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Ending "Sex Education": Eric Effiong's Climatic Character Arc [SPOILERS]

Amelia Carey, Volunteer Reporter

The final season of "Sex Education" introduced many quirky new characters including... God? While continuing to focus on funny and relatable sexual issues, this final season of "Sex Education" was centered around the broad themes of identity, alienation and religion. Many of the plot lines were rushed and all over the place to the point of being forgettable, fading into the background. Other plot lines were cohesive with earlier seasons. I could see how the writers were patient and detail-oriented in executing the character's plot, for example, those of Eric, Adam and Aimee.

Some of the characters started going their own ways, like Maeve and Adam, who didn't attend the same college as everyone else. This is a realistic scenario but didn't help with the jumbled feeling of the show. It was overwhelming to meet new characters like Jean's sister and see their hurried plot lines, all while the consistent characters were wrapping up their stories. We don't get to see the full potential of these characters' development, although they do, somewhat, serve the more established characters' own development. Roman, Abbi, and Aisha were a fun addition; it's bittersweet that we don't get to see more of them.



Netflix season art from "Sex Education."

One of the most cohesive plotlines was given to Eric Effiong. His ending is the least ambiguous of the characters in this final season. Through the entirety of the show, Eric has had an internal struggle between fitting in with his Nigerian heritage, his Christianity and his sexuality. Although his church captures certain aspects of his identity, they are not welcoming of everyone, particularly queer people, leaving Eric feeling alienated.

This struggle comes to a climax in the most impactful scene of the season: Eric's baptism. It's easy to forget that "Sex Education" is just a TV show in this tense scene, with incredible acting from Ncuti Gatwa, who plays Eric.

Eric stands before his whole church congregation, dressed in white.

"My name is Eric Effiong. And I'm a Christian. And a proud gay man," he said. "And I love myself too much to not tell my truth. So, if you love me as I am, I will be baptized, but if you don't, then I must leave."

After a long, suspenseful pause, his mother stands. "I love you as you are, my son," she says. But she is the only one. So with his head held high, he leaves the church.

Eric starts getting visions of God, which turns into a path of spirituality, previously unexamined thoroughly by the show. It's reminiscent of "Holy Camp!," a musical where God is in the form of a man singing Whitney Houston songs). This was an interesting choice, as spiritual experiences do not seem to be popular in modern day media. Eric's God is a Black woman with a rich, wondrous voice and sometimes sparkly eyeshadow to the likes of the show, "Euphoria." His version of Jesus is Cal, his nonbinary classmate.

God speaks to Eric after his missed baptism. "I made you this bright so that others would see in the darkness," God said to Eric. Immediately after hearing this, Eric then finds Cal, who had been missing. It is implied that Cal is in a very dark place, having just thrown their backpack and belongings away, due to the estrangement and helplessness felt as a nonbinary person who is unable to afford top surgery.

"I don't think the world really wants people like me in it," Cal said sheepishly.

Eric is able to deeply empathize with Cal on this subject. They have a heart-to-heart, where Eric shows a new, somber, heartfelt side to his personality. This leads Eric to realizing his purpose as a pastor. It's a satisfying ending for Eric because his interpretation of Christianity will help serve the queer community and also give Eric a place to fully be himself.

Another notable mention is Adam's storyline. It's very moving to see his personal growth throughout the show while he works with horses and lets them ease his mind. We even get a full circle moment with Adam and his dad. In an earlier season, Adam had painfully watched as Eric and his father hugged, knowing that he and his own father didn't have that kind of relationship. However, in the final episode he finally gets to hug his father, who tells him "I love you" for the first time.

Then there's Aimee, who finds photography a comforting, healing way to process the trauma from her past. She uses her art to take back her power, from snapping pictures of pestering construction workers to her finally burning the jeans she was wearing at the climax of her trauma.

Although the final season felt a bit rushed, there were still many parts that were very much worth watching and contained great character development. "Sex Education" shows the beauty of humanity through the different bizarre, vibrant personalities of its characters, particularly Eric Effiong, who shines especially bright in this final season.

