Traditional Views and Non-Traditional Views In Game of Thrones

Game of Thrones is a HBO television series that takes place in a fictional setting that resembles the medieval times with elements of magic and fantasy. (McKinney, 2015) The show first premiered in April of 2011 but it is still an ongoing series. (McKinney, 2015) It is an adaption from the book series A Song of Fire and Ice by George R. R. Martin and created by David Benioff and D.B. Weiss. (McKinney, 2015) The plot of the show revolves around how the conflicts between the great houses on who should rule Westeros, works as a distraction from the upcoming threat of a long winter that brings the 'dead' with it. (McKinney, 2015) The show is well known for its abundance of graphic scenes pertaining to violence and sex but has still gained popularity and positive feedback. (McKinney, 2015) There are combinations of both progressiveness as well as traditionalism in the show in relation to many of the characters and their portrayal. This paper will analyze the traditional and non-traditional roles and values regarding gay and bisexual characters, race, and gender in the series.

Traditional Views and Non-Traditional Views

In regards to sexuality, race and gender, there are attitudes that take a conservative standpoint in the western world which date back to hundreds of years ago. These stereotypes work to make minorities feel less than and oppress them in society. Gender roles are a "set of social expectations imposed on individuals based on their perceived gender". (Beemyn, 2019) Being caring is a traditional gender role for women and being aggressive is a traditional gender role for men. (Beemyn, 2019) Regarding sexuality, those who are not heterosexual have faced centuries of discrimination for being seen as being unnatural and sinful. Only recently, has there been a shift on how people perceive same-sex relationships which has resulted in an increase in acceptance. However, heterosexual women also been faced with a negative response regarding how they express their sexuality due to a traditional double standard. Ethnic minorities in the West have faced oppression and prejudice. Traditionally, those who were not Caucasian were seen as inferior and were not worthy of the same rights and fair treatment. Although many of these traditional standpoints are no longer the exact same in the West, these views have yet to disappear and still impacts society and those who are given these labels.

The Burden of Sexuality

Game of Thrones has not ignored the representation of LGBT+ characters in its show. There are many characters that have a preference towards the same sex. Some of these characters include Renly Baratheon, Loras Tyrell, Yara Greyjoy, and more. Throughout the show, these characters who belong to great houses are shown engaging in sexual relations with people of the same sex. (Benioff & Weiss, 2011) Loras Tyrell and Renly Baratheon are involved in an affair and there appears to be genuine love between the two men. Although they do not publicly tell people of their relationship, it is no secret to the people of Westeros that the two have a romantic preference towards each other. Loras Tyrell is even punished for it and thrown into a dungeon for committing such a sin. (Benioff & Weiss, 2011) However, not all gay characters attempt to protect their secret. Yara Greyjoy publicly engages in sexual acts with women without

worrying of being ridiculed. One of the women she shows interest in is Ellaria Sand, a bisexual woman from Dorne. (Benioff & Weiss, 2011) Although homosexuality is not entirely accepted, there is some tolerance among certain individuals and certain regions.

Women do not have the freedom to engage in promiscuous acts without facing backlash. Unless a woman works as a prostitute, she cannot have sexual intercourse at all until her wedding night and only then, can it be done with her husband only. In Game of Thrones, men are constantly portrayed as being lustful and seeking women to satisfy their sexual needs. (Benioff & Weiss, 2011) A man who has affairs with multiple women, married or not, is not at all shamed for it. For example, Tyrion Lannister, rewards his squire, Podrick Payne, by giving him the opportunity to engage in sexual acts with multiple prostitutes as a thank you for his service. (Benioff & Weiss, 2011) Not to mention, Robert Baratheon, who served as King of Westeros, was sexually involved with several women despite having a wife. It was common knowledge that he was an adulterous man because he did not attempt to keep his illicit relationships a secret and would occasionally brag about his actions. (Benioff & Weiss, 2011) However, he did not face any repercussions for it. There is a double standard between men and women regarding sexual relationships and sexual expressiveness.

The Exotic and the Civilized

There is a lack of racial diversity in Game of Thrones. The have expressed how the lack of diversity is due to the vision of staying true to the book series. A majority of characters who are people of colour are not shown of great importance (Bahadur, 2017). Ethnic characters are not portrayed the same positive spotlight as their white counterparts. For example, the Dothraki are repeatedly referred to as savages. (Benioff & Weiss, 2011) Even the Westerosi people are not secretive for their racist attitudes towards the Dornish. (Benioff & Weiss, 2011) Daenerys Targaryen is portrayed as a white savior for the slaves across Essos, wo are people of colour. Freeing slaves for them to join her army are just objectives in becoming more powerful to help her “claim the throne in Westeros” (Young, 2017) Two characters who now have important roles are Missandei and Grey Worm, former slaves. (Benioff & Weiss, 2011) There is a common pattern in television programs of not having enough racially diverse characters with important roles and Game of Thrones is guilty of this as well.

Lords and Ladies

The cities and towns of Westeros and Essos, tend to traditionally portray women and men in a traditional light, with a few exceptions of certain female leads. Majority of the cities make no effort in hiding their misogynistic values deeming women as inferior. In these patriarchal societies, the roles of women are traditionally to please men and bear children. (Cruz, 2017) Also, the few women in the show who exhibit characteristics of being a strong leader play into traditional feminine roles. Daenerys Targaryen has endured a long journey to becoming the woman she is, but did not get there alone. She has relied on multiple men such Ser Jorah Mormont, a knight who serves her or Xaro Xhoan Daxos, a wealthy merchant who saved her and her people from dying on the Red Waste, and many more. (Benioff & Weiss, 2011) Daenerys would not be who she is, or possibly alive, if it were not for the men who have helped her along her path. Melisandre, another powerful woman with magic, plays into the traditional feminine role of being seductive. It is her attractive appearance and sexual engagement with men that brings her power. Not to mention, the men tend to fit their traditional gender roles. The

men are usually very violent and always getting into some sort of conflict, whether in a brothel or on a battle field. (Cruz, 2017) As being set in a time era resembling the medieval times in Europe, it is no surprise that men and women are portrayed in a traditional light.

However, there is some aspects of progressiveness in Game of Thrones. There are several female leads that are represented as a strong female leader. (Sengupta, 2017) One woman who now serves as the Queen of Westeros is Cersei Lannister. Despite growing up in a family where it was the men who held all the power, Cersei commands respect and knows how to get what she wants. Throughout the series, she has not been depicted as a very nice, caring woman, which are traditional attributes of women and she is instead portrayed as being ruthless. (Sengupta, 2017) Brienne of Tarth is another example of a powerful woman. Despite being a woman, she is one of the greatest knights in the show and even served as the rightful knight on Renly Baratheon's rainbow guard, the only female knight (Sengupta, 2017) In a male dominated society that holds on to traditional values of women, it is near impossible for them to become powerful figures on their own but many current strong female leads used that to their advantage on their journey to being who they have become, respected persons that hold power. There are many women that showcase strong characteristics and break out of the traditional stereotypes on how a woman must be portrayed.

Conclusion

A fantasy show set in an in era resembling the middle ages of Europe, Game of Thrones portrays gay and bisexual characters, ethnic minorities, and women in both a traditional and non-traditional light. Same-sex relationships are frowned upon by a majority of society in the show with only a few exceptions. Most of the non-white characters who were once slaves now serve Daenerys on her conquest to rule the seven kingdoms, with very few who have become important characters. Women are not allowed to express themselves sexually as men, cannot rise to power without the aid of men and viewed as being only important when it comes to either pleasuring men or bearing children. This show contains some elements of being progressive but there are several themes of old fashioned values that are perpetuated in the show.