal of queer love, queerphobia, gender norms, and empathy in the *Steven Universe* episodes "Alone Together" (Season 1 Episode 36), "The Answer" (Season 2 Episode 21), "Off Colors" (Season 5 Episode 3), "Reunited" (Season 5 Episode 23), and "Change Your Mind" (Season 5 Episode 29-32) will be analysed. This analysis will provide the basis for the lesson plans, presented in the subsequent chapter.

4.1 *Steven Universe*

The children's animated series *Steven Universe* comprises five seasons, totalling 160 episodes, and aired from 2013 until 2019 on Cartoon Network. This coming-of-age story centres around Steven, who is half-human and half-Gem, a magical being of light. While portraying Steven's adventures on Earth and in space¹², the series also presents the audience with diverse depictions of queerness that challenge societal norms. For instance, instead of growing up in a nuclear family, Steven lives together with his caretakers Garnet, Amethyst, and Pearl, who are portrayed as strong fighters that can change their shape at will. Rebecca Sugar also disclosed that, with the exception of Steven, all Gems are female-presenting non-binary individuals (Kennedy 233). In addition to this, the series depicts Steven as an empathetic role model, as he continuously advocates for peaceful resolutions of conflicts and shows kindness to family and friends, as well as strangers and "monsters". Overall, the verbal and visual content of the show is rich in metaphors that, once decoded, can educate viewers about queerness. Furthermore, the series' positive depictions of empathy indicate that queer individuals are valued.

¹² A more in-depth summary of the five *Steven Universe* seasons will be provided in the Appendix.

4.2 Methodology

Akin to a close reading, in which the reader creates meaning through interpretation (Greenham 6), I engaged in a “close watching”, an in-depth reception of an audiovisual narrative, to collect data from five *Steven Universe* episodes. The episodes “Alone Together” (Season 1 Episode 36), “The Answer” (Season 2 Episode 21), “Off Colors” (Season 5 Episode 3), “Reunited” (Season 5 Episode 23-24), and “Change Your Mind” (Season 5 Episode 29-32) were selected for the analysis, as they feature diverse female-coded bodies and gender performances as well as portrayals of different kinds of love (platonic, romantic, familial). Moreover, queerphobia is subtly addressed in these episodes, and my conception of empathy is shown. Table 1 provides a more specific overview of the series’ depictions of queerness and empathy.

Episode	Topic/Theme/Focus
“Alone Together” (Season 1 Episode 36)	-platonic conception of love -coming-out scene -non-binary identity
“The Answer” (Season 2 Episode 21)	-romantic conception of queer love -queerphobia in society and the punitive consequences of defying societal norms
“Off Colors” (Season 5 Episode 3)	-queerphobia in society and the punitive consequences of defying societal norms -internalised queerphobia -empathy (understood as philoxenia and grief)
“Reunited” (Season 5 Episode 23-24)	-queer wedding -non-stereotypical presentations of gender (clothing and behaviour of characters) -empathy (prioritisation of talking over fighting)
“Change Your Mind” (Season 5 Episode 29-32)	-familial conception of love -queerphobia in the family and the conquering thereof through conversation -stereotypical and non-stereotypical presentations of gender (clothing and behaviour of characters)

Table 1. *Depictions of Queerness and Empathy in Steven Universe.*

On the basis of the close watching, the data was then analysed, using a multimodal content analysis. As a variant of qualitative content analysis, the multimodal content analysis

emphasises the multiple modes of the data corpus. Instead of solely concentrating on written language, this research method allows the “meaning potential” of a dataset to be expanded (Serafini and Reid 623-624, 628-629). I specifically focused on verbal, visual, and auditory elements to interpret how ambiguous child-friendly language, visual as well as verbal metaphors, and melodies are used in *Steven Universe* for meaning-making purposes and to circumvent the censorship of queerness.

4.3 Analysis

4.3.1 “Alone Together” (Season 1 Episode 36)

This episode begins with Garnet, Amethyst, and Pearl teaching Steven about fusion dances, although they are unsure, if he is able to fuse, as he is half-human. Steven then tells his friend Connie about his plight, which leads her to admit that she is uncomfortable dancing in front of others. However, when Steven asks her to dance, she accepts and they laugh as they move their bodies. Connie catches Steven when he trips, his gem starts to glow, and the two friends fuse. The viewer is introduced to this new character, who then presents themselves to the other Gems. While Pearl reacts rather negatively, asking them to unfuse, Amethyst asks about their feelings and names them the portmanteau “Stevonnie”, and Garnet is smiling, telling them to have fun. Thus, Stevonnie gambols on the beach, eats donuts, and is invited to a dance party. Even though Kevin, a boy at the party, makes them uncomfortable, causing them to unfuse, Steven and Connie nevertheless enjoy their time dancing together, fused or not.

The significance of this episode becomes apparent through its depiction of a platonic conception of love, a coming out scene, and a non-binary experience. The fusion Stevonnie can be understood as the embodiment of *philia*, or platonic love. Fusions are only able to exist when their two (or more) parts share a strong and stable bond; their hearts and minds need to be synched. I purport that this bond is built on the basis of love, which can take diverse forms. My understanding of fusions as embodiments of different kinds of love stems from the song “Stronger Than You” in the season one finale “Jailbreak” (Season 1 Episode 53). This song can be conceptualised as a love song, in which Garnet sings about being a fusion and “made of love”. I believe that all fusions can be classified as personifications of certain kinds of love, such as *philia* (platonic love), *eros* (romantic love), or *storge* (paternal love)¹³, and although fusion dances may at times include sensual elements, fusions are not inherently romantic or

¹³ The only exception would be fusions involving Jasper, who thinks of fusing as simply a battle strategy. Malachite, the fusion between Jasper and Lapis, could perhaps be classified as mania, or toxic love.

sexual. The relationship between Steven and Connie is exemplary of this fact, as they share a platonic bond and not a romantic one. This is reiterated in the last season of the show, when Steven refers to Connie as his “best friend” (“Kevin’s Party”, Season 5 Episode 10).

As they do not exist for a specific purpose, such as to fight a battle, Stevonnie’s existence defies the norms of the Gem society. Thus, while they are free to live on Earth, Stevonnie would not be accepted on Homeworld. Indeed, in the episode “Together Alone” (Season 5 Episode 27), Steven and Connie fuse to dance at a ball on the Gems’ home planet. They are met with frowns and threats of violence, put in a jail cell to reflect on their actions. Although they did not harm anyone, Stevonnie is punished simply for existing. Conversely, the reactions of Steven’s caretakers to Stevonnie’s first appearance are far more welcoming.

Stevonnie: “Pretty cool, right?”

Pearl [shocked]: “He fused? With his friend, Connie?”

Amethyst [chuckles]: “Pearl, look at Garnet!”

Garnet [big smile]

Pearl: “This is unprecedented.” [inspecting Stevonnie] “A Gem fusing with a human being? It’s impossible! Or at the very least inappropriate.”

Amethyst: “Woow! You two look *great* together! How does it feel, Steven ... Connie ... Stevonnie?” [grins]

Stevonnie: “It feels *amazing*.” [smile]

Pearl: “Yes, well. I’m glad you’re enjoying yourselves, but you two should unfuse this instant.”

Stevonnie: “Wait, what? Pearl, you were so worried Steven wouldn’t be able to do this. Aren’t you proud of him?”

Pearl: “Of course I am! I ... Garnet, help me out here.”

Garnet: “Stevonnie. Listen to me.” [cradles their face] “You are not two people. And you are not one person. You ... are an experience! Make sure you’re a good experience. Now ... Go! Have! Fun!” [big smile]

(“Alone Together”, Season 1 Episode 36, 04:19-05:28 min.)

As Stevonnie first introduces herself to Garnet, Amethyst, and Pearl, they receive varied reactions. While Pearl reacts in shock, echoing internalised Homeworld norms, even asking Stevonnie to unfuse, Amethyst inquires about their feelings, and Garnet, with a big smile, tells Stevonnie that they should enjoy living freely, as they do not have a purpose to fulfil. When Steven and Connie accidentally fuse in front of Steven’s father, Greg (“We Need to Talk”, Season 2 Episode 8), he does not react negatively either, simply surprised, and tells Steven

about his own past experiences with fusion. Both Pearl and Greg quickly overcome their initial shock and treat Stevonnie with respect. These scenes can be interpreted as analogies for a coming out, as Stevonnie presents Steven's family members with a queer gender expression – they are no longer recognisable as a cisgender boy and girl – receiving mixed, but ultimately positive, reactions. Thus, instead of the explicit mention of a coming out, the episode uses subtle visual and verbal cues to represent one example of this queer experience.

As a fusion between the cisgender boy Steven and the cisgender girl Connie, Stevonnie is neither male nor female, and both at the same time. They are an intersex non-binary individual, using they/them pronouns (Cartoon Network). As stated by Garnet, Stevonnie is neither one person nor two people; they are both “alone” and “together”, also indicated by the episode's title. This is further established at the dance party, when Stevonnie says, “I wish you were here; if we were together, it would be okay. But we are together, and it's not. I'm alone” (“Alone Together”, Season 1 Episode 36, 09:40-09:49 min.). Instead of explicitly discussing Stevonnie's non-binary identity, auditory and visual elements are utilised to imply their non-heteronormative gender expression. To exemplify, Stevonnie's voice actress voices neither Steven nor Connie. Hence, viewers encounter them as their own person, a new character. In addition to this, they/them pronouns are used to address Stevonnie, for instance, by Pearl and Garnet in the episode “Mindful Education” (Season 4 Episode 4). Furthermore, Stevonnie visually represents a non-binary gender identity, as elements of Steven's and Connie's appearances are combined. Steven's gem, shirt, pants, and curly hair, as well as Connie's dress (now a shirt) and long hair are prominent features of the fusion (Figure 1; Figure 2). In later episodes, Stevonnie is even shown shaving their face (“Jungle Moon”, Season 5 Episode 12). They are also able to use Connie's sword-fighting skills and summon Steven's shield (“Mindful Education”, Season 4 Episode 4). Thus, Stevonnie is both Steven and Connie, while simultaneously being one character. They offer viewers a visualisation of platonic love and a non-binary identity.



Figure 1. *Connie Catching Steven While Dancing. “Alone Together”, Season 1 Episode 36, 03:32 min.*



Figure 2. *Stevonnie Running on the Beach. “Alone Together”, Season 1 Episode 36, 05:41 min.*

4.3.2 “The Answer” (Season 2 Episode 21)

In this episode, Garnet tells Steven the tale of how Ruby and Sapphire met. The story takes place 5,750 years ago, when a Gem rebel group was hindering the colonisation of Earth. Sapphire was sent to the Earth colony together with three Ruby guards and summoned by Blue Diamond to share her visions of the future, regarding the Rebellion. Sapphire states that although seven gems will be poofed¹⁴, the rebels will be captured. As foretold, the rebels – Rose Quartz and Pearl – appear, but Ruby saves Sapphire from being poofed, fusing into Garnet in the process, and the rebels flee. When they unfuse, murmuring and angry looks surround Ruby and Sapphire, and Blue Diamond sentences the former to be broken. Without thinking, Sapphire runs away with Ruby. They hide on Earth and talk about their experience as a cross-gem fusion. After dancing together and forming Garnet once again, they stumble across Pearl and Rose Quartz. Garnet panics and offers to unfuse, but Rose welcomes her to Earth. Confused and asking questions about fusion, Rose Quartz tells Garnet to never question her existence, as she already is the answer; she is love.

¹⁴ When a Gem’s physical body is damaged, they are “poofed”, retreating into their gem to reform. Shattering or breaking Gems, on the other hand, kills them.

This episode gives viewers a visualisation of romantic queer love and addresses queerphobia in society. As a fusion of the non-binary women Ruby and Sapphire, both of whom use she/her pronouns, Garnet embodies a queer relationship. The episode's title "The Answer" is reflective of her realisation that she is love.

Pearl: "It's you ... the fusion."

Garnet: "We didn't mean to fuse! Well, well, we did this time. We'll unfuse! We ... We'll ..."

Rose: "No, no ... please. I'm glad to see you again."

Garnet [narrating]: "And there they were. Rose Quartz, the leader of the Rebellion, and her terrifying renegade Pearl."

Garnet: "I don't upset you?"

Rose: "Who cares about how *I* feel? How *you* feel is bound to be much more interesting."

Garnet: "How *I* feel? I ... I feel ... lost ... and scared ... and happy. Why am I so sure I'd rather be this than everything I was supposed to be and that I'd rather do this than anything I was supposed to do?"

Rose [laughs]: "Welcome to Earth."

Garnet: "C...Can you tell me? How was Ruby able to alter fate? Or why was Sapphire willing to give up everything? W...What am I?"

Rose: "No more questions. Don't *ever* question this. You already *are* the answer."

Steven: "So ... what was it? The Answer?"

Garnet [whispers]: "Love."

Steven: "Wooow, I knew it."

Garnet: "So did I."

("The Answer", Season 2 Episode 21, 09:25-10:47 min.)

This conversation can be interpreted as an analogy for experiencing confusion about (queer) feelings and questioning one's identity. It illustrates that feelings do not have to be rationalised, love can simply be experienced.

Garnet's existence as a personification of love is further emphasised by Ruby and Sapphire humming the melody of "Stronger Than You" when they dance together ("The Answer", Season 2 Episode 21, 08:33-09:00 min.). As previously stated, this song explains to viewers that Garnet is "made of love". However, instead of a platonic love, which can be attributed to Stevonnie, Garnet embodies romantic love, or eros. She *is* the romantic relationship between Ruby and Sapphire, given form. This notion is further exemplified by Garnet's appearance in this episode,

featuring hues of blue and pink, as well as elements of Sapphire's dress and Ruby's pants (Figure 3). By exhibiting traits of both Ruby and Sapphire, Garnet offers viewers a visual combination of the two characters, depicting their togetherness. The pink flowers, perhaps roses, which are present when Garnet is first depicted (Figure 3) and when she speaks with Rose Quartz and Pearl at the end of the episode, may be indicative of Rose's influence on Garnet's continued existence, as she tells her not to unfuse. This aspect is reimaged in the episode "The Question" (Season 5 Episode 21), in which Ruby asks Sapphire to marry her, making it their decision to be Garnet.



Figure 3. *Garnet's First Appearance. "The Answer", Season 2 Episode 21, 04:03 min.*

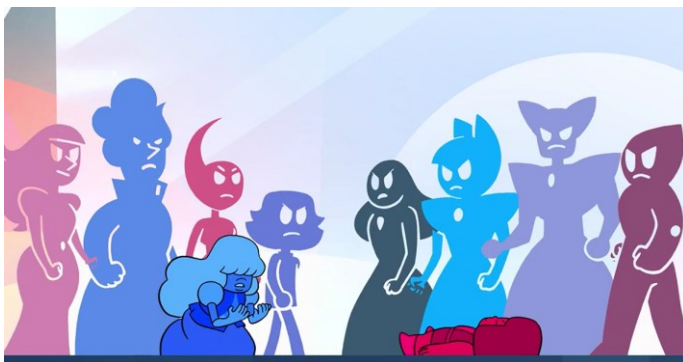


Figure 4. *The Furious Crowd. "The Answer", Season 2 Episode 21, 04:28 min.*

Aside from the portrayal of queer love, societal queerphobia is also addressed in this episode. Following the brief accidental fusion of Ruby and Sapphire, the two Gems encounter a furious crowd, denouncing this occurrence as "unbelievable", "disgusting", and "unheard of" ("The Answer", Season 2 Episode 21, 04:28-04:38 min.). The disapproval of these Gems is etched in their faces, in the form of deep frowns and clenched fists (Figure 4). Blue Diamond, whose face remains hidden inside her palanquin, voices her revulsion verbally.

Blue Diamond [to Ruby]: "How dare you fuse with a member of my court!"

Ruby: "Forgive me! I ..."

Blue Diamond: "You will be broken for this!"

(“The Answer”, Season 2 Episode 21, 04:54-05:00 min.)

By sentencing Ruby to be broken, Blue Diamond confirms that cross-gem fusion is unacceptable in the Gem society and warrants capital punishment. This is not dissimilar to the treatment that queer people may face in countries where being queer is illegal. Garnet is not allowed to exist, according to Homeworld norms, a fact that is readdressed in a later episode, when Blue Diamond explains procedures regarding a Homeworld ball to Steven’s family and friends (“Together Alone”, Season 5 Episode 27).

Blue Diamond: “The Sapphire will need to enter with the other Sapphires, of course, and the Ruby will need to enter with the guard.”

Steven: “Woah, woah, woah, are you talking about Garnet?”

Blue Diamond: “Does *that* call herself a Garnet? [laughs]

(“Together Alone”, Season 5 Episode 27, 05:15-05:29 min.)

Evidently, Garnet is invisible to Blue Diamond, as she considers only Ruby and Sapphire to have worth. Punishments and remarks, such as those, induce fear, compelling Gems, who are considered “abnormal”, due to not fitting societal standards, to hide their true selves. Conversely, on Earth, Rose welcomes Garnet, giving her the opportunity to live freely, which she would have been denied on Homeworld. Rose cares about Garnet’s feelings, reminiscent of Amethyst asking Stevonnie how they feel in “Alone Together” (Season 1 Episode 36). On Earth, Gems do not have to adhere to Homeworld norms and will be accepted as cross-gem fusions. This bears similarity to our contemporary society, as queer individuals may be persecuted, tolerated, or respected, based on their country of residence.

4.3.3 “Off Colors” (Season 5 Episode 3)

The episode begins with Steven and his friend Lars fleeing from robonoids, killer robots that are policing the area, in search of the fugitives. These flying robots scan their surroundings, in order to identify gems, which they then shoot with lasers, shattering them. Steven and Lars manage to escape with the help of a stranger, who leads them to the hideout of the self-proclaimed “Off Colors”. The Off Colors are described as a group of Gem outcasts, whose existence defies Homeworld norms. This group comprises conjoined Rutiles, a Rhodonite fusion, a Padparadscha Sapphire, and a Fluorite fusion. These ostracised Gems offer Steven and Lars shelter; however, the safety is short-lived, as the robonoids attack anew. Despite being frightened, Lars utilises the fact that he is invisible to these robots, as he does not possess a gem, to protect Steven and the Off Colors. He distracts one of the robonoids by throwing a stone at it, seconds before it can scan the Rutile twins, swings a stone club at the robots to protect

Padparadscha and Steven, and jumps in front of Rhodonite to prevent her gems from being scanned. However, as Lars is destroying the last robonoid, it explodes, killing him in the process. Steven rushes to his side and cries over his body, his tears reviving Lars and turning him pink.

This episode addresses society's expulsion of queer people, leading to internalised queerphobia, while also teaching empathy, in the sense of love towards a stranger and the willingness to protect them. As made evident by the previous analysis, Homeworld does not look kindly onto Gems who stray from their societal norms. This episode offers viewers a perspective into the lives of the ostracised and oppressed, exemplified by the Off Colors, a group of Gems who hide underground, in a place "where only those that don't belong, belong" ("Off Colors", Season 5 Episode 3, 03:52-03:55 min.).

Fluorite: "They don't look like Gems."

Rutile twins: "That's what I said. I said the same thing."

Steven: "Hi, I'm Steven. I'm a Gem ... well, half-gem. And this is Lars. He's all human."

Fluorite: "That's why you look so unusual."

Lars: "*We* look unusual?"

Rhodonite: "Of course you do. You can't just walk around on the surface like that. You're off-colour, just like the rest of us."

Steven: "What do you mean, off-colour?"

Rutile twins: "You know, wrong. Not right. Flawed."

Steven: "Wait. I don't see anything wrong with you guys."

Fluorite: "Gems like us aren't needed. Padparadscha can only predict things that just happened."

Padparadscha: "Here comes Fluorite."

Rhodonite: "And a fusion like me is unforgivable. When my ... our Morganite found out, let's just say, we were replaced."

[...]

Rutile twins: "We're just a Rutile that came out wrong. We survived because all the other Rutiles ran away when we emerged. We survived because they were afraid of us."

Lars: "Afraid of you? So, you've been hiding your whole lives ... What happens if they find you?"

Rutile twins: "We'll be ..."

Padparadscha: "Shattered."

("Off Colors", Season 5 Episode 3, 05:22-07:04 min.)

This conversation illustrates the highly negative connotation of the term “off-colour”. Serving as the episode’s title and the self-given name of this group of Gems, it is explained that off-colour Gems must conceal their existence, as they would be persecuted and shattered, if discovered. These Homeworld norms, which deny the Off Colors liberty and self-determination, are internalised by the Gems. This is made apparent through the verbalisations of the Rutile twins, thinking of themselves as “flawed”, or Rhodonite, describing herself as “unforgivable”. The self-depreciation of these societal outcasts, due to their internalisation of Homeworld norms, is highlighted once more in a later episode, when Garnet compliments them, which confuses Rhodonite, who blatantly states that the Off Colors are “inappropriate” and “should be ashamed” (“Your Mother and Mine”, Season 5 Episode 13, 02:59-03:03 min.), implying that they are not worthy of admiration. Nevertheless, Steven, together with his friends and family, continues to treat them with respect, attempting to counter the harmful norms.

Throughout the series, Steven has always been depicted as an empathetic person, showing love and kindness to friends, strangers, and “monsters” alike. For instance, Steven adopts a pink lion in “Steven’s Lion” (Season 1 Episode 10), befriends and attempts to heal a corrupted Gem in the episode “Monster Buddies” (Season 1 Episode 23), protects and successfully heals a Gem, who was trapped in a mirror (“Ocean Gem”, Season 1 Episode 26), helps Ruby and Sapphire reunite in the season one finale “Jailbreak” (Season 1 Episode 53), and performs instead of Sadie at the Beach-a-Palooza, when she feels overwhelmed in the episode “Sadie’s Song” (Season 2 Episode 16). Even in this episode, he protects the Off Colors and cries about Lars’ death, reviving a person who was uncaring and belittling towards him, with his tears (Figure 5; Figure 6). Indeed, Lars used to only care about himself. For instance, when he was stranded on a deserted island with Steven and Sadie, Lars did not help them battle “monsters”, hiding away instead (“Island Adventure”, Season 1 Episode 30), and when he was kidnapped alongside other friends and family members of Steven, he ran and hid, as opposed to fighting (“I Am My Mom”, Season 4 Episode 25). Thus, Lars undergoes a drastic change in character in this episode. He shows immense empathy for strangers by protecting the Off Colors, even sacrificing his own life to save theirs. As an empathetic role model, Steven’s kindness and compassion may have positively influenced Lars’ behaviour, encouraging him to change for the better. Thus, viewers of *Steven Universe* may change in the same way, learning from Steven to be kind and respectful towards others.



Figure 5. *Steven Crying About Lars' Death. "Off Colors", Season 5 Episode 3, 10:31 min.*



Figure 6. *Lars Being Revived by Steven's Tears and Turning Pink. "Off Colors", Season 5 Episode 3, 10:58 min.*

4.3.4 "Reunited" (Season 5 Episode 23-24)

Steven starts the episode with a song about dismissing unresolved tension and worry for a day, in order to celebrate love, in the form of Ruby and Sapphire's wedding. Steven officiates the wedding, with Gems and Beach City citizens in attendance. Ruby and Sapphire say their vows, they kiss and fuse into Garnet. At the reception, there is dancing and a bouquet toss, as Gems and humans alike celebrate Garnet. However, the mood abruptly shifts, when Blue and Yellow Diamonds' spaceships arrive to awaken the Cluster, a gem-built geo-weapon in the Earth's core. Although it forms only partially, the Cluster fights against the Diamonds. Steven attempts to talk to Blue Diamond, but she attacks him, and a fight between Steven's allies and Blue Diamond ensues. As Steven is knocked unconscious, he discovers that he can telepathically communicate with the consciousnesses of the people around him. Consequently, he gives words of encouragement to his companions. By creating a pink aura around himself, Steven also manages to convince the Diamonds that Pink Diamond was never shattered. As he wakes up, the fight has stopped.

The most important aspects of this episode, in regard to queerness and empathy, encompass its celebration of queer love through verbal, visual, and auditory elements, its presentation of

behaviour and attire, countering prevalent gender norms, and its prioritisation of talking over fighting. The decision to include an episode featuring a queer wedding in *Steven Universe* communicates to viewers that *all* weddings are a celebration of love; it does not matter whether this love is heterosexual or queer. It also cannot be denied that this episode depicts a wedding, and not another form of celebration, as characters confirm this fact verbally and viewers receive several visual cues that are symbolic of weddings. For instance, the episode includes a venue, strewn with pink and light blue flower petals, leading to an altar (Figure 7). Peridot appears as a flower girl and Ruby and Sapphire wear a wedding dress and tuxedo, respectively. There is a ceremonial exchange of vows, rings, and a kiss (Figure 8), a bouquet toss, and dancing. Therefore, this queer wedding does not differ from that of a heterosexual couple, and addressing this fact may help normalise queerness. The only dissimilarity to a heterosexual wedding was that, instead of pronouncing the lovers to be “husband and wife”, Steven declares Ruby and Sapphire to be “Garnet” (“Reunited”, Season 5 Episode 23-24, 06:44 min.).

Ruby and Sapphire’s love is further made intelligible through auditory and visual cues. For instance, their love song “Stronger Than You” accompanies Ruby down the aisle, played on the guitar by Steven’s father (“Reunited”, Season 5 Episode 23-24, 04:10-04:43 min.). This parallels the dancing scene from the episode “The Answer” (Season 2 Episode 21, 08:33-09:00 min.), recalling to viewers that Garnet, Ruby and Sapphire’s relationship, is “made of love”. Steven, who officiates the wedding, emphasises this fact verbally, by starting his speech with the announcement that “[Garnet] is [Ruby and Sapphire’s] love given form” (“Reunited”, Season 5 Episode 23-24, 05:00-05:13 min.). In addition to this, the colours pink and light blue, present in the flower petals (Figure 7) and when Ruby and Sapphire fuse into Garnet at the end of the wedding ceremony (Figure 9), also remind viewers of the episode “The Answer” (Season 2 Episode 21), specifically when Garnet first emerged (Figure 3).

The episode’s title “Reunited” refers, on the one hand, to the wedding as a union of Ruby and Sapphire, forming Garnet once again, and parallels, on the other hand, the episode “Now We’re Only Falling Apart” (Season 5 Episode 19), in which Garnet unfuses, as a result of experiencing deep hurt, following the revelation that Rose Quartz was Pink Diamond. Ruby and Sapphire believe Rose Quartz to have influenced their decision to form Garnet in the past, and decide to live separately, until their reunion as Garnet in this episode. This time, their decision to form Garnet is entirely independent of Rose Quartz, which is illustrated with a pair of red and blue roses, representing Ruby and Sapphire (Figure 10), and the absence of pink roses, which would have symbolised Rose Quartz.

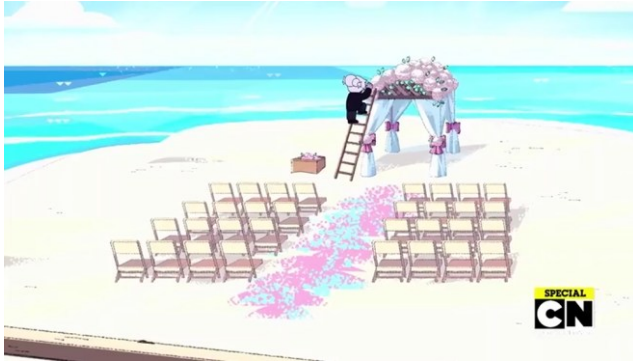


Figure 7. *Wedding Venue. "Reunited", Season 5 Episode 23-24, 02:17 min.*



Figure 8. *Kiss. "Reunited", Season 5 Episode 23-24, 06:45 min.*



Figure 9. *Garnet. "Reunited", Season 5 Episode 23-24, 06:51 min.*



Figure 10. *Roses. "Reunited", Season 5 Episode 23-24, 06:54 min.*

In addition to queer love, the diversity of female bodies is made visible through the varied clothing choices and behaviours of the female-presenting characters. For instance, while Peridot and Connie wear dresses to the wedding, Amethyst wears pants, Pearl a tuxedo, Bismuth armour, and Mayor Nanefua appears in a suit (Figure 11; Figure 12). The dressing choices of the characters are not questioned or disrespected but simply accepted.

Steven: “Bismuth, is *that* what you’re wearing to the wedding?”

Bismuth: “It’s the nicest thing I own.”

Steven: “Lookin’ sharp!” [playful finger guns]

(“Reunited”, Season 5 Episode 23-24, 02:05-02:11 min.)

During this conversation, there is no prejudice or hostility in Steven’s tone. Although he may be surprised by Bismuth’s attire, he acknowledges her choice and continues with the wedding preparations.

Another example of diverse representation of female-presenting bodies can be seen in the wedding attire of Ruby and Sapphire. The impulsive and rowdy Ruby, normally depicted in shorts and a shirt, is wearing a white gown, and the elegant and demure Sapphire, usually adorning a dress, is shown in a tuxedo. Moreover, although she is wearing a wedding dress, Ruby lifts Sapphire in a bridal carry (Figure 13), similarly to the way in which a groom may hold their bride. Once they reemerge as Garnet, their wedding attire combines (Figure 9), presenting the audience with an image that may be understood as a personification of weddings, as Garnet *is* Ruby and Sapphire’s relationship.

Furthermore, the reactions of the Gems and humans upon the arrival of the Diamonds also defy prevalent gender norms. The Gems and Connie are quick to draw their weapons, while Greg hides in the house and Steven tries to talk to the Diamonds instead. Hence, the female-presenting characters favour a violent approach, while the male cast prefers to either hide or de-escalate the situation through a peaceful conversation. Overall, these examples demonstrate that gender is a spectrum, and individuals who use she/her pronouns may behave and dress in myriad ways without compromising on their femininity.



Figure 11. *Wedding Attire. "Reunited", Season 5 Episode 23-24, 04:06 min.*



Figure 12. *Mayor Nanefua. "Reunited", Season 5 Episode 23-24, 08:19 min.*



Figure 13. *Bridal Carry. "Reunited", Season 5 Episode 23-24, 06:47 min.*

Even though the Diamonds have shown him nothing but hostility, Steven continues to display empathy, dissuading the Gems from fighting; he wholeheartedly believes that their issues can be solved amicably.

Steven: "Blue Diamond, please listen."

Blue Diamond: "I felt something, someone."

Steven: "It worked! I gotta get through to them" [Pause] "Pink isn't gone. I can explain everything if you just stopped this fighting."

Blue Diamond: "There it is again."

Yellow Diamond: "What are you jabbering about?"

Blue Diamond: "A presence. It feels like ..."

Yellow Diamond: "Please Blue. You're being hysterical. More so than usual."

Steven: "Listen, Yellow. Pink's fate is different than you think. She faked her shattering!"

Blue Diamond: "This feeling ... I know it."

Yellow Diamond: "It must be a trick. Show yourself, foe!"

Steven: "I'm not your foe. Please just listen to me."

Yellow Diamond: "There!" [Blue and Yellow Diamonds use their powers against Steven, who deflects their attacks]

Steven: "Please. The fighting has to stop. We aren't enemies, we're family. Please, listen to me. I need you to know WHO I AM!"

Blue Diamond: "Impossible ..."

Yellow Diamond: "This aura ..."

[Steven wakes up. Everyone stopped fighting]

Blue Diamond [tearing up]: "It's you! Pink."

("Reunited", Season 5 Episode 23-24, 20:51-22:16 min.)

Despite the fact that Blue and Yellow Diamonds instigated the fight and will not listen to Steven, he does eventually manage to de-escalate the situation by talking to their inner selves. Although the Diamonds might only heed his words because he is Pink Diamond, the episode nevertheless teaches viewers that peaceful resolutions of conflicts are possible, and anger does not have to be countered with aggression. Fighting the Diamonds would only have aggravated the situation, perhaps leading to worse circumstances, but by showing empathy and engaging in conversation, the characters manage to resolve past issues together.

4.3.5 "Change Your Mind" (Season 5 Episode 29-32)

The series' finale of *Steven Universe* begins with a dream sequence, in which Steven experiences a memory of his mother, who was in a similar situation he now finds himself in, being imprisoned in a tower, due to having "misbehaved" at a Gem ball. Blue Diamond chides him, deciding that he and Connie are not allowed to leave this prison cell until they apologise for having fused into Stevonnie. Steven refuses to apologise, trying to convey that fusion is not something to be abhorred, and confronts Blue Diamond about past times she has made Pink Diamond cry. Consequently, Blue Diamond realises the unkindness she and the other Diamonds have shown Pink Diamond and decides to help Steven and his entourage return to Earth. Together, they confront Yellow Diamond, rescuing Garnet, Amethyst, and Pearl – who are now

in gem-form, as they had previously been poofed by said Diamond. Steven halts a physical fight between Blue and Yellow Diamonds by convincing the former that she is hurting her people by “perfecting” the empire. Yellow Diamond decides to help Steven and company escape, but White Diamond’s Pearl stops them from leaving. Bismuth, Peridot, and Lapis arrive on Blue and Yellow Diamonds’ spaceships to rescue Steven, Connie and the other Crystal Gems.

In an attempt to reason with White Diamond, Blue and Yellow Diamonds express their unhappiness, to no avail. White Diamond counters with a white light, striking both Blue and Yellow Diamonds’ gems, absorbing their colour, and turning them into puppets controlled by the matriarch, mirroring the lifeless state of her Pearl. Garnet, Amethyst, and Pearl, who had not yet reformed, fall from a great height, but Steven saves them through fusion, forming Smoky Quartz, Rainbow Quartz 2.0, and Sunstone. The plan has now changed from leaving to getting into White Diamond’s head – her spaceship that is shaped to represent her head – in order to change her mind about her imperial conduct. By forming Obsidian – a fusion of Garnet, Amethyst, Pearl, and Steven – they manage to enter White Diamond’s head, together with Connie, who has received a new sword from Bismuth.

Unreceptive, White Diamond uses her power to turn Garnet, Amethyst, and Pearl into her puppets, firmly believing that she is making them more “perfect”, more like herself. As Connie is restrained by Pearl, White Diamond removes Steven’s gem, adamant that this would revive Pink Diamond. However, Steven is not Pink Diamond; his gem-half and human-half are both Steven. White Diamond throws a childish tantrum, unwilling to accept that Pink Diamond is gone for good. Steven then confronts White Diamond with her immature behaviour, making her blush and, thus, off-colour. White Diamond is ashamed and relinquishes control over the Gems that had been affected by her white light. Finally, White Diamond listens to Steven, who convinces her that everyone should be allowed to live as their true self. The Diamonds accompany Steven and his found family back to Earth, where a concert is taking place, simultaneously arriving with Lars and the Off Colors. Together, the four Diamonds heal the corrupted Gems. Blue, Yellow, and White Diamond then return to Homeworld, and the series ends with Steven singing about acceptance.

The *Steven Universe* finale contains depictions of a familial conception of love, elements of queerphobia, and non-normative presentations of gender. Similar to the portrayal of fusion in the episodes “Alone Together” (Season 1 Episode 36) and “The Answer” (Season 2 Episode 21), the fusions in the “Change Your Mind” special can be understood as embodiments of love. In my previous analyses, I have associated Steven and Connie’s bond to *philia*, the love of

friendship, and related Garnet to eros, a romantic conception of love. The fusions Smoky Quartz (Figure 14), Rainbow Quartz 2.0 (Figure 15), Sunstone (Figure 16) and Obsidian (Figure 17), on the other hand, exemplify familial love, or storge, as they materialise when Steven expresses his desire to protect his family members, verbalising his love for them. Smoky Quartz represents the sibling-like relationship between Steven and Amethyst, and has made an appearance prior to the series' finale, in the episodes "Earthlings" (Season 3 Episode 23) and "Know Your Fusion" (Season 4 Episode 2). Rainbow Quartz 2.0 and Sunstone are fusions of Steven with Pearl and Garnet, respectively, highlighting their parental bond. These fusions combine the Gems' and Steven's clothes as well as personalities. They all don Steven's red T-shirt with the yellow star, paired with Amethyst's ripped shirt for Smoky Quartz, Pearl's jacket for Rainbow Quartz 2.0, and Garnet's sunglasses for Sunstone. Together with Obsidian – a fusion of Garnet, Amethyst, Pearl, and Steven – they embody the familial love that Steven shares with his Gem guardians. This clarifies anew that fusing is not a sexual act, but one "made of love", in this case, the love between a parent and their child, or a deep sibling bond.



Figure 14. *Smoky Quartz. "Change Your Mind", Season 5 Episode 29-32, 18:25 min.*



Figure 15. *Rainbow Quartz 2.0. "Change Your Mind", Season 5 Episode 29-32, 19:29 min.*



Figure 16. *Sunstone*. “*Change Your Mind*”, Season 5 Episode 29-32, 20:31 min.



Figure 17. *Obsidian*. “*Change Your Mind*”, Season 5 Episode 29-32, 24:50 min.

Through the Diamonds’ immense aversion to fusion as well as their deadnaming of Steven, this special also exhibits examples of queerphobic behaviour.

Blue Diamond: “You’re not leaving this tower until you apologize for fusing at the ball.”

Steven: “No.”

[Blue Diamond gasps]

Connie: “Steven!”

Steven: “What? I’m not sorry.”

[...]

Steven: “Blue, Connie and I fuse all the time. It’s totally normal and fun.”

Blue Diamond [distracted]: “In what universe could that possibly be fun?!”

Steven: “This universe! The Crystal Gems fuse all the time, too. Blue, you gotta tell me where their gems are. They didn’t do anything wrong.”

Blue Diamond: “Oh! Pink! Your time on Earth has warped your sense of right and wrong.”

Steven: “Yeah, maybe it has. Maybe Pink thought you guys were right to lock her in here, when she messed stuff up, but I know what it’s like to have a loving family and we don’t do stuff like this to each other. The Crystal Gems understand that I’m Steven and they support me and Connie. And you guys poofed them for sticking up for me, that isn’t normal.”

Blue Diamond: "That's enough!"

[Blue Diamond sends a ball of light towards Steven, slightly hurting him]

Steven [indicating his tears]: "*This* isn't normal. How many times did you lock her in here? How many times did you make her cry?"

Blue Diamond: "I didn't ... I. I'm doing it again, aren't I? And this is why you left, isn't it?" [Pause] "You were right to leave. I always thought you were failing this world, but if you were happier on Earth, maybe this world was failing you."

("Change Your Mind", Season 5 Episode 29-32, 03:21-05:23 min.)

Following Homeworld norms, Blue Diamond condemns cross-gem fusion, necessitating an apology from Steven for engaging in this practice. She persists in calling Steven "Pink", believing him to be his mother, even though he continuously clarifies that he is Steven. During their conversation, Steven confides to Blue Diamond that he feels accepted on Earth, resulting in the matriarch questioning the legitimacy of Homeworld norms, as they seem to make Gems miserable. Yellow Diamond has a similar change of heart after talking to Steven.

Yellow Diamond: "What are you doing?"

Steven: "I'm taking back my friends!"

Yellow Diamond: "What are you doing, *Blue*? Take Pink back to the tower."

Blue Diamond: "She prefers to be called *Steven*."

Yellow Diamond [partly destroying her chair, angry]: "What are you talking about?! You can't keep bending the rules for her, Blue. She has to set an example. And we have to set an example. If we bend the rules for her, we have to bend them for everyone."

Connie: "Well, maybe you *should*!"

[...]

Yellow Diamond: "You'd hurt a fellow diamond?"

Blue Diamond: "Didn't we hurt Pink?! She was suffering in silence for *ages*! Just like our Gems, just like me. And I know you're suffering in silence too!"

[Yellow Diamond reluctantly attacks Blue Diamond]

Steven: "Stop!" [throws his shield] "You don't have to do this."

Yellow Diamond: "Yes, I do. This is what White Diamond expects of all of us, from a thin flake of Micah to the deepest, hardest stone. We all must make sacrifices for the sake of our *perfect* empire."

Steven: "Does this look *perfect* to you?"

[Silence. A wall partially crumbles]

Steven: "My dad says, 'If every pork chop were perfect, we wouldn't have hot dogs.'"

Yellow Diamond: "And that means ... what?"

Steven: "It means that if you try to make this empire perfect, if you just wipe away everything you see as flawed, you lose all the things that make you happy, like hot dogs."

Blue Diamond: "Or our Pink."

[Yellow Diamond cries]

Yellow Diamond: "Stop it, Blue. Stop using your power on me."

Blue Diamond: "I'm not."

[Blue Diamond comforts Yellow Diamond]

("Change Your Mind", Season 5 Episode 29-32, 06:28-09:41 min.)

While Yellow Diamond refers to Steven as "Pink", the viewers witness Blue Diamond's progress, as she calls Steven by his name, although still using the wrong pronouns – most likely out of habit and not maliciousness. These instances may be reminiscent of deadnaming – being referred to by one's birthname, instead of one's chosen name – which might occur even with family members.

By talking to Steven, Yellow Diamond realises that Homeworld's norms should be reworked, as the empire's objective must not be "perfection" if that involves inflicting harm, a sentiment that is not shared by White Diamond.

White Diamond: "Please stop *helping* them. You'll only make things worse; that's what you do. *I* make things better. Here...!" [snaps fingers]

[Amethyst, Garnet, and Pearl speak in White Diamond's voice, saying that they feel excellent]

White Diamond: "There we are! I've removed their flaws! Now there is nothing to hinder my white light from sparking through them. I'd rather not spread my uninhibited self so thin, you know, but you've made it *absolutely* necessary. Now, the impurities you've encouraged in them are gone. Now, they are brilliant! Now, they are perfect! Now... they are *me*!"

Steven: "You're wrong! Please, just listen to me! My friends don't need to be fixed! They're fine the way they are, flaws and all!"

[...]

Connie: "Steven! Are you back together? Are you *you*?"

Steven: "Yeah, yeah! I'm me! I've always been me...!"

White Diamond [pounding fists on floor]: "No! You are Pink Diamond! That is Pink Diamond's gem! You do not look like this! You do not sound like this! You are not half human! You're just...! A-Acting like a child!!!"

Steven: "...I *am* a child. What's *your* excuse?"

[Connie laughs, White Diamond blushes]

[...]

White Diamond: “This can't be happening! I can't have a flaw! I'm supposed to be flawless! If I'm not perfect, then... who am I?! If you're not Pink, then... who are you?! Who- Who is anyone?!”

Steven: “Ya know, if you just let everyone be whoever they are, maybe you could let yourself be whoever you are, too.”

White Diamond: “But I'm not supposed to be like this! I'm supposed to *know* better! I'm supposed to *be* better! I'm supposed to make everything better!”

Steven: “You can! But first, you're going to have to leave your own head.”

(“Change Your Mind”, Season 5 Episode 29-32, 28:37-38:33 min.)

This scene illustrates that White Diamond considers herself perfect and believes that turning other Gems into her puppets by using her white light “fixes” them. While Steven uses peaceful communication to change other people's minds, she employs violence. Although it takes a long conversation and a violent, but ultimately failed, attempt to revive Pink Diamond for the matriarch to understand that Pink Diamond had truly perished, White Diamond does eventually accept that Steven has always been Steven. In addition to this, White Diamond realises that she would benefit from leaving her own headspace, which is visualised by her spaceship in the shape of her own head (Figure 18), interpretable as a metaphor for her detachment from reality, to reevaluate certain Homeworld norms.



Figure 18. *White Diamond's Ship*. “Change Your Mind”, Season 5 Episode 29-32, 10:41 min.

Throughout *Steven Universe*, societal norms have been challenged, for instance, with the myriad depictions of non-normative presentations of gender. One such example, which also recurs in the series' finale, is Steven being consistently associated with the colour pink. Aside from his pink gem, pink shield, pink pet lion, and Lars, who turned pink after Steven brought him back to life (Figure 6), he is also given a pink poofy outfit on Homeworld (Figure 19). Although this colour is mostly marketed towards girls and women in our contemporary society, there is no reason why boys or men should be forbidden from liking it. By having Steven wear

pink clothes without showing disgust or embarrassment, the series suggests that anyone can wear pink, if they want. Even when Steven changes back into his signature clothes, the pink outfit is never ridiculed or presented as emasculating. Hence, the notion that pink only represents girls and women is challenged, allowing for anyone, regardless of their gender identity, to be associated with this colour.



Figure 19. *Steven's Pink Outfit. "Change Your Mind", Season 5 Episode 29-32, 01:20 min.*

Conversely, there are no traces of gender nonconformity present in the depiction of White Diamond. It is interesting to note that, as the “villain” of the series, she strictly conforms to feminine ideals. To exemplify, White Diamond’s female-coded body is portrayed with nail polish, lipstick, eyeshadow, long eyelashes, high heels and a glittering cape (Figure 20; Figure 21). This hyper-feminine portrayal, coupled with the fact that White Diamond considers herself to be perfect, can be interpreted as a ruling that gender norms ought to be strictly followed, and those who stray will be punished. Therefore, the relentless enforcement of heteronormativity on Homeworld establishes a stark contrast to the free gender expression on Earth.



Figure 20. *White Diamond's Shoes. "Change Your Mind", Season 5 Episode 29-32, 26:29 min.*



Figure 21. *White Diamond's Make-up*. "Change Your Mind", Season 5 Episode 29-32, 27:02 min.

The gender binary is further challenged in *Steven Universe* through the depiction of the female-presenting cast as strong fighters. To exemplify, the Gems are quick to attack and draw their weapons, choosing violence, before considering other options. Connie also joins them in the fights, wielding Rose's sword, until it was broken by Blue Diamond in "Reunited" (Season 5 Episode 23-24), and then her own, which was gifted to her by Bismuth (Figure 22). Connie's bright smile can be indicative of her excitement and gratitude for this present. She has proven herself to be capable of being Steven's knight, which is the reason she began sword fighting under Pearl ("Sworn to the Sword", Season 2 Episode 5). Thus, *Steven Universe* presents being a sword fighter or knight not as a male profession, but open to individuals of any gender identity.



Figure 22. *Connie's Own Sword*. "Change Your Mind", Season 5 Episode 29-32, 23:21 min.

Although the Gems usually attempt to solve their problems with violence, Steven prefers peaceful conversations.

Steven: "No ... No! I won't go. Pink Diamond ran away from you. Rose Quartz, my mom, she started a war with you. But I don't wanna run. I don't wanna fight. I just want to *talk*! We've come so far just to get White Diamond's attention and now we finally have it! If we can fix our family, we can fix *everything*!"

Blue Diamond: "But in order to fix it, we'd have to admit that it's broken."

Yellow Diamond: "She'll never wanna hear it."

Steven: “But it’s the truth!”

Connie: “My mom back on Earth used to have so many rules for me to follow. It was so overwhelming and it made me feel miserable. After I told her how I was feeling, things got *way* better between us. She even let me come out to space to help Steven. If White knew how unhappy she’s made you feel, maybe everything would change.”

Blue Diamond: “What do you say, Yellow? Do you think White might actually listen to us for a change?”

Yellow Diamond: “It’s worth a try.”

(“Change Your Mind”, Season 5 Episode 29-32, 13:07-14:34 min.)

Through Steven, the audience learns that conflicts can be resolved amicably. However, the opposing party, in this case, White Diamond, has to *listen* for a productive conversation to be possible. This is further exemplified by Steven’s song “Change Your Mind”, which brings the series to a close.

Steven: “I don’t need you to respect me, I respect me. I don’t need you to love me, I love me. But I want you to know you could know me, if you change your mind.”

(“Change Your Mind”, Season 5 Episode 29-32, 44:03-44:33 min.)

When Steven first tries to communicate with White Diamond, the matriarch disregards his woes, deaf to his pleas for change; only once she gives him her full attention can White Diamond actively listen and learn from him, changing her mind in the process of their conversation. The song “Change Your Mind”, also entitling the series’ finale, emphasises that it is important to love and respect yourself first. Others, even family members, might not want to get to know the true you; however, by engaging in conversation, they might change their minds if they are open-minded and willing to listen.

4.4 General Findings

Steven Universe presents viewers with empathetic portrayals of queerness on Earth, as fusion and non-normative gender expressions are normalised and celebrated. By utilising fusion as a storytelling device, the series gives audience members visualisations that can be interpreted as different kinds of love, making it possible to differentiate between the love that might be felt for friends (philia), romantic partners (eros), or family members (storge). Fusions, when understood as representations of queer love, also grant viewers the possibility to observe the way queer people are treated differently, based on their place of residence. Earth, which is portrayed as a place with freedom of gender expression, is contrasted with Homeworld, where Gems need to conform to strict gender norms to avoid punitive consequences. On Homeworld, queerphobia is expressed outwardly by the Diamonds through their abhorrence of fusion, which

results in queer-coded Gems, such as the Off Colors, internalising a sense of worthlessness. However, the events in the series' finale may prompt a revision of these queerphobic norms. In addition to this, *Steven Universe* offers audience members examples of non-normative gender expressions, such as the series' depiction of female-presenting characters as strong fighters and its association of Steven with the colour pink. These aspects counter prevalent gender norms and may lead viewers to challenge gender categories. Throughout the series, Steven also acts as a role model, showing kindness towards everyone and inspiring others to follow suit. Similar to Lars' character development, audience members may be positively influenced by Steven's empathetic and pacifist demeanour. Overall, the series' positive portrayals of queerness provide viewers with great learning opportunities.

5 The *Steven Universe* Project

This chapter centres around the *Steven Universe* project, comprising three lesson plans that aim to provide educators, specifically Austrian EFL teachers, with an approach to openly discuss queer topics in the classroom, using a children's animated series with positive queer representation.

5.1 Methodology

The following three lesson plans are exemplary, theoretical in nature, serving a purpose as possible materials for teachers, who would like to use *Steven Universe* to teach students about queerness. Hence, these lessons have yet to be conducted and evaluated by teacher practitioners. The general objective is for the classroom to become a safe space for everyone, especially queer students, characterised by empathy and compassion. Although these lesson plans pertain to the Austrian curriculum, they may be utilised by educators globally.

These three lesson plans have been specifically designed for a 5th grade AHS (Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schule) English class, comprising 24 students with a B1 level of English, according to the CEFR (Common European Frame of Reference). The choice of a 5th grade, 14–15-year-old students, was made for this project, in order to establish a balance between students' interests and their English language proficiency as well as their ability to understand and think critically about queerness. As *Steven Universe* is a children's series, older students might not be intrigued by its content or humour; however, lower secondary students may have difficulties understanding the vocabulary and underlying queer themes.

In the 5th grade, Austrian students have three lessons of English per week. It would be sensible to dedicate one of these weekly lessons to *Steven Universe*, as this project will require students to watch selected episodes of the series at home. They will need time to prepare for the next *Steven Universe* lesson, which will be based on the content of the episodes they have watched. I have created a watching plan (Table 2) as an overview for the students, detailing which episodes are supposed to be watched at which point in the project. During the lessons, we will then discuss specific scenes, making queer themes visible and connecting the series' content to real life experiences.

I have designed the lesson plans on the basis of the CELTER (Centre for English Language Learning, Teaching, and Teacher Education Research) lesson plan template, which has been slightly adapted. As a result, the contextualisation, topic appropriateness and relevance, and reference to curriculum, will only appear once for all three lesson plans, with the latter also including reference to the guidelines of the BMB on „Reflexive Geschlechterpädagogik und Gleichstellung in Unterrichtsmitteln“ (BMB, *Unterrichtsmittel*) as well as current literature on good teaching practice (Breux; Johnston). On the other hand, the precise learning outcomes, CEFR competences, and EPOSTL (European Portfolio of Student Teachers of Languages) descriptors will be provided for each lesson plan individually, followed by the step-by-step procedure, detailing the lessons' contents.

	In class	Homework
Lesson 0	Introducing students to <i>Steven Universe</i> Watching Season 1 Episode 1	-“Steven’s Lion” (Season 1 Episode 10) -“Giant Woman” (Season 1 Episode 12) -“Mirror Gem” (Season 1 Episode 25) -“Ocean Gem” (Season 1 Episode 26) -“Island Adventure” (Season 1 Episode 30) -“ Alone Together ” (Season 1 Episode 36) -“The Return” (Season 1 Episode 52) -“Jailbreak” (Season 1 Episode 53) -“Sworn to the Sword” (Season 2 Episode 5) -“Sadie’s Song” (Season 2 Episode 16) -“ The Answer ” (Season 2 Episode 21)
Lesson 1	Queer Love and Queerphobia Focus on: -“Alone Together” (Season 1 Episode 36) -“The Answer” (Season 2 Episode 21)	-“Bismuth” (Season 3 Episode 20-21) -“Mindful Education” (Season 4 Episode 4) -“Gem Heist” (Season 4 Episode 13) -“The Zoo” (Season 4 Episode 14) -“That Will Be All” (Season 4 Episode 15) -“ Off Colors ” (Season 5 Episode 3)

		-“Your Mother and Mine” (Season 5 Episode 13) -“A Single Pale Rose” (Season 5 Episode 18) - “Reunited” (Season 5 Episode 23-24)
Lesson 2	Gender Expressions Focus on: -“Off Colors” (Season 5 Episode 3) -“Reunited” (Season 5 Episode 23-24)	-“Legs From Here to Homeworld” (Season 5 Episode 25) -“Familiar” (Season 5 Episode 26) -“Together Alone” (Season 5 Episode 27) - “Change Your Mind” (Season 5 Episode 29-32)
Lesson 3	Overcoming Queerphobia Focus on: -“Change Your Mind” (Season 5 Episode 29-32)	

Table 2. *Watching Plan for the Steven Universe lessons.*

5.2 Lesson Plans

Before the first *Steven Universe* lesson, the students will be introduced to the series, by watching the first episode together in class and receiving general information about the show from the teacher (Lesson Zero). Following this introductory segment, the first lesson on *Steven Universe* will explore the difference between sex and gender, gender performativity, diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, a platonic and romantic conception of love, and the existence of queerphobia. In the second lesson, gender categories will be queered, individuality and intersectional discrimination examined, and empathy towards strangers addressed. Concluding the project, the third and last lesson will allow students to expand their knowledge on different kinds of love, ponder consequences for (gender) nonconformity in fiction and reality, discuss the prospect of helping others overcome their queerphobia, and reflect on the series’ content as well as the insights they have gained. All lessons will also provide students with the opportunity to pose questions, as they might require further elaboration of a complex concept or have a more general inquiry. These questions will be collected in written form at the end of each *Steven Universe* lesson, to be answered in the following English class. Lastly, all materials that were created for these lessons, such as worksheets or Power Point slides, can be found in the Appendix.

As the lessons centre on discussions, either in groups or with the entire class, the language skill most needed is speaking. This is then followed by writing, present in producing uplifting notes or perhaps in posing a question, and listening, which is needed pre-eminently during the

teacher's explanations and discussions. Reading is only explicitly required once, when articles about queerphobia in society are studied. Therefore, it would be reasonable to focus on vocabulary and grammar exercises, as well as, perhaps, reading, in the two weekly lessons in between the *Steven Universe* project. However, if students are very engrossed in the exercises in connection with *Steven Universe*, the teacher may also decide to utilise one of these other weekly English lessons as a continuation of the *Steven Universe* project, finishing the activities and answering students' questions.

Furthermore, the series itself should be both appropriate and relevant for a 5th grade classroom. Indeed, I would expect the language level of *Steven Universe* to not exceed the CEFR level of B1, due to its target audience being children with English as their first language. The content of the show also features no explicit scenes or language, and complex topics, such as queerness, are discussed with simple, child-friendly terms. In addition to this, the relevance of *Steven Universe* is indisputable, as the topics that are addressed are of immense importance for the lives of students. To exemplify, the series normalises non-traditional family constellations, queerness, or asking for help when feeling mentally unwell through its diverse depictions and storylines. Moreover, it portrays issues of self-worth due to (gender) nonconformity from an individual as well as a societal perspective. Overall, *Steven Universe* teaches viewers about the horrors of war and colonisation, convincing them to choose love over violence and value the environment, as well as the people and creatures inhabiting it, by showing empathy.

In addition to this, the activities in the lesson plans are reflective of current literature on good teaching practice. While conceptualising the lessons, I have focused specifically on variation, cooperation, and relevance. Including a variety of activities, methods, and interaction formats in a lesson keeps students interested. This is facilitated further by incorporating games and other fun elements to review content (Breux 85, 92-93; Johnston 84, 104-105, 156). Teachers are also advised to actively engage students in the learning process, for instance, with group work. By cooperating with their classmates in discussions or project work, students can learn and develop social skills (Breux 73-74, 87; Johnston 132, 135). Moreover, meaningful learning occurs when the content is deemed relevant for the students' lives, helping them reflect on their own experiences and hone their critical thinking skills (Breux 76-77, 89-90; Johnston 54, 107). Thus, in my lesson plans, I have aimed to provide students with a variety of tasks, including fun elements, such as developing a short sketch or creating an original character. Furthermore, I have incorporated several pair and group work activities as well as opportunities to connect the topics presented in *Steven Universe* to the lives of the students.

Lastly, educating students on queerness, helping them develop empathy for the queer Other, and choosing *Steven Universe* as teaching material can be justified with reference to the Austrian AHS curriculum and the BMB guidelines for teaching materials on gender education. The curriculum features the topics “me and my surroundings”, “life planning”, “attitudes and values”, and “living together” for upper-secondary English classes and “social relations: forms of family, partnership, and friendship” for 5th grade Ethics classes (BMB, *Lehrplan AHS “Achter Teil”*, [my translation]), which I believe to be particularly relevant for educating students on queerness, as they allow students to reflect on previously held beliefs, potentially changing their outlook on life and the people they encounter. Moreover, cross-curricular teaching is recommended, with the curriculum listing overarching topics that may be taught in any subject. These topics include “Reflective Gender Education and Equality”, which encourages students to queer gender norms and stereotypes, reflecting on societal as well as individual prejudices and values (BMB, *Lehrplan AHS “Vierter Teil”*; BMB, *Grundsatzertlass 4-5*). In connection with this overarching topic, a guideline on teaching materials proclaims that diversity ought to be presented in non-stereotypical ways, using inclusive language and providing students with opportunities for reflection. Hence, *Steven Universe* is an excellent material for gender education, as it depicts diverse family constellations, such as Steven living with Garnet, Amethyst, and Pearl, while his father occasionally visits. Furthermore, people of all genders are represented in non-stereotypical ways, for instance, Steven being prone to crying and connected to the colour pink, Pearl and Peridot being scientifically gifted, Sadie’s mother working as a “mailman” and Connie’s mother as a doctor. Additionally, the series addresses discrimination against queer lifestyles, for example, with the hatred towards cross-gem fusion, as well as violence in family and society, which is shown by the Diamonds mistreating and deadnaming Steven. Overall, *Steven Universe* uses non-discriminatory language and non-stereotypical visuals in its portrayals of diversity, encouraging discussions and reflections on gender norms and stereotypes in the classroom (BMB, *Unterrichtsmittel 9-13*).

5.2.1 Lesson 1: Queer Love and Queerphobia

This first *Steven Universe* lesson, on the topic of queer love and queerphobia, comprises six activities: a mind-map on the topic of gender, a comparison of definitions regarding sex and gender, a familiarisation with terms related to sexual orientation and gender diversity, a comparison of two kinds of love, a discussion about queerphobia, and an opportunity to ask questions. After this lesson, the students will be able to define gender performativity, correctly use terms related to queer identities, differentiate between *philia* and *eros*, and provide reasons

as well as countermeasures for queerphobia in society. The specific CEFR competences and EPOSTL descriptors are listed in Table 3.

CEFR Competences	“Can understand straightforward factual information about common everyday [...] topics, identifying both general messages and specific details, provided people articulate clearly in a generally familiar variety.” (CEFR, Overall oral comprehension, B1) “Can report straightforward factual information on a familiar topic [...], provided they can prepare beforehand” (CEFR, Sustained monologue: giving information, B1) “Can relate the plot of a book or film and describe their reactions.” (CEFR, Sustained monologue: describing experience, B1)
EPOSTL Descriptors	“I can create a supportive atmosphere that invites learners to take part in speaking activities.” (EPOSTL, Speaking, no. 1) “I can evaluate and select meaningful speaking and interactional activities to encourage learners of differing abilities to participate.” (EPOSTL, Speaking, no. 2) “I can evaluate and select a range of meaningful speaking and interactional activities to develop fluency (discussion, role play, problem solving etc.).” (EPOSTL, Speaking, no. 4)

Table 3. *CEFR Competences and EPOSTL Descriptors for Lesson One.*

To begin the lesson, the term “gender” is written on the blackboard, and the teacher asks students for their associations with the word. By having the students name interconnected aspects that relate to the topic “gender”, the teacher can assess their prior knowledge and create a mind-map, visualising the topic and its potential components.

After the students have copied the mind-map into their notebooks, the teacher proceeds to explain the difference between “sex” and “gender”, comparing them to the German word “Geschlecht”. A distinction between a biological understanding of the body and a socio-cultural one is made, referring to sex and gender, respectively. The teacher then introduces the class to Judith Butler’s concept of gender performativity. Using high-frequency words, the teacher can remark, “with how we dress and act, we tell the world how we want to be seen and spoken to; for example, by wearing a dress, I can show that I want to be seen as a woman”. It can further be addressed that men or intersex individuals may also wear dresses to appear (more) feminine, and that queer ways of dress or behaviour may be adopted to challenge existing norms, in regard to the categories “male” and “female”. Subsequently, the students are presented with a gender

spectrum (male – female), on which they help the teacher place the terms “hunter”, “cooking”, “intelligent”, “emotional”, “fighting”, and “healing”, providing explanations for their choices (Figure 23). In a following step, the *Steven Universe* characters Connie, Steven, Sadie, and Lars are displayed, and students are asked to reflect on their previous decisions. To exemplify, if the term “fighting” was placed on the male end of the spectrum, it may now move towards the middle or the female end, as the students remember seeing the Gems and Connie using their weapons to fight and protect others. The teacher explains that *Steven Universe* reverses stereotypical gender traits. For instance, oftentimes (non-binary) women are portrayed as aggressive and confrontational, while men are depicted as fragile and in need of protection. By using examples from the series, the teacher can mention that queer presentations of gender have the potential to induce a revision of gender norms.

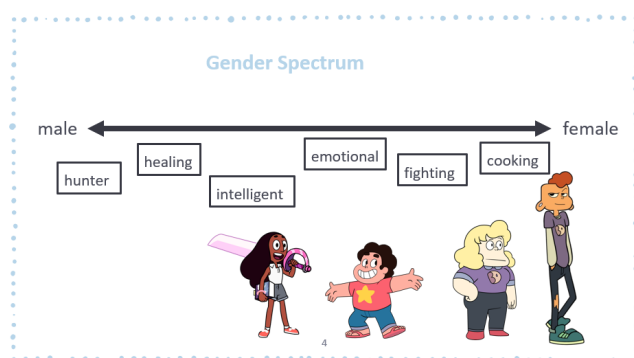


Figure 23. *Steven Universe and the Gender Spectrum.*

The next activity focuses on diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities. In preparation for the lesson, the teacher gathers 26 small pieces of paper, one for every student. Each card will feature one of the following 15 terms: “queer”, “gay/homosexual”, “lesbian/homosexual”, “questioning”, “aromantic”, “asexual”, “demisexual”, “bisexual”, “biromantic”, “pansexual”, “panromantic”, “cisgender”, “transgender”, “non-binary”, and “genderfluid”; the teacher can choose which of these words to use twice, perhaps those they would deem lesser well known. During the lesson, each student takes one of the cards, researching the term it contains; they may use their laptop or phone to complete this step. The objective of this individual work is for each student to have a definition of their word, reproducing the information they found online in their own words. Thereafter, all 15 labels are discussed in the plenary. In case two students have researched the same term, they can expand on each other’s definition. In the course of this deliberation, it would be sensible for the teacher to direct the students’ attention to the prefixes “inter”, “trans”, “hetero”, “homo”, “bi”, “pan”, and “a”, present in several of the words, as deconstructing these labels may enhance the students’ understanding of them. In addition to

this, the teacher can explicate the categories “intersex” and “non-binary” with the *Steven Universe* character Stevonnie, emphasising that they are both Steven and Connie, but also neither a girl nor a boy, in reference to both their sex as well as their gender. The teacher can ask about their personality and abilities, highlighting that Stevonnie is a combination of Steven and Connie, but, nevertheless, their own person.

For the subsequent exercise, the students form pairs and join one of two groups, named “Stevonnie” and “Garnet”. The students are tasked to invent and perform a scene about love with their partner, embodying either Ruby and Sapphire or Steven and Connie. This scene should be fairly short, approximately a minute, and is to be shown to a pair of the other group, not to the entire class. Thus, a pair of the Stevonnie group performs their scene for a pair of the Garnet group. While waiting for their classmates to finish the activity, the newly formed groups of four have time to engage in conversation about their scenes and different portrayals of love, comparing and contrasting platonic and romantic relationships. These talks continue in the plenary, where the teacher introduces the students to the concepts of *philia* and *eros*, helping them to distinguish between these different kinds of love.

Following this drama exercise and conversation about love, the students’ experiences watching the episodes “Alone Together” (Season 1 Episode 36) and “The Answer” (Season 2 Episode 21) are discussed in relation to queerphobia. Stevonnie and Garnet exemplify queer experiences, as they portray a non-binary coming out and a queer romantic relationship, respectively. In these episodes specifically, the students were confronted with the positive and negative reactions of other characters towards Stevonnie and Garnet being formed for the first time through fusion. The reactions from the Crystal Gems and Homeworld Gems can be compared, queering the negative attitudes of the latter group. Furthermore, the teacher can pose questions, such as, “Why would anyone react negatively to another person’s existence or romantic feelings?”, “Why does queerphobia – showing hatred towards queer people – exist?”, and “What can we do to help make queer people feel safe?”. During this deliberation, the topic of internalised queerphobia as well as the provision of safe spaces (in school) for queer individuals can be addressed.

At the end of the lesson, the students are provided with an opportunity to reflect on its content and write down any questions they may have. The teacher can store these anonymous pieces of paper in a small container for safekeeping until they are answered.

Evidently, the first lesson on *Steven Universe* includes varied methods as well as interaction formats, cooperative learning activities, and information that is relevant to the students. Indeed, next to teacher-centred instruction, this lesson features individual work, pair work, group work, and plenary discussions. In addition to this, the students are involved in the creation of a mind-map, research information online, and invent, as well as perform, a short scene. Hence, the students are active for the majority of the lesson, learning cooperatively in pairs and groups, while (hopefully) having fun embodying, or engaging in conversation about, characters of *Steven Universe*. Furthermore, the topics presented in this lesson are of relevance to the students' lives, as knowledge about terms concerning the diversity of sexual orientations and gender identity may be helpful for better understanding a queer friend or family member as well as for challenging queerphobia.

5.2.2 Lesson 2: Gender Expression

The topic for the second lesson on *Steven Universe* is gender expression. In this session, the students are engaged in activities about queering gender stereotypes, examining intersectional discriminations, discussing empathy towards strangers, and, once again, have possibility to ask questions. After this lesson, the students will be able to define intersectionality, provide examples for (counter-)stereotypes, and share their knowledge about privilege and discrimination. The CEFR competences and EPOSTL descriptors for this lesson can be found in Table 4.

CEFR Competences	“Can follow a lecture [...], provided the subject matter is familiar and the presentation straightforward and clearly structured.” (CEFR, Understanding as a member of a live audience, B1) “Can reasonably fluently sustain a straightforward description of one of a variety of subjects within their field of interest, presenting it as a linear sequence of points.” (CEFR, Overall oral production, B1) “Can produce straightforward connected texts on a range of familiar subjects within their field of interest, by linking a series of shorter discrete elements into a linear sequence.” (CEFR, Overall written production, B1)
EPOSTL Descriptors	“I can evaluate and select texts, source materials and activities to make the learners aware of stereotyped views and challenge these.” (EPOSTL, Culture, no. 6) “I can evaluate and select a variety of texts, source material and activities which help learners to reflect on the concept of ‘otherness’ and understand different value systems.” (EPOSTL, Culture, no. 5)

	“I can evaluate and select meaningful activities to encourage learners to develop their creative potential.” (EPOSTL, Writing, no. 1)
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Table 4. *CEFR Competences and EPOSTL Descriptors for Lesson Two.*

At the beginning of the lesson, the students receive a worksheet with the task to categorise 25 characteristics, such as “athletic”, “cooperative”, or “gentle”, as generally masculine, feminine, neutral, and whether these attributes would describe themselves as well (Figure 24). After talking about their choices with a partner, gender stereotypes are contemplated in a plenary discussion. The focus of this deliberation should be on the fact that stereotypes generalise information, potentially falsifying it, as well as the presence of stereotypes in the media we consume. A definition of “stereotype” can also be written on the blackboard. Regarding the latter aspect of the discussion, the teacher then mentions that in *Steven Universe* stereotypes often appear purposefully reversed, for instance, in Steven’s depiction as a sensitive and caring boy as well as his association with the colour pink. Moreover, the teacher can show the students the previously analysed image from the episode “Reunited” (Season 5 Episode 23-24) (Figure 11), to exemplify the series’ counterstereotypes, indicated through the dress (and behaviour) of the characters, the way in which they perform their gender. The image also highlights the show’s non-stereotypical and diverse representation, regarding people of all genders.

Typically male – typically female – typically me

Characteristics	more “male”	more “female”	neutral	me
adventurous				
aggressive				
ambitious				
assertive				
athletic				
calm				
caring				

Figure 24. *Excerpt From the Gender Stereotypes Worksheet, adapted from Leeb et al. 27-29.*

Following this exploration of stereotypical and counterstereotypical attributes, the teacher emphasises that gender is one aspect of a person’s identity and that every individual contains diverse intersecting categories, connected to power and privilege. Kimberlé Crenshaw’s conception of intersectionality is then explained with high-frequency words. For instance, the teacher can say,

“Depending on the categories a person falls into, they are more or less discriminated against in society, meaning that they are either privileged and have advantages over others, or they are hurt and treated unfairly by the people around them. These discriminations also intersect. This means that a white woman might be confronted with sexism and a Black man might be confronted with racism, but a Black woman is disadvantaged in both categories; they intersect, the discrimination specifically against Black women is a mix of sexism and racism that cannot be placed in one of these categories alone”.

When explaining this concept to the students, it would be sensible for the teacher to write a definition of intersectionality on the blackboard and to highlight that discrimination is incomparable, as living with a disability cannot be equated to living in poverty, for instance.

In the next step, the students are given a paper cutout of the “wheel of power/privilege” (Figure 25) and tasked to categorise Steven, in pairs or small groups, familiarising themselves with the sections in the process. The teacher then addresses the fact that discrimination on the basis of race, class, and gender is most common in our society, whereas in *Steven Universe*, Gems are oftentimes discriminated against based on their abilities, class, and sexuality. For instance, Amethyst is mistreated for being small, Pearl is expected to only serve other Gems, and Garnet is not allowed to exist on Homeworld.

WHEEL OF POWER/PRIVILEGE

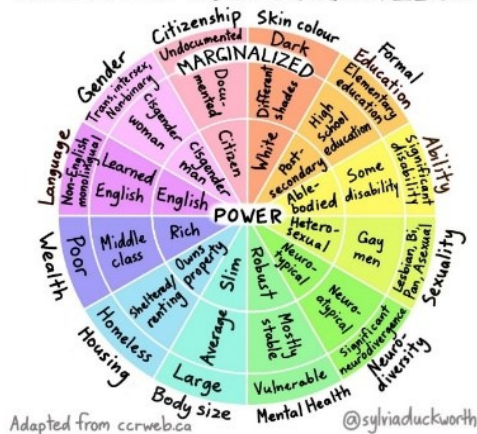


Figure 25. *Wheel of Power/Privilege* by @sylviaaduckworth.

For the remainder of this activity, the students create an original character: a Gem, a human, or a Gem-human. In groups of four, the students first pick a “pronoun card” – “she/her”, “she/they”, “he/him”, “he/they”, or “they/them” – prepared in advance, emphasising gender anew as a spectrum. The students then choose three to five additional categories from the “wheel of power/privilege” and sketch their character on a piece of paper, before briefly presenting them to their classmates, focusing on the correct use of their character’s pronouns.

Thereafter, the students' watching experiences of the episodes "Off Colors" (Season 5 Episode 3) and "Reunited" (Season 5 Episode 23-24) are discussed, in relation to empathetic and respectful treatment of others. In highlighting the different treatment of nonconforming Gems on Homeworld compared to Earth, which is prominent in these two episodes, the students are made aware of the fact that the series aims to teach its viewers that everyone is deserving of empathy and respect. Occasionally, others may not accept empathy, which *Steven Universe* illustrates with the Off Colors' internalised hatred towards themselves, especially present in the episode "Your Mother and Mine" (Season 5 Episode 13). However, they should still be treated with respect.

During this activity, the teacher asks how Steven shows empathy in the series, towards friends and family, but also towards strangers and "monsters". Additionally, the students contemplate Lars' character development, comparing his demeanour in "Island Adventure" (Season 1 Episode 30) and "Off Colors" (Season 5 Episode 3). Reaching the consensus that people ought to be treated empathetically, regardless of potential differences in comparison with ourselves, the students reflect on how they themselves can show empathy to others. The students then imagine that they have the possibility to meet the Off Colors and write one of them an uplifting note; by providing the students with pretty as well as colourful paper, the teacher can make this task even grander. In the remaining few minutes, the students are again given the opportunity to reflect on the lesson and write down any questions.

This lesson plan for the second *Steven Universe* lesson features a variety of interaction formats, ranging from individual, pair, and group work to plenary discussions and teacher-centred instruction. In addition to this, the students complete varied activities, including the categorisation of attributes according to gender on a worksheet, the engagement in deliberations about gender stereotypes, intersectional discrimination, and empathy towards strangers, the group design and presentation of an original character, and the writing of a short text for a fictional character. Most of these activities require the students' active engagement in the learning process, aiming to promote cooperation through pair and group work sequences. Moreover, through the inclusion of fun and creative elements, such as the creation of an original character and the note-writing to a fictional character, it was aspired to make learning more interesting for the students. Lastly, the topics that are discussed in this lesson are also relevant to the students' lives, as they further critical thinking about stereotypes and societal discrimination, and, by contemplating the empathetic treatment of characters in *Steven Universe*, the students may hone their own sense of empathy through these positive role models.

5.2.3 Lesson 3: Overcoming Queerphobia

The third and last *Steven Universe* lesson focuses on overcoming queerphobia. It includes an exploration of six types of love (philia, eros, storge, agape, philautia, and philosophia), a discussion of queerphobia and the conquering thereof in the *Steven Universe* finale, comparing fiction to reality, the creation of a poster in solidarity of queer individuals, the disclosure of favourite moments as well as suggestions regarding the continuation of the story in *Steven Universe*, and, as always, the opportunity to ask questions. After this lesson, the students will be able to define the abovementioned kinds of love, providing examples for each one, and express their opinion about queerphobia in society as well as the conquering thereof. The CEFR competences and EPOSTL descriptors for this lesson are included in Table 5.

CEFR Competences	“Can give a prepared straightforward presentation on a familiar topic within their field which is clear enough to be followed without difficulty most of the time, and in which the main points are explained with reasonable precision.” (CEFR, Addressing audiences, B1) “Can follow argumentation and discussion on a familiar or predictable topic, provided the points are made in relatively simple language and/or repeated, and opportunity is given for clarification.” (CEFR, Formal discussion, B1) “Can express thoughts on more abstract, cultural topics such as films, books, music, etc.” (CEFR, Overall oral interaction, B1)
EPOSTL Descriptors	“I can select texts appropriate to the needs, interests and language level of the learners.” (EPOSTL, Reading, no. 1) “I can evaluate and select a variety of post-reading tasks to provide a bridge between reading and other skills.” (EPOSTL, Reading, no. 7) “I can evaluate and select a variety of materials to stimulate speaking activities (visual aids, texts, authentic materials etc.).” (EPOSTL, Speaking, no. 6)

Table 5. *CEFR Competences and EPOSTL Descriptors for Lesson Three.*

The first activity of the lesson centres around different kinds of love. In addition to philia and eros, storge, agape, philautia, and philosophia will be studied. The teacher begins by reminding the students of their first lesson on *Steven Universe*, in which the differences between platonic and romantic relationships were discussed, using the characters Stevonnie and Garnet. In preparation for this activity, the teacher has labelled twelve cards (pieces of A4 paper), six with “philia”, “eros”, “storge”, “agape”, “philautia”, and “philosophia”, and the remaining six with an example of each kind of love. The students are then divided into six groups, each group

selecting a card with one of the terms. Meanwhile, the pieces of paper inscribed with the examples are displayed on the blackboard, using magnets. In their groups, the students research their term, writing down a short, paraphrased definition. Furthermore, they attempt to match their card to its corresponding example on the blackboard. Once all groups have completed this task, the different kinds of love are deliberated in the plenary, with one member of each group presenting their definition and example. Thereafter, these six kinds of love are explored in relation to *Steven Universe*, with a specific focus on the portrayal of storge in “Change Your Mind” (Season 5 Episode 29-32). Images depicting the fusions Smoky Quartz, Rainbow Quartz 2.0, Sunstone, and Obsidian, which contain Steven and at least one of his family members, are shown to the students, exemplifying the strong familial love these characters feel for one another. In addition to a conversation about storge, the teacher can ask the students for further examples of these six kinds of love, pertaining to their experiences, provided that they feel comfortable sharing stories from their own lives.

Subsequently, the portrayal of queerphobia in the series’ finale is examined, including a comparison of fiction and reality. The teacher first inquires about queerphobic comments made by *Steven Universe* characters, for instance, the Diamonds’ abhorrence of cross-gem fusion or their insistent referral to Steven as “Pink”, eventually leading to a deliberation of the topic in the plenary. In the next step, the class is split into two groups, each group receiving one of two newspaper articles to read. Prior to the lesson, the teacher adapted these texts, slightly shortening them as well as altering the vocabulary to align more closely with the students’ current English language proficiency level. After reading the articles and answering five questions related to them, students from each group form pairs to inform one another of their text’s content and confer on their answers to the reading questions. The persistence of queerphobia in society is then discussed with the entire class, emphasising that the fight for queer rights is ongoing.

Following this exchange about the perseverance of queerphobic beliefs, the possibility of overcoming queerphobia as an individual and as a society is explored, in *Steven Universe* as well as in reality. This activity begins with an inquiry about the difference between the approaches of White Diamond and Steven in “Change Your Mind” (Season 5 Episode 29-32), as both characters attempt to convince others to reconsider previous convictions; however, while White Diamond employs violence, Steven uses peaceful communication. On the basis of the information from the articles of the previous activity and their watching experience of *Steven Universe*, the students then form pairs or small groups to debate the possibility of

changing another person's mind, to be more accepting of queer people; the students can also share personal stories, if they feel comfortable enough in their groups. Afterwards, the students are given time to reflect on all *Steven Universe* lessons, compiling their knowledge to write a reason for accepting and respecting queer individuals on small and colourful pieces of paper, supplied by the teacher. While the students work, the teacher can play music, for instance, the *Steven Universe* songs "Escapism", "Change Your Mind", and "Love Like You", as they are calm and comforting. The students' notes are then collected and taped onto a poster entitled "A Queerer Future", which can be displayed in the classroom.

The next activity is referred to as a "story circle" by me. It requires the students to leave their desks and form a circle in the classroom, either with chairs or standing upright. The teacher then hands the students a small and soft ball to lightly throw to one another. Whoever is in possession of the ball discloses their favourite moment(s) from *Steven Universe*. Thereafter, the ball is passed from one student to the next, as they imagine a possible continuation of Steven's story, with each student only adding a few sentences to the collective narrative. Lastly, as always, the students can use the final minutes of the lesson to write down any lingering questions.

This lesson concludes the *Steven Universe* project. Similar to the previous two lessons, this session comprises various teaching methods as well as interaction formats. To exemplify, in this lesson, the students research information online, read slightly modified newspaper articles, engage in discussions, collaborate on the creation of a poster in support of queerness, and playfully pass a soft ball to one another in order to partake in a last meaningful exchange about having watched *Steven Universe*. In addition to this, the students work individually, in pairs or groups, and in the plenary. The absence of teacher-centred instruction results in additional time, which the students spend actively involved in conversations with one another. Thus, cooperative learning takes place throughout the lesson, when the students work together to define different kinds of love, and discuss (overcoming) queerphobia as well as their general thoughts on *Steven Universe*. Moreover, it is hoped that providing the students with cards on the different kinds of love, colourful paper, and a small ball, contributes towards making learning fun, and that conveying the relevance of the topics to the students captures their interest. Regarding this last aspect, the subject matter can be connected to the students' lives, as they are given space to reflect on storage in their own family, critically think about queerphobia in our contemporary society, and express their empathy as well as support towards queer individuals by writing a respectful note.

5.3 General Considerations

Overall, these three *Steven Universe* lessons are adaptable, contain cross-curricular teachings, and provide students with learning that is varied, cooperative, and relevant to their lives. Indeed, the lesson plans serve as guidelines for teachers. Instead of rigorously following them, educators are advised to adapt them to the specific needs of the students they are currently teaching. Whether an educator has eager and ambitious students in need of a challenge or students who need additional support, the lesson plans can be modified accordingly. For instance, the former type of learners can be supplied with additional tasks or the original versions of the newspaper articles about queerphobia. On the other hand, the teacher can help the latter kind of students by shortening the activities or providing them with additional time as well as language support, such as explanations of vocabulary from the *Steven Universe* episodes and detailed summaries of the episodes' content. Furthermore, before the *Steven Universe* project can commence, the teacher may need to confirm whether the students can maintain a respectful classroom environment when discussing topics related to queerness. Therefore, the students should establish or be reminded of classroom rules for communication, such as actively listening to a classmate's contribution, without interrupting or belittling them, as well as accepting opinions that differ from their own. There might be students who are averse to learning about queerness. Although everyone has a right to share and justify their opinions, hateful language should not be tolerated, especially as there may be queer or closeted students in the classroom. Regarding their prior knowledge on the subject, the students might also differ considerably. While some students may have already conducted their own research on queerness, others may be learning about it for the first time. These more knowledgeable students can be of assistance, for instance, with the explanations of queer terms and concepts, while the teacher endeavours to prevent the content from being boring as well as overwhelming. Evidently, students in a classroom form a heterogeneous group, but activities can be adapted to their specific needs, for the best possible learning experience.

In addition to this, the lesson plans combine aspects from both English and Ethics classes. On the one hand, the language of instruction for the entirety of the *Steven Universe* project is English; it is the language, in which the students watch the series and discuss its content. Furthermore, these lessons feature the CEFR competences speaking, listening, writing, and reading, with a particular focus on spoken interaction. By engaging in conversation, the students improve their English language proficiency, while learning about queerness. On the other hand, teachers may also include queer topics in Ethics, in connection with "social relations: forms of

family, partnership, and friendship” (BMB, *Lehrplan AHS* “Achter Teil”, [my translation]). Concepts such as gender performativity or different kinds of love – especially Aristoteles’ conceptualisation of *philia*, *eros*, and *agape* – can be taught, or revisited in the 6th grade, with regard to “love and sexuality: sex and gender, moral dimensions of love and sexuality” (BMB, *Lehrplan AHS* “Achter Teil”, [my translation]). During the *Steven Universe* project, certain subject matters recur as well, providing the students with an opportunity to deepen their knowledge. For instance, different kinds of love are first addressed with a comparison of *philia* and *eros*, before also including *storge*, *agape*, *philautia*, and *philosophia* in later activity. Similarly, when queerphobia is first mentioned, the students compile general reasons and countermeasures for it, followed by a discussion about more specific ways to overcome the phenomenon, in a subsequent lesson. Lastly, empathy is first introduced with a note-writing activity to a fictional character and later widened to queer individuals in general. Notably, in these examples, the topics are first encountered with *Steven Universe*, as the students embody Stevonnie and Garnet to depict *philia* and *eros*, queerphobia is addressed in relation to the experiences of Garnet and the Off Colors, and empathy is discussed with a focus on the Off Colors as well. After being deliberated in a fictional context, the subject matter is then revisited in connection with reality, for instance, students’ own experiences or newspaper articles.

Aside from the individualisation and cross-curricular teachings, the lesson plans also show variety, cooperation, and relevance. Certainly, the learning experiences in the *Steven Universe* lessons are varied, as they include diverse teaching methods and interaction formats, mentioned at length in the analyses above. With a focus on active participation of the students instead of teacher-centred instruction, cooperative learning occurs, oftentimes in pairs or small groups, to make conversations about sensitive topics less daunting. Variation in the lessons, as well as creative elements, such as designing an original character or the myriad references to *Steven Universe*, can make learning interesting and fun. A teacher’s creativity can also be utilised when students are grouped together. Instead of letting the students choose their group members or randomly assigning them, the teacher can, for instance, use sweets or UNO cards to form groups. When groups of four are needed in the *Steven Universe* lessons, the teacher could also print out scenes from the show and cut them into four parts, or distribute items with the colours pink, blue, yellow, and white, representing the Diamonds, letting the students find their group members. Moreover, the topics that are featured in the lesson plans, while related to *Steven Universe*, are also shown to be relevant to the students’ lives. As queerphobia is a continued issue in society, engaging in critical discussions on this topic may help students to view queerness more positively. By teaching about gender performativity, diverse sexual orientations

and gender identities, different kinds of love, counterstereotypes, intersectionality, and possibilities of overcoming queerphobia, students can learn to value queerness and show empathy towards queer individuals, which may include themselves, classmates, friends or family members.

6 Discussion of Results

This chapter revisits aspects of the analysis of selected *Steven Universe* episodes and the lesson plan designs, offering connections to previous research. The potential of this children's animated series, to teach students about queerness and develop their empathy, will be explored. Regarding the education of queerness, Judith Butler's conception of gender performativity is discussed, in relation to portrayals of gender nonconformity in *Steven Universe*, the concept of intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, is linked to *Steven Universe*'s authentic queer representation, and Queer Pedagogy, developed by Deborah P. Britzman, is used to investigate the queering of gender stereotypes in connection with *Steven Universe*. The development of students' empathy – understood as a combination of philoxenia and grief – is explored with Emmanuel Levinas' conception of the Other and the empathetic demeanours of *Steven Universe* characters. Through the authentic portrayals of queerness in *Steven Universe* and open discussions thereof, it should be possible to establish a safe learning environment for (queer) students.

6.1 Gender Performativity in *Steven Universe*

In their everyday lives, students are confronted with gender stereotypes, for instance, in television series or movies. If left unquestioned, these generalisations about women and men could lead to the false belief that gender roles are fixed (Reinhard and Olson 253-254; Vonguru and Menon 553; Butler, "Performative Acts" 524). In order to discontinue this development, teachers can help students develop their critical thinking by questioning stereotypical portrayals of gender roles. According to the general decree "Reflective Gender Education and Equality" and its abbreviated mention in the Austrian curriculum, students should be taught that gender norms are social constructs that can be revised. Moreover, they should learn to critically reflect on their own values and previously held beliefs, queering gender stereotypes, for instance, in stereotypical depictions of people in media they consume. This overarching topic on gender education can be taught in any subject (BMB, *Grundsatzterlass* 4-7, 9; BMB, *Lehrplan AHS*

“Vierter Teil”). Therefore, aside from honing students’ language competences, EFL teachers in Austria are authorised to allocate time for gender education.

This instruction may incorporate aspects of Deborah P. Britzman’s Queer Pedagogy or Judith Butler’s concept of gender performativity, as these theories largely coincide with the learning objectives, mentioned both in the general decree as well as the Austrian curriculum. To exemplify, Britzman writes that the aim of a queer pedagogy is to reconceptualise what is considered as “normal”. In a process she terms “unlearning”, old certainties, for instance, heteronormativity, are re-examined, allowing for a discussion about normalcy in relation to difference to ensue. In this regard, categories, such as “feminine” and “masculine” can be queered, meaning that the essence of these expressions is challenged. Hence, concepts that have hitherto remained unquestioned can be critically investigated and contemplated in class (Britzman, “Stop Reading Straight” 227; Britzman, “Strange Techniques” 293, 297, 304; Mayo 144).

Similarly, Butler’s notion of gender as performative can also be integrated into the English language classroom. The teacher can begin by introducing students to this concept, using high-frequency words. Therefore, instead of explaining that gender performativity is “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (*Gender Trouble* 43-44), the teacher could describe this concept as “the way people dress and behave in their everyday lives”, leading to the public addressing them a certain way. The addition of an example could further benefit students, for instance, a person can indicate that they wish to be perceived as a woman by wearing make-up or a dress. Akin to Britzman, Butler also proposes that the categorisation of people into feminine and masculine can be challenged, positing that “masculine” may describe a male as well as a female body; the same is true for the term “feminine” (*Gender Trouble* 10). This can be exemplified with the statement that anybody can be considered “feminine” when donning clothing, accessories, or other products that were created specifically for women.

In order to queer prevalent gender classifications, the gendered nature of personal attributes can be examined in class. For instance, students can be presented with the terms “hunter”, “cooking”, “intelligent”, “emotional”, “fighting”, and “healing”, and told to place them on the gender spectrum (male – female) (Figure 23). Moreover, the teacher can provide students with a worksheet featuring characteristics, such as “athletic”, “cooperative”, or “gentle”, asking them to categorise these attributes as typically masculine, feminine, neutral, and “me” (Figure 24).

The aim of these exercises is for students to contemplate the meaning of the categories “feminine” and “masculine”, comparing and contrasting their opinions among themselves. In the next step, students can be given the opportunity to reconsider their choices regarding the placement of characteristics and categorisation of attributes, according to gender, with *Steven Universe*. By depicting the characters Steven, Connie, Lars, and Sadie, or asking students to remember the *Steven Universe* cast more generally, the lesson can proceed with a critical reflection on previously held beliefs, as these characters oftentimes exhibit counterstereotypical behaviours, for instance, Sadie hunting for food in the episode “Island Adventure” (Season 1 Episode 30) or Connie learning to swordfight and becoming Steven’s knight in the episode “Sworn to the Sword” (Season 2 Episode 5). As a result, the existence and malleability of gender stereotypes can be queered.

Indeed, *Steven Universe* offers myriad instances of non-normative gender performances. Other examples that can be discussed with students include, but are not limited to, the moment Connie catches Steven when they are dancing in the episode “Alone Together” (Season 1 Episode 36), reminiscent of how women are oftentimes held by their male dancing partners (Figure 1), or Pearl wearing a tuxedo and Bismuth donning armour to Ruby and Sapphire’s wedding in the episode “Reunited” (Season 5 Episode 23-24) (Figure 11). Additionally, throughout the series, Steven is connected to the colour pink, for instance, when resurrecting Lars (Figure 6) or wearing his custom-made outfit on Homeworld (Figure 19). Moreover, while the female-presenting cast is depicted as combative, Steven favours a peaceful resolution of conflict through conversation. Thus, gender stereotypes are actively reversed in *Steven Universe*, as television series would typically depict men as violent, wearing armour or a tuxedo, and women as tranquil, associated with the colour pink (Kinney 23-24; Reinhard and Olson 254; Vonguru and Menon 553). These counterstereotypes, presented in the series, can provide students with material for interesting plenary discussions.

Furthermore, *Steven Universe* can be utilised to teach students about the punitive consequences of gender nonconformity. Butler writes that a person’s gender performances can reproduce or alter gender norms, and although there is no “true” way to perform one’s gender, there are penalties for doing it wrong (*Undoing Gender* 52, 218; *Gender Trouble* 178, 180). Similarly, in *Steven Universe*, Gems are expected to strictly adhere to Homeworld norms, following what is considered “perfect” by their diamond matriarch. White Diamond herself is depicted wearing make-up, nail polish, high heels and a glittering cape, appearing overly feminine. Her portrayal in the series is described by *Steven Universe* scholar Corinne E. Collins as a “high-femme

gender presentation” (109). Thus, Gems, most of whom are female-presenting, are expected to conform to cis-gendered ideals of femininity.

Nonconformity to these gender expectations or societal norms regarding relationships across gem types, exemplified by cross-gem fusions, is harshly punished on Homeworld. For instance, when Ruby and Sapphire first fused into Garnet in the episode “The Answer” (Season 2 Episode 21), Blue Diamond wanted Ruby to be broken. Moreover, the Off Colours, a group of Gems that are regarded as “flawed” (“Off Colors”, Season 5 Episode 3), were ostracised from the Gem society and would be shattered, if their hideout were discovered. Thus, nonconformity, through fusion or an “abnormal” appearance, is a capital offense, punishable by death. There is a stark contrast between life on Homeworld and on Earth, pertaining to individual difference. Indeed, on Earth, Gems can express themselves freely by fusing or shapeshifting, without fear of punishment. For instance, Amethyst frequently changes her shape, and cross-gem fusions, such as Garnet, Opal, Suggulite, or Sardonyx, are respected as well as valued. All of these expressions of individuality are normalised. However, once Steven and the Crystal Gems arrive on Homeworld, attending a ball in the episode “Together Alone” (Season 5 Episode 27), Amethyst is expected to wear prosthetics to reach her gem type’s “normal” height. Additionally, the protagonists are all poofed or imprisoned for fusing into Garnet, Opal, and Stevonnie during this formal event. By contrasting the treatment of Gems on Homeworld and on Earth, a discussion about punitive consequences of nonconformity can ensue, comparing fiction and reality. Furthermore, the chasm that exists between the “normal” and the “queer” can be questioned (Britzman, “Strange Techniques” 294), instigating a conversation about the normalisation of queerness in society. Through *Steven Universe* students can learn that “normal” and “queer” are not necessarily antonymous; queerness can be normalised, as it is in Beach City.

6.2 Intersectionality and Positive Queer Representation in *Steven Universe*

In contemporary society, normalcy can be characterised by heteronormativity, which supports the gender binary and makes queerness invisible. School curricula as well as coursebooks oftentimes assume heterosexuality and gender conformity as a default, disregarding queer individuals. However, heteronormativity can be queered by including marginalised voices, for instance, with queer representation featured in books or series that are taught in class (Neto 589; Mayo 139; Atay and Pensoneau-Conway 7). Although queer representation is important, scholars aver that this representation ought to be authentic and positive, by no means portraying queer characters as abnormal or in a stereotypical manner. Indeed, students should encounter

diverse representations of queerness to avoid making generalisations about queer individuals (Britzman, “Stop Reading Straight” 213; Bittner 44; Luhmann 111; Bittner 41).

In recent years, queer representation in the media has vastly improved. Although television series used to feature derogatory stereotypical queer characters, such as the flamboyant gay, an increase in diversity among media creators may have been the catalyst for more positive and multifaceted depictions of queerness. These counterstereotypical portrayals reassure queer viewers that their identities are valid and promote empathy as well as understanding among all audience members (Chhimwal, “Challenging Stereotypes” 85-86; Bittner 39-40, 44). *Steven Universe* is an example of a television series with positive queer representation, as it features a diverse cast of characters and presents manifold gender expressions in a non-stereotypical way (Collins 107; Valentín 206-207). Aside from actively countering gender stereotypes, as mentioned in the previous discussion, the series also presents its audience with examples of queer love in the form of cross-gem fusions – such as Garnet, Rhodonite, or Fluorite – a queer wedding, and Stevonnie as a non-binary major character.

When explaining diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, some of which may be quite difficult to conceptualise for students in the 5th grade, the teacher may utilise *Steven Universe* characters to facilitate their understanding. Stevonnie, for instance, provides students with a visual example of an intersex and non-binary identity. By watching *Steven Universe*, students learn that they are neither a boy nor a girl. The fact that Stevonnie is voiced by their own voice actress, wears a combination of Steven’s and Connie’s clothes in the episode “Alone Together” (Season 1 Episode 36), and they/them pronouns are used to address them, for instance, in the episode “Mindful Education” (Season 4 Episode 4), may facilitate students’ understanding of their identity. Although there are no explicit mentions of Stevonnie’s intersex and non-binary identity in the series, it is heavily implied through visual and verbal context clues, officially confirmed six months after the series’ finale, in an advertisement for the skincare company Dove (Cartoon Network).

The portrayal of fusions in *Steven Universe* can also teach students about different kinds of love. Butler posits that fantasy assists the imagination of non-normative bodily possibilities (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 28-29), which coincides with the use of fusion as a fantastical element in *Steven Universe*, its depictions of diverse embodiments of love that transcend heteronormative constrictions. On Earth, fusion is presented as a well-respected and normal practice, in which the Crystal Gems happily engage, effectively normalising queerness in the form of platonic, romantic, and familial love. Students can explore these diverse conceptions

of love, for instance, by comparing the relationships between Steven and Connie, Ruby and Sapphire, as well as Steven and Amethyst, Pearl, or Garnet. Stevonnie is exemplary of *philia*, a close friendship between two pre-teens. Garnet embodies *eros*, the love of a married couple. Smoky Quartz, Rainbow Quartz 2.0, as well as Sunstone, represent *storge*, the close bond between a child and their sibling or parent. In addition to this, the teacher may present students with further conceptions of love, such as a caritative love, also known as *agape*, a self-love or *philautia*, and *philosophia*, the love of wisdom. By having students research these terms themselves, connecting them to examples on the blackboard and discussing the depiction of different kinds of love in *Steven Universe*, students reflect on the myriad ways in which a person can express their love.

This positive presentation of queerness can be contrasted with the delineation of cross-gem fusion as a capital offence on Homeworld, connecting this topic to discussions about queerphobia and intersectional discrimination. In *Steven Universe*, cross-gem fusions are described as portraying strong bonds that are shared between two or more Gems, interpretable as embodiments of queer love, several of which are romantic, such as Garnet, Rhodonite, or Fluorite. Thus, it is reasonable to infer that hatred towards these cross-gem fusions can be understood as queerphobic. Students can engage in conversation about queerphobia by comparing the first appearances of Stevonnie and Garnet in the episodes “Alone Together” (Season 1 Episode 36) and “The Answer” (Season 2 Episode 21). While Ruby and Sapphire encountered disgust and disbelief from Homeworld Gems, Steven and Connie experienced support. On Earth, queer love is celebrated, which is further exemplified by Ruby and Sapphire’s wedding in the episode “Reunited” (Season 5 Episode 23-24). Conversely, cross-gem fusions on Homeworld, such as Rhodonite or Fluorite, have to live in hiding, lest they are killed, as explained in the episode “Off Colors” (Season 5 Episode 3). Furthermore, when Steven arrives on Homeworld at the end of season five, the Diamonds persist in referring to him as “Pink”, using she/her pronouns, even though he constantly reminds them of his actual identity (for instance, “Change Your Mind”, Season 5 Episode 29-32). These queerphobic instances can be discussed in the plenary, giving students the possibility to compare fiction and reality, critically thinking about reasons for queerphobia and pondering measures that may help queer individuals feel safer. By reading newspaper articles about queerphobia in society, students can be made aware of the fact that it is an ongoing issue that might affect them or the people they care about.

Regarding discussions on intersectional discrimination, the concept of intersectionality must first be introduced to students. Similar to the conception of gender performativity, Kimberlé Crenshaw's notion of intersectionality ("Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" 149) can be explained to students, using high-frequency terms, for instance, "The discrimination specifically against Black women is a mix of sexism and racism that cannot be placed in one of these categories alone". Following the teacher's explanations about intersecting societal categories, resulting in privilege or discrimination, discriminatory categories in our contemporary society can be compared to those in *Steven Universe*. To exemplify, on Homeworld, Gems are expected to have a certain appearance, perform their predestined activities, based on their gem type, and only temporarily fuse with Gems of the same kind. Gems who diverge from these societal norms – such as Amethyst due to her height, Pearl's refusal to merely act as a servant, and Garnet's existence as a cross-gem fusion – would be discriminated against on Homeworld. The Off Colors, for instance, are ostracised from the Gem society for these reasons, internalising the hatred they face in their daily lives. Thus, categories that negatively impact people in our contemporary society, such as the colour of a person's skin or their gender, appear to be irrelevant in *Steven Universe*. They are replaced with other markers of difference, for instance, appearance, gem type, and interest in cross-gem fusion, which may be linked to ability, class, and sexuality, respectively. Students can then be tasked with creating an original character, using the "wheel of power/privilege" (Figure 25), which depicts an array of societal categories. By placing their character in some of these categories, socially disadvantaging them in certain regards, and giving them the pronouns "she/her", "she/they", "he/him", "he/they", or "they/them", students have the opportunity to reflect on intersectional discrimination with *Steven Universe* and explore the use of diverse pronouns in small groups, queering societal norms and developing their critical thinking in the process.

6.3 Learning from *Steven Universe* Characters

In addition to challenging stereotypes and developing critical thinking skills, connected with gender education, students are supposed to learn about more fundamental principles during their time at school. The Austrian curriculum advises educators to teach democratic values, such as humanity, tolerance, and peace, culminating in an appreciation of others (BMB, *Lehrplan AHS* "Erster Teil"). Although this appears to be promising, Britzman advises against using the term "tolerance", as it may provoke an exclusionary us versus them dynamic, by marking difference between "the tolerant normal and the tolerated subaltern" ("Stop Reading Straight" 221, 226-227). Therefore, instead of striving towards "tolerance", the development of respect and

empathy can serve as a more worthwhile goal, portraying difference as a resource. In this context, empathy is understood not as “putting ourselves in the other’s shoes” (Todd 53), but as a combination of philoxenia and grief, denoting a feeling that is experienced at an injustice befalling a stranger.

Students can develop empathy by learning *from* the Other. While Hegel described the relation of the self and the Other as that of a master and a slave (Pinkard 70-71), Lacan and other psychoanalysts found the Other within a person, in the unconscious part of the mind (Fink 3-4). However, these conceptualisations are forgone, in favour of Emmanuel Levinas’ understanding of the Other. Levinas posits that the Other is “the stranger, the widow, and the orphan, to whom I am obligated” (215), comprising an alterity that can never be fully comprehended. They are presented in a positive manner, described as gentle and well-respected, addressed with the formal “vous” (Levinas 75, 87, 150). Moreover, according to Levinas, the Other acts as a teacher, who calls the self into question in conversation, procuring feelings of guilt and responsibility towards them as an apology (43, 51, 86, 251-252). Hence, the Other can be understood as a kind teacher, who invites the self to change for the better through conversation.

Sharon Todd further develops Levinas’ concept with her suggestion of learning *from* the Other, emphasising a distinction between learning *about* and learning *from*. The former involves rationalising the Other, using language and concepts the I is familiar with, making them into an “object of *my* comprehension”, effectively de-Othering them (Todd 8-9, 15). Alternatively, learning *from* encompasses the Other teaching the I directly – in face-to-face encounters or through literary as well as audiovisual narratives – without reducing their complexity. The I is affected by the Other, developing feelings of responsibility for them, prior to engaging in dialogue (Todd 15, 113, 145). In this regard, it is possible to develop empathy for the Other – love towards the stranger, whose alterity can never be fully comprehended, and grief towards their unnecessary hardships – prior to entering into conversation with them.

Steven Universe can serve as a narrative encounter with the queer Other, positively influencing students’ empathetic development. Throughout the series, Steven is depicted as empathetic towards friends, family members, antagonists, and “monsters”. To exemplify, he befriends creatures he has just met, such as a pink lion, who becomes his pet in “Steven’s Lion” (Season 1 Episode 10), and a corrupted Gem, who Steven attempts to heal in the episode “Monster Buddies” (Season 1 Episode 23). Moreover, Steven is always happy to help his friends and strangers alike, for instance, by healing Lapis’ gem in “Ocean Gem” (Season 1 Episode 26),

assisting Ruby in the search for Sapphire during “Jailbreak” (Season 1 Episode 53), and performing instead of Sadie at the Beach-a-Palooza in the episode “Sadie’s Song” (Season 2 Episode 16). In addition to this, the viewers see how other characters are positively influenced by Steven’s empathetic demeanour, perhaps mirroring their own personal development. This aspect of the series is the most prominent with Lars, who was first portrayed as rude and self-centred, for instance, in the episode “Island Adventure” (Season 1 Episode 30), in which he decidedly does not help Sadie and Steven procure food or shelter on a deserted island. However, his attitude changes on Homeworld, where he helps Steven protect the Off Colors. He sacrifices his own life to save Gems he has just met (“Off Colors”, Season 5 Episode 3). Thus, the audience continuously witnesses Steven’s kindness and compassion towards others, as well as the positive influence his empathetic behaviour has on other characters, making him an excellent role model for students.

In class, students can discuss the empathetic behaviour of Steven and Lars, contemplating the acceptance and respect that is shown to strangers, who do not consider themselves worthy thereof. Indeed, in the episode “Your Mother and Mine” (Season 5 Episode 13), the Off Colors express discomfort at being admired, as they have internalised the hatred, which they encounter on a daily basis from other Homeworld Gems. This exemplifies that people may occasionally hesitate to accept kind words or other forms of assistance, but it is important to never cease being respectful and benevolent. The empathetic behaviour of *Steven Universe* characters can then be compared to instances in which students themselves have shown, or could show, empathy to others. Students’ ideas are compiled and communicated in uplifting notes to the Off Colors, expressing their empathy for these fictional characters. In this respect, empathy is understood as the abovementioned combination of philoxenia and grief. Steven and Lars exhibit compassion towards strangers, aiming to protect them from the injustice, legalised by Homeworld norms. Although they have just met the Off Colors and do not fully comprehend their underground existence, Steven and Lars feel obligated to help this group of outcasts; they develop responsibility towards the Other prior to knowing them.

Aside from the episode “Off Colors” (Season 5 Episode 3), the series’ finale “Change Your Mind” (Season 5 Episode 29-32) also depicts *Steven Universe* characters learning empathy from Steven. Through conversation, Blue and Yellow Diamonds realise that Steven is not Pink Diamond and begin using his correct name as well as pronouns. Moreover, they become aware of the fact that by aspiring to attain “perfection”, the Diamond matriarchs are actively harming their subjects. White Diamond was more difficult to convince, as she seemingly never left her

own head, a metaphor for her detachment from reality. Although she disregards Steven's pleas for change at first, once she actively listens to him and a conversation can take place, White Diamond recognises the error of her ways, agreeing to revise Homeworld norms. In this regard, Steven acts as the Other, teaching the Diamond matriarchs; by listening and engaging in conversation with him, they learn *from* Steven. During their conversations, the Diamonds reflect on themselves, their selves having been called into question by Steven. In the end, they are changed for the better, assuming responsibility for their past actions as an apology to their subjects. By interpreting Homeworld norms as queerphobic, as in the prior discussions, these conversations with the Diamonds in the series' finale can be understood as overcoming queerphobic beliefs. The possibility to conquer previously held queerphobic convictions by entering into conversation with the queer Other can be discussed with students, comparing fiction and reality. In this discussion, students can reflect on the complexity of reality, likely deeming conversations about the acceptance of queerness more complicated than their depictions in *Steven Universe*. However, they may also realise that through education and the queering of old certainties, a person may change their outlook on life.

6.4 Fostering a Safe Classroom Environment

The overarching goal of the *Steven Universe* project is to create a safe space for all students, especially queer individuals. This objective is achieved through open discussions about queer topics in class and authentic depictions of queerness. However, despite the positive queer representation *Steven Universe* offers viewers, described in a prior discussion, the production of the series was noticeably plagued with censorship. Indeed, Rebecca Sugar mentioned in an interview that she was strongly advised against featuring the romantic relationship between Ruby and Sapphire, two female-presenting characters, to avoid the series' potential cancellation. Nevertheless, *Steven Universe* was cancelled or censored in certain parts of the world (Romano; Kennedy 247; Sugar qtd. in Moen). In order to avoid further backlash, while continuing to portray queer topics, Sugar created characters that embody queerness. To exemplify, Garnet as a personification of queer love, and Stevonnie as an embodiment of a non-binary identity, visually portray queerness without explicitly discussing it, effectively circumventing censorship (Kennedy 233, 238-239). In this respect, *Steven Universe* leaves ample room for interpretation. The series ought to be watched attentively in order to perceive the queer undertones, for instance, the way in which romantic moments between Ruby and Sapphire are oftentimes accompanied by the melody of "Stronger Than You", or Stevonnie's appearance and abilities, representing attributes of both Steven and Connie. Assuming that

students perhaps do not watch the episodes very closely, they may need additional guidance from the teacher in the form of plenary discussions, to understand the series' more implicit messages.

To this day, there are restrictions on queer media in the form of censoring positive queer representation or entirely cancelling children's animated series, limiting adolescents' exposure to queerness. Occasionally, queer media is even retroactively removed from streaming services or from public as well as school libraries (Jones; Riedel; K. Moore; PEN America). Due to the censorship of children's animated series, which exemplify queer topics in a child-friendly manner, students are denied valuable learning opportunities. Instead of "protecting" students, collective harm is being done, and the classroom ceases to be a safe space, when queerness can no longer be openly discussed (Pollock et al. "Education Restriction" 60, 66). To counter this tendency and establish the classroom as a safe learning environment, the teacher ought to immediately interrupt any queerphobic remarks or actions and actively show that they value diversity, for instance, by using inclusive language during instructions and on worksheets. The teacher's appreciation of heterogeneity may also positively influence mutual respect, not merely tolerance, among students. Moreover, the available coursebooks ought to be critically examined, challenging heteronormative texts as well as illustrations, and supplemented with material that incorporates non-discriminatory language as well as diverse depictions of queer individuals, creating opportunities for critical thinking and reflection, for instance, on gender stereotypes (Mayo 145; Neto 595, 600-601; BMB, *Lehrplan AHS "Dritter Teil"*; BMB, *Unterrichtsmittel* 13). *Steven Universe* would be an exemplary teaching material in this regard, as it comprises diverse depictions of queerness and challenges heteronormativity as well as gender conformity, promoting open conversations about queer topics.

As a first step in establishing the classroom as a safe space, where queerness is normalised and respected, the teacher needs to ascertain that students can be respectful towards one another; they must be able to actively listen to the opinions of their classmates without mockery. With the commencement of the *Steven Universe* project, this preliminary safe environment can then be developed further, by compiling students' prior knowledge, visualising it with a mind-map. The objective of this activity is to ease students into queerness as a topic, ensuring that the safe space can be upheld. Following this introductory segment, students can be educated about queer topics, which are generally explored in pairs or small groups, as this may increase students' confidence to share personal stories, reassuring them of their safety. Occasionally these group discussions will be continued in the plenary, where insights are shared and critical thinking is

enhanced through additional input from the teacher. However, students should never be pressured into voicing their thoughts; their autonomy ought to be respected. Lastly, every *Steven Universe* lesson provides students with the opportunity to ask questions, written (anonymously, if they prefer) on a piece of paper. They may ask the teacher to revisit a complex topic in a subsequent class or perhaps covertly inquire about another aspect in relation to queerness. Thus, students can address topics or issues in a manner that may feel safer than speaking in front of their classmates.

In addition to this, the positive depictions of empathy in *Steven Universe* teach students the virtue of pacifism and encourage them to behave more empathetically towards others. Students repeatedly witness Steven resolving conflicts without resorting to violence, for instance, in the episode “Reunited” (Season 5 Episode 23-24), when Blue and Yellow Diamonds attack the Crystal Gems at Garnet’s wedding. Thereby, they learn that conflicts can be resolved amicably and respectfully. Subsequently, students can contemplate the violence that queer individuals may experience in their everyday lives and devise possibilities to make them feel safer in society. By reflecting on the contemporary treatment of queer people, mentioned in newspaper articles, as well as the teachings in *Steven Universe*, conveying that everyone is deserving of respect and kindness, students can compile reasons for accepting and respecting queer Others. Students can show empathy for queer individuals by writing these notions on colourful paper that is taped to a poster entitled “A Queerer Future”. This poster can then be displayed in class, reminding everyone that queerness should be valued, and contributing to the transformation of the classroom into a safe space for queer students.

6.5 Limitations

This study aims to provide educators with exemplary lesson plans, featuring *Steven Universe*, to teach students about queerness and empathy. However, there are certain limitations to this endeavour. For instance, the lesson plans that are presented in this piece of research were created on the basis of the Austrian curriculum. Thus, in order to utilise them elsewhere, teachers from other countries would need to adapt them to their national laws and guidelines. Moreover, these lessons have yet to be tested in actual classrooms; at present, the lesson plans consist of ideas of possible teachings, involving *Steven Universe*, without empirical evidence. Therefore, the degree to which these activities can be actualised, for instance, in terms of time-management, remains unknown. Nevertheless, the objective of this study is to provide educators with ideas; the particular activities can be altered to fit a specific teaching context. For example, occasionally additional teacher-centred instruction may be required, recapitulating the

teachings and providing students with further insights into a topic. Indeed, it may be necessary to modify the *Steven Universe* lessons whenever they are taught, as circumstances surrounding the project may change and each class may respond differently to the project, some more positively than others.

In addition to this, there are certain ordinances to be taken into consideration when showing *Steven Universe* to a class. According to copyright law in Austria, cinematic works, and, by extension, presumably also *Steven Universe*, are allowed to be shown in class, when there is a teaching purpose and the school pays an annual fee (“Urheberrechtsgesetz”; Stadt Wien). It becomes more complicated when students are requested to watch *Steven Universe* episodes as homework. Although students can be tasked with reading book chapters in preparation for class, watching *Steven Universe* episodes legally would require a subscription to a streaming service, such as HBO Max or Apple TV, which offer the entirety of the series in English (HBO Max; Apple TV). It cannot be expected that students, or their parents, pay for a streaming service subscription in order to complete this homework. Nevertheless, this issue can be circumvented, for instance, by showing students the episodes in class. Certainly, this would lengthen the *Steven Universe* project. However, instead of showing entire episodes, in several cases, it might be enough to use specific scenes of the show to prepare for the subsequent activities. Fortunately, my *Steven Universe* lesson plans are adaptable.

7 Conclusion

In conclusion, teachers can use *Steven Universe* to educate students about queerness and develop their empathy for the queer Other, thereby fostering a safe and inclusive classroom environment for everyone, especially queer students. In spite of restrictions on queer media in the United States, such as book bans in schools and the censorship of children’s animated series (PEN America; Collins 105; Blodgett and Salter 144-145), *Steven Universe* was able to largely circumvent these constraints, through implicit depictions of queerness (Kennedy 233, 238-239). Instead of explicitly addressing queer topics, the series portrays queerness visually. To exemplify, the close watching and multimodal content analysis of the *Steven Universe* episodes “Alone Together” (Season 1 Episode 36), “The Answer” (Season 2 Episode 21), “Off Colors” (Season 5 Episode 3), “Reunited” (Season 5 Episode 23), and “Change Your Mind” (Season 5 Episode 28-32) has revealed that the series uses fusion to depict different kinds of love – philia, eros, and storge – personified by the characters Stevonnie, Garnet, and Sunstone. Moreover,

queerphobia and the effects thereof can be encountered in scenes featuring the Off Colors, contrasted by queerness being celebrated and normalised on Earth, for instance, with Ruby and Sapphire's wedding. The active reversals of gender norms, such as the depiction of Connie as Steven's knight or Steven's association with the colour pink, also show that queerness is valued and respected. These visual representations of queerness may be overlooked by students, due to their indirect nature, necessitating a close watching, ideally followed by a discussion of the implicit queer topics in the plenary, making them more tangible.

My *Steven Universe* project provides students with ample activities, during which the queer undertones of the series can be contemplated and discussed, educating them on queerness. Indeed, concepts, such as Judith Butler's gender performativity or Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality, are addressed, using simplified language, in connection with depictions of queerness in *Steven Universe*. For instance, counterstereotypes of masculinity and femininity in the series, exemplifying the fluidity of gender and changeability of gender norms, the multifacetedness of *Steven Universe* characters, and gender nonconformity, including the punitive consequences thereof, can be discussed in the plenary. The lesson plan activities were also created in accordance with Deborah P. Britzman's Queer Pedagogy and the Austrian curriculum, as well as guidelines from the federal ministry of education, denoting that students should be provided with opportunities to queer normalcy, gender stereotypes and heteronormativity. Furthermore, these frameworks state that time ought to be allocated to critically thinking and reflecting on old certainties as well as previously held beliefs; the aim is to establish a classroom environment imbued with respect and appreciation. In this regard, *Steven Universe* constitutes an exemplary teaching material for gender education, as it features inclusive language, diverse depictions of genders, and opportunities for reflection, for instance, on gender stereotypes (Britzman, "Strange Techniques" 304; BMB, *Lehrplan AHS* "Dritter Teil", "Vierter Teil"; BMB, *Unterrichtsmittel*, 13).

Aside from educating students on queerness, a second focus of the *Steven Universe* project lies in students' development of empathy for queer individuals. In this study, empathy is understood as a combination of philoxenia and grief, emphasising the fact that people can feel a connection and sense of responsibility towards strangers, without attempting to place oneself in their stead. Utilising Emmanuel Levinas' conception of the Other, "the stranger, the widow, and the orphan, to whom I am obligated" (215), I have found that *Steven Universe* characters can act as this stranger, educating the viewers on queerness and empathy. Additionally, instead of learning *about* queer topics, students learn *from* a narrative encounter with the queer Other, namely,

depictions of queerness and empathy in *Steven Universe*. Thereby, previously held beliefs can be challenged and a new sense of self may emerge, respectful of the queer Other.

The *Steven Universe* lesson plans incorporate this idea of learning *from Steven Universe* characters. Specifically designed for a 5th grade AHS class (14- to 15-year-old students), comprising 24 students with a B1 level of English, they aim to maintain a balance between students' interest in a children's animated series, their English language proficiency, as well as their ability to understand and think critically about queerness. During this project, students will be required to watch certain episodes at home, in preparation for the three weekly lessons. These lessons feature a variety of activities, namely, generating a mind-map, conducting online research alone or in a group, enacting a short scene, completing a worksheet, reading newspaper articles, writing empathetic notes, creating a poster, designing an original character, and discussing gender stereotypes, (overcoming) queerphobia in society, as well as intersectional discrimination in the plenary. Queer topics are first addressed with fictional moments in *Steven Universe*, before being connected to reality, highlighting their relevance to the students' lives. To exemplify, the series' depiction of Lars' character development, with regard to empathy, can be discussed and compared to Steven's empathetic demeanour, followed by the writing of uplifting notes to *Steven Universe* characters, and the composing of empathetic messages to queer individuals in our society, during a later activity. Moreover, throughout the majority of the *Steven Universe* project, students are actively engaged in the learning process, as teacher-centred instruction is substituted with cooperative learning activities. These lesson plans can be used in English or Ethics classrooms, with the aim of developing a safe space for (queer) students, characterised by uncensored discussions about queer topics, where students can queer gender norms and ask questions, inclusive language in the material and class, and immediate interruptions of queerphobia.

Certainly, this piece of research is limited by the adherence to Austrian copyright law and the dearth of empirical evidence for the feasibility of the activities featured in the *Steven Universe* project. However, the lesson plans can be modified by educators to fit a specific teaching context. Hence, it would be interesting for future researchers to conduct lessons based on my lesson plan designs, adapting them to suit their particular circumstances. The project may even be altered, to teach about queerness using newer children's animated series with positive queer representation, such as Dana Terrace's *The Owl House*. Overall, it is important that students are given the opportunity to be educated on queerness by learning *from* the queer Other, developing

empathy for queer individuals in the process. Thereby, the classroom can be transformed into a safe space for everyone, establishing a queerer future.

(30,174 words)

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Appendix

Lesson Plans

Lesson Plan 1

rough time frame	procedure	interaction format	skills / systems	materials	notes
5 min.	Mindmap: The students think about what they already know about the topic “gender”. The teacher writes their comments on the blackboard.	S-T	speaking	blackboard + chalk	
12 min.	Sex, Gender, and Judith Butler: The teacher explains the difference between a biological conception of the body (sex) and a social or cultural conception (gender). Then, the teacher introduces the students to Judith Butler’s concept of gender performativity. <i>Steven Universe</i> characters are used as examples of non-heteronormative gender expressions and prevalent gender norms are queered.	T S-T	listening speaking	PP slides	
10 min.	Diversity of Sexual/Romantic Orientations and Gender Identities: Every student draws a term to briefly research and write down a definition in their own words. These concepts will then be discussed together. The <i>Steven Universe</i> character Stevonnie can be used to explicate an intersex and non-binary identity.	S S-T	writing speaking	little cards (terms) electronic devices PP slides	Mention what the prefixes inter, trans, hetero, homo, bi, pan, and a mean.
15 min.	Different Kinds of Love (Philia and Eros): The students form pairs and choose whether they want to be in the “Stevonnie” or “Garnet” group. With their partner, they create a very short scene about love. The Stevonnie groups and Garnet groups will present their scenes to one another and briefly discuss how love can be expressed differently in a friendship and romantic relationship.	S-S	speaking		

6 min.	Queerphobia: The relationships of Garnet and Stevonnie are used to explicate possible reasons of and countermeasures for queerphobia.	S-T	speaking		
2 min.	Questions: The students are given time to reflect on the lesson and think about whether they have further questions, or anything was unclear. They can write the teacher a note.	S	writing	a little box	

Lesson Plan 2

rough time frame	procedure	interaction format	skills / systems	materials	notes
15 min.	Counterstereotypes: The students receive a worksheet with 25 attributes to categorise as feminine, masculine, or neutral behaviour, also noting which ones they would ascribe to themselves. Reflecting on their choices, gender stereotypes (in media) will be discussed. The teacher then asks the students to think of <i>Steven Universe</i> characters, who embody some of these 25 attributes, explaining that the series aims to actively counter stereotypes. To exemplify counterstereotypes, the teacher shows the students a picture from the episode “Reunited”, discussing the gender performances (dress and behaviour) of the female-presenting characters and the show’s diverse representation of women.	S S-S S-T	speaking	worksheet blackboard + chalk PP slide	Write a definition of “stereotype” on the board.
25 min.	Intersectionality: The teacher explains the concept of intersectionality, further stating that people are individuals, comprised of different categories. The students then use the wheel of power/privilege to categorise Steven and discuss the differences between discrimination in our society and the Gem society. Afterwards, the students create an original character for <i>Steven Universe</i> , picking a pronoun-card and choosing 3-5 additional categories from the wheel of power/privilege, and sketching their character, before presenting their character to the class.	T S-S S-T groups of 4	listening speaking	blackboard + chalk “wheel of power/privilege” pronoun cards	Write a definition of “intersectionality” on the board.

8 min.	Empathy: Nonconforming (due to a disability or being queer) Gems are treated very differently on Homeworld and on Earth. The teacher makes students aware of Steven's empathy towards strangers, explaining that sometimes it can be difficult to accept empathy because of internalised hatred, as shown by the Off Colors. The students are then asked how Steven shows empathy throughout the series and what they could do to be empathetic towards others. Afterwards, the students are tasked to write an uplifting note to the Off Colors.	T S-T S	listening speaking writing	colourful paper	
2 min.	Questions: The students are given time to reflect on the lesson and think about whether they have further questions, or anything was unclear. They can write the teacher a note.	S	writing	a little box	

Lesson Plan 3

rough time frame	procedure	interaction format	skills / systems	materials	notes
18 min.	Different Kinds of Love (Storge): The teacher reminds the students that philia and eros have been discussed in a previous lesson and now wants to introduce the students to further kinds of love (storge, philautia, agape, and philosophia). The teacher has prepared examples of all six kinds of love for the students (in groups of four) to match with their names. Then, the students are asked what kinds of love they saw in the <i>Steven Universe</i> episodes, and storge is examined in detail, in connection with the fusions in the series' finale.	groups of 4 S-T S-S S-T	speaking	electronic device cards for love + magnets blackboard PP slide	
12 min.	Punitive Consequences of Gender Nonconformity: Queerphobia is examined anew, this time in connection with the series' finale. Afterwards, the teacher splits the class into two groups to read and discuss articles about queerphobia.	S-T S S-S	speaking reading	newspaper articles	

8 min.	Overcoming Queerphobia: The students compare Steven’s and White Diamond’s approaches to changing someone’s mind. Then, after discussing how people’s minds may be changed (or not), the students write down why queer others should be accepted and respected. These little notes will then be put on a poster titled “A Queerer Future”.	S-S S-T S	speaking writing	colourful paper poster + tape	Maybe play songs from <i>Steven Universe</i> (“Escapism”, “Change Your Mind”, “Love Like You”).
10 min.	Story Circle: Standing in a circle, the students throw a small soft ball to each other and disclose their favourite moments of <i>Steven Universe</i>. Afterwards, the ball is passed around as the students imagine how the story might continue.	S-S	speaking	small, soft ball	
2 min.	Questions: The students are given time to reflect on the lesson and think about whether they have further questions, or anything was unclear. They can write the teacher a note.	S	writing	a little box	

Steven Universe

Sex and Gender



Sex: biological understanding of the body

Gender: social/cultural understanding of the body

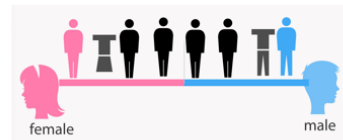
2

Gender Performativity

„[...] gender is in no way a stable identity [...]; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*.” (Butler 519)

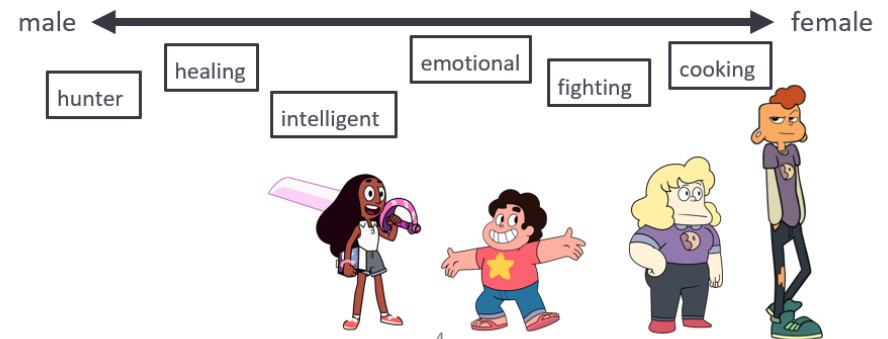
=> your daily actions construct your gender (no fixed identity)

=> gender norms can be challenged and reworked



3

Gender Spectrum



4

Romantic and Sexual Orientations

- queer – everyone who is not heterosexual
- gay/homosexual – sexual attraction to the same gender (men)
- lesbian/homosexual – sexual attraction to the same gender (women)
- questioning – everyone who has not found a fitting label for their romantic and/or sexual orientation



5

Romantic and Sexual Orientations

- aromantic – little or no romantic attraction, little or no interest in a romantic relationship
- asexual – little or no sexual attraction, little or no interest in a sexual relationship
- aroace – everyone, who is both aromantic and asexual
- demisexual – sexual attraction based on a former romantic or platonic relationship



6

Romantic and Sexual Orientations

- bisexual – sexual attraction to two or more genders
- biromantic – romantic attraction to two or more genders
- pansexual – sexual attraction to all genders/to a person, regardless of their gender
- panromantic – romantic attraction to all genders/to a person, regardless of their gender



7

Gender Identities

- cisgender – the sex and gender of a person match
- transgender – the sex and gender of a person don't match (ex. MTF, FTM)
- non-binary – a person, who does not want to be seen as either female or male
- genderfluid – a person, who does not have a fixed gender



8

Stevonnie

Sex: intersex

Gender: non-binary
(uses they/them pronouns)



9

Further Informations

- Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no. 4, 1988, pp. 519-531, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893>.
- <https://rainbowandco.uk/blogs/what-were-saying/sexuality-definitions?srsId=AfmBOooRRWjvaeSOiP7m4QlhgwZzm0X5VT4NrRAo3BnEspyDPxXU3bJD>
- <https://teentalk.ca/learn-about/gender-identity/>

10

Pictures

https://thelocalindian.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/200x300_163086-abc.jpg

<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5f/JudithButler2013.jpg>

https://media.3dn.com/8ms/image/v2/C4513A0Pvst956a-5A/article-cover_image-shrink_600_2000/0/13209208773147e-2147483647&v-beta&u=ciAhlhwaq@0r98_nG29s-3u0v5C-0rbhwh4y00

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https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/0_/_/_/images/8/84/Debut_pearl_request.png/revision/latest?cb=20180918204133&path=prefix:protagonist

<https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/steven-universe/images/2/22/ConnieNewIntro.png/revision/latest?cb=20160920145958>

<https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/steven-universe/images/6/67/Boss.png/revision/latest?cb=20160212171400&path=prefix:de>

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/5/50/Intersex_inclusive_pride_flag.svg/1280px-Intersex_inclusive_pride_flag.svg.png

https://res.cloudinary.com/mtnus18/image/upload/v1675959196/104HCHMT/Arts/dn520/images/whet_all_the_pride_flags_represent_2_n88x7.jpg

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/2/12/Aracee_Flag.svg/960px-Aracee_Flag.svg.png/720211012002806

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/a/a7/Demiseual_Pride_Flag.svg/960px-Demiseual_Pride_Flag.svg.png/720180407192213

https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/gender/images/0/07/Cigender_Flag.png/revision/latest?cb=20230307092632

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/9/9d/Genderfluidity_Pride_Flag.png/960px-Genderfluidity_Pride_Flag.png

<https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/steven-universe/images/c/c6/StevonnieAloneTogether.png/revision/latest?cb=20161002193202>

11

Gender performances



"Reunited", Season 5 Episode 23-24, 04:06 min.

12

Storge



"Change Your Mind", Season 5 Episode 28-32, 18:25 min.



"Change Your Mind", Season 5 Episode 28-32, 19:29 min.



"Change Your Mind", Season 5 Episode 28-32, 20:31 min.

13



"Change Your Mind", Season 5 Episode 28-32, 24:50 min.

Additional Materials

Typically male – typically female – typically me

Characteristics	more “male”	more “female”	neutral	me
adventurous				
aggressive				
ambitious				
assertive				
athletic				
calm				
caring				
combative				
competent				
cool				
cooperative				
courageous				
curious				
daring				
dominant				
emotional				
gentle				
intelligent				
logical				
pretty				
sensitive				
strong				
talkative				
trusting				
violent				

(adapted from Leeb et al. 27-29)

she/her

she/they

he/him

he/they

they/them

they/them

I once wasn't worried about being 'visibly queer' in public, now I am

Emesha Boyko, March 9th 2025 (adapted and shortened)

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/rise-in-queerphobia-scares-community-1.7474220>

I came out as bisexual when I was 13 and had the luck of having accepting parents. I really liked reading lesbian literature and found myself at home among queers — people, whose gender presentation didn't match their assigned sex or whose sexuality fell outside of what was considered “normal”. My friends' parents were almost entirely accepting, and I didn't encounter any direct homophobia until I was 19.

But then, walking through Winnipeg¹⁵, a woman saw my rainbow hat and gloves, said "I hate (slur¹⁶ for gay women)" and punched a signpost. She saw my sad face but did not apologise. It was then I began to understand that I wasn't as safe as I'd believed.

When, in my 20s, I began asking friends and family to use neutral pronouns¹⁷ for me, I encountered very different responses. Nobody was explicitly transphobic, but a boyfriend was annoyed that we had to spend any energy on gender, something he didn't encounter as a problem in his daily life. He, a cis man, could paint his nails without worry; I was anxious about which change room to use. When I headed for the men's room in a small bar, the barkeep simply shouted "No," and pointed me toward the line of the women's room.

Why would my gender presentation bother anyone? It usually doesn't. I'm privileged, in a sense, that most people read me as cis¹⁸. Being misgendered doesn't impact my self-esteem. I know that there are always aspects of ourselves that aren't understood by the general public, and I'm grateful to have a strong community of queer people who see me as I am, without insisting on gender conformity¹⁹.

In the last year, though, we've noticed a shift. To me, it seems as though people are being given wrong information about trans people and are starting to believe it. Ex-friends now believe my trans women colleagues are pedophiles or trying to gain access to women's locker rooms and bathrooms for bad purposes. They're in our DMs, repeating Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling's words about men and boys in women's sports. Queerphobia, I feel, is on the rise.

A year ago, my friend Cora took her life. She had reached out for help, but no amount of community support could outweigh the voices opposing her very existence. In her 30s and tired of being harassed and assaulted, she couldn't see her life getting any better. Just weeks earlier, a non-binary teen was assaulted in their high school bathroom. That queer youth, Nex Benedict, died by suicide a few days later, and every queer person I knew was sick with

¹⁵ Winnipeg is a city in Canada.

¹⁶ A slur is a hurtful word.

¹⁷ Neutral pronouns are they/them.

¹⁸ The author is a trans woman, being seen as a woman.

¹⁹ Conforming means following rules.

grief. I was devastated. I can't count how many times I've seen heartless comments directed to trans people online, suggesting suicide.

A few years ago, I thought, as a culture, we'd come a long way in resolving queerphobia of the past. I hadn't felt much fear around being visibly queer in public until a few months ago. Since Sam Nordquist, a trans man, was found murdered in New York state this winter, I've been kept awake by thoughts of what the last few days of his life were like, of the last few minutes for Nex and Cora.

When my gay Grade 10 friend was nervous meeting a guy for the first time, I asked why he couldn't tell people he was gay. He told me that his mom worked in the hospital and saw victims of homophobia, and that he was afraid for his safety. The dangers of being visibly trans are increasingly obvious these days. Now, more so than ever, we need each other, and we need to show queer youth that the world is more beautiful with them in it.

1) Why do you think people resist using neutral pronouns, even though it would help someone feel more understood?

2) What may help non-binary and trans people feel more comfortable in choosing a bathroom?

3) What wrong information are people being given about trans people?

4) What impact can queerphobia have on queer peoples' lives?

5) What can we do to help queer people feel safe?

I have never, in my adult life, felt less safe to be gay in public in the US

Dan Clark, 1st September 2023 (adapted and shortened)

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/sep/01/lgbtq-homophobia-rise-new-york>

After coming out of the closet two decades ago, I never thought I'd go back in. But homophobia seems to be acceptable again.

In the last few months, I've started to change my appearance to avoid the growing hostility toward the LGBTQ+ community in the US – even in New York, a state often said to be a safe space for queer communities. I've stopped wearing brighter, lighter colors, for dark ones that don't look feminine.

I started to change how I present myself in public this spring, when someone approached my open car window in traffic, screamed a slur²⁰ in my face, and walked away without another thought. I was shaken. It was far from the first time I'd been called a slur, but the aggression and confidence with which he talked to me were scary. The next day, I bought a baseball bat, which now lives in my car in case I'm ever followed and attacked.

It's difficult to understand how we got here and why our view of safety in public has changed so rapidly in just a few years, but it has. We can find clues in surveys about people's feelings regarding the LGBTQ+ community. A 2023 poll²¹ found that about two-thirds of adults in the US – 64% – consider same-gender relationships to be acceptable, but the remaining people do not. This first number has risen by 8% in comparison to 2022.

At the same time, more people now identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community than ever. Another poll from 2022 said that about 7.1% of US adults identify with our community – double the 3.5% recorded in 2012. That means more people are coming out at a time when acceptance of same-gender relationships has gone down, creating a recipe for hostility²² and – in some cases – danger for queer people, and their allies²³.

Laura Ann Carleton, a 66-year-old woman from California, was shot dead in August after her killer took issue with an LGBTQ+ pride flag that was hung outside the store she'd owned and worked in for the last 10 years. She had a husband and a family. At least 15 transgender and gender nonconforming people have been violently killed in 2023, according to data collected by the Human Rights Campaign. Those are the situations we know about; because not everyone is out, and because data collection on LGBTQ+ adults can be difficult, researchers from the US Bureau of Justice Statistics say we don't have a clear picture of how dark the situation really is.

²⁰ A slur is a hurtful word.

²¹ A poll is a survey.

²² Hostility is aggressive behaviour.

²³ Allies are supporters.

In 2022, threats of violence against the LGBTQ+ community have been on the rise, according to the US Department of Homeland Security. They even warned that public spaces, and healthcare sites, could be the site of an attack.

The trigger for these hateful feelings towards the queer community appears to be the false stereotype that queer people, men in particular, are more likely to act inappropriately around children. Opponents of the LGBTQ+ community have also claimed that children will change their sexual orientation or gender identity if they spend time with us. Queer people will be the first to tell you that argument is false as well. For one, it would mean that children will be able to choose, or change, who they're attracted to after they've reached puberty, which just isn't possible.

Overall, compassion, empathy, and understanding are ideas that hold value for everyone, regardless of whether they are queer or not. And if you disagree with that, there's a good chance you're part of the problem.

1) Why did the author change the way he dressed?

2) How many US citizens are said to not find same-gender relationships acceptable?

3) Why might it be dangerous that more and more people are identifying as queer?

4) What wrong information is being shared about queer people, causing unnecessary fear?

5) What can we do to help queer people feel safe?

Philosophia

Eros

Philia

Agape

Storge

Philautia

After finishing your homework, you continue to research the topic because you find it interesting, reading articles and watching videos about it.

Your friend is sick and you take time out of your busy day to bring them tea and medicine.

You donate your clothes and toys to bring a smile to the faces of people, who you will never meet.

Even though you've had a long day, you help your younger sibling prepare for a vocabulary check-up.

Instead of staying up late to complete a homework due in a few days, you decide to read a chapter in your book and go to bed early.

You tell your friend about a date you've had and how you long to be close to that person again.

Summary of *Steven Universe* for Students

Season 1

Steven is half-human and half-Gem. Together with his caretakers, Garnet, Amethyst, and Pearl, he goes on little adventures, fighting monsters, helping his friends, and protecting the city. Being part Gem means that Steven can shape-shift and summon²⁴ a weapon, in his case, a shield or a bubble. While the Gems usually solve their problems through fighting, Steven prefers to talk; he shows empathy to friends, strangers, and even monsters. Soon, a pink lion and human girl, Connie, join their group (the Crystal Gems); Steven also befriends another Gem, Lapis Lazuli, but she does not want to stay on Earth. Throughout the season, Steven learns a lot about Gems: for example, when their bodies get hurt, they retreat²⁵ into their gems to heal, and when two (or more) Gems share a strong bond, they can fuse, connecting their minds and emotions, becoming one being. He also learns a lot about himself: Steven discovers that he has healing powers, using them to heal Connie's eyesight, Lapis' gem, and accidentally brings watermelons to life. Although Pearl tries to teach Steven to sword fight, he doesn't like it and stops. The season ends with two Gems, Peridot and Jasper, arriving on Earth, leading to a fight.

Season 2

Peridot is stranded on Earth, and Lapis fused with Jasper (forming Malachite), to imprison her in the ocean. With the help of little robots, Peridot tries to repair warp pads – modes of transportation, teleporting Gems from one place to another – to go back to Homeworld, the birthplace of most Gems. Pearl fuses with Garnet (forming Sardonyx) to destroy the progress, but Pearl lies about Peridot coming back, and Garnet is so upset about her behaviour, that she unfuses into Ruby and Sapphire. Eventually, Garnet comes back, hears her out and accepts her apologies. Meanwhile, Connie learns to sword fight from Pearl and finally tells her mother that she fights alongside Steven. Greg, Steven's father, finds out that Steven and Connie fused and tells Steven the story of how he met his mother, Rose Quartz. Steven also develops dream powers, being able to enter other people's minds and help them. The Crystal Gems eventually manage to capture Peridot, and after being locked in the bathroom for a bit, Steven shows her empathy and befriends her. At first, Peridot mirrors the attitudes of Homeworld, calling Garnet an "abomination", saying Amethyst is "defective" because she is smaller than other Amethysts (which she is very insecure about), and making fun of Pearl's mechanic abilities. Gems are made for a purpose, for example, a Pearl's purpose is to serve, but on Earth, Gems can be whoever they want, they do not have to follow Homeworld norms²⁶. Garnet tells Steven the story of how Ruby and Sapphire first met and came to live

²⁴ To summon means to make something appear.

²⁵ To retreat means to leave.

²⁶ Norms are rules in a society.

on Earth, because she would not be allowed to exist on Homeworld. For the longest time, Peridot believed the Diamonds and Homeworld to be perfect, but Steven made her realise that life is better on Earth; so, she turned her back on Homeworld, insulted Yellow Diamond, and joined the Crystal Gems.

Season 3

The Crystal Gems learn that underneath the Earth's crust is something called "the Cluster", millions of Gem shards in an unconscious state. If they get awoken, they will expand, until the Earth gets destroyed. Steven manages to form a huge bubble around the Cluster, keeping the Gem shards safe. Other than that, the Crystal Gems also manage to unfuse Malachite, rescuing Lapis, while Jasper disappears. Lapis comes to live on Steven's family's barn together with Peridot. Steven learns that when the natural resources on Homeworld decreased, the Diamonds decided to colonise other planets to create more Gems, and newer Gems that were made on Homeworld had fewer abilities, which is why Peridot can't shape-shift. However, after Pink Diamond was shattered²⁷ on Earth by the Crystal Gems, the remaining Diamonds (White, Yellow, and Blue) attacked Earth with a bright light, corrupting²⁸ the remaining Gems, except the Crystal Gems, who were protected by Rose's shield. In this season, Greg gets rich because the music he released years ago was used in an advertisement and Ruby soldiers appear to look for Jasper, but the Crystal Gems manage to outsmart them and send them away. Steven also learns that the reason why Pearl does not like Greg much is because she was also in love with Rose Quartz, and he meets a former member of the Crystal Gems, Bismuth, who he gets into a fight with, after she says that she would not hesitate to shatter Homeworld Gems. When Jasper reappears, she attacks Steven, who she keeps calling "Rose", but is poofed²⁹ and bubbled when Steven fuses with Amethyst (forming Smoky Quartz).

Season 4

Steven is still very empathetic, helping family, friends, and strangers alike. However, he and Connie sometimes repress³⁰ their own emotions, and Garnet helps them talk about their feelings. When he meets his uncle, Steven learns that their family name used to be "de Mayo", before Greg changed it. Andy, Steven's uncle, is quite rude to the Gems and outraged³¹ that they technically aren't citizens; he tries to throw them out of "his" barn, but eventually he realises that they are family and he accepts them. Steven's world gets turned

²⁷ Shattering a Gem is the same as killing them.

²⁸ Corrupted Gems are the "monsters" that we see throughout the series.

²⁹ Poofing a Gem doesn't hurt them, it only damages their physical body, making them retreat into their gem.

³⁰ To repress means holding something in, trying not to show it.

³¹ To be outraged means to be very angry.

upside down again, when Blue Diamond arrives on Earth to mourn³² Pink Diamond's death. Greg emphasises with her, sharing his grief about Rose's death, and Blue Diamond abducts him, believing that she is saving him from the Earth's destruction by the Cluster. Garnet, Amethyst, Pearl, and Steven travel to outer space to Pink Diamond's "human zoo" to rescue Greg. In order to not be suspicious, the Gems must play the roles they were made for, showing a clear hierarchy of Gem types. Amethyst also meets other Amethysts and starts feeling better about herself, as she realises that there is a diversity of body types among her fellow gem types, and she is not worth less because she is small. The season comes to a close with Steven's friends and family getting taken by the Homeworld Gems Topaz and Aquamarine due to a mistake Steven had made back in season one, listing humans living on Earth, which was recorded by Peridot, when she was still working for Yellow Diamond. However, Steven manages to convince the Homeworld Gems to only take him and let everyone else go, by telling them that he is Rose Quartz, the Gem that shattered Pink Diamond.

Season 5

Lars is taken together with Steven, as he was too scared to leave his hiding spot on the spaceship. On Homeworld, Steven is on trial³³ for the murder of Pink Diamond; however, he and Lars escape, meeting the "Off Colors" in their underground hiding place. In a tragic turn of events, Lars turns pink, allowing Steven to use his hair as a gateway³⁴ to lion's mane, meaning that he can now travel between Homeworld and Beach City, his home. Back home, Connie isn't responding to Steven's messages, as she is mad about him sacrificing himself for others. Eventually, they talk about their feelings and become friends again. With the possibility of the Diamonds' return to Earth to look for Steven, Lapis leaves to live on the moon, taking the barn with her, but Peridot decides to stay, moving in with Steven. Steven continues to visit Lars, who is now a space pirate, introducing the Off Colors to Connie and Garnet. Pearl finally decides to share Rose Quartz' secret, about what really happened to Pink Diamond, upsetting all of the Crystal Gems, especially Garnet, who unfuses. Ruby and Sapphire spend time apart, but eventually talk and reform, celebrating their love in the form of a wedding. Blue and Yellow Diamonds arrive and fight the Crystal Gems, but Steven stops the fighting by sharing his true identity. He then asks for the Diamonds' help to de-corrupt the Gems on Earth and they take him to Homeworld to talk to White Diamond. Finally, the Diamonds understand that Pink Diamond is truly gone and help Steven heal the corrupted Gems on Earth.

³² To mourn means to be sad about someone's death.

³³ To be on trial means that a judge decides whether or not someone is guilty of a crime.

³⁴ A gateway is a path through which another place can be reached.