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In the Temple of the Dosh Khaleen, Dothraki warriors speak in their native tongue about the fate of the pretty, pale, white-haired girl standing before them. "Don't you want to know what I think?," she calmly questions. The towering pillars, burning goblets of fire, and patronizing gazes are no sources of intimidation to Daenerys. "You are small men. None of you are fit to lead the Dothraki. But I am. So I will." Laughter erupts from the men, but their ridicule and insults are nothing to Daenerys when she takes one hand on the burning goblet and effortlessly pushes it over to set fire to the entire building, burning all the men inside. The wooden temple burns to the ground, but Daenerys Targaryen emerges from the ashes. She is not a little princess, a widow, or slave. She is the Mother of Dragons (Benioff, 2016).

Shakespeare posed an important question centuries ago: "What's in a name?" (Shakespeare, 1597/1985). In *Game of Thrones*, Daenerys Targaryen's name contains almost all of her life: Daenerys of the House Targaryen, the First

of Her Name, The Unburnt, Queen of the Andals, the Rhoynar and the First Men, Queen of Meereen, Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, Protector of the Realm, Lady Regnant of the Seven Kingdoms, Breaker of Chains, and Mother of Dragons (Daenerys Targaryen, 2017). While the lengthiness of her name certainly speaks to her ability as a conqueror and ruler, it does not do her life story justice. Daenerys serves as a heroine to not only the fictional world which she lives in but also to the reality in which we admire her. The purpose of this chapter is to offer an analysis of the heroine's transformation of Daenerys Targaryen, drawing from the literature of heroism science.

Joseph Campbell identified a pattern of narrative that exists in the dramas, stories, myths, and religious rituals of all time periods and named it, "The Hero's Journey" (Campbell, 1949). The journey is partitioned into three stages: departure, initiation, and return. Within those three stages are five to six "mini stages" which the hero takes on before moving into next stage. The hero's journey exists within every ancient and modern story because it reflects our human unconscious wishes and dreams, and it calls us to go on the same journey.

The hero's journey exists in *Game of Thrones* just as much as it exists in the Bible or Star Wars. Daenerys Targaryen's journey is significant for several reasons. The first is that she holds the most potential to take control of the Iron Throne and -- both metaphorically and literally -- win the Game of Thrones. The second reason is that her story is significant to a large audience that, for many centuries, has been and is still overlooked: women. The path of men and women's lives are drastically different, especially in patriarchal societies where men are taken much more seriously in social, political, and economic battles. From the day she was born, Daenerys was certainly not raised nor expected to become the powerful political player and moral heroine she is now. The term "hero" is technically masculine and, the research done on heroes often does not account for the heroine's journey. While many of the stages are similar to those of the hero's journey, the heroine's journey is certainly not identical because of the additional battles of sexism that

heroines must fight. The heroine's journey begins as all hero's journeys do when she is summoned with a call to adventure.

Departure

Joseph Campbell describes the first step of the hero's journey as the "call to adventure" (Campbell, 1949). This call can either be accepted or refused, but the multitude of heroic stories indicate that the hero's response often does not affect the continuance of the journey. At the beginning of *Game of Thrones*, Daenerys was a naive pawn used by the men in her family battling in a political war. She was forced on her heroine's journey when her older brother, Viserys, sold her in an arranged marriage to Khal Drogo of the Dothraki clan in exchange for the Dothraki army. At this time, her future appeared very bleak as she was forced to abandon her home and be dehumanized into a tool of reproduction for the Dothraki clan. On her wedding night, she receives three dragon eggs as a gift. Dragons had been extinct for decades, and the eggs would not hatch, so the present initially seemed useless and would only exist as decor. However, she eventually discovers that the eggs begin to hatch when they come into her ownership. The abrupt marriage arrangement is important to her journey because the departure stage of the heroine's journey awakens the heroine to a growth mindset (Allison et al., 2017; Worthington & Allison, 2018), meaning she learns that her identity is not fixed, and "the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit" (Krucli, n.d.). At the beginning of the journey, Daenerys learns that she has not fully developed her identity and sense of self within her world.

Daenerys as an Underdog

On her wedding night, the youthful Daenerys is raped by the aggressive Khal Drogo. This moment was disheartening to watch because Daenerys is an underdog in the series. Underdogs are defined as "disadvantaged parties facing advantaged opponents and unlikely to succeed" (Vandello et al., 2017). Daenerys is an underdog because she is young, naive, and alone. The numbers favor her captors because they are both stronger physically and numerically as a group.

Daenerys doesn't know how to defend herself until a Dothraki woman becomes her mentor in that moment and teaches her how to come into contact with her inner Khaleesi, or "queen" through taking advantage of Drogo's carnal urges. By taking control in the bedroom, Daenerys shows Drogo that she refuses to be his submissive. It is in this moment that their relationship drastically changes from one of slave and slave-keeper, to husband and wife. The transformation within this relationship once again reflects Daenerys' growth mindset.

The heroine can never complete her journey alone; it often takes at least one guide to teach her lessons that her current self cannot learn on her own. The writer's choice to make Daenerys' aid a woman is intentional because female power and women helping women is a significant aspect of the heroine's journey that shapes Daenerys' perspective on her own heroine's journey. Without the unnamed woman's help, Daenerys would have lived an unsatisfying life of submissive wife. One could argue that the unnamed woman was a heroine herself. There are three categories in which heroes fall: enhancing, moral modeling, and protecting (Kinsella et al., 2017). The unnamed woman certainly falls into the enhancing category because she uplifts Daenerys and enriches her life, even for a short period of time. The woman's identity, or lack thereof, also contributes to her heroism because she does not gain anything out of the situation which is typical of heroism.

Belly of the Whale

The "belly of the whale" stage refers to the point in the heroine's life that, "rather than conquering what lies beyond, the heroine is swallowed into the unknown" (Sargeant, 2013). As soon as the heroine thinks she knows what the journey will look like, her entire world is flipped upside down. The tumultuous journey out of the heroine's comfort zone is pushed further as the heroine "find herself trapped in the antagonist's backyard" (Sargeant, 2013). The purpose of the "belly of the whale" stage is to foreshadow the path of the heroine's journey. In Daenerys' case, her moment is when Khal Drogo and their first born child dies of infection and she is locked away in the widow's hut where she will spend her days praying. Her moment as a worshipped Khaleesi halts when Khal Drogo dies because, up until this point,

he had essentially served as her bodyguard against the oppressive expectations that the Dothraki society places on women who are not associated with men of high status. Daenerys is able to use her intelligence and other heroic attributes to escape the widow's hut, her journey's "belly of the whale." This stage foreshadows her heroic path by revealing her life's purpose as a woman of power and independence.

Initiation

The initiation stage is the longest period of Daenerys' life, and arguably, is the most important stage of the heroine's journey. During this time, Daenerys' identity is solidified as she ascends to power. She slowly gains armies, earns allies, and makes enemies not by conquering with a fist of fury and rage, but by showing she is to be trusted and taken seriously.

The stereotypically-viewed feminine aspects of her identity are remarkably important to why she is arguably the most pivotal character in *Game of Thrones*. In the entertainment industry, masculinity is reserved for male characters and femininity is for female characters. In Game of Thrones, the lack of gender diversity in the royal realm causes many of the male rulers to use the same strategies because the traditionally masculine methods are all they know. In other words, the men are not accustomed to non-masculine methods of leadership or war, so they rise to power just as they fall from power. The women in *Game of Thrones* are arguably smarter rulers because have the capacity to choose strategies from both the masculine and feminine categories. Daenerys favors strategies that enact cooperation, independence, and mutual benefit because she was denied these qualities for most of her life. Unlike many of her counterparts, Daenerys does not lose the essence of herself as she becomes more powerful. While she does abandon her naive, little girl identity behind, her empathy for the oppressed and passion for justice only grows stronger.

Man as the Tempter

One of the "sub-steps" of the initiation stage is referred to as the "man as the tempter." This stage is when the heroine faces temptations, often of a physical

or pleasurable nature, that may lead her to abandon or stray from her quest (Campbell, 1949). Daenerys is tempted to abandon her quest when a warlock creates an illusion of her late husband, Khal Drogo, who asks her to join him in the afterlife with their son. She escapes the dream because she knows that her true destiny is not wifehood or motherhood, but something much greater. Like many other heroes, Daenerys' has an epiphany that reveals her destiny to avenge her family and those like her by taking the Iron Throne. Daenerys now has a newfound purpose for living, and everything she does after this point will focus on the steps she must take to fulfill her duty. After realizing her destiny, it is not long until the audience finds them watching the "little, naive princess" burning down a hut of Dothraki leaders, as described at the beginning of this chapter.

Return

The latest season of *Game of Thrones* encapsulates Daenerys' beginning steps in the "Return" stage of the hero's journey. She returns to her home in Dragonstone for the first time since she was born, and she is officially identified as a major player in the game in the eyes of the Iron Throne. Daenerys also teams up with the great male hero from the north, Jon Snow, who shows her that there is not just one war being fought in Westeros.

The next season is the final season of the series which means the audience will finally see the precise nature and shape Daenerys' return stage of her heroine's journey. Many critics question Daenerys' sanity, going as far as to say she is turning into her father who was known as "the mad king." This begs the question: Will next season's events shape Daenerys into a hero or a villain? With all of her new power, will she be able to maintain her morals and use her dragons for overall good? It's important to emphasize "overall" because while the basis of Daenerys' campaign is to free the people that the ruling family, the Lannisters, put into slavery and avenge the oppressed, she has to make some very difficult decisions that could be seen as evil. The idea of someone watching the scene where Daenerys kills the Dothraki men in the hut with no context and then labelling Daenerys as evil is known as "consequentialism" (Li, 2015). Knowing the entirety of the story leads the viewer to adapt a "bad deed for overall good" point of view. Daenerys may be killing men, but she

is doing it to rid the world of a few oppressors and continue her journey to create a more just and equal Westeros.

Daenerys begins her journey as a naive young girl and will likely end as a strong, powerful, queen. In both the hero's and heroine's journeys, transformations do not typically occur overnight. The time it takes to grow as a person is referred to as a "journey" for good reason. Allison and Smith (2015) identified several types of transformations that heroes undergo such as moral, emotional, intellectual, and physical.

Moral Transformation

Heroes who experience a moral change must overcome a personal value that prevents them from reaching their greatest potential (Allison & Smith, 2015). For Daenerys, a moral transformation that she undergoes is one operating from a sense of entitlement and power to one deriving from a sense of duty and justice (G.E., 2017). As a princess turned Khaleesi, power runs through her veins which leads to a recurring close-call between lust for burning her enemies alive in dragon fire and passion to undo injustices. Daenerys' critics who predict she will morph into the mad king that her father was usually point to her moral transformation as being incomplete. While notions of her moral transformation being incomplete are valid because the journey is not complete, the previous seasons allow viewers to infer that Daenerys is not on the same path as her father. Unlike her father, Daenerys undertook a journey from princess to slave, and now that she understands what it is like to be patronized and abused, her identity will never revert back to one of entitlement. The essence of Daenerys' return will be one of reestablishing justice in Westeros.

Emotional Transformation

The emotional transformation refers to "transformations of the heart, and they include heroes who, through adversity, grow into courage, resilience,

and empathy" (Allison et al., 2017). As mentioned previously, Daenerys emotionally transforms from being naive and weak to compassionate and strong. The season one plotline follows Daenerys' transformation from being a terrified obedient to a total independent. The emotional transformation is extremely prevalent in the heroine's journey in comparison to the hero's journey. In the words of Richard Rohr, "if you do not transform your pain, you will transmit it" (Rohr, 2011). Daenerys allows herself to accept pain and transform it to strengthen her relationships instead of allowing her pain to foster her motivation to avenge her family and the oppressed.

Intellectual Transformation

An intellectual transformation refers to a change in mental abilities or fundamental insights about the world (Allison et al., 2017). Coming-of-age stories are perfect examples of such transformations. Many heroic journeys feature a hero or heroine as a child or adolescent, a time of development when growing into wisdom becomes paramount. Daenerys is forced to mature very quickly when she is married to Khal Drogo. The audience can relate to Daenerys' initial fear and hesitations because of moments in their own lives that forced them to grow up, moments such as moving from home and going to college. The intellectual transformation is important to the heroine's journey because it was vital for Daenerys to mature in order to understand her role in changing her society. If Daenerys did not mature enough to accept the role as Khal Drogo's wife and transform it into a position of personal power, she never could have continued on the heroine's journey because she wouldn't have acquired the mental strength to do so.

Physical Transformation

The fourth transformation is the physical transformation, which refers to the heroine's bodily or physical change. Physical transformations are more prevalent in hero's journeys than in heroine's journeys. This male bias may exist because traditionally men use physical strength as a means of bringing about change while women use other strategies such as communication. Daenerys experiences a physical metamorphosis by becoming impervious to fire. More importantly, she often refers to the hatching of the dragons as

the birth of her children. Although Daenerys was not literally pregnant with dragons, her connection with them is so strong that she feels like their hatching was a birth she labored. This physical transformation is significant to her heroine's journey because it resulted in her newfound sense of responsibility. Daenerys must take great caution in her decisions throughout her journey because her death doesn't only affect her. If Daenerys is reckless and is imprisoned or killed, her dragons will be motherless and likely enslaved. The physical transformation heightens the stakes of her journey, and it pushes Daenerys to improve her response to pressure, hence, strengthening her role as a heroine.

Gender Significance in the Hero's Journey

Brief references to the significance of Daenerys' gender as a heroine do not do justice to the importance of this demographic variable. Traditional gender stereotypes have been injurious to women and have followed the mindset that "women take care" and "men take charge" (Hoyt, 2014). Historically, women have been restricted to the homely realm, while men have had the freedom to move autonomously throughout life. The media and entertainment industries have been no exception to this patriarchal rule. In the top 100 films of 2016, women represented 29% of all protagonists (2016 Statistics, n.d.). Daenerys' womanhood is not only important to the other women in Game of Thrones, but also to the society in which her audience admires her.

Dimensional Characters

Increasing the number of female protagonists in the entertainment industry is important, but an important aspect of creating female characters is promoting dimensional women like Daenerys. Her identity is not entirely shaped by her relationships with men in the show. She has qualities that stereotypically reside in both the masculine and feminine categories such as strength, determination, compassion, and love. Hoyt writes that Hillary Clinton claims she personally experienced society working tirelessly at labeling women as either "a hard working professional woman or a conscientious and caring hostess" (Hoyt, 2014). By creating female characters with multiple dimensions, Game of Thrones allows the audience to relate much more profoundly to the character of Daenerys.

Daenerys acknowledges her gender, but does not let it define her. Many of her obstacles include convincing men that she is not their submissive princess. Instead of taking the insults men hurl at her, she throws them right back at these men. "Woman? Is that meant to insult me? I would return the slap if I took you for a man" (Martin, 2000).

Burning down a hut of men who want to enslave her is extremely satisfying to watch for feminist viewers who sometimes wish they could do the same. Another example of Daenerys teaching men that beauty is not to be confused with naivety occurs when she is making a trade to free 'The Unsullied', an army of elite warriors. The slave owner agrees to trade his massive army for one of her dragons. After Daenerys takes possession of the army, she frees them, and after witnessing her genuine passion for justice, the army unanimously decides to serve her despite their newfound ability to live freely. Daenerys outwits the slave owner because he underestimates the loyalty she has cultivated with her dragons which are historically perceived to be untamable. The dragon burns the slave owner to ashes, and Daenerys is soon recognized as a major player in the war to win the game of thrones.

Women Helping Women

Daenerys personally experiences the effects of a patriarchal society, so whenever an opportunity to uplift a woman presents itself, she does not ignore it. Missandei was originally a slave until she was freed by Daenerys and offered a high position as Daenerys' trusted advisor. Another example of women helping women is seen when Daenerys meets Yara Greyjoy. The female characters saw bits of themselves in each other, for they both had terrible fathers and are both battling the same battles against sexism while working to maintain their position in a much grander war.

Women helping women is an important theme in the heroine's journey that the hero's journey lacks. In the heroine's journey, there is more of an emphasis on community growth, an essential but often overlooked consequence of heroic action (Efthimiou, Allison, & Franco, 2018). In the hero's journey, the men may be fighting similar battles, but they are ultimately working towards different goals. In the heroine's journey, an undercurrent of a gender-based

battle exists within every story. All the women in Westeros experience sexism, so they all have something common between them that unites them in a way that the men cannot fathom. Daenerys couldn't have continued on her journey without the help of other women, and she understands that she has a duty to help uplift other women as well.

CONCLUSION

While *Game of Thrones* is set in a fictional land, themes of power and gender ultimately connect the audience to reality. The world we live in is far from achieving equality among genders. For example, the United States has yet to elect a woman as President, women in Saudi Arabia only recently earned the right to drive, and there are more CEOs named John than there are CEOs that are women (Wolfers, 2015). Like many female political figures today, Daenerys has to work twice as hard to get to the same place as her male counterparts. The entertainment industry's role is to entertain its audience, and it does so by holding up a mirror to society and picking out different themes and issues on which to focus.

Daenerys is the perfect example of the entertainment industry dipping its toes into creating dynamic, powerful female protagonists. This movement is important because showing powerful women on television can motivate people to achieve gender equality in the real world. Dimensional female characters that people can relate to can drastically impact the perceptions of women as leaders. When Daenerys ascends to power and finishes the heroine's journey by changing her society into a more equal world, a ripple effect can be set in motion. Daenerys' success as a woman and as a character has challenged the entertainment industry to create more dimensional female protagonists, thus challenging women in the real world to model these powerful characters' behaviors. The media definitely influences people's decisions, and *Game of Thrones* poses the question: Could Daenerys' success as a heroine inspire real women to take on their own heroine's journey? Time will tell.

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