

Politics, Hidden Agendas and a Game of Thrones

An Intersectional Analysis of Women's Sexuality in George R.R. Martin's A Game of Thrones

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Abstract

This essay is an analysis of George R.R. Martin's fantasy novel *A Game of Thrones*. The novel is analyzed from an intersectional perspective, and focuses on women's positions in the power hierarchy, and in what ways they use their sexuality to access power. The analysis also discusses the family concept, and how women preserve their families in order to maintain biological ties. The intersectional theory used in this essay mainly consists of the definitions provided by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and the concept of family structure is grounded in the views of Patricia Hill Collins.

In combination with the analysis, an intersectional model, which consists of eight different social and cultural categories, is presented in order to reflect the apparent hierarchy within the society described in the novel. The model shows that hierarchies within this society exist, and that the male gender, straight sexuality, and fertility are highly privileged factors. It is concluded that women's sexuality and fertility constitute an important element in order for them to gain power, and it is also evident that women are incapable of attaining powerful positions if they are not in partnership with powerful men. For women, it is necessary not to deny their men sexual intimacy, meaning that they have to please them, giving them full access to their bodies, in order for them to be influential in society and attain a higher state of power in the hierarchy. The male ability is connected to intellect and physical strength, whereas the female ability is equal to fertility, which is also what constitutes a woman. The relationships between different families, or houses, reflect political alliances performed by men where women have no say. Women are merely regarded as assets, or wives, with the purpose of conceiving heirs.

Keywords: A Game of Thrones, George R.R. Martin, literature, intersectionality, women, sexuality, gender, power, hierarchy

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1. Introduction

This essay presents an intersectional analysis of the American author George R.R. Martin's fantasy novel *A Game of Thrones*. It was published in 1996, and it is the first book in the series *A Song of Ice and Fire*, which still has not been finished. Over the years, *A Game of Thrones* has won many awards. It became a bestseller, and was recently made into a ten episode television series. It is a story about a political game, where the struggle for the Iron Throne is what motivates the characters. Everyone has their own political agenda, but only a few of these are successfully fulfilled. The desire to increase one's power is reflected in the alliances between houses where women become important actors. It is by marriage one is capable to achieve a higher state of power, which becomes very apparent when studying the female characters.

Since there have not been many literary studies in connection to intersectional theory, the anticipation is to contribute to the literary field by offering an intersectional analysis. It will aim to provide a comprehensible female perspective through the study of female characters apparent in the novel, where sexuality, fertility and power constitute important elements.

Aim

The aim of this essay is to examine the power structures in *A Game of Thrones* by studying its female characters from an intersectional viewpoint. Specifically, the analysis will focus on women's sexuality and how it is used as an instrument to access and exercise power.

Method

Gender, sexuality and power are central categories in this essay, and are also essential parts of intersectional theory. Therefore, gathering information and constructing an intersectional frame based on the factors involved in the novel were crucial, so it could be possible to direct the analysis and address the chosen subjects. Intersectionality turned out to be a very rewarding theory to work with when studying *A Game of Thrones*. Since gender, sexuality and power can be linked to other categories, e.g. class and ethnicity, using intersectionality was practical in the work of scrutinizing these categories in order to achieve a more extensive and adequate description of the political power structure apparent in the novel. Intersectionality was also very functional in terms of structuring the analysis because it provides well-defined categories. This appeared to be rewarding since the study included many factors.

Before the actual analysis could take place, it was necessary to map out the political structure of power, the different hierarchies and examine how the characters are positioned in it. That is why an explanatory section was added before the intersectional study. I also had to be quite selective regarding the choice of characters involved in my analysis. Many of them are interesting in their own way, and even if this essay were supposed to focus only on female characters, it felt necessary to involve some male ones in the sections as well so that it becomes clear that the power of women are not completely independent of men's positions. The male characters sometimes contrast the female ones. It is occasionally through their actions and descriptions one can understand how and why some of the female characters are viewed and portrayed, and at the same time understand their actions.

Since intersectionality includes many more social and cultural categories than gender and class, many interesting opportunities for the analysis were provided. This contributed to the possibility of male characters being a part of this essay as well. While the analysis progressed and notes were taken on each of the characters included in this essay, it turned out that an outline of the categories existent in the novel was required in order to make the presentation of each character coherent. While going through the different social and cultural categories in *A Game of Thrones*, an estimation of their internal hierarchy was also necessary to fully depict the characters' positions and in what way they are functioning in the hierarchy. A way to make this clear and easy to grasp was to create a scheme over the different categories and their internal factors, which are presented hierarchically. The scheme was used extensively in the analysis because of its basic and uncomplicated structure, and it was also a concrete way of using intersectional theory in this essay.

2. Theoretical background

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a theory that was first introduced by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw during the 1980s. The term “derives from the English word intersection and refers to the meeting and interaction” between social and cultural categories, such as gender, class, disability, ethnicity, nationality and sexuality (Olsvik 2007:8). It is used in studies on how such factors interact with each other, in order to understand how powerful positions or marginalization of people are generated. Briefly, the intersectional perspective is beneficial when examining how the hierarchies, social and cultural ones, within different societies, conventions and discourses are constructed (Knudsen 2006:62). The concept of intersectionality can be considered a complement to gender studies since it examines factors in connection to gender.

Crenshaw is most known for her studies on oppression of women of color, also known as Black Feminism. She states that social and cultural categories themselves are not the cause of problems such as oppression of women. Instead, it is the attachment of definite values and the use of these categories in order to create hierarchies that really cause the complications (Crenshaw 1994). According to Crenshaw in her studies of American societies and hierarchies, it is mainly women who suffer from oppression, and when the links of the matter are examined further, it becomes clear that the majority of oppressed women are both colored and unemployed (Crenshaw 1994). This shows that both ethnicity and class become necessary to study when aiming to identify specific links between factors and how they cause marginalization or oppression (Crenshaw 1994:94ff).

As mentioned earlier, certain hierarchies within social and cultural categories exist in society (Knudsen 2006:62) and it is these kinds of hierarchies, which act as frameworks for power structures, that intersectional theory strives to shed light on. In order to exemplify how intersectionality works, I have created an illustration depicting hierarchies within two categories. It is then easier to see how they function and how positions in the power structure get determined:

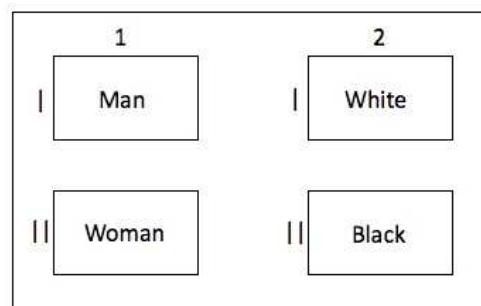


Figure 1. *An illustrative example on how intersectionality works when studying power hierarchies*

As opposed to gender studies, which would only have focused on the two boxes in row number one labeled *Man* and *Woman*, intersectional theory examines many more factors that can cause certain positions and marginalization of people. The study from an intersectional perspective may start at observing gender and then continues in a chain of factors which are linked to each other. The construction in Figure 1 shows an example of a following factor, which, in this case, is ethnicity (row 2).

When studying hierarchies and how they are organized, it becomes rather clear that fixed structures are existent, and that certain factors are superior to others within Western societies and families. *Man* is superior to *Woman* and *White* is superior to *Black* (Crenshaw 1994). In

this example, the ranking of the factors is indicated by the markers | and || next to the boxes in Figure 1. When comparing the genders while studying oppression of women, it becomes obvious that there is a difference between them: the fewer the markers, the more powerful the gender. However, when performing a study from an intersectional perspective, it becomes rather clear that further superior attributes are required in order to maintain a powerful position. If adding the markers next to one attribute in row 1 with another attribute in row 2 the following scheme would appear:

- *Man* | and *White* | → 2
- *Man* | and *Black* || → 3
- *Woman* || and *White* | → 3
- *Woman* || and *Black* || → 4

This shows that men have increased chances of attaining powerful positions while women have not; while a man can start at 2, a woman can only start at 3. This indicates that there is no equality between genders since superior factors and hierarchies still remain in society. Patricia Hill Collins, on the other hand, states that it is possible for white women to access power, but only through partnership with a white and powerful man (Collins 1998: 65). The suggestion that women would be entirely without power, which could happen if interpreting the scheme too literally, is untrue. As can be seen, a white woman and a black man have equal chances to obtain power, but neither of them is superior, or equal, to a white man. However, if another row with other factors were to be added, e.g. class, there would be a possibility for the scheme and its current ranking to change.

The example of Figure 1 thus shows the complexity of using intersectionality and the possible risks in scrutinizing too few categories. One category cannot speak for the rest, and it is in connection to other ones one gets to understand, in more precise ways, how power structures are constructed and in what ways they function. The importance of understanding the correlation between social and cultural hierarchies is something Collins discusses thoroughly when examining the importance of family positions. She claims that “individuals typically learn their assigned place in hierarchies of race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, nation, and social class in their families of origin” (Collins 1998: 64). While this learning happens, the hierarchies become viewed “as natural social arrangements, as compared to socially constructed ones” (Ibid: 64). The “naturalization” of hierarchies is a result of the “natural processes of the family” (Ibid: 64), which causes the individual to view existing hierarchies in society as natural phenomena and, therefore, cannot find any reason to question them. Collins

argues that the concept of a family being the generator of structured hierarchies must change into a device that can challenge the hierarchy, so that inequality does not become reproduced (Ibid: 77f).

When examining the family concept closer from an intersectional point of view, it becomes clear that heterosexual married couples are privileged by the legal system since they are “the preferred family organization” (Collins 1998:69), and that blood ties are of great importance. The bonds between the generations that have existed up until the present family show how significant biology is when defining the family. The importance of biology has lead to women, regardless of ethnicity or race, having something of a responsibility in “maintaining blood ties” (Ibid: 69).

For example, White women play a special role in keeping family bloodlines pure. Historically, creating White families required controlling White women’s sexuality, largely through social norms that advocated pre-marital virginity. By marrying White men and engaging in sexual relations only with their husbands, White women ensured racial purity of White families. Thus, through social taboos that eschewed pre-marital sexuality and interracial marriage for White women, White families could thereby avoid racial degeneration [...] When reinserted into naturalized hierarchies of gender, race, class and nation, and institutionally enforced via mechanisms such as segregated space and state-sanctioned violence, efforts to regulate sexuality and marriage reinforced beliefs in the sanctity of “blood ties.” (Collins 1998:69)

The quote above presents the historical model that was permeating the concept of family, but there is yet another dimension of the family concept that is strongly linked to purity: the notion of responsibility and accountability. This notion is also what ties the family together, the willingness to routinely help and support family members, but is mostly considered benefits that blood-linked family members gain automatically simply by belonging (Collins 1998: 71). The positions, the hierarchy, of the family members cause certain responsibilities to be reliant on different positions, e.g. the oldest child often gets to babysit for his or her younger siblings. But besides responsibility, family members may also rely on certain privileges. The family concept, the way it is structured and functioning, can be regarded a smaller model of society as a whole (Ibid: 71ff). The way the family members can rely on support and privileges and are expected to take responsibility, citizens within a society are no different. A citizen is guaranteed protection by law, free public education etc. but is also expected to pay taxes and “engage in military service when required” (Collins 1998:71). This is what non-members of society would lack, but even if the structure, and its system, seems to

work for the members, inequity and marginalization still occur due to superior and subordinated attributes within categories that are part of the society's internal power structure (Ibid: 71). The concept of family and pureness is an important aspect in *A Game of Thrones*, which will be discussed in the character analyses.

Previous research on *A Game of Thrones*

Only a few scholarly texts concerning *A Game of Thrones* have been published, which is a privilege as regards to this essay, since none of them can be considered specific in-depth analyses of the novel. A few of them discuss the novel and certain themes in connection to it, while others refer to George R.R. Martin while discussing the fantasy genre. Laura Miller, the author of the critical essay *Just Write it!*, discusses Martin's previous productions, early works and his success in television, along with his current success with his series *A Song of Ice and Fire*, and what an impact it has had worldwide. She writes about Martin's authorship, what he thinks about his own works, his connection to his fans, and his relationship to other fantasy novels written by other authors (Miller 2011).

Verhoeve (2011) has published the book *Re-Reading A Game of Thrones: a Critical Response to George R.R. Martin's Fantasy Classic*, which discusses Martin's first book in the series. Verhoeve reviews many of the characters and the themes, but mostly from his own point of view, which makes this critical text more of a fan-publication. The text mainly consists of criticism, ideas and personal impressions and his impatient waiting on the upcoming books in the series of *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

Although only a few studies on *A Game of Thrones*, as well as on the other books in the series, exist, there is plenty of other written material available, especially book reviews. These are not just available on genre-specific websites or forums passionately committed to George R.R. Martin's works, but are also found on websites such as the British website *The Telegraph*. Most of the reviews found on the Internet websites of newspapers and such mainly concern the later works of Martin or the TV-series, but some reviews assess the first book. Tim Martin's review *Game of Thrones: the phenomenon* is one example, although he refers to the novels in connection to the TV-series produced by HBO (*The Telegraph* 2011).

When viewing previous research on the fantasy genre, in connection to theoretical frameworks, much more has been published. Fantasy, as well as science fiction, has been scrutinized in many ways, not least in connection with feminism. When it comes to intersectionality, not many literary studies in connection to intersectional theory have been published. As far as this essay is concerned, the anticipation is to contribute to the literary

field by presenting the fantasy novel in connection with intersectionality, and to offer a comprehensible female perspective through the analysis of female characters that exist in the novel.

3. Analysis and discussion

This section consists of six parts where the first two will function as introductions to the novel and its plot, and the other sections represent the analysis from an intersectional perspective.

Overview of the plot in *A Game of Thrones*

The story of *A Game of Thrones* has a European medieval, and feudal, setting in a continent named Westeros. Westeros is divided into seven kingdoms, and each kingdom has its own warden, who represents a certain house. Westeros and its Seven Kingdoms were exposed to a war, caused by a kidnapping of Lyanna – member of the House of Stark, wardens of the North – carried out by the Targaryen Prince, son of the Mad King, Aerys Targaryen II. When Lyanna's father and brother demanded her back, the Mad King had them executed. This caused a great conflict where the House of Baratheon and the Stark family attacked the Targaryen dynasty, with the help of other houses as well. So began "Robert's Rebellion", as the war is called, since Lord Robert Baratheon and Lyanna were engaged to be married (Martin 1996).

During the war, due to Robert's killing of the Prince, House of Lannister agreed to support the Mad King. However, their support did not last very long, and the Lannisters eventually turned against the King when Jaime Lannister executed him. The Lannisters then swore loyalty to Robert Baratheon, the new King of the Seven Kingdoms who possessed the Iron Throne, the symbol of kingship. Since Lyanna passed away of illness, Robert Baratheon married Cersei Lannister instead. The siblings Daenerys and Viserys, who were the only ones left of the Targaryen dynasty, managed to escape across the narrow sea (Martin 1996).

The great conflict between the Targaryens, Starks and Baratheons that was causing the war happened fifteen years prior to the plot's beginning. It begins with King Robert Baratheon, his wife Cersei and other members of the court visiting the North, Winterfell, where the Stark family lives. The reason for the visit is the recent death of Jon Arryn, who was Robert's Hand of the King. Eddard Stark (also referred to as Ned) then becomes the new Hand of the King (Martin 1996).

During the King's visit at Winterfell, conflicts start to arouse when Lysa Arryn, Catelyn Stark's sister, secretly accuses the Lannisters of the murder of her husband Jon Arryn. Ned

has no choice but to follow King Robert when he decides that it is time for them to leave for the south, but the mistrust of the Lannisters follows him. While Ned is the new Hand of the King, he becomes the new target for the Lannisters. Not only does Ned understand that the Lannisters are displeased with his new position, but he also finds out that Robert's children actually belong to Jaime Lannister, Cersei's twin brother who is a King's knight (Martin 1996).

The sudden death of Robert Baratheon means Ned is unable to tell him the truth, and the event turns into a chaotic situation where Prince Joffrey (son of Cersei and Jaime) becomes the new ruler of the Seven Kingdoms. While Cersei tries to rule Westeros through her son, he quickly begins to act on his own. Since he is the King, Cersei has no real control over him, and while she would have preferred to confront matters with caution, Joffrey starts to operate hasty and impulsively. Sansa Stark, daughter of Catelyn and Eddard, who is betrothed to Joffrey, tries, together with Cersei, to keep him calm and have mercy over Ned, who tried to make things right, but since they have "the soft hearts of women" (Martin 1996: 607), he refuses to listen and has Ned beheaded.

The death of Eddard Stark resulted in Lannisters achieving new enemies, where the Starks and other houses constitute both a military and political threat. Since the Lannisters now act in the open, due to King Joffrey, their political agenda becomes evident to others in the Seven Kingdoms, causing new alliances to emerge, hence political upheaval. At the same time, the Targaryen siblings, who managed to escape to the Free Cities of Pentos across the narrow sea, hunger for revenge and are not far from returning to Westeros in a claim for the Iron Throne (Martin 1996).

The political structure and Houses

As mentioned in the previous section, Westeros is divided into seven kingdoms, which are ruled by a king. The wardens of each kingdom represent a house, also referred to as family, which has its internal hierarchy. The oldest son is the upcoming warden after his father and will inherit not only all the titles, but also the entire estate. The younger sons of a warden can choose to either work for their older brother and his house, e.g. serving as castellans or knights, or work outside the house as maesters. The daughters usually do not get any powerful positions through inheritance, nor do they work or educate themselves to the labors of men. The only way for a woman to access a powerful position is through marriage, but even then she is not permitted to exercise power if her husband does not allow it.

The different houses have their own words, mottoes, which reflect their common values, what ties a family together, and are followed by the house members. When a female family member marries a man of another house, it is expected of her to acclimatize to the new house, not only by name, but also by adapting to the house rules, its religion and words, and show her support to her new house. In other words, she more or less declines her former house and its notions. It is common for different houses to ally with each other by arranged marriages in order to gain each others' political and financial support.

Each house generally has a quite solid household, which often consists of a clergyman, a steward, maesters, septas (similar to teaching nuns who take care of female upbringing), wet nurses, cooks, blacksmiths, stablemen etc. The members of the household serve the lord and his lady faithfully and are sworn to obey them, but even if they all are considered "common folk", and exist and work under the same kind of oath, there is still an existing hierarchy among them. It becomes rather clear that some labor roles are regarded finer than others, which provide a certain status. Maesters and blacksmiths are examples of such labor roles, where a maester is considered more cultivated and noble than a blacksmith, which is not considered as refined a worker, but is still just as required as a master is.

Common folk is a somewhat wide category, which includes people who are not privileged with high titles, such as farmers, smiths, sailors, lumberjacks etc. They function as freestanding households or are employed under the different houses. Common folk seem to have the same kind of hierarchy of inheritance within their families as the houses of wardens have. Bastards, however, are not privileged with any inheritance after their parents, which is often due to the fact that there is nothing to inherit. In some cases, bastards belong to men with titles, such as lords, but even if they are part of the family and are raised under the same conditions as the other, non-bastard, children, they are not allowed to inherit anything after their lord fathers. Bastards exist on every level within society and are emerged from extra-marital occurrences. However, since prostitutes constitute an accepted part of society, bastards are strongly associated with them and their affairs. Although prostitution is officially allowed, it is by no means a coveted labor. It is restricted as a female chore where hierarchies also are present. Prostitutes who are well paid are considered more superior than the ones who are not, and, therefore, attain a higher status within their proficiency. Both bastards and prostitutes represent the lowest faction of society, although some individual exceptions may exist.

Intersectional categories in *A Game of Thrones*

When examining the political structure in the novel, it becomes obvious that certain social and cultural categories consist of internal hierarchies. Intersectional theory includes and problematizes as many categories as needed, and this analysis will address eight categories since they are the ones apparent in the novel, and in the society of Westeros. A scheme of these categories and the factors belonging to each of them has been created in order to give a clear description of how the hierarchies within each category are arranged, and, again, the fewer the markers the more powerful the gender:

	Gender 1	Sexuality 2	Marital Status 3	Ability 4	Class 5	Ethnicity 6	Culture 7	Religion 8
I	Man	Straight	Married	Able-bodied	King's Court	Old Valyria	Old Valyria	Faith of the Seven
II	Woman	Incest	Unmarried	Disfigured	Houses	Andals (Common)	Andals (Common)	The Old Gods
III	Eunuch	Homo-sexuality	Unwanted	Disabled	Common folk	Barbarians	Barbarians	Foreign Gods
IIII	Prostitutes Bastards Barbarians							

Figure 2. *An illustration of the social and cultural categories and their hierarchies apparent in the society of Westeros in A Game of Thrones*

The first category, *gender*, consists of three factors; man, woman and eunuch. In *A Game of Thrones*, the male gender is presented as superior since it is the male characters that contribute in war, resolve alliances, rule and dominate the society. Women are depicted as assets where they are either married to men or live to serve and obey them. Catelyn Stark's previous engagement to Brandon Stark is a clear example of how women are being depicted as assets and how they live to obey:

“[...] And I was only twelve when my father promised me to your brother Brandon.”

[...] “[...] It was all meant for Brandon. You, Winterfell, everything.
(Martin 1996: 50)

Catelyn is presented as someone who belongs to another, and also not by choice, but by an arrangement between two houses and their lords. Thus, women are not depicted as independent as men are in the novel. Eunuchs are also not functioning independently in society. In this model, they are placed at the bottom of the hierarchy, which is due to their

being very few and not having any true positions of power. They are not considered men, but they are also not regarded as women. They are ambiguous in their biological nature and carry characteristics and qualities belonging to both genders.

Category number two, *sexuality*, contains the factors straight, incest and homosexuality. Straight, heterosexuality, is considered superior since it is a way to naturally unitize houses and receive descendants. Incest is placed right under straight due to the fact that it is an accepted practice. The Targaryen dynasty has wed brothers with sisters for as long as anyone can remember in order to maintain a pure bloodline. Cersei and Jaime Lannister, the twins, have also dedicated themselves to each other, hence incest (Martin 1996: 405f). Incest is not a sexual approach that is accepted and approved by everyone, but it is not a rejected phenomenon. Since it was restricted to the Targaryen house, and was not affecting anyone else, it became more or less accepted. Homosexuality, on the other hand, is never spoken of in the open. It is never mentioned explicitly as something good or bad, but the way the society is structured, feudally, and the way descendants and alliances between houses are valued, one can presume that homosexuality constitutes the opposite pole to the celebrated norm, which is heterosexuality.

The third category, labeled *marital status*, is very comparable to the hierarchy that exists in our society, but in the novel, one's marital status has more to do with class and power. It represents merged houses that grow more powerful by acquiring political support, gaining wealth and obtaining the right alliance in which one's children shall be raised. The component labeled unmarried includes children, common folk and people belonging to houses who have not been married. The last factor, unwanted, represents the characters that usually do not marry because other characters do not find them interesting in terms of marriage. Prostitutes and bastards often belong to this factor since they are not representing wealth or class.

Ability is the category that ranks the physical and intellectual abilities of the characters. This is a rather difficult category seeing as there are differences in the abilities of men and women. While men participate in war and need to be able to fight and use their physical power, women do not. Men also carry intellectual abilities depending on their positions and labors. Ned, for instance, who is the Hand of the King, needs to help the King make wise decisions (Martin 1996). However, the strongest ability of women is fertility. It is considered a crucial quality since it is what shall generate descendants. In this essay, fertility will be equal to able-bodied given that if a woman were barren, others would consider it a disability.

The fifth category, *class*, shows a hierarchy including four components instead of the standard of three. This is due to the difference between common folk and bastards, prostitutes,

and barbarians. At the top, we have the King's court with houses ranked right below. By being a member of a house, titles are received, such as lord and lady, which denote a greater position in society. Below houses comes common folk, which represent people with labors that are relatively respected, such as farmers. Prostitutes are accepted, however not as valued as, for instance, a fisherman. The reason for this has to do with heritage and honor. Being a child of a prostitute honors no one, and this goes for bastards as well. Thus, prostitutes and bastards represent the lowest section of society and are placed at the bottom of the hierarchy. Barbarians also belong at the lowest rank within class because they also differ, like prostitutes and bastards, in terms of norms in the society of Westeros. The difference between barbarians and prostitutes and bastards is that barbarians are not very common in Westeros since they are living out in the woods and across the sea where the free cities and Vaes Dothrak are. People living in Vaes Dothrak are called Dothraki and are nomadic warriors.

Ethnicity, culture and religion are very much connected with each other. The first two carry the same internal structure and represent the history of Westeros. Old Valyria is regarded as the mythical prominent culture, where dragons and steel like no other are key aspects. Old Valyria also represents the strong connection to the mythical old kings who possessed the throne. The Targaryens are said to carry Valyrian blood, which is the reason for their wanting to keep their bloodlines pure. Andals (common) represents everyone else with a historical background that is not as dreamlike as Old Valyria. The *religion* is connected to both *culture* and *ethnicity* in the sense that barbarians have their foreign gods, which are not similar to those worshipped in Westeros. The Faith of the Seven is the most common religion, whereas the Old Gods are not as common and worshipped only by few people, such as the Starks.

The way the scheme is constructed is not in order to create large gaps between men and women. In fact, it only functions to reflect the different categories apparent in *A Game of Thrones*, so that the characters can be discussed properly and follow a certain structure. It is never the scale of the gaps that is important, but what is causing them. If one were to add the factors ranked the lowest from each category for each type of gender, it would not show any large differences between them. If we were to pick the lowest factors for a man, the result would be 23, for a woman 24 and for a eunuch 25. The point of using this scheme, and the point of intersectionality, is to identify the different categories, and their internal ranking, in order to see how certain factors that have been given specific ranks are functioning to increase or lower a person's position of power in society. After studying all these factors, it will then

be clear who is superior and who is not and in what way they differ from each other, regardless if one marker or more separates them.

Catelyn Stark

Catelyn, a former member of house Tully, is married to Eddard Stark (also referred to as Ned), who is the warden of the north. At first, she was betrothed to Brandon Stark, Ned's older brother who was executed by the Mad King, but since he died she got married to Ned instead (Martin 1996). It is not stated why she got to marry Eddard Stark, but it is likely it was due to the arrangement between the houses. In other words: Catelyn had to marry a Stark since it was already settled. It did not matter whom as long as she married the heir apparent in that family.

Catelyn and Eddard have a very stable marriage, which is permeated with strong love, faith and respect for each other. Catelyn never replaced her old house's religion or its words when she married Ned, which he respects. He often encourages her, letting her have her own religion, the Faith of the Seven, while he still believes in the Old Gods, and he entrusts her with many tasks and decisions. When Catelyn and Ned got separated, when he departed as the Hand of the King together with their two daughters, Catelyn was left at Winterfell with the rest of their children and was entirely in charge of the house and the staff (Martin 1996).

Since Catelyn still lives by the words of Tully's, *Family, Duty, Honor* (as opposed to Stark's *Winter Is Coming*), she prioritizes her family above everything else and strongly commits to her duty as a mother and wife. She has a strong will, is very protective and loving with her children and would do anything for her family and their safety. A clear example of Catelyn following the words of Tully's is when Ned is traveling to the south, and an assassin tries to murder their son, Bran. Catelyn, together with Bran's direwolf, manage to stop the murder. Although the fight against the assassin injures her hands very badly, making her incapable of using them properly, she does not think of it as any loss as long as it kept Bran safe. When she, a short while after the horrible event, understands that it is the Lannisters who hired the assassin, she immediately prepares a journey to the south in order to warn and rescue the rest of her family (Martin 1996).

When studying Catelyn and Ned from an intersectional perspective and determining their power positions in the political hierarchy, their schemes would be the following:

Catelyn:

Woman ||, *Straight* |, *Married* |, *Able-bodied* |, *House* ||, *Andals* ||, *Andals* || and *Faith of the Seven* | → 12

Eddard:

Man |, *Straight* |, *Married* |, *Able-bodied* |, *King's court* |, *Andals* ||, *Andals* || and *the Old Gods*
|| → 11

As can be seen, Eddard is placed above Catelyn in the power hierarchy. Together, they constitute a fairly powerful house since two great houses have merged. What is interesting, however, is that although they seem very equal in terms of power, Catelyn's ability is related to her fertility whereas Ned's is connected to his intellect where his position as the Hand of the King means to help the King by giving advice. But, Ned is also able-bodied in the sense that his physical condition is in good shape. In other words, Catelyn's sexuality is of great importance since it is what shows her commitment to her husband and the house. The following quote describes the sexual relationship between Cat and Ned:

So when they had finished, Ned rolled off and climbed from her bed, as he had a thousand times before. [...] Her loins still ached from the urgency of his lovemaking. It was a good ache. She could feel his seed within her. She prayed that it might quicken there. It had been three years since Rickon. She was not too old. She could give him another son.
(Martin 1996: 49)

What is clear from the quote above is that daughters are not as important as sons, since sons constitute heirs, and, secondly, it is implied that intimacy is required, not only to conceive children, but also in order to please the husband. Catelyn is very content with her marriage and the way things are between her and Ned, but it is rather clear that her sexuality and fertility are of importance.

It is stated quite early that Ned has a bastard son named Jon, whose mother is unknown, which has affected Cat in a strong way: “[i]t was the one thing she could never forgive him. She had come to love her husband with all her heart, but she had never found it in her to love Jon” (Martin 1996: 55). The interesting thing is that although Ned's affair with another woman was devastating to Catelyn, she claims to be fine with Ned having a man's needs and is permissive when it comes to him sleeping with other women, even though it may result in a child. However, she would not want anything to do with the child, and that is the reason for her being unenthusiastic towards Jon (Martin 1996).

Despite the existence of Jon, a constant reminder of Ned's betrayal, Catelyn committed to her duty as a wife by obeying her husband, and while their love grew so did the trust for each other. If Catelyn would have turned away from Ned, it would most likely have become difficult for her to achieve respect from him, which would have made her weaker and not as

influential. This shows that it is possible for women to attain powerful positions through partnership with powerful men, which Collins states in her studies. The fact that Catelyn does not question the hierarchy she lives under at Winterfell is because it is the same hierarchy that is reflected in the entire Westeros. Since everyone grew up under these circumstances, these hierarchies have become naturalized where everyone seeks and finds their own position, which is exactly what Collins discusses regarding the family concept. The woman has great responsibility when it comes to “maintaining blood ties” (Collins 1998: 69), which is what Catelyn, and everyone else, considers her responsibility as a married woman. For Catelyn, who is exceptionally dedicated and believes in her marriage and family, the existence of Jon, who lives in her family where the other children are tied biologically, represents a disturbance in the natural hierarchy, which was the one she strived, but failed, to uphold. No matter how many children she and Ned conceive, or how hard she tries to push Jon away from her sphere, their family will always be viewed as different from the norm.

Cersei Lannister

Cersei is yet another of the novel’s interesting characters. She is described as a beautiful, tall and golden-haired woman with intense green eyes, and a short temper. Her marriage with Robert is quite complex. Cersei was deeply in love with Robert, but when it became clear to her that he was not over his lost love Lyanna Stark, she was devastated and eventually grew bitter. This affected their marriage in the sense that a distance between them developed. They stopped sharing the same bed, and Robert started visiting prostitutes instead (Martin 1996).

The children of Cersei, said to belong to King Robert, are conceived with her twin brother Jaime. Together in secret, they constitute both a loving couple as well as a couple conspiring against her husband, the King. Cersei and Jaime are equals in the sense that both possess power and have common interests in the political game. This is clear when King Robert becomes wounded while hunting and eventually dies. Cersei is not at all devastated over her husband’s death, but instead well prepared to claim the Iron Throne for her son Joffrey. She neglects the law, the King’s last commands transcribed by Eddard Stark which stated that Joffrey would become the new King, but was changed into “my heir” (Martin 1996: 422) by Eddard since he knew the truth about Joffrey not being his son. Cersei instead tries to rule Westeros through Joffrey and has Ned imprisoned for treason. It is not stated clearly if Cersei were part of Robert’s death, but the hints are present (Martin 1996).

When Ned realizes that the Baratheon children do not belong to King Robert, he decides to confront Cersei. She sees no point in denying his suspicions, thus answers him truthfully when he asks her about Jaime:

“Your brother?” Ned said. “Or your lover?”

“Both. [...] Since we were children together. And why not? The Targaryens wed brother to sister for three hundred years, to keep the bloodlines pure. And Jaime and I are more than brother and sister. We are one person in two bodies. We shared a womb together. [...] When he is in me, I feel ... whole.”

(Martin 1996: 405)

This shows that an admiration towards the Targaryens exists. They become an excuse for Cersei’s love with her brother, an explanation that cannot be argued due to the allowed practice within the Targaryen family, because incest is not generally customary. It is considered immoral, and she is aware of the consequences that would follow if anyone found out that she, as Robert’s queen, has conceived her children “unnaturally”. Shortly after explaining this to Ned, Cersei confirms Ned’s suspicions regarding her children belonging to Jaime by saying “Thank the Gods” (Martin 1996: 406). It then becomes clear that Cersei’s bitterness towards Robert has not healed. She tells Ned about the incident when Robert stumbled into her bed and whispered Lyanna’s name, and that it has made her averse towards Robert:

“Your Robert got me with child once [...] My brother found a woman to cleanse me. He never knew. If truth be told, I can scarcely bear for him to touch me, and I have not let me inside me for years. I know other ways to pleasure him, when he leaves his whores long enough to stagger up to my bedchamber. Whatever we do, the king is usually so drunk that he’s forgotten it all by the next morning.”

(Martin 1996: 406)

Although Cersei has managed to cover the fact that the children do not belong to Robert to both him and the rest of Westeros, she still has to commit to the duties of a wife – pleasing the husband. By doing so, no suspicions regarding her political agenda emerge. She becomes sheltered and can manage to keep doing whatever she likes as long as her husband is happy and believes that the children of her and Jaime belong to him. The three characters, Cersei, Jaime and Robert, constitute an interesting triangle, and the intersectional schemes belonging to each of them would look as follows:

Cersei Lannister:

Woman ||, *Incest* ||, *Married* |, *Able-bodied* |, *King's court* |, *Andals* ||, *Andals* || and *Faith of the Seven* | → 12

King Robert Baratheon:

Man |, *Straight* |, *Married* |, *Able-bodied* |, *King's court* |, *Andals* ||, *Andals* || and *Faith of the Seven* | → 10

Jaime Lannister:

Man |, *Incest* ||, *Unmarried* ||, *Able-bodied* |, *King's court* |, *Andals* ||, *Andals* || and *Faith of the Seven* | → 12

While Cersei and Jaime share the same final position in the power hierarchy, Robert has a higher one since he is the King. Cersei is, just as Catelyn (who is also a 12 in the hierarchy), considered able-bodied since she has managed to give Robert heirs and can please him when he is not visiting prostitutes. For Cersei, the sexual relationship with her husband is extensively different from the one between Cat and Ned. Since Cersei has kept herself away from Robert as much as possible, Robert eventually stopped trying to love Cersei. Instead, they are both speaking of each other in rather vile ways where no one is eager to save their marriage. Instead, Robert pleases himself otherwise, causing Cersei to lose her grasp over him, making it more difficult for her to get what she wants. That is why she does not receive any further responsibilities, which means that she is not trusted entirely by Robert. One could actually say that Cersei has betrayed Robert in the sense that she has deprived him his rights to her body, whereas the case is different for Catelyn. Furthermore, Cersei's incestuous relationship with Jaime is what demotes her power, which is why she stays at the same position as Catelyn, who does not belong to the King's Court but who is heterosexual.

Since Jaime shares both children and the same position as Cersei, it is easier for him to influence her by persuading her to do what is best for them as Lannisters. It is evident that Cersei feels more committed to Jaime than Robert, but since her position as queen is invaluable, she must at least try to show Robert affection from time to time. Her sexuality is, therefore, split between two men, where the first sexual relationship is to maintain her power position and the second relationship functions to keep a pure bloodline. Cersei's and Jaime's sexual intimacy corresponds with Collins' study of the family concept and the purity aspects. Although Cersei acts behind the scene, she is considered a heterosexual woman in the eyes of others since she is married with Robert, because it is what is preferred and honored by society. But instead of accepting her place in the hierarchy, like Catelyn does, Cersei has

found a way to work around it by manipulating others in order to get her way. To her, the hierarchy is maintained on the outside while her actions on the inside reflect another family structure with a similar, but yet different, hierarchy. The coincidence that these two family constructs overlap and function on both the inside and the outside (Robert's family by Westeros, and Jaime's by the ones who know the truth) is a very successful one. Cersei's son Joffrey manages to become both the new king, since the titles are tied to Robert, and stay pure.

Daenerys Targaryen

Daenerys, also referred to as Dany, escaped Robert's Rebellion together with her older brother Viserys, and ended up in the Free City of Pentos where they received protection from one of the rulers in Pentos, Magister Illyrio. Because of the war and the loss of the Iron Throne, Viserys lusts after revenge. His entire world evolves around building an army before coming back for the throne, and Dany becomes a key to fulfill his plan. Together with Illyrio, he forces Dany to marry the Dothraki leader, Khal Drogo, with the plan to use Drogo's men as his army. Dany, a frightened thirteen-year old girl, has no say in the plan of her arranged marriage. Her only wish is to have a home where she can feel safe, so she cries out of despair when her dreams get crushed and she realizes that she will marry a wild man from a completely different culture (Martin 1996). Viserys hold on Dany is explicitly strong as well as cruel, which makes Dany incapable to act on her own:

“Please, *please*, Viserys, I don't want to, I want to go home.”

[...] “*How are we to go home?*” he repeated, meaning King's Landing, and Dragonstone, and all the realm they had lost.

[...] “I don't know ...” she said at last, her voice breaking. Tears welled in her eyes.

“I do,” he said sharply. “We go home with an army, sweet sister. With Khal Drogo's army, that is how we go home. And if you must wed him and bed him for that, you will.” He smiled at her. “I'd let his whole *khalasar* fuck you if need be, sweet sister, all forty thousand men, and their horses too if that was what it took to get my army. Be grateful it is only Drogo. In time you may even learn to like him. [...]”

(Martin 1996: 31)

The quote above shows how Dany is in no control over herself. Her only function is to fulfill her brother's wishes so that he can become Westeros' new ruler. Dany obeys her brother and marries Khal Drogo. As a wedding gift, she receives three dragon eggs, which become her favorite possessions since they remind her of her heritage; the dragons of Old Valyria.

Unfortunately, the beginning of her marriage could not have been more miserable for her. Daeneris and Khal Drogo are not able to communicate since Drogo does not speak the common language but instead speaks Dothraki. This is frustrating for Dany, and because Drogo's culture is so different from her own, she finds it even more painful to be his Khaleesi, a title in Dothraki which refers to the wife of a Khal (war leader). Every night, Drogo comes to her tent to have sexual intercourse with her, always taking her from behind, which makes her cry. It is not until she considers taking her own life that things start to change (Martin 1996).

After a fierce argument with her brother, where he tries to harm her but fails thanks to Drogo's men, Dany decides to at least try to adapt to her new life and become closer to her husband. She consults one of her handmaids, a prostitute, to learn how to please the Khal, but on her own conditions. She takes full control over the situation and Drogo appreciates her efforts, becoming fonder of her. When Dany becomes pregnant, she feels stronger and protected for the first in a long time, and she now starts to confront Viserys, whenever he harasses her, and begins learning Dothraki (Martin 1996).

The changes in Dany are very apparent, emerging when she starts pleasing the Khal sexually. She starts to grow more powerful than her brother and has found a way to survive as well as attain power. By carrying the son of the Khal, Dany achieves greater respect from Drogo's men, where she becomes accepted as a Khaleesi even to them. Dany's intersectional scheme of her power, as well as Khal Drogo's and Viserys', would look as follow:

Daenerys' scheme:

Woman ||, *Straight* |, *Married* |, *Able-bodied* |, *House* ||, *Old Valyria* |, *Old Valyria* | and *Faith of the Seven* | → 10

Viserys' scheme:

Man |, *Straight* |, *Unmarried* ||, *Able-bodied* |, *House* ||, *Old Valyria* |, *Old Valyria* | and *Faith of the Seven* | → 10

Khal Drogo's scheme:

Man |, *Straight* |, *Married* |, *Able-bodied* |, *Barbarians* ||||, *Barbarians* |||, *Barbarians* ||| and *Foreign Gods* ||| → 17

Dany's scheme is very interesting in the aspect of power. Although she is isolated from the Seven Kingdoms, she still represents the highly respected culture that is part of her heritage in terms of ethnicity and bloodline, Old Valyria. This is an important aspect to Khal Drogo since he is a very respected leader on the east continent and, therefore, is not capable to settle for

someone below his status, although his own scheme results in a fairly low power position. In Westeros, his position as a war leader is not worth anything, he is merely seen as a potential threat since the Dothraki are considered barbarians, but in the Free Cities of Pentos and Vaes Dothrak he is considered the direct opposite.

Viserys have the same position as Daenerys in the power hierarchy, which is interesting. Not until Dany marries the Khal is she able to achieve greater power, which again shows that powerful positions are attainable in partnership with powerful men (Collins 1998). Of course, Viserys would have become the ruler if he were able to reclaim the throne, whereas Dany would not since she is younger and a woman, which means that her power is disregarded in that respect.

As time passes and Dany's child grows stronger inside her, she and Drogo become deeply in love. This means that Drogo entrusts Dany with making decisions for them, letting her speak to and command his men. He also defends Dany whenever anyone questions her, including her brother Viserys, and finally Drogo gets tired of Viserys and kills him, which makes Dany more relieved than sad (Martin 1996).

After participating in a duel, Drogo becomes wounded and weak. Dany now needs to look after herself and at the same time take care of her husband, who gets weaker and weaker for each day. Dany becomes desperate and finally consults a godswife who tries to save the Khal with bloodmagic, but fails. During the godswife's ritual, Dany had a miscarriage and lost her child, which made her barren. Not only did she lose her husband, she also lost the heir to the Khalasar, which left her with nothing – except her dragon eggs. It turns out that the godswife has deceived Dany, not wanting to bring the Khal back to life, and is also responsible for Dany's miscarriage which made her barren, hence depriving Dany her womanhood (Martin 1996).

The power over Drogo's men and the Khal himself is indeed strongly connected to Dany's sexuality. She is not only fulfilling her duty as a wife, by being fertile and pleasing her husband, she also adapts to her new situation by learning her husband's customs and language. As soon as Dany becomes barren, her power over the men weakens. Without the Khal's protection, she gets questioned and some of the men eventually leave her which means she has lost almost everything in terms of power. When Dany burns Drogo's body, she also decides to burn the godswife. Dany herself also steps into the fire, together with her dragon eggs, and when everything is burnt to the ground and the fire is out, Dany and her hatched dragon eggs are the only ones left, alive and well (Martin 1996).

From being fertile, pregnant and sexually active, Dany received respect and power from the ones that surrounded her. As soon as she lost her husband and her child, and became barren, her function as a woman got extinguished. She is now without the ability to have children, heirs, which means that her intersectional scheme changes from 10 to 13 (unmarried and disabled). Of course, it is possible for Daenerys to use her sexuality, but the one factor that constitutes a true woman, being able to give her husband children, is forever gone. It is possible to consider Dany the mother of dragons, which in itself is a powerful tool since dragons are extremely rare and powerful, but it does not compensate her loss of fertility entirely.

The relationship between Daenerys and Viserys reflects the hierarchy present in most families, the older siblings looking after the younger. These positions are so fixed that Dany does not question them, nor does she refuse her brother's wishes. Even though Dany becomes more powerful than Viserys, since she has control over the Khal and his men, it is never even considered that Dany would take her brother's place as a ruler when and if they reclaim the Iron Throne. It is, undeniably, considered natural that the oldest child shall receive the throne, even if the other siblings work harder for it. When this is contrasted with the traditions of Khal Drogo's Khalasar, it becomes obvious that certain hierarchies do not function in all cultures and societies. When Dany loses the Khalasar, it is not only because the Khal has died, but since she has lost the heir as well. She never was part of the Dothraki culture, nor was she a Dothraki by blood, and as soon as she loses the last piece of string that connects her with the men of Khal Drogo, her days as a Khaleesi, as well as an able-bodied woman, are over.

4. Summary and conclusion

The intersectional theory presented in this essay focuses on cultural and social categories, which include hierarchically ranked factors, e.g. gender, sexuality, and class. The intersectional model that was applied to the novel *A Game of Thrones* shows that the fixed power structure in the society of Westeros is celebrating men rather than women, and that the same structure is apparent within families as well. It has been shown that it is more or less impossible for women to be regarded as powerful if they are acting on their own, without support from male characters. Through marriage, women are capable of entering the political power structure in a completely different way, which means that they become able to influence their husbands and are finally getting their political voices heard. However, this will

only occur as long as their men approve of them being influential. If they do not, the women have no choice but to continue to figure as assets and/or wives.

The analyses of the three characters Catelyn, Cersei and Daenerys have all reached the same conclusion; that women's sexuality and fertility is what manifests and preserves the hierarchies within society as long as they are viewed as a natural element within one's family. While some female characters use their sexuality as a tool to achieve power and have their way, like Cersei and Daenerys do, others use it in order to maintain society's norms, e.g. Catelyn. The fertility of women is influential in two respects: providing new heirs or bastards and/or keeping the bloodline pure. While a pure bloodline is of greater importance to some than to others, the ability to conceive children is what really constitutes a woman. To be able-bodied is an important factor that should be seen in every woman since it is part of her duty as a wife. To use sexuality under other circumstances is merely seen as part of marriage where the woman should not deny her husband or reject his needs if she wishes to maintain or increase her position in the power hierarchy.

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