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Game of Thrones Speech

So how many of you are fans of the TV series *Game of Thrones*? How many of you have at least heard of it? Well, for anyone that hasn’t, *Game of Thrones* is a popular fantasy show about members of extremely powerful families battling to rule the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros. Since I personally am a huge fan of the show, I would love to stand here and tell you that “*Game of Thrones* is a show that you all will *love”.* In reality, this is not the case – the aspect that turns away many viewers is the prominent nudity and blatant sexualization of women in the show. I recently came upon an article titled “The *Game of Thrones* Universe Is Violent and Sexist – And That’s Not a Bad Thing” by Alison Herman, and this is why I’m talking to you today. Women definitely are not equal to men in the society of Westeros. They are used for sex, traded like property, and never seen as viable threats by the men of the show. However, the status of women in the show does not necessarily reflect the opinions of the writers or their role in the plot. There are many strong female characters in *Game of Thrones,* such as Daenerys Targaryen or Queen Cersei, that deserve commendation for their actions and their ways of survival.

One of the most serious candidates for the throne is a woman, Daenerys, and she is not even worthy of the King Robert’s attention until he learns that she is pregnant and has a 50% chance of having a son. Then, all of a sudden, the King’s entire council believes that she should be killed before the child is even born. Throughout the show, she has grown to become a force to be reckoned with, and very realistically may become the ruler of the Seven Kingdoms. However, she was not always so respected by the audience, but rather existed as an object of pity. She is supposed to be between the ages of 13 and 15, but her brother married her off to Khal Drogo, an older man of an entirely different culture and language, all in exchange for an army so that he could take over the crown. She is raped by her new husband until she finally embraces her situation and uses her “womanly wiles” to win him over. When her husband is killed, she is understandably upset, but quickly realizes that she has people relying on her and gains an army of her own. If this show was completely sexist, they would never portray such a beloved character as a *female.* The concept of her arranged marriage at such a young age and the subsequent rape is what is considered the most “sexist” aspect of her character, but what many do not realize situations such as hers are prevalent today. The International Center for Research on Women finds that ⅓ of girls in the world are married before the age of 18, and that 1 in 9 are married before the age of 15. In her article, Ms. Herman states that “The women of Westeros negotiate issues like exploitation and rape as if they are real, life-threatening forces — and that’s how it should be”. So yes, Daenerys is a woman, and she is raped, and I fully believe that this is undeniably wrong, but is depicting her situation in the show sexist or simply a reflection of what is happening in society even today? Can we blame the writers for showing us a truth?

Another example of an arranged marriage for someone else’s gain is with Cersei Lannister. She was initially married off to King Robert by her father so that he could have a hand on the throne. Despite being the current queen regent, it is clear to viewers she is unhappy. She is a smart, capable woman, but she has been forced into submission by the men in her life, which has made her jaded, bitter, and generally unlikeable as a person. When she finally escapes her loveless marriage, she is forced into yet another by her father to strengthen their position in another part of the kingdom. Cersei is not portrayed as any stock character – such as the damsel-in-distress or the classic villainess – but rather as a *real* woman that succumbs to her situation after being beaten down one too many times, which to me is more plausible than a woman patiently waiting for rescue. I agree with Ms. Herman when she says that portraying women as stock characters objectifies them more than presenting them as real people reacting to real situations that may or may not exist today. You can consider it sexism and be infuriated at her treatment by the men in the show, or you can consider her situation and see her for what she really is - a person that is simply trying to live through her life.

There are countless other examples *Game of Thrones* that present women in a positive light, such as Ros, the prostitute, who makes her way from the kingdom in the North to King’s landing, the home of the Iron Throne. She is personally one of my favorite secondary characters because she is witty, funny, and can hold her own in almost every situation. Despite her job, she seems to be content with her life, and she certainly does not let anyone treat her like property. Another woman, Brienne, is an excellent fighter and aspires to be a knight for Lord Renly, who she secretly loves. She can beat even the most skilled of knights, and achieves her dream by beating one of Renly’s best knights in a duel. Brienne is fiercely loyal, and cannot be bought by money, as many men often are in the show. Lord Renly’s own wife Margery seems sweet and innocent, but she has one goal - to become the Queen, and she will use any amount of cunning to attain it. She quickly moves on to Joffrey after her husband dies and secures his hand in marriage. I could list many other women such as these, but I think you get my point. Women are definitely discriminated against in Game of Thrones, but this does not mean that they are not powerful or capable of getting what they want.

*Game of Thrones* is an excellent TV show that has elements of romance, drama, fantasy, action, and various other genres, all tied into an engaging story. I agree with the title of Ms. Herman’s article that the fantasy universe is sexist, and it is okay, because it is just that – a *fantasy*. It has a basis in history, but in the end, it is just a television show. It is not meant to be a social commentary, or a suggestion of how the writers think society should be. It draws from real life, but really, what form of media does not? It is meant to entertain and make money, as most television shows are. The creators of the show surely have some creative license, to portray their world with as much or as little controversy as they would like. The world of *Game of Thrones* may be patriarchal, but at the same time, it does dismiss the value of women. It simply shows how women put in that society survive and what they make of their lives. Whether they use their skill in battle, their wits, or their sexuality, they are simply *living*. Who are we to judge how any man or woman lives his or life and to call it sexist or feminist?