

Feminism Within The Patriarchy

A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of the Portrayal of Women in HBO's
House of the Dragon (2022-)

Student Name: Ilona Theunisse

Student Number: 496617

Supervisor: Khanh Nguyen

Master Media Studies - Media & Business
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

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ABSTRACT

The presence of TV shows cannot be ignored in our contemporary society, nor can the influence that media and the hegemonic discourses conveyed by it have on their audience (Garretson, 2015). Especially women have been underrepresented and often portrayed as stereotypical characters on TV (Yang et al., 2020). Thus, studying popular TV series on their depictions of women is important and extremely relevant today.

One such TV show is the recently released medieval fantasy show *House of the Dragon* (2022-), a prequel of the hit series *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019). While the female characters in *Game of Thrones* are dynamic, plot-driving women, a lot of criticism especially surrounding female power, sexuality, and motherhood emerged from the audience and researchers alike. Thus, to understand whether Hollywood can improve and listen to this criticism when producing a new TV show within the same transglobal media universe, this study analyzed female representation in *House of the Dragon*. The following research question is answered: *How are female power, sexuality and motherhood portrayed in HBO's Game of Thrones prequel series, House of the Dragon (2022-)?*

The research question is answered through a multimodal critical discourse analysis. This method allowed an in-depth analysis of both visual and textual aspects of the first season, consisting of 10 one-hour episodes, of *House of the Dragon*. The analysis showed that the creators were successful in portraying characters in a patriarchal society with sexist notions, while simultaneously portraying women as powerful, dynamic, and feminist characters. Major differences with *Game of Thrones* were noticed, especially considering the absence of unnecessary sexual violence, not reducing women to sexual objects or stereotypical mothers, and the power coming from female characteristics instead of solely male attributes. The findings highlight (1) female power within the patriarchal society, (2) the role and manifestation of sexuality, and (2) the adverse side of motherhood.

KEYWORDS: *Female Representation, TV Series, Female Power, Sexuality, Motherhood*

Table of Contents

Abstract and keywords

1. Introduction.....	4
1.1. <i>Portrayal of Women on Television</i>	4
1.2. <i>Societal Relevance</i>	5
1.3. <i>Scientific Relevance</i>	6
1.4. <i>Implementation and Structure of the Study</i>	7
2. Theoretical Framework.....	8
2.1. <i>Theoretical Approach</i>	8
2.2. <i>Contemporary TV Shows in Context of Feminism</i>	11
2.3. <i>The Portrayal of Women in Game of Thrones</i>	13
2.2. <i>Female Representation in Medieval Fantasy TV Show</i>	16
3. Methodology.....	19
3.1. <i>Explanation and Justification</i>	19
3.2. <i>Data Collection</i>	19
3.3. <i>Operationalization</i>	20
3.4. <i>Methods of Analysis</i>	22
3.5. <i>Credibility and Reflexivity</i>	26
4. Results.....	28
4.1. <i>Context of the Situation</i>	28
4.2. <i>Female Power: Fuck the Patriarchy</i>	31
4.3. <i>Sexuality: To Desire or To Be Desired</i>	41
4.4. <i>The Adverse Side of Motherhood</i>	49
5. Conclusion.....	56
5.1. <i>Main Results</i>	56
5.2. <i>Theoretical and Practical Implications</i>	59
5.3. <i>Limitations and Future Research</i>	60
References.....	62
Appendix A.....	67
Appendix B.....	72
Appendix C.....	73
Appendix D.....	74

1. Introduction

Almost thirty years ago, George R. R. Martin created a fantasy world that would grow to be an influential transglobal media universe (Gjelsvik & Schubart, 2016). The universe of Westeros was introduced to the world through the highly popular medieval fantasy television series *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019). The final season averaged 46 million viewers per episode, even though the ending of the series is heavily criticized by its fans (Pallotta, 2022). *Game of Thrones* is set in a medieval fantasy world, where different characters are followed in their battle for the Iron Throne. Eight seasons aired, produced by HBO. Even though the show has ended, the world of Westeros is still very much alive. The prequel series *House of the Dragon* (2022-) debuted its first episode in August 2022, breaking HBO records by having the largest audience for any new premiering season (Warner Bros Discovery, 2022). In January 2023, they won the Golden Globe Award for *Best Television Series – Drama*. This television show centers around the Targaryen family (who have ruled Westeros for most of its history) and takes place 200 years before the events in *Game of Thrones*. The first season of *House of the Dragon* follows princess Rhaenyra and Queen Alicent in their relationship and the effects that it has on the succession and their families. This season tells the story of the events leading up to the civil war nicknamed Dance of Dragons. The television show is based on Martin's novel *Fire & Blood*, written as a history book.

While the world of Westeros is highly popular and beloved, there is a lot of criticism concerning the portrayal of women in *Game of Thrones* (Clapton & Shepherd, 2017; Evans, 2018; Gjelsvik & Schubart, 2016; Marques, 2019; Needham, 2017; Trejo Morales, 2020). The criticism is centered around topics such as femininity, female violence, and motherhood. How does this criticism relate to *House of the Dragon*? Did HBO incorporate feedback and improve the way women in Westeros are portrayed?

1.1. Portrayal of Women on Television

Television is an influential type of media, with TV shows playing an important role in socialization through the representation of women (Zare, 2019). Large numbers of people of different ages and with varying backgrounds from all over the world spend many hours in front of a screen with their favorite TV series (Dumova et al., 2008).

Gerbner et al. (1980) argue through cultivation theory that television has the power to cultivate and shape the beliefs, attitudes, and cultural values of its viewers over time. Gender roles are such a cultural value, and people are influenced by their representation. The way women are portrayed in television shows is therefore important, as this can affect the way viewers see the female gender. Not only perception, but actual social behavior is influenced by this. Garretson (2015) found frequent viewers of television shows with recurring working female characters, exhibit higher levels of social tolerance towards women (especially women who work and defy traditional gender roles) than non-viewers. Gender stereotyping in media has a significant effect on socialization (Oppliger, 2007). Researching how women are portrayed in television is essential to understand how viewers are influenced by either stereotypical or realistic female characters.

Female representation has been detrimental in the past, with women being underrepresented on screen, and when they were present, often in stereotypical gender roles (Yang et al., 2020). Recently, female representation has been improving, although there is still much to be desired. In terms of quantity, male characters appear more frequently (60.4%) than female characters (39.6%) on primetime television (Sink & Mastro, 2017). Hypersexualization and hyperfeminization of women is still repeatedly evident, although there is some progress in their portrayal as men are not still portrayed as always being more competent than women (Sink & Mastro, 2017). Yang et al. (2020) found that good female representation is closely related to female crew members in high positions, such as screen writers and directors.

1.2. Societal Relevance

With their episodes averaging a 29 million viewership in just the U.S., *House of the Dragon* is already a very popular television show (Warner Bros Discovery). The making of a second season has been confirmed. From these numbers and the overwhelming reactions of fans, it is clear that this show reaches many, and in the future might reach even more, people. The sheer popularity of the television show makes it necessary to research how certain societal groups are represented.

Popular culture reflects as well as influences how society, in this case, sees women (Thompson, 2007). Kuhn argues more strongly that films are deeply gendered and reflect the dominant gender norms of the culture (Humm, 1997). Thus, understanding how

women are portrayed in *House of the Dragon* is important as this portrayal shows us, to some extent, how society views women, as well as how recently produced media products influence this view.

This research will also provide viewers of *House of the Dragon* with a better grasp of how to recognize stereotypes and whether women are portrayed in a realistic and well-rounded, or problematic way. It can be difficult to detect whether female representation is done well, as we are so used to inadequate portrayals of women that those can seem normal (Humm, 1997).

In the end, the producers of television content have the power to change the way women are portrayed in popular culture. This study will create more awareness as to the duty and the importance of female representation in television series. It will also provide a more in-depth understanding as to what representation is problematic, and what makes female characters realistic and feminist.

1.3. Scientific Relevance

There is a lot of academic literature concerning gender portrayal in *Game of Thrones* published (Clapton & Shepherd, 2017; Evans, 2018; Gjelsvik & Schubart, 2016; Marques, 2019; Needham, 2017; Ruf, 2020; Trejo Morales, 2020; Zare, 2019). Similar television shows such as *Outlander*, *Merlin*, and *Vikings* have also been studied in terms of how they portray female characters (Donstrup, 2019; Herrera, 2019; Hoffman, 2017; Łaskiewicz, 2015; Meredith, 2015). On *House of the Dragon*, however, there is no existing research yet. It will be interesting to find whether the portrayal of women in *HotD* is similar to *Game of Thrones* and other medieval fantasy shows, or whether this more recently produced tv series is different in their gender portrayal.

While there exists a lot of academic writing on female representation on TV shows, these are mostly in the form of essays and an occasional content analysis. There are scarce studies that analyze a television show through using multimodal critical discourse analysis. Thus, these studies do not consider the visual and textual elements in combination with the broader social context in which the tv show is produced as methodologically and in-depth as MCDA does.

Recently, the creation of multiple media works within one fictional universe, which is called transmedia storytelling, is becoming more common (Schiller, 2018). Using

intertextuality industrially to connect media products is even proposed as a strategy for streaming services (Gray, 2022). Research on how different stories within the same universe relate to each other, especially on themes such as gender portrayal, is scarce. This study will be a valuable source of whether the portrayal of women within the same intertextual framework can change and improve through new media creations.

1.4. Implementation and Structure of the Study

Considering the literature on the female portrayals in *Game of Thrones*, combined with the different research gaps mentioned, the following research question will be answered through this study:

How are female power, sexuality and motherhood portrayed in HBO's Game of Thrones prequel series, House of the Dragon (2022-)?

When considering female representation, the themes of female power, sexuality and motherhood were criticized recurrently in literature.. Female power refers to the female characters' agency, their portrayal as capable and dynamic characters, and the power difference between them and the male characters. Sexuality explores if and how women are sexualized and the role that sex plays in the story, while motherhood indicates the role that being a mother plays and how motherhood is portrayed to the viewer.

The research question will be answered through a multimodal critical discourse analysis of the first (and at the time of writing, only) season of *House of the Dragon*. To create an extensive understanding of how women are portrayed, each episode (ten in total) will be analyzed. A selection of scenes that are highly relevant to the research question will be analyzed in-depth, both visually and textually.

This thesis will proceed with a comprehensive theoretical framework, where I analyzed the existing literature on female representation in *Game of Thrones* extensively but have also investigated how women are portrayed in similar television shows. The methodology will proceed to address the steps involved in conducting a multimodal critical discourse analysis, as well as an operationalization of the concepts of female power, sexuality and motherhood. Subsequently, the results of the study are expanded upon, after which the last chapter will provide a conclusion and an answer to the research question.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter will rigorously examine female representation, in specific the concepts of female power, sexuality, and motherhood, in television series. After having expanded on these themes, feminist film theory and contemporary movie making conventions in relation to gender are discussed. As *House of the Dragon* is closely connected to *Game of Thrones*, in terms of both the creators and the fantasy world it portrays, I will dive into the literature concerning the portrayal of women in *Game of Thrones* extensively, before exploring female representation in other medieval fantasy television shows.

2.1. Theoretical Approach

2.1.1. Female Power

Goffman (1979) created a framework of six categories through which the portrayal of power dynamics between male and female characters can be assessed. The first category is *relative size*, meaning how much space on screen is taken up by which gender, and how they are portrayed in size next to each other. Large depictions are associated with more dominance and authority. Next is *function ranking*, which refers to how characters are placed in position to objects and each other. For example, standing is a position of power, while lying down is a subservient position. Third, there is *feminine touch*. The kind of physical gestures and body language communicates gender discourse, as women are often depicted with delicate touches and soft gestures, while men have more aggressive and assertive expressions. The fourth category is *ritualization of subordination*, referring to how men are often depicted as dominant and powerful, while women are shown in sexualized or submissive poses. Furthermore, there is the category of *licensed withdrawal*. Women are often portrayed as daydreaming, while men are focused; which communicates men to be more powerful. Finally, there is the category of *the family*. This focuses on how women are usually shown in domestic roles, with men in work-related portrayals.

Sutherland (2013) applies three conceptions of power to women in film. The first concept is *power-over*, meaning that a character is dominant and empowered over another character, relating mostly to women gaining power from masculine characteristics. Next, there is *power-to*, which is a sense of personal control and self-efficacy; women that find agency and independency, and break free from the restrictions around them. The final

concept is *power-with*, relating to women working together and building a coalition to address an oppressive system and inequality.

Female power is a concept that refers for a large part to the ability of women to exercise their agency. It is about the representation of women as strong, dynamic, and influential characters, who drive the narrative and wield agency over their own lives. In *Game of Thrones*, one could argue that a lot of these things are true for many female characters. However, female power is also about the role that being a woman plays in the power that female characters wield. Questions to ask are, for instance, what is the role of femininity in their power? Are women powerful due to their female characteristics, or through masculine traits? Are women triumphant in their challenges, or trumped by men?

2.1.2. Sexuality

In her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey coined the concept of the male gaze. In cinema, Mulvey (1975) argues, the perspective of a heterosexual man is often utilized, thus structuring movies around male pleasure. This results in women frequently being objectified and sexualized to facilitate the (assumed) male audience. Mulvey (1975) distinguishes two ways in which the male gaze operates. First there is the narcissistic gaze, where the (male) audience is drawn to connect with the male protagonist, with women in the plot regarded as secondary characters that aren't to be identified with. Then there is the scopophilic gaze, focused on the pleasure of looking at the female body. Women in a film that are subjected to this gaze, are portrayed as a passive object for desire, purely there to satisfy the male gaze. For the concept of sexuality in this study, the focus is on the scopophilic gaze.

Kim et al. (2007) proposes four types of the *heterosexual script* that is apparent in TV shows, a script for men and women to follow in the sexual and romantic encounters. The first complementary script refers to having and desiring sex as masculine, while women are supposed to be good girls and their value is connected to their virtue. The second script addresses commitment, and how men avoid commitment while women chase commitment and value romance over sex. The third set of scripts concerns non-heterosexual relationships: while men avoid being feminine and are homophobic, female same-sex desire is portrayed to be erotic. The final script addresses courtship strategies,

posing that men should chase women and be an active agent, while women are passive and indirect.

The concept of sexuality refers not only to whether females are objectified and sexualized on screen. Often in film, women do not have sexual agency, which can be conveyed through sexual violence committed to women, and through lack of expressed sexual desire (Marques, 2019). Therefore, sexual agency is a relevant part of sexuality. There is also the question of whether women are represented in a manner that emphasizes their sexual appeal or attractiveness or are more focused on their personality and intellectual qualities. Are women sexual objects, showing unnecessary female nudity and storylines that revolve around women's sexuality? What role does sex and the sexuality of the women play in their lives?

2.1.3. Motherhood

Often, when women appear in TV, they encompass the role of the mother (Humm, 1997). While that is not problematic in itself, the way in which motherhood is constructed can be. In films, motherhood is frequently the defining quality of a woman (Kaplan, 2000), meaning that her being a mother is most of her characterization. An example of this from *Game of Thrones* would be Catelyn (Schubart & Gjelsvik, 2016).

As will be expanded upon when diving into the role of motherhood in *Game of Thrones*, Ruf (2020) defines three constructions of motherhood in *Game of Thrones*, which are relevant to understanding how motherhood is established in *House of the Dragon*. These three themes are *motherhood under patriarchy: motherhood as a duty*, describing motherhood as something that all women must do, with certain tasks that come along with it; *maternal power: motherhood as status*, expressing that women should only have power through being a mother; and *good mother, bad mother: motherhood as an ideal*, where a female's character is defined by her performance as a mother.

Kaplan (2000) distinguishes four archetypes of mothers in Hollywood, of which this study intends to find whether they can be applied to *House of the Dragon*, as well. The first archetype is *The Good Mother*, who is completely invested in her family, does not drive the narrative of the story and lives only through her family. The second archetype is *The Bad Mother*, a sadistic woman who wants her own life apart from her children and is usually punished for this. Furthermore, there is *The Heroic Mother*, who does everything for her

family and is suffering for their sake; and *The Weak Mother*, who is satirized by the plot and her family.

A significant part of motherhood is the process to become a mother: childbirth. With multiple extensive labor scenes displayed in *House of the Dragon*, their portrayal will be compared to contemporary media representations of births. Takeshita (2017) identifies five criteria of which birth representations on-screen fall along: “Representations (1) incite fear of childbirth by emphasizing the risks; (2) solidify the idea that hospitals are the only rational place to give birth; (3) normalize reliance on technology and trivialize women’s capacity to give birth; (4) present pregnant women as passive actors without agency; and (5) ignore or disparage midwifery.” (pp. 334–335). Apart from these specific representations, there are other recurring themes in contemporary TV scenes of childbirth. No differing positions and movement during labor are portrayed nor women’s choice and agency about interventions (Cummins, 2020).

The concept of motherhood focuses on the role that being a mother plays in the plot of the story and in the characterization of the women. The way in which motherhood is constructed is of importance, both in the narrative and in the way it is presented to the viewers.

2.2. Contemporary TV Shows in Context of Feminism

2.2.1. Feminist Film Theory

This branch of film theory emerged in the 1960s, with a focus on how movies reinforce and reflect gender inequality. Feminist film theory analyzes how film shapes our understanding of gender, identity, and power; as well as how these topics intersect with concepts such as race and social class (Humm, 1997). It is build on the notion that films aren’t neutral representations of society, but constructions of meaning shaped by contemporary cultural and social values. The way in which female characters are often reduced to stereotypical one-dimensional women is explored. While early feminist film theory had a mostly sociological approach, later on it started drawing on psychoanalysis: examining how women are represented in film and how gender norms are perpetuated or challenged, specifically analyzing power dynamics and psychological processes (Ruti, 2016). The importance of an intersectional approach by taking into account concepts such as

sexuality, age, and ethnicity also emerged in feminist film theory, critiquing the psychoanalytic approach for its exclusive focus and heterosexual bias (Smelik, 2016).

A significant concept within feminist film theory is Mulvey's concept of the male gaze (1975), which highlights how Hollywood invites the viewer to identify with the male characters and objectify women. There is also Kuhn's theory of materialist criticism, which emphasizes the significance of understanding the social and economic context of the production and consumption of films, as this reinforces our grasp on the cultural and historical forces that shape our narratives (Humm, 1997). Another influential feminist film theorist is Haskell, who argued that women fulfill restrictive roles in films that reflect sexist societal norms of femininity, resulting in stereotypes (Ruti, 2016). Haskell also stresses the importance of diversity in the decision-making processes behind movies to challenge the dominant male-centered narratives.

2.2.2. Contemporary Gender Conventions in Movie Making

A major issue in Hollywood today is the low number of women employed behind the scenes of movies; the movie-making industry is overwhelmingly male, with female representation barely improving in the past 25 years (Elsesser, 2023). In 2022, women comprised of 7% of cinematographers, 21% of female editors (which was 20% in 1998), 19% of writers, 25% of executive producers, and 31% of producers in the top 250 grossing films (Lauzen, 2023). Elsesser (2023) describes how these numbers aren't low because of a lack of interest or talent in this line of work by women; however, EEOC cases illustrate that major Hollywood Studios engage in sexist hiring practices and systematic discrimination against female directors.

Women are not only underrepresented behind the camera, but also in front of it. Only 30.5% of speaking characters are women and 12% of movies featured a cast with a balanced male/female ratio (Murphy, 2015). Apart from the amount of women, there is also significant misrepresentation happening, resulting often in stereotypical female characters. Kumar et al. (2022) found in their longitudinal analysis that while there is improvement, female stereotypes, especially in relation to romance and relationships, are still present in contemporary films. However, the stereotype is evolving and changing, with less associations with 'beautiful' and 'passive', but more with 'wedding' and 'relationship'.

However, it is important to keep in mind that there is progress, with feminist TV shows and films that empower women being released, as well. Sutherland and Feltey (2017) take an intersectional approach to analyze gender, power, ethnicity and social class in feminist films. They conclude that most of these films revolve around women finding the courage to challenge norms; however, these are almost exclusively white, middle class women and mostly focused on the individual. Solidarity amongst women as a theme and empowering characteristic is scarce.

2.3. The Portrayal of Women in *Game of Thrones*

Before getting into the literature on *Game of Thrones* and specifically into the critique surrounding the gender portrayal in the television series, a clarification on the subject is of value. First and foremost, George R. R. Martin has created a story in which women play important parts which push the plot forward and are not just secondary characters with no depth (Marques, 2019). However, this is only the first layer concerning representation of women (Calvert et al., 2007). They are fully depicted as well-rounded characters; but in what way are they represented?

2.3.1. Sex, Nudity, Rape, and Sexualization

A recurring subject that is thoroughly critiqued is the amount and portrayal of nudity, gendered violence and sex in *Game of Thrones* (Evans, 2018; Ferreday, 2015; Needham, 2017; Schubart & Gjelsvik, 2016). One scene that is especially criticized is analyzed by Ferreday (2015), is the rape of Cersei by Jaime. While they are grieving over their son's dead body, Jaime starts to kiss and undress Cersei, under her protest which Jaime ignores; and proceeds to rape her. It was coined by director of this episode Alex Graves to have become consensual at the end. Ferreday (2015) addresses the problematics of the scene, as this trivializes rape and implies that a sexual act that is non-consensual can become consensual, if you simply persist. That is without even mentioning how Cersei was physically overpowered by Jaime.

Schubart & Gjelsvik (2016) point out that female characters are dehumanized as sexual objects, often physically exposed and subjected to sexual violence. Use of sex is depicted as an instrument women can use to gain power, instead of their intelligence or bravery. Queen Cersei literally tells young Sansa that 'a woman's best weapon is between

her legs' (Schubart & Gjelsvik, 2016). Meanwhile, sex is also used by men to have power over women. "Rape, in particular, is portrayed with almost smug indifference as a widespread and common weapon, and thus, an effective instrument of power" (Schubart & Gjelsvik, 2016, chapter 11).

Needham (2017) conducted a content analysis of naked men and woman in the first three seasons of *Game of Thrones*. She found that there is much more female nudity than male nudity. She points out that the show is created with a male audience and their pleasure in mind, thus objectifying women through unnecessary nudity and no visual pleasure for them.

Another scene in *Game of Thrones* that has received a lot of criticism is the Littlefinger brothel scene. In this scene, Littlefinger has a long monologue in which he conveys a lot of information. It is situated in one of his brothels, and there are naked women who are sexually engaged with each other. Littlefinger directs them around the room during the monologue as objects. The women don't seem to have any real pleasure in their actions. They only exist in the scene to make it less dense with information, while being objectified and being filmed with an extremely male perspective (Needham, 2017). A term was even coined for what happens in this scene: *sexposition*; when sex and nudity are used in conjunction with information (Needham, 2017). The author concludes that while brothels are a recurring location during scenes, there is barely any male nudity nor actual female pleasure depicted on screen.

2.3.2. Motherhood

The representation of motherhood in *Game of Thrones* is another point of discussion. Ruf (2020) argues that there are three constructions of motherhood apparent in the television series. The author analyzes how they are manifested, especially through the character of Cersei. First there is *motherhood under patriarchy: motherhood as duty* (Ruf, 2020), which implies that there are duties that come with being a mother that shouldn't be evaded. But also, becoming a mother in itself is something that women in the patriarchy must want and do. There is also *maternal power: motherhood as status* (Ruf, 2020), reinforcing the idea that women can and should have power through motherhood alone. Cersei's storyline underlines the idea that women shouldn't develop their own identity as more than a mother, as this will punish them and hurt their children. Lastly there is *good*

mother, bad mother: motherhood as an ideal (Ruf, 2020). This theme refers to how women's characters in the story are tied to their performance as mothers. When a woman doesn't fulfill her parental responsibilities, they are a bad person; we see this arc happen to Cersei.

Schubart & Gjelsvik (2016) analyze Cersei and Catelyn and the role that motherhood plays in their establishment as characters in *Game of Thrones*. The authors illustrate how they portray the archetypes of 'Bad Mother' (Cersei) and 'Good Mother' (Catelyn). While Cersei has her own agenda and intentions (albeit they also revolve around her children), Catelyn does everything only for her children. There is also a significant difference between the book-characters and the show-characters (Schubart & Gjelsvik, 2016). For example, in the original books, Cersei confesses to having aborted her only child from Robert, while they changed this to a death during the baby's infancy in the show, to make Cersei more motherly. Catelyn is much more intelligent and strategic in the books, while in the show she cannot see beyond protecting her children. Much of Cersei's and Catelyn's agency has been handed over to their sons (Joffrey and Rob), during the adaptation process; filing down their personalities to less complicated women and revolving more around their status as mothers (Schubart & Gjelsvik, 2016).

2.3.3. Power and Femininity

The power of women in *Game of Thrones* is often connected to the (lack of) femininity in the characters (Clapton & Shepherd, 2017; Evans, 2018; Marques, 2019; Tan, 2018; Trejo Morales, 2020). Despite the existence of several strong women, female characters are often represented as objects to be used by men and wield very little actual power in Westeros (Clapton & Shepherd, 2017). The authors examine Daenerys and her rise to power, which they characterize as gendered in itself. Her power comes mostly from her being 'Mother of Dragons', which is an extremely gendered term. Furthermore, the traits she develops as a leader are masculine (aggressiveness, confidence, ferocity). Tan (2018) goes on to code Daenerys, as well as Cersei, as hypermasculine females. Hypermasculinity is defined as characters who will go to any length to accomplish their goals, including violence and mass slaughter (Tan, 2018).

Both Daenerys and Cersei are female characters with agency who wield political power in Westeros, but due to being depicted as evil (Cersei) and power crazy (Daenerys),

there is nothing feminist about it (Trejo Morales, 2020). Not to mention how the series ending treats these characters. Their complex, dynamic personalities are simplified in the final season: Cersei is whittled down to a crying, helpless woman waiting for Jaime to rescue her, leading to both of them dying, while Daenerys is unceremoniously made crazy and is killed by her lover. The final season of *GoT* aligns itself with the patriarchal values of the world it portrays, sending the message that women shouldn't be in positions of power (Evans, 2020). This point is reinforced by Evans (2018), who argues that "Almost all of Cersei's decisions are hastily made and poorly considered, which may suggest to readers that female masculinities are poor imitations of male masculinities, or worse, that women should be excluded from power because they cannot rule effectively." (p. 11).

Trejo Morales (2020) analyzes Arya Stark and Brienne of Tarth, who are often coded as warrior women. Both females have rejected all their femininity and are powerful only through masculine traits. They are presented as strong women, but they both actively disassociate from being female, while also looking down on other women and on feminine characteristics (Trejo Morales, 2020). As Arya pointedly says in the second season of *Game of Thrones*: "Most girls are idiots" (S02, E07).

According to Marques (2019), female characters that wield power tend to fail and be outshined by smarter men. The author points out that women in *Game of Thrones* can only be powerful through masculinity (Arya, Brienne and Yara) or through sexuality (Cersei, Margaery).

2.4. Female Representation in Medieval Fantasy TV Shows

Both *House of the Dragon* and *Game of Thrones* fall within the genre of medieval fantasy. The world of Westeros resembles Middle Age England, with some of the storylines in *Game of Thrones* even loosely based on historical events, such as the War of Roses (Frankel, 2014). However, the story and the world exhibited in both tv series is pure fantasy; as the important role that dragons play illustrates.

The treatment and portrayal of women in *Game of Thrones* is often attributed to the Westerosi society being based on medieval times, when women weren't considered equal to men by a long shot (Frankel, 2014). Thus, an important topic to explore when conducting this study, is in what way women were depicted on other tv shows that fall (partly) in the genre of medieval fantasy.

Outlander. In this TV show, the main character Claire accidentally travels back in time, from being a nurse during the second world war, to the 18th century Highlands. Herrera (2019) explores how themes such as motherhood and sex are portrayed in *Outlander*. While motherhood plays a big role in the characterization of Claire, Herrera (2019) argues that it isn't what defines her, nor is it depicted as a simple experience that women are supposed to go through. Nonetheless, the author remarks that the hegemonic femininity in which mothers must sacrifice everything for their children is perpetuated in the show.

From the first episode on, it becomes evident that protagonist Claire has sexual desires and is an active agent in satisfying these (Herrera, 2019). Scenes between her and her sexual partner often utilize the female gaze, where the viewer is invited to explore the male body while undressing. Claire's body is not objectified by the camera, but rather seen as the entity through which she experiences pleasure. While Claire is portrayed as a sexual agent, she comes from a more contemporary time. Her husband in the 18th century, Jaime, expresses that in his society, women don't generally enjoy sex. There is also a darker side; Etges (2021) points out that there is an abundance of gendered violence in *Outlander*. Rape and abuse are common in the TV show, normalizing violence against women.

Vikings is a TV series inspired by medieval Scandinavia, intermingling history with Norse mythology, following Vikings on their adventures. Donstrup (2019) analyzed the topics of gender and power in this historical TV show, and whether the classical values associated with women (passivity, maternity and sexuality) are apparent in the female characters. While female character Lagertha is dynamic and supposed to be a leader, Donstrup (2019) argues that she is the archetype of a matriarch. She abandons tasks to help her husband, seduces people with her body, and fails to gain followers and respect from men. Motherhood is also an important theme in Lagertha's characterization. Donstrup (2019) concludes that values of maternity and sexuality are still apparent, at least in the TV show *Vikings*.

Merlin. Based on the legend of king Arthur, *Merlin* is a medieval fantasy TV series, where magic is illegal, and we follow the friendship between Merlin and Arthur. While almost all the male sorcerers use magic solely for good, practically all the women who possess magic are inherently evil, creating a gendered depiction of magic (Meredith, 2015).

The TV show sends the message that it is bad for women to be active and to have power, for they will supplant or exercise control over men (Meredith, 2015). The author explores how female sorcerers are also sexual, and they are completely evil with no redeeming reasoning; stereotypical femme fatales.

While female representation varies in different other TV shows from the medieval fantasy genre, a similar theme that occurs, like in *Game of Thrones*, is the inability to separate the patriarchal societies and its views on women that they portray in their stories with the way they actually represent female characters. The one character that defies those notions is Claire from *Outlander*, who is a character that doesn't come from the medieval world but from relatively modern times.

3. Methodology

3.1. Explanation and Justification

In order to answer the research question: “How are female power, sexuality and motherhood portrayed in HBO's *Game of Thrones* prequal series *House of the Dragon* (2022-)?”, a multimodal critical discourse analysis of the first season of *House of the Dragon* has been conducted. This method was chosen since the research question is exploratory in nature and seeks to make meaning from data. Since there is no existing research on *House of the Dragon* to support this study, it was imperative to study the show itself. I utilized a postmodernist epistemological approach, meaning that this research is built on the theory that knowledge is constructed through language and power dynamics, and that there is no single, objective truth (Hassan, 1985). This approach fits well with multimodal CDA, since this framework focuses on how language constructs knowledge, and emphasizes the importance of interpretation.

Multimodal CDA allows researchers to analyze different modes of communication, including language and visual elements, which can provide a more complete understanding of how female portrayals are constructed and represented (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Furthermore, MCDA also takes into consideration the broader social context in which the text is produced and consumed, which is extremely relevant when researching gender portrayal. Thus, MCDA was the best choice for the purpose of this study.

3.2. Data Collection

As the research question seeks to understand the portrayal of female power, sexuality and motherhood in *House of the Dragon*, I have used the complete first season as my data set and have extracted narratives and scenes as units of analysis. Only the first season is analyzed, since there have not been any additional seasons released at the time that this study is conducted. While the research question is based on critique from the female representation in *Game of Thrones* and this study draws comparisons between the two TV series, I have chosen not to analyze any material from *Game of Thrones*. This decision was made as there was a lot of research available already that covered all the eight seasons that have aired, and analyzing one season myself would not be of additional value.

House of the Dragon is an American television series created by George R. R. Martin and Ryan Condal for HBO. Condal also served as showrunner of the first season, together with Miguel Sapochnik. More information can be found in Appendix D. The show features two female and two male main characters. This study is focused especially on the female main- and supporting characters and how they as characters, as well as the storyline in the show itself, portrayed the themes of female power, sexuality and motherhood.

The first season of *HotD* consists of 10 episodes of approximately one hour each. The transcripts for each episode were found online, although they had to be altered and checked, for some information (such as which character was speaking) was missing. I did this personally by checking them while watching the episode simultaneously. Once the scripts were ready, I analyzed the text critically as a whole, by marking relevant words and phrases and adding personal notes.

The visual data was collected through the online streaming service HBO Max. I watched the entire show four times through (not counting the first time when I watched it for pleasure). First to familiarize myself with the characters and the storyline, and to learn to adopt a critical stance. As a starting point for analysis, and to make it as transparent and organized as possible (Silverman, 2011), I constructed a plot-segmentation on the third rewatch. This plot segmentation was meant to note the boundaries of each scene, including descriptions of the main events, observations, and the screenshots that I made (Gocsik et al., 2013). Furthermore, I also included the characters in each scene and noted when one of the main themes of this study (female power, sexuality, and motherhood) appeared.

On the fourth rewatch, I took screenshots of each scene in which the theme of female power, sexuality, or motherhood was observed. This resulted in a total of 205 screenshots, which were roughly analyzed. Finally, based on the plot segmentation and the overall general visual and textual analysis, a total of 9 scenes were picked for in-depth multimodal (visual and textual) analysis.

3.3. Operationalization

To be able to answer the research question, the concepts of female power, sexuality, and motherhood must be operationalized, to understand how I perceived the way they are constructed in *House of the Dragon*. In the previous chapter, the theoretical

foundation for each concept was laid. This part expands on how the established notions can be found in *HotD*.

Female Power. As established in chapter two, the six categories of Goffman (1979) on portrayal of power difference between two genders are used. Thus, during visual analysis, attention was paid to the position of female characters in the frame in comparison to their male counterparts, the body language that is expressed, the composition of different characters in the shots, and what kind of tasks they are doing (taking care of a child or having political discussions). However, the power dynamics between the different genders are an actual plot line around which much of the narrative revolves. This was kept in mind during analysis, by asking questions such as, does the portrayal of the female characters actively reflect the sexist notion that exists in the society of Westeros, or do they go against it? Also, is the message to the audience that a woman is indeed not meant to become queen, or does it oppose the views that are expressed by some of the characters? The conceptions of power of women in film by Sutherland (2013) were identified for each significant female character. Furthermore, the role that female characters have in the plot was assessed; as well as the personality traits attributed to the women in *House of the Dragon*. Attention was paid to the femininity and masculinity of these characteristics; do they accept their womanhood or rebel against it? Do classically coded female traits such as compassion color them as weak, or as strong?

Sexuality. The focus of this concept is the use of the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975). Use of the four different heterosexual scripts (Kim et al., 2007) was analyzed critically. Visually, the way the camera follows the characters, especially during sex scenes, is analyzed. Does the camera function as a male gaze, lusting after the female body as an object; or is there focus on the male naked body, perhaps? Generally, what is the proportion of male and female nakedness? Apart from how the bodies of the characters are depicted, sexual violence is also analyzed. Is there any violence, and in what way do the creators handle it? Is the focus on the experience of the woman, or that of the men? Lastly, there is also the role that sex plays in the lives of the female characters. Are they sexually active or passive? How do they express their sexuality?

Motherhood. To understand how motherhood is portrayed in *House of the Dragon*, the role that being a mother plays in the lives of female characters is analyzed. Is their ability as a mother connected to their character; are their personality traits and storylines

more than their position as a mother? Do they conform with the Hollywood archetypes identified by Kaplan (2000), are they similar or different from the conceptions of motherhood found in *Game of Thrones* (Ruf, 2020)? Furthermore, the childbirth scenes are examined closely. Analyzing the narrative of the story is highly important for this subject, but the visual depictions of mothers with their children are also relevant. They will also be compared to those of fathers with their children. Is motherhood something that all female characters idealize; do all women long to become a mother?

3.4. Methods of Analysis

Before having visually and textually analyzed the data, the context of the situation (Fulton, 2005) is provided, as it is important to understand the environment in which the meaning is being exchanged to be able to interpret those meanings. Subsequently, a multimodal critical discourse analysis has been completed based on Fairclough's three-dimensional framework (1993), the toolbox offered by Machin and Mayr (2012), and the model proposed by Barsam and Monahan (2015). The multimodal CDA included both a textual and visual analysis of *House of the Dragon*. Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional framework of multimodal CDA presents the three dimensions of text, discourse practice, and social context. First, the text and visuals were analyzed; this consists of all the transcripts, the screenshots taken and the episodes as a whole. Next, I focused on the discourse practice, which consists of a thorough visual and textual analysis of the nine scenes that were picked out. During this analysis, the social context was also provided; including exploring contemporary cinematography conventions in relation to gender. After the data analysis, themes regarding female power, sexualization and motherhood in each episode have been summarized, and then compared with the other episodes to find overarching themes and patterns. Below, each phase of the analysis is described in-depth.

3.4.1. Context of the Situation

This theory was originally provided by Halliday (1985) to give contextualization of the object of study. Analyzing the context of the situation creates insight into how language use is shaped by cultural and social factors, and how it is used to construct social identities and power relations (Halliday, 1985). The historical and cultural context of the TV show are specified. The context of the situation concept consists of the three dimensions of field,

tenor, and mode. The field indicates the topic or subject matter of the text, including the purpose and functions of the interaction. Tenor refers to the people, their social roles and their relationships. Finally, mode is related to the channel of communication, including spoken words and visuals. Fulton (2005) provided an adaptation that focuses more specifically on film. I have used this alternating model, seeing as it fits better with this study. The field therefore refers to the context of the film, the tenor to the characters and their relationships, and the mode explores the organization of the content and the chronological plot (Fulton, 2005).

3.4.2. Visual Analysis

The analysis of the nine selected scenes from *House of the Dragon* has been conducted with the tools offered by Machin & Mayr (2012). This toolbox is constructed largely from the framework of The Grammar of Visual Design (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) and Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday, 1985). This method grants the ability to observe all individual elements on screen closely and find the implicit meanings that they convey about female power, sexuality and motherhood.

When analyzing a scene, the first step that I took was denotation, thus, to describe every visual element on the screen. Next was connotation, during which I interpreted these visual elements into their meaning potential (Machin & Mayr, 2012), seeing as their meanings are dependent on the context, not a general truth. This process of denotation and connotation included observing the representational meta function of each scene, after which the interactional system and finally the compositional meta function was represented (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Barsam and Monahan (2015) divided this (considering film analysis) into *mise-en-scène*, *cinematography* and *narrative*.

Mise-en-scène. Everything that appears in a frame, including the characters, objects, their surroundings, and how all these elements are arranged within the shot (Barsam & Monahan, 2015). Thus, this part focuses on the objects, setting and salience. How are the settings, attributes, and the composition of image used to communicate ideas and values, and what discourses do they communicate? I focused on how the female characters were presented in the frame, especially in combination with male characters. For instance, in how they are composed (who is foregrounded, who is backgrounded?).

Cinematography. This concept refers to how moving images are captured in film and how tools such as framing, camera angles and use of light are used for creating meanings and conveying discourses (Barsam & Monahan, 2015). The way in which the creators of *House of the Dragon* decided to set up different shots and how they used color and light, can reveal a lot about the how they intended (or didn't intent to) portray female power, sexuality and motherhood. Furthermore, this allowed me to analyze how contemporary cinematography conventions concerning gender intersect with *House of the Dragon*.

Narrative. This is the structure of how the story is presented through events and the characters in the story (Barsam & Monahan, 2015), which reveals a lot about the way in which women are represented. For this part, I critically analyzed whether the female characters could be defined as round or flat characters, and what their role is in the narrative and plot of the story.

Furthermore, the interpretation of the analysis is supported by Ryan and Lenos (2020), who offer insight on the different techniques in film and their meanings.

3.4.3. Textual Analysis

The scripts of every episode of *House of the Dragon* are analyzed through use of critical discourse analysis to “reveal what kinds of social relations of power are present in texts both explicitly and implicitly” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 25). CDA enables the researcher to interpret language as a means for social construction. By exploring the text while using CDA, I can understand how women are portrayed through the language use of the characters in *HotD*. The textual analysis was done simultaneously with the visual analysis of each scene, so that the two analyses together create a deeper understanding of the material and to draw out the discourses that are buried within the two types of texts (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

The analysis focuses not only on female characters in their own language use, but also on how male characters speak about them and specifically how the themes of female power, sexuality, and motherhood are addressed. Through CDA, the text is placed in a social, cultural and political context (Huckin, 1997), thus, the theoretical framework also functions as a theoretical foundation to create contextual meaning.

The semiotic choices in the script of *House of the Dragon* were uncovered through a lexical analysis (Machin & Mayr, 2012). This included exploring *word connotations, overlexicalization, suppression, structural opposition, and lexical choices*.

Word Connotations. What kind of words and phrases have been chosen by the creators, and why could that be? Since every choice has been made deliberately, and some words have been chosen over others, it is important to critically examine these choices (Machin & Mayr, 2012). I marked all the words and phrases related to female characters, and especially the concepts of female power, sexuality and motherhood; I also explored what discourses the words and phrases are associated with.

Overlexicalization. This refers to identifying words, phrases and synonyms that were repeated, for this can be an attempt to underline a dominant ideology (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Here I looked at the word repetitions around female agency, sexuality, or their status as mothers, and explored the deeper meanings that were conveyed.

Suppression. In contrast to overlexicalization, suppression highlights terms that would be expected in the text but are actually absent (Huckin, 1997). In analyzing the text, I focused on dialogue that discussed the female characters and phrases that referred to female agency. During analysis, I contemplated how the lack of certain words affect the portrayal of women.

Structural Opposition. This step analyzes opposing concepts within the text, such as kind vs mean. Often, only one of the concepts is explicitly mentioned, thus only implicitly implying the difference (Machin & Mayr, 2012). When exploring this in the text, I concentrated on the opposition between men and women, specifically in their social status, capability, expected behavior, sexuality and parenthood.

Lexical Choices. Through lexical choices, the author of a text can present a statement as a universal fact, thus manipulating their audience; in other words, a type of power and authority is practiced on the consumer of the text (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Although this part of lexical analysis may not completely apply to a tv show, since the producers don't communicate directly to their audience, but through the mediation of characters communicating with other characters, this step was kept in mind during the analysis, although there weren't any findings.

3.4.4. Analysis

After having provided the context of the situation, the episodes, screenshots, and script were roughly analyzed as a whole. I did this by noting down theoretical concepts and observations in the plot segmentation of all *House of the Dragon* episodes (as in Appendix A), and by commenting on all the screenshots and relevant passages in the scripts. Then I proceeded with the in-depth MCDA, analyzing the visual and textual data for each of the nine selected scenes. The textual analysis was done through the use of Microsoft Word which was suitable for highlighting and adding notes with the highlights. An example of textual analysis can be found in Appendix B. The visual analysis was done through Microsoft OneNote, as this allowed me to systematically organize the analysis for each scene (Appendix C).

When the analyses were conducted, the findings were grouped systematically across the three categories of female power, sexuality, and motherhood. The next step was to group and analyze the findings within each category, to create sub-categories. This resulted in the following findings: for female power, (1) female agency in a patriarchal society, (2) contradicting sexist societal conceptions, (3) manifestations of female power, (4) power and the plot: developing into empowered women, and (5) gender power relations. In the category of sexuality, the sub-findings include: (1) sex as a duty vs. sex as a pleasure, (2) a realistic female gaze, (3) male and female nudity, (4) verbal female objectification, and (5) refining sexual abuse. Finally, for motherhood the findings are the following: (1) the childbed is our battlefield, (2) motherhood as a prison, and (3) being a parent: effect on characters and plot.

3.5. Credibility and Reflexivity

In qualitative research, credibility and reflexivity are important to consider. Since multimodal CDA especially is based on the interpretation of the researcher (Machin & Mayr, 2012), it is important to reflect on myself and my role as a researcher. First of all, I am a fan of the *Game of Thrones* franchise, which is good to establish, even though this does not mean that I cannot be critical of the works. This study was inspired initially by the portrayal of childbirths in *House of the Dragon*, which is different and much more realistic than I have experienced on television so far. Furthermore, the representation of women in television is a subject that lies close to my heart. As a woman myself and as I believe that female representation in media has a significant influence on how women are perceived in

society, this research is important to me. My awareness of my personal views and position helps me to minimize their influence on my research, although it would not be realistic to assume complete neutrality. My interpretations of the text are dependent on my context and personal experiences (Gocsik et al., 2013), and my knowledge of shared sociocultural discourses is necessary to do connotation on the texts. My position as a researcher is not an objective outside view, as I am a part of the societal structure which I study (Wodak, 2014).

To make this study as credible and reliable as possible, I am completely transparent in both the methodology and the theoretical foundation of this research (Silverman, 2011). Every step of the research process is described in detail, as well as the theory and literature on which this study is based. The analysis itself is based on academic literature and theory, not simply personal judgement. Furthermore, the choices for the sample size and data collection have been justified.

4. Results

In this chapter, the results of the multimodal critical discourse analysis on the portrayal of female power, sexuality, and motherhood in *House of the Dragon* are presented and discussed. First, the context of the situation will be provided to contextualize the data. Next, the findings from the analysis are explained and connected to the theoretical framework. These results are divided by the main concepts of the research question: female power, sexuality, and motherhood. Examples from the visual and textual analyses are presented to support the findings. A discussion on how these findings fit within the theoretical foundation and concepts previously provided is also part of this chapter.

4.1. Context of the Situation

The existence of *House of the Dragon* goes back to George R. R. Martin writing the novel series *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Momentarily consisting of five books, with two still expected, these books are the inspiration behind the television series *Game of Thrones*. Both the books and TV series are considered medieval fantasy. The story told is inspired, according to Martin, by the War of Roses and Nordic Mythology. In both the book- and TV series, many different characters' viewpoints are followed, with multiple storylines weaving through each other. The success of *Game of Thrones* inspired HBO to make a prequel series, resulting in the production of *House of the Dragon*.

4.1.1. Field

Fulton (2005) constituted *field* to refer to the context of the film (in this case, TV show). *House of the Dragon* is an HBO TV series, with one season released thus far in 2022, a second season in the making at the time of writing, set to release in 2024. The series is created by George R. R. Martin and Ryan J. Condal, the latter also acting as co-showrunner together with Miguel Sapochnik for the first season. *House of the Dragon* is a prequel to *Game of Thrones*, happening nearly 200 years before the events of *GoT*.

House of the Dragon takes place when the Targaryen family ruled Westeros; they are the only family that can ride and (to some extent) control dragons. More than twenty live dragons roam the realm. King Viserys Targaryen sits the Iron Throne. The TV show is based on the fantasy history book *Fire & Blood* written by George R. R. Martin, describing

the Targaryen history as rulers of Westeros. It is written from multiple perspectives, with different (in varying shades of reliability) accounts of the same events, making it unclear what has really happened.

While *Game of Thrones* was immensely popular, the last two seasons were less well received, with a lot of critique on the final two episodes of the series (Evans, 2020). The main focus of the criticisms was centered around the rushed ending, insufficient character development and continuity errors. Especially the ending of female characters is perceived negatively, as it doesn't do them justice at all. The dismay is also connected to the reduced involvement of Martin in the TV series, and the fact that there were no more books to be adapted in the final seasons. A sour after-taste was left in the mouths of most *GoT* fans, which resulted in a rather apprehensive audience for *House of the Dragon*.

The critique resulted in Martin being closely involved in the making of *HotD*, as well as using one of his already existing (and finished) books as a basis for the show. The position of the fans demonstrated a pressure for the producers, since *House of the Dragon* has a lot of bad opinions and feelings to change and overcome. Their treatment of women, especially, is under stress. A lot of criticism on *Game of Thrones* surround female representation, as is elaborated upon in the theoretical framework; but we also live in a time where this subject is closely watched and discussed (Kumar et al., 2022). Additionally, due to Westeros being established by earlier works as an extremely patriarchal society, there is also the challenge of portraying that realistically and believably while simultaneously substantiating their female characters as strong, dynamic and equal to the male characters.

House of the Dragon is released during a time when gender equality is a much discussed and loaded subject. The year 2022 was a rollercoaster on this front, with some highs concerning political progress and shows of solidarity; but also lows in the form of violence against women and less female rights, such as the U.S. rolling back abortion rights (Nowrojee, 2022). It is a strenuous time for releasing a TV show in which the position of women in a patriarchal society is highlighted; but therefore also important to do it right.

When considering the contemporary situation on female representation within popular culture, there is a genuine increase going on (Kumar et al., 2022). However, while it is assumed by some to be a "golden age" for the representation of women on TV, this is sadly far from the truth, as there is still a lot of progress to be made (Sink & Mastro, 2017).

In terms of quantity, there are more women in speaking roles on TV. The focus on female representation is mostly on the quality of their portrayal, especially considering use of stereotypes (Sink & Mastro, 2017).

4.1.2. Tenor

The characters in *House of the Dragon* and their relationships are important to understand and will be described in this section. The two main female characters are outlined in detail, with other significant characters shortly recounted.

Rhaenyra Targaryen. Princess Rhaenyra is the eldest child of current King Viserys, and heir to the Iron Throne. At the start of the TV series, she is fourteen, whereas she is thirty-four at the end of season one. As a teenager, Rhaenyra's best friend is Alicent Hightower. They are very close, until her father Viserys marries Alicent, which Rhaenyra did not take well. Rhaenyra is a strong-willed person, who doesn't want to be a lady, nor married or a mother. She is more interested in being a warrior and dragonrider. Rhaenyra eventually gives birth to children by her first husband Laenor and her second husband Daemon (who is also her uncle). Rhaenyra and Daemon have always had a special bond since she was a child, and they love each other.

Alicent Hightower. Alicent's mother died when she was a child. She grew up in the castle and was very close to Rhaenyra. She is a conservative person, who finds it important to do her duties and stick to the rules. She is the second wife of Viserys, making her Queen. While at first close to Rhaenyra, Alicent is annoyed by Rhaenyra's constant disregard for the rules. Alicent is religious to the Faith of the Seven.

There are other important characters who play a significant part in *House of the Dragon*. King Viserys is a good man who wants peace, but not a very effective ruler. His brother Daemon is a fierce, unpredictable warrior; aggressive but also brave. Furthermore there is Otto, Alicent's father and Viserys's advisor. He is self-interested and manipulative. There are also Rhaenys Targaryen and Corlys Velaryon, who are married and a powerful House as well.

4.1.3. Mode

This part refers to the chronological plot and the organization of the narrative (Fulton, 2005).

The ten episodes span over a time period of twenty years. The series starts with a prologue, in which we see old King Jaehaerys convening the Great Council to choose his heir, as his own children are dead. Prince Viserys, the oldest male descendent, is chosen over Princess Rhaenys, the eldest grandchild. The season follows Viserys as King, and how he chose Rhaenyra as the first female heir to the Throne. Viserys becomes more ill throughout the years. He marries Alicent in the beginning of the show, which destroys the close friendship of her with Rhaenyra and starts the rivalry between them. Rhaenyra eventually marries Laenor, although she'd rather been single, and has children as well. After Laenor's death, she marries her uncle Daemon, which is an actual love marriage. They have children as well. Rhaenyra's and Alicent's children take up on their rivalry, creating a rift between the two families. When Viserys dies, Alicent and Otto usurp the Throne by putting Aegon, Alicent's son, on it. Rhaenyra finds out, resulting in war almost breaking out. It is the death of her son Luke by the hands of Alicent's son Aemond that seals it: the Dance of Dragons (as the civil war is known for) is beginning.

4.2. Female Power: Fuck the Patriarchy

4.2.1. The World and Women of Westeros

Female Agency in a Patriarchal Society. Westeros, is made clear from the very beginning of *House of the Dragon*, is a patriarchal society with no place for women in positions of power. The first episode starts with a prologue, in which we see how Viserys was chosen as King by the lords of Westeros, even though his cousin Rhaenys had a better claim. Viserys, in turn, essentially murders his wife Aemma because of his desire for a male heir; even though he already had his daughter, Rhaenyra. He eventually makes her his heir, which is a highly controversial move in the existing society.

Lord Strong: If order and stability so concerns this council, then perhaps we shouldn't break 100 years of it by naming a girl heir (E01).

Rhaenyra is only chosen as heir to spurn Daemon, since many on the Small Council believe him to be an extremely bad King, and because Viserys is angry at him. Rhaenyra's suitability to the role concerning her personality instead of her gender is not even

discussed. Her appointment as heir is not a feminist move, but a decision made despite her being a woman; because of the lack of an alternative.

Once Viserys has married Alicent, who gives birth to their son, Aegon, it becomes clear that everyone in Westeros assumes and desires for Viserys to change the succession. His decision not to do so will eventually lead to war. A woman on the Iron Throne is not acceptable in Westeros.

Otto: It is Aegon that's being robbed [of his birthright]. He's the firstborn son of the King. To deny that he is heir to the throne is to assail the laws of gods and men. The road ahead is uncertain, but the end is clear. Aegon will be king (E03).

The women in Westeros generally don't have agency over their own lives. Their society dictates that men decide over women. A scene in which this is emphasized is during Aemma's childbirth scene (E01). The baby is breach and won't come. Even though it is her body, Viserys is the one who makes the decision over what happens to Aemma.

Mellos: During a difficult birth, it sometimes becomes necessary for the father to make an impossible choice. [...] To sacrifice one or to lose them both (E01).

As Mellos says, it is a choice made by the father, not by the mother. He refers to Aemma, not as a human being, but as 'one', dehumanizing her and reducing her to an object instead of an agent. Viserys decides to sacrifice Aemma. He does not explain what is happening to her. When she realizes what they are doing, she screams 'no' multiple times. Women dying tragically during childbirth is a common trope in medieval TV depictions, used as a tool to comfort the audience about how far we've come since those times (Harper, 2021). However, *House of the Dragon* utilizes this trope by giving it more depth, creating a contrast between the significantly improved medical care of today and the barely improved agency that women have over their own body, especially in post-*Roe* U.S. (Nowrojee, 2022).

Contradicting Sexist Societal Conceptions. While *House of the Dragon* shows the viewer a world in which sexist beliefs rule and women are treated as lesser human beings than men, the show doesn't portray that view to be true. In truth, it contradicts these stigmas and patriarchal views by introducing strong female characters and portraying them as intelligent and capable women.



E2: Screenshot 2.7

Rhaenyra is not allowed to sit at the Small Council as a member, even though she is officially Viserys's heir. She is pouring the men wine, not allowed to partake in the conversation. However, the camera reveals her thoughtful and concentrated expression as she thinks about what is being said. The shot shows two of the categories of Goffman (1979) reversed; Rhaenyra takes up half the screen (*relative size*) and is shown focused (*licensed withdrawal*). She is portrayed as being intelligent, and when she speaks up, she gives an insightful idea that proves to be successful later in the episode. It is not appreciated by the Small Council, illustrating the patriarchal sexist views of their society, but the viewer is shown that Rhaenyra is smart with perceptive political views, portraying her in a feminist way.

The unfair patriarchal way in which the society of Westeros is shaped is even called out by several characters throughout the TV series. The distorted treatment of women is acknowledged by both the female and male characters. For example, in this exchange between Rhaenyra and Viserys.

Rhaenyra: Were I born a man, I could bed whomever I wanted. I could
 father a dozen bastards, and no one in your court would
 blink an eye.

Viserys: You are right... but you were born a woman (E04).

Rhaenyra calling this out is another parallel from the medieval fantasy world to our own modern times, where women are still shamed for being sexually active when men are celebrated for it.

Even though Westeros is the same patriarchal society as we know it from *Game of Thrones*, there are major differences in how this subject is breached in *House of the Dragon*. In the former TV show, women that aimed for power (Cersei and Daenerys) are portrayed as hypermasculine females descending into madness while using destruction as a power tool, who eventually fail and succumb, sending the message that men are indeed better fit for ruling (Evans, 2018; Tan, 2018). They fit more in the category of *power-over* (Sutherland, 2013). In *House of the Dragon*, Alicent and Rhaenyra are portrayed as level-headed queens, thinking their decisions through and trying to avoid unnecessary violence. They are both portraying the concept of *power-to*, finding personal agency and utilizing their own characteristics for power (Sutherland, 2013).

Alicent : A true queen counts the cost to her people (E09).

4.2.2. Manifestations of Female Power

Acts of Strength: Being Powerful. There are several ways in which female power is expressed in *House of the Dragon*. Through significant acts of strength performed by female characters, it is showcased to the viewer that they are inherently powerful people.



E2: Screenshot 2.12



E2: Screenshot 2.19

In the scene portrayed above, Otto has gone to Dragonstone with soldiers to retrieve the dragon's egg that Daemon has stolen. He is not very successful, and a fight is at the point of

breaking out, when Rhaenyra flies in on her dragon, Syrax. She singlehandedly manages to retrieve the egg safely from him without any violence, triumphing over Otto. Both screenshots show how she is portrayed as powerful and confident: her posture is straight, her gaze focused, and the camera filming her from a lower angle, indicating her empowerment (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Before Rhaenyra and her dragon appear on screen in the shot, the combination of the diegetic screeching of her dragon in the distance with the non-diegetic low, menacing music underlines how a powerful person is about to appear (Ryan & Lenos, 2020).

An interesting thing that *House of the Dragon* does, is taking common medieval tropes and turning them around in a critical way. For instance, the knight coming to save the princess In episode 9, Viserys has died and Alicent and Otto are usurping the throne, putting her son Aegon on it. Rhaenys is locked in her room at the castle, so she cannot go and warn Rhaenyra. Kingsguard knight Ser Erryk rescues her from her chambers, taking her out of the castle, telling her to flee. Instead, Rhaenys manages to break into the Dragon pit and escape on her dragon, Meleys.



E9: Screenshot 9.19

Rhaenys emanates power, with the backlight making her look imposing on the back of her dragon, smoke billowing around, looking down calmly. The music during the scene is serious and menacing. Connecting the image to Goffman's categories (1979), some of them are shown in reverse; she is portrayed in a dominant seat (*ritualization of subordination*) and has a focused gaze (*licensed withdrawal*). No one is saving her, but herself.

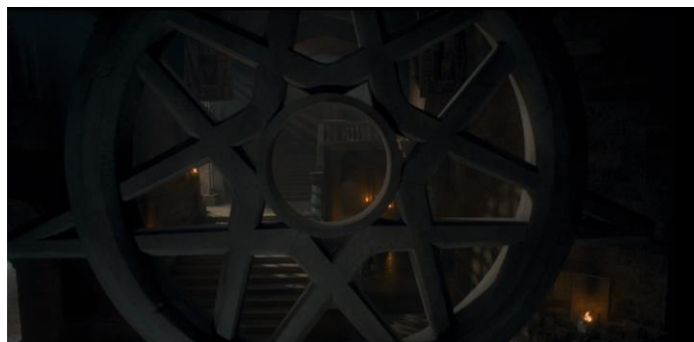
Similarly, in episode 3, when a boar attacks Rhaenyra, Ser Criston saves her by putting his sword through the beast. However, the boar turns out to still be alive, and Rhaenyra attacks it with a knife, stabbing it multiple times until it is actually dead.

The female characters in *HotD* show the viewer that they are powerful women through acts of strength and bravery. They are no damsels in distress, but very capable of taking care of themselves.

Showcasing Strength: Wielding Power. Another way that power is manifested in *House of the Dragon*, is through women that wield power in Westeros, which is showcased in several ways. This element is contradictory to *Game of Thrones*, where there were strong female characters, but they did not have any substantive power (Clapton & Shepherd, 2017).

Alicent : You may do as you wish, husband... when I am cold in
 my grave (E06).

While Alicent's husband Viserys is King of the Seven Kingdoms and thus arguably the most powerful person in the realm, her words show that she is the one who holds the power in their relationship. Her word choice, using 'husband' instead of his proper title 'Your Grace', classifies as nomination, making the matter personal instead of official (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Alicent literally tells him he cannot do what he wants, exhibiting the power she has over him.



E8: Screenshot 8.3

Alicent visually showcases her power throughout the castle, when Viserys takes ill, and she essentially takes over ruling Westeros. She rids the hallways of Targaryen heraldry and adds the Symbol of the Seven, which is her religion. As she expresses to Rhaenyra, this symbol is meant to remind everyone of a higher power; that of the gods. But essentially, she means her power over Rhaenyra's.

Power through Femininity. The women in *House of the Dragon* are powerful through their feminine characteristics. Their compassion doesn't make them weak but is something that qualifies them as good rulers, even though the men around them try to discredit them through it.

Otto: A sacrifice. A sacrifice made for the stability of the realm. No king has ever lived that hasn't had to forfeit the lives of a few to protect the many. Though I understand your squeamishness.

Alicent: Reluctance to murder is not a weakness! I have Aegon. We'll proceed now as I see fit. We will send terms to Rhaenyra on Dragonstone. True terms, such that she may accept without shame (E9).

While Otto shows typically masculine-coded characteristics such as being prone to violence (Marques, 2019), Alicent takes her compassion in stride. Otto talks down to her and tries to diminish her by referring to reluctance to murder as 'squeamishness'. Alicent calls him out on it and stands firm, telling him what's going to happen.

Rhaenyra proves herself to be a sensible queen. When all the men around her tell her to go to war because Aegon has usurped her throne, she shows constraint. In contrast to the hypermasculine Daenerys and Cersei, who would destroy everything to sit the Iron Throne (Tan, 2018), Rhaenyra demonstrates her female qualities.

Rhaenyra: As Queen, what is my true duty to the realm, Lord Bartimos? Ensuring peace and unity? Or that I sit the Iron Throne, no matter the cost? (E10)

This quote illustrates how Rhaenyra is cautious instead of rash. She doesn't act on her emotions, but instead uses her head, and considers her options carefully and calmly. The men around her demonstrate the opposite, as they all urge her to go war, no matter the destruction that it would cause to the realm.

4.2.3. Power and the Plot: Developing into Empowered Women

The role that women play in the plot is important to consider: are they dynamic characters that drive the narrative forward? For *Game of Thrones*, this was certainly the case, even if there was much critique in the way these characters were represented (Marques, 2019). In *House of the Dragon*, women play a significant part in the story. The rivalry between Alicent and Rhaenyra is the driving force of many of the events that take place in *HotD*. The two women created a rift between their families that caused the start of a civil war in Westeros.

Due to the first season of *House of the Dragon* taking place over a timespan of twenty years, the viewer can follow the development of the characters as they mature and change as human beings.



E1: Screenshot 1.5



E8: Screenshot 8.11

Alicent and Rhaenyra change both as characters and in the relationship they have with each other. In the first screenshot, the two of them are teenagers. Multiple of Goffman's (1979) categories can be found within this frame. Rhaenyra is lying down with her head in Alicent's lap, and Alicent is sitting laid back on the ground (*function ranking*); Alicent's hand is resting elegantly on the book, while Rhaenyra is fiddling with her fingers (*feminine touch*). The light colors of the shot and their light, flimsy dresses also add to the portrayal of the two of them as soft, young, sweet girls. The contrast with the second screenshot is significant. They are positioned on opposite ends of the frame, signifying the distance between them (Ryan & Lenos, 2020). Both are sitting upright, heads held up, wearing dark sturdy clothes and serious expressions on their faces. They are confident and powerful women now. However, their rivalry is another example of how women in contemporary TV depictions are portrayed as opposing and fighting, instead of female solidarity (Sutherland & Feltey, 2017). There is little to no *power-with* (Sutherland, 2013)

portrayed in *House of the Dragon*, even though women coming together to fight the patriarchy would make sense in their storyworld.

Over the episodes, Alicent develops from a little girl, who lets her father manipulate her, to a powerful woman who takes matters into her own hands. At first, she is nervously visiting Viserys at her father's orders. Later, when Alicent finds out Rhaenyra has lied to her about her virginity, she makes a power entrance at Rhaenyra's wedding feast, coming in late, wearing green, the colors of her home (Oldtown) when they go to war. The camera shoots her from a low angle, signifying her empowerment (Ryan & Lenos, 2020).



E5: Screenshot 5.5

Other female characters develop into strong women, as well. Laena Velaryon, for instance, who we first meet as a little girl in episode 2, where she expresses that she is interested in the dragon Vhagar. Later, when she is married to Daemon in episode 6, the viewer can see her flying Vhagar, meaning that she found the oldest and biggest dragon in the realm and managed to become her rider. The storyline signifies to little girls that their goals can be achieved, if they are brave and daring enough. There is also the character of Mysaria. She is first introduced as Daemon's sexual partner and confidante, but later becomes the most well-informed woman of King's Landing, with a network of spies across the city and the castle.

4.2.4. Gender Power Relations

Even though men technically hold the power in patriarchal Westeros, *House of the Dragon* portrays male/female relationship almost equally. Almost, because women are sometimes depicted as the more powerful in the relationship.



E6: Screenshot 6.14

An example of this is the scene above, which depicts Rhaenys as wielding more power than her husband. She is sitting up, talking down to him, while Laenor is low in his chair, looking up at her. Although they take up an equal amount of space on the screen, portrayed from the same straight angle, depicting them as equals in the *relative size* category of Goffman (1979), Rhaenys's posture in combination with what she is saying (commanding him to stay by her side) makes her the more powerful person.

More often, the visual depiction of men and women is equal. They share the same amount of space in in the frame, and despite height differences, the camera barely ever has a downwards angle on women, which would indicate vulnerability (Barsam & Monahan, 2015). Men and women are usually depicted in similar positions, like sitting down or standing.



E3: Screenshot 3.7

The above shot is an example of how Rhaenys and Criston are equally portrayed. When considering Goffman's categories (1979): the camera faces them at a straight angle, giving them equal space and size (*relative size*); they are positioned next to each other in the same upright position (*function ranking*); only Criston is visibly holding his horses halter

(*feminine touch*); both are in the same pose, with their shoulders back and heads slightly tilted down (*ritualization of subordination*); their gazes are similarly focused on walking (*licensed withdrawal*); and there is no different role portrayal visible (*the family*).

4.3. Sexuality: To Desire or To Be Desired

4.3.1. Sex as a Duty vs. Sex as a Pleasure

Sex plays an active role in the lives of our female main characters, Rhaenyra and Alicent, but in significantly different ways. Episode 4 especially lights out the different attitudes that both women have on sex. While Rhaenyra has sneaked out of the castle with Daemon, who is showing her around a brothel in King's Landing, Alicent is called into the King's chambers late at night.

Servant: Pardon me, Your Grace. The King has requested your presence.

Alicent: The hour is quite late.

Servant: Yes, Your Grace (E4).

Alicent is already asleep. She is woken by the servant, and must go to her husband's side, no matter whether she wants to or not. Alicent replies by mentioning it is late. She suppresses her opinion (Machin & Mayr, 2012), as it is her duty to go to the King. The servant uses the word 'requested', using a deontic modality marker that signifies that she can decline (Machin & Mayr, 2012). However, both know that when the King has a request, it is a demand; but a request sounds kinder, making the harsh truth softer. Sex is a duty that Alicent must fulfill as part of the marriage, and the above dialogue makes it clear that she is not an active agent, nor does she portray any sexual desire of her own throughout the first season of *House of the Dragon*. The character of Alicent perpetuates the sexual double standard script (Kim et al., 2007), not showing any pleasure in sex, and her relationship with Viserys is portrayed as him wanting to have sex (thus, sex as masculinity), while she isn't interested.

Meanwhile, Rhaenyra and Daemon are making their way through the pleasure house. Rhaenyra is still a virgin at this point in the story and is now exposed to a world that she has never known.

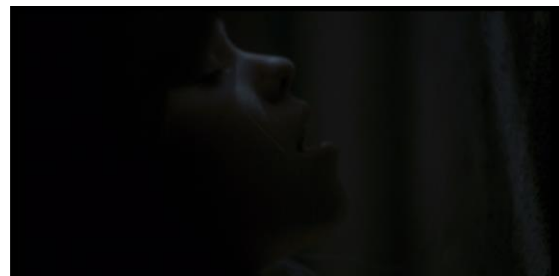
Rhaenyra: What is this place?

Daemon: It's where people come to take what they want. Fucking is a pleasure, you see. For the woman as it is the man (E4).

Rhaenyra has grown up in patriarchal society with the notion that sex is simply a marital duty that women must partake in, not enjoy. Daemon now shows her that sex is not just that, but something that women can take pleasure in, as well.



E4: Screenshot 4.8



E4: Screenshot 4.9

The consequent shots of the faces of Alicent and Rhaenyra during sexual encounters highlights their different approaches to sex. Alicent is lying still, her expression barely portraying any emotion, her eyes looking at the distance; she is not present in the moment nor enjoying what is happening. She is simply fulfilling a duty. On the other hand, Rhaenyra's head is tilted backwards, her lips parted, her eyes closed. She is enjoying what is happening and taking pleasure from it.

Rhaenyra proceeds to develop into a sexual agent, taking the lead and initiating her sexual encounters with both Criston and Daemon. She is portrayed as enjoying sex and actively separates it from the duties of marriage, when she tells her betrothed Laenor that they should both go ahead and have sex with others, once they have done the duty of creating heirs.

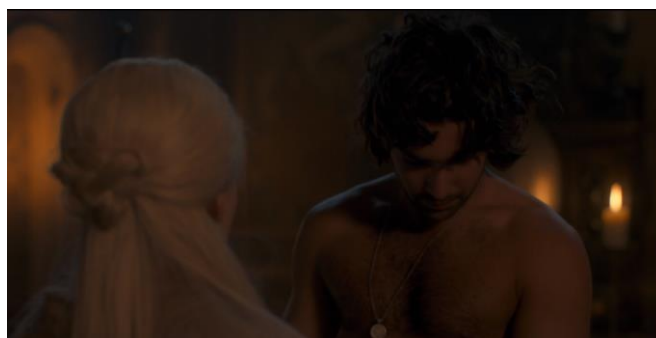


E4: Screenshot 4.12

In the above image it is Rhaenyra who is leading Criston to her bedroom. She initiates the sex, kissing him first, and undressing him. Generally, *HotD* depicts Rhaenyra as a young woman who enjoys sex and actively seeks it out. Her sexual desires aren't repressed or ridiculed but passed off as something natural to have for a young woman, even if the society she lives in dictates otherwise. The portrayal of Rhaenyra goes completely against the sexual double standard script (Kim et al., 2007), exhibiting that sex isn't something masculine to want, but also fits with femininity.

4.3.2. A Realistic Female Gaze

A much-uttered critique on *Game of Thrones* is the use of the male gaze, meaning that the female body is objectified, sexualized and portrayed as something to be looked at by heterosexual men (Mulvey, 1975; Needham, 2017; Schubart & Gjelsvik, 2016). For *House of the Dragon*, the male gaze has been supplanted for that of a woman. Instead of following the perspective of a male and their pleasure during sexual intercourse, it is the female perspective that is employed.



E4: Screenshot 4.22

In this shot, for instance, the viewer is exposed to Criston's naked torso. Rhaenyra's head is visible from the back; thus, the viewer literally gets to see her perspective of Criston (Machin & Mayr, 2012). During the sexual intercourse, it is mostly Rhaenyra's emotion that is shown. Her pleasure is visible on her face, and their bodies intertwine in a manner that is not degrading towards Rhaenyra and shows both of them naked evenly.

The sex scene between Rhaenyra and Criston shows two awkward teenagers who have sex together for the first time. Instead of objectifying their bodies and glorifying the experience, a more realistic approach is taken. The viewer is taken along the long process of undressing and sees them cast shy glances at each other's bodies. During the intercourse, multiple common sexual positions are shown, which is a realistic visual as well.

During this sex scene, another common TV trope is reversed. In medieval TV portrayals, sex scenes recurrently start with the man slowly undressing the woman, particularly the corset she is wearing. In *HotD*, the opposite happens, as Rhaenyra is slowly undressing Criston, taking off his armor. She is portrayed as the active agent, desiring his clothes to come off. Criston is passive and nervous; a role that is usually reserved for the female character (Aubrey et al., 2020).



E4: Screenshot 4.15

The female perspective is employed in most of the sex scenes that are apparent in *House of the Dragon*, which, admittedly, aren't that many. For instance, it is Alicent's face and her experience that the camera is focused on when she is having sex with Viserys. Furthermore, there is a scene that shows Daemon and Mysaria having sex. This scene is more focused on Daemon, although Mysaria expresses enjoyment during the intercourse, and her perspective becomes evident later. The only other sex scene in the first season of

HotD happens between Rhaenyra and Daemon, which is from Rhaenyra's perspective, showing her pleasure, as well. It is all very contrary to *Game of Thrones*, where sex scenes were used as a way to entertain the male audience, from the male perspective; even when showing sexual violence (Needham, 2017).

4.3.3. Male and Female Nudity

On-Screen Nakedness. While there is nudity displayed in *House of the Dragon*, the number of naked characters exposed in the TV show's first season is redundant in comparison to *Game of Thrones*. Out of ten episodes, a scene is located in a brothel in only two of them (episode 1 and episode 4). In *GoT*, these scenes were set with a distinct male gaze, with men visiting the pleasure house, usually fully clothed, with the room filled with naked women pleasuring men while not showing any sexual agency or enjoyment (Needham, 2017). Furthermore, naked women were used to sensationalize scenes with long monologues or less exciting events.

The brothel scenes in *House of the Dragon* are of a different nature. Men and women are roaming around the rooms, dressed in heavy clothing and naked alike. It is not obvious who is working there and who is visiting; the viewer only sees people sexually enjoying each other. The darkness in the shots sometimes makes it more difficult to discern whether the naked people shown are men or women. Whereas there was a lot of insincere lesbian sexual action between women purely for the enjoyment of the male audience (both in the scene and the actual viewers) in *Game of Thrones*, this is not the case in *HotD*. There is gay action going on between two men in one of the scenes, not fabricated for enjoyment of others, but for themselves.

During sex scenes, the nudity displayed is limited and predominantly equally distributed between male and female characters. When Daemon and Mysaria have sex, for instance. Afterwards, both are shown naked from behind; although Daemon covers up quickly while Mysaria stays nude for the remainder of the scene.



E1: Screenshot 1.4



E1: Screenshot 1.5

Absence of Visual Sexual Objectification. Whenever women were portrayed naked in a scene, it's done in a natural way that doesn't sexually objectify their bodies. In the shot of Mysaria above, she is naked, which makes sense as they just had sex. The scene continues with Mysaria nude, but the camera angle and her hair disguises most of her body. She is not simply an unimportant naked person put in the scene to look at, but she is revealed to care for Daemon and to know him well. She is reassuring him, while he shows her his vulnerable side.

The female characters in *House of the Dragon* are barely ever naked, but that wouldn't necessarily mean that their bodies can't be sexually objectified to the viewer. However, this is not the case. The female characters are often dressed in sturdy materials with high necklines and dark colors; in contrast to their flimsy clothing in other contemporary TV shows and in *Game of Thrones* (Needham, 2017). Their décolletage is never revealed in the dresses that they wear, nor is any emphasis put on the more sensual aspects of their bodies. Characters such as Rhaenys are even depicted in their female battle armor.

4.3.4. Verbal Female Objectification

Contrastingly, while women aren't visually objectified by the camera, textual analysis revealed that (male) characters repeatedly sexually objectify female characters in their language. Women are intermittently labeled as 'whore' or 'cunt' throughout the TV series, thus verbally reducing them with sexual terms (Ryan & Lenos, 2020). There are no similar words used for men, although a male character is also referred to as a 'cunt' at some point (episode 4).

Daemon: I think my bronze bitch is happier for my absence. [...] In the Vale, men are said to fuck sheep instead of women. I can assure you, the sheep are prettier (E1).

The problematic views of the patriarchal society the characters of *House of the Dragon* live in seep through in the language that is used. Daemon refers to his wife Rhea as 'my bronze bitch': signifying her as an object that can be owned by him and degrading her (Ryan & Lenos, 2020). He goes on to compare women to sheep and reduces women from independent people to objects to be fucked by men. By concluding that sheep are prettier than the women, Daemon implies that beauty is the most important quality of the female gender; a value that is comparable with sheep.

Women are also reduced to an object to be married off. Their worth as human beings are connected by men to their virtue. Once they have had sex, they have no value in the marriage market anymore.

Viserys: You fucking... You have ruined her! What lord will wed her now? In this condition? (E4).

During this conversation with Daemon, Viserys uses multiple synonyms for 'ruined', reiterating that Rhaenyra's value as a person is simply her virtue and the ability for her to marry someone of a high position. He refers to Rhaenyra as the passive object. Utilizing the transitivity system (Machin & Mayr, 2012), it becomes apparent that material processes (have, will) are dominant in Viserys's speech when talking about Rhaenyra, making the male participants (Daemon, nameless lord) powerful over the passive participant (Rhaenyra).

When female characters are discussed in the light of marriage, they are reduced to passive sexual objects, to be traded and owned by men. However, during other conversations about and with women, there is a lot less objectification evident in the language use of the characters.

4.3.5. Refining Sexual Abuse

While there is plenty of violence and gore depicted in *House of the Dragon*, sexual cruelty wasn't included explicitly on the screen. In contrast to *Game of Thrones*, where the amount of rape and gendered violence, together with the male-centered approach to it induced a lot of recrimination (Ferreday, 2015; Schubart & Gjelsvik, 2016). However, just because the sexual abuse wasn't pushed in the faces of the audience, it played a subtle yet significant role in the story. The few moments connected to sexual abuse aren't sensational, simple scenes that diminishes female characters, but they are complicated situations with substantial, thought-provoking implications.

The audience of *HotD* didn't have to watch a girl be raped; Aegon sexually assaulting the servant Dyana happened off-screen. Dyana comes to Alicent after it happened, and the scene shows the pain and trauma that the girl went through, without explicitly showing the event. The scene is focused on Dyana and her experience, fully appreciating her perspective and her suffering. A heavy scene that is very relevant in today's day and age.

Alicent: [...] though I believe you are not to blame, others might not be so trusting. They might think you were trying to besmirch the Prince, or worse... that you're the sort of girl that might have enticed him in the first place (E8).

Alicent is voicing the fears of all the women who have experienced a sexual assault about what others will believe and think of them. Overall, this scene isn't about a man raping a woman for whatever reason; it is about the effects of a sexual assault on a woman and the painful emotions that come with it.

Abusing sex to gain power over a man is an action often executed by Cersei in *Game of Thrones*, but also critiqued for sending the message that women need to use their sexuality to become powerful, instead of their wits (Schubart & Gjelsvik, 2016). Near the end of the season, the viewers of *House of the Dragon* find that Alicent does something similar, albeit also different. The character Larys has been seen in her service throughout the episodes, but in episode 9 it is revealed that his information and actions came at a price. Alicent shows him her feet, to which he is apparently sexually attracted, and lets him pleasure himself at the sight of them. Although Alicent indeed uses her body for power

over Larys, the situation is more complex than that. Larys has a lot of important information and has proved himself (after murdering his father and brother) to be a dangerous man with no conscience. Alicent needs him on her side, and Larys takes advantage of this. She may gain power, but she is also trapped in a complicated situation.



E9: Screenshot 9.18

The screenshot above portrays Alicent's face when Larys is pleasuring himself. She is looking away from him, disgust and sadness apparent on her features. The close-up shot of her face emphasizes how she is trapped, by enclosing her in the frame (Ryan & Lenos, 2020). It is not the look of an empowered woman.

4.4. The Adverse Side of Motherhood

4.4.1. The Childbed is our Battlefield

A recurring topic that runs through the first season of *House of the Dragon* is that of childbirth. There are a total of four labor scenes depicted, each different from the other, but all with the same theme: the childbed is a woman's battlefield. None of the scenes shy away from the gruesome reality that can accompany (especially medieval) childbirth. The parallel with the battlefield is introduced almost immediately in the first episode, when Rhaenyra tells her mother that she doesn't want to get married and have children, but that she wants to be a knight.

Aemma: We have royal wombs, you and I. The childbed is our battlefield. We must learn to face it with a stiff lip (E1).

By comparing fighting a battle with giving birth, *HotD* essentially compares the medieval duties of men and women and presents them as equally heavy, and by extension, portrays men and women as equals. This comparison is not only presented in words, but Aemma's childbirth scene visually illustrates the point as well. Shots of her trying to give birth, screaming and in agony, are interchanged with cuts of a grim fight that has broken out at the tourney. The final episode mirrors this, when Rhaenyra's labor is intercut with scenes of Daemon plotting a war.

Gritty Realisms of Giving Birth. Out of the four childbirths portrayed, only one of them goes well. All of them, however, portray labor in a different yet realistic way. The different positions in which women give birth, for instance. TV almost exclusively portrays women lying on their back, while in truth there are many different positions that women can prefer (Cummins, 2020).



E6: Screenshot 6.17

Laena, for instance, is shown on her knees, leaning forward over the bed. Aemma is in the classical position, lying down on her back. Rhaenyra, on the other hand, is depicted as sitting upright, squatting on the ground.

The three scenes in which labor goes wrong, twice killing both mother and child, and once resulting in a still-born baby, portray the abysmal yet true reality of giving birth without modern medicine. Even with today's medical care, childbirth is still dangerous, and pregnancies don't always end well. The one scene that does portray a labor that goes well (Rhaenyra in episode 6), also shows some realistic aspects of giving birth that TV often glosses over; what happens after the baby has made its entrance into the world. While the camera often turns away from the mother at this point, *House of the Dragon* sticks with

Rhaenyra. The viewers see the afterbirth happening, and the blood trail that Rhaenyra leaves behind while walking with extreme difficulty after the birth.

Servant: To ease the pain, Princess. [...] You'll feel better in a day or two, when the milk dries up (E6).

During a meeting with the Small Council later that day, Rhaenyra's nipples start leaking milk, right through her dress. Afterwards, the viewers learn that this is a painful process that takes a few days before becoming easier. These are all different and difficult things that come with giving birth, which *HotD* addresses head-on in a respectful manner.

Although the birthing scenes are more diverse and complicated than in contemporary TV portrayals (Cummins, 2020), most of the birthing scenes do still fall along the five criteria of media representations of birth (Takeshita, 2017). Thus, there is still progress to be made by including the other, more positive, side of childbirth and showing a more complete picture of the process.

Gendered Violence or Female Empowerment? The childbirth scenes in *House of the Dragon* don't beat around the bush. The realism of it comes with violent visuals and traumatic graphics that don't spare the viewer. There may be no excessive rape scenes such as in *Game of Thrones* (Schubart & Gjelsvik, 2016), but the labors do portray women in pain in a brutal way, which could almost be interpreted as similarly gendered violence. However, an important critique against the rape scenes in *GoT* are centered around the unnecessary nature of the visuals and the focus on the male experience instead of the female one (Evans, 2018). This is a key difference with the childbirth scenes in *HotD*. Each scene was relevant to the plot of the story and most of them followed the female perspective, except for Aemma's birth scene, although her fear and emotions were still highlighted. Furthermore, while sexual violence is unnecessary in general, as it is an appalling event that women don't have to experience at all, childbirth is a natural occurrence that women do need to go through if they want to become mothers. Showcasing it, while this can be traumatic for women to see and should contain a trigger warning, doesn't promote gendered violence but illustrates the experiences of strong women.

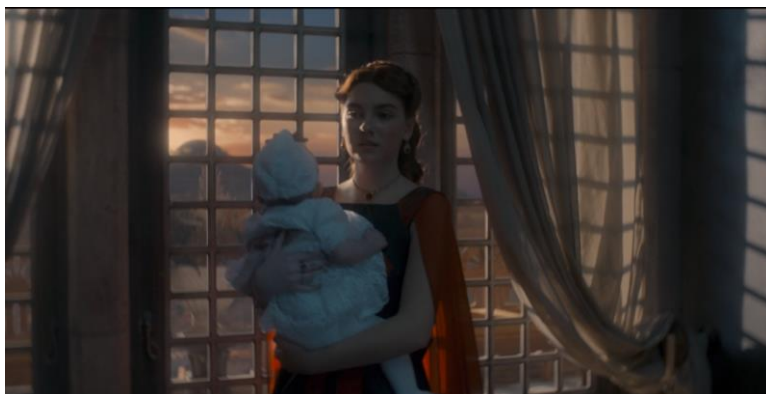
4.4.2. Motherhood as a Prison

The twenty-year timespan of the first season of *House of the Dragon* permits the viewer to meet the main female characters Alicent and Rhaenyra as teenage girls and to watch them grow up and become mothers. Both their views on motherhood as children and then what motherhood means for them when they become parents are featured. This in combination with other female characters and their storylines, brings forth a recurrent theme: that of motherhood as a prison. Becoming a mother, specifically in the world that the characters of *HotD* live in, is incredibly difficult, strenuous and constraining. Although the viewer also sees sporadic moments of the more positive side of motherhood, the TV show mostly exhibits the less beautiful part of being a mother.

Alicent's character fits with the construction of *motherhood as duty* (Ruf, 2020), as she believes that becoming (and wanting to become) a mother is the duty of every woman in the patriarchal society of Westeros. While this construction of motherhood is advocated by especially the men in *House of the Dragon*, the duty of becoming a mother isn't glorified. It is simply that: a duty to be fulfilled. Not only by women, as Viserys points out to Rhaenyra in episode 3, but men must marry and sire heirs as well. Rhaenyra especially is very averse to becoming a mother.

Rhaenyra: How romantic it must be to get imprisoned in a castle and
 made to squeeze out heirs (E4).

Rhaenyra ties motherhood up with marriage, as it signifies the same thing to her: freedom and agency that is taken away. There is use of nominalization, deleting the agent of who imprisons who, and who makes who squeeze out heirs. This removes a sense of time and specificity (Machin & Mayr, 2012), making the sentence both applicable to Rhaenyra, and to Alicent, who Rhaenyra says this to and who is momentarily in that position.



E4: Screenshot 4.32

The above screenshot signifies how motherhood is indeed a prison for Alicent. She is holding her baby, who is crying unrelentingly in the shot, looking sad and dejected. The low sunlight from outside casts shadows on her and the room, which, combined with the structure of the window frames, gives the impression that she is standing behind prison bars (Ryan & Lenos, 2020).

House of the Dragon doesn't show any character who actively wishes for children and who inherently, truly wants to become a mother. The idea of motherhood as the ultimate life fulfillment for women, and the idea that all women want to, and are suited to, become mothers, which was apparent in *Game of Thrones* (Ruf, 2020), doesn't appear in *HotD*. There is only one scene in which a male character, Daemon, assumes that Mysaria would want to become a mother. Mysaria immediately rejects this view.

Mysaria: I ensured long ago that I would never be threatened by childbirth (E2).

Not only does Mysaria not long to become a mother, she also actively views this as a burden, something that could threaten her and her ambitions. Daemon instantly backtracks and expresses his real thoughts on the matter, which is that he agrees and finds children to be annoying.

4.4.3. Being a Parent: Effect on Characters and Plot

The Driving Force of a Mother's Love. The love that the female characters in the plot feel for their children plays a significant part in the story told in *House of the Dragon*.

Alicent believes that if Rhaenyra became queen, her children would be in danger, for they would challenge Rhaenyra's claim. It is this idea that starts to cause the rift between Alicent and Rhaenyra, and what motivates Alicent to usurp the throne for her son Aegon.

Rhaenyra's love for her son, Lucerys, is what eventually starts the civil war that has been brewing between her and Alicent's family. While she had been holding off on attacking and considering the terms sent by the Hightowers, the death of Lucerys by the hands of Alicent's son, Aemond, means that all bets are off.

The love that Alicent and Rhaenyra bear for their children shows the viewer how powerful they are as people, as we see this emotion as a catalyst for some of the powerful, strong things they do. When the royal children fight and Lucerys takes out Aemond's eye, Alicent lets anger rule her head and tries to attack Rhaenyra.

Otto: And yet... I've never seen that side of you, my daughter. I even doubted its existence. [...] We play an ugly game. And now, for the first time, I see that you have the determination to win it (E7).

Alicent finds power and strength through her love for her children, as Otto points out. However, unlike in *Game of Thrones*, motherhood is not the only attribute that makes her, or the other female characters, powerful; *maternal power: motherhood as a status* isn't manifested in *HotD* (Ruf, 2020). The female characters love their children deeply, but this is not their main characteristic. They are complicated women, whose mother's love is a driving force and motivation for their actions, but certainly not their only incentive. Nor are their characters simplified to fit with the idea that society has about motherhood, such as what is done to Cersei and Catelyn in *GoT* (Schubart & Gjelsvik, 2016).

Good Mother, Bad Mother. Throughout the episodes, there are several scenes in which we see Rhaenyra and Alicent interact with their children. Alicent has a hard time with motherhood, especially with her oldest son, Aegon. She is often screaming at him or even slapping him. She is gentler with her daughter, Helaena, who she sits with sometimes and hugs once. For Rhaenyra, on the other hand, motherhood seems to come easy, contradictory to her views on motherhood when she was younger. Her children come to her for advice and look up to her.

Lucerys: I'm not like you.
Rhaenyra: In what way, sweet boy?
Lucerys: I'm not so... perfect (E10).

This interaction together with the soft, almost romantic music playing in the background signifies the relationship between Rhaenyra and her children. She is very kind and loving with him, and Lucerys idealizes her.

Although neither Rhaenyra nor Alicent is portrayed as the clear antagonist in the story, one could argue that Rhaenyra is the protagonist, being the main character and the rightful heir to the Throne. However, both Rhaenyra and Alicent are nuanced and complicated characters, with their own understandable motivations and good and bad qualities. *House of the Dragon* does portray Rhaenyra as a good mother, and Alicent as a bad mother, but despite this, the construction of motherhood *good mother, bad mother: motherhood as an ideal* (Ruf, 2020), does not apply as it did for *Game of Thrones*. This depiction of motherhood relies on the female's character being defined by their performance as a mother. Even though one could interpret Alicent as the antagonist, she has been established as a complex character, not just a bad person. The same goes for Rhaenyra.

None of the four archetypes that Kaplan (200) distinguished of mothers on TV (*The Good Mother, The Bad Mother, The Heroic Mother, The Weak Mother*) can be applied to the female characters in *House of the Dragon*. Mostly because the characterization of women doesn't revolve around their status as a mother, but rather, their being a mother is an aspect of who they are. The female characters all have individual, distinctive personalities with a lot of depth and nuance, thus making it implausible to reduce them to simple archetypes.

5. Conclusion

While there is improvement in the portrayal of women on television shows, stereotypical representations of female characters and their storylines are still customary (Yang et al., 2020). This is a problem which has implications on how women are perceived and treated in our contemporary society (Garretson, 2015; Oppliger, 2007). The first step for social change is to understand the issue; therefore, research on TV shows and their depiction of the female gender is necessary and important.

A popular television show that has attracted a lot of critique on their portrayal of women, while at the same time praise for having female characters that are dynamic enough to be critically analyzed, is *Game of Thrones* (Evans, 2018; Gjelsvik & Schubart, 2016; Marques, 2019). The original TV show has ended but left a legacy and a media universe that resulted in the airing of a prequel series in 2022: *House of the Dragon*. Utilizing the main points of criticism that emerged on female representation in *Game of Thrones* as a foundation, I analyzed in what way women in *House of the Dragon* are depicted.

The aim of this study was to answer the subsequent research question: *How are female power, sexuality and motherhood portrayed in HBO's Game of Thrones prequel series, House of the Dragon (2022-)?* Through conducting a multimodal critical discourse analysis with the framework presented by Machin and Mayr (2012), I analyzed all 10 current episodes (one season) of *HotD*. The main results that ensued from the analysis are outlined below.

5.1. Main Results

The portrayal of women in *House of the Dragon* is done in a constructive and realistic way in comparison to *Game of Thrones*. The show displays elements of the themes of power, sexuality, and motherhood that show the complex and nuanced nature of these topics. The female characters are complicated, empowered women, who aren't subjected to archetypes such as in *GoT* (Marques, 2019). Overall, the results show that Hollywood can be aware of the criticism they receive and use it to improve their portrayal of female

characters and supports the notion that female representation on TV is making progress (Yang et al., 2020).

The duality of Feminism in a Patriarchal Society. The medieval fantasy world in which the characters of *House of the Dragon* exist, is a patriarchal society, largely mirroring the hegemonic discourses and social order that existed in medieval times. It's a world in which women are not believed to be equal to men. It is a difficult task for *House of the Dragon* to portray this world and make the characters with sexist views and actions relatable; while simultaneously conveying the message that women are capable, powerful and equal to men. It is a task, however, that they largely succeeded in; in contrast to *Game of Thrones* and other contemporary medieval fantasy TV shows (Donstrup, 2019; Meredith, 2015; Schubart & Gjelsvik, 2016). The women in *House of the Dragon* challenge the hegemonic gender norms of a sexist society instead of perpetuating them, portraying real progress in the field of feminist film (Ruti, 2016). The different results of visual and textual analysis, for one, express this. Verbally, women are objectified often by male characters, which fits with their position in their patriarchal society. Visually, the camera depicts the different genders as equals, occasionally with women as more powerful. The verbal objectification of women makes sense in context of the society in which the characters live and they are (partly) justified by that, but mostly because the camera and creators of the show prove the linguistic discourses wrong. On top of that, the hypocrisy of patriarchal values is called out by characters multiple times.

The Empowered Complicated (White) Woman. Female characters in *House of the Dragon* are strong women with complex characters. They do not renounce their femininity and draw strength from female traits such as compassion, in contrast to *Game of Thrones* (Trejo Morales, 2020). While their natural agency is restricted due to the patriarchal nature of their world, they are still shown to have an impact on their surroundings with their decisions. While not all women are as empowered and strong at the start of the series, the viewer gets to see them growing and developing into those attributes. Rhaenyra, Alicent and Rhaenys are all women who encompass the conception of power defined as *power-to*; they find their personal agency and self-efficacy as women (Sutherland, 2013). While most female characters are mothers, this feature does not define them, nor do they fit within any of the typical representations of mothers on TV (Kaplan, 2000).

On the other hand, while the female characters in *House of the Dragon* are all dynamic, complicated characters, there are not many women represented in the TV show, fitting with the findings of Murphy (2015) on the quantity of female representation. Most of the supporting characters are men, thus progress can be made by introducing more interesting female side characters. Furthermore, of those female characters, almost all of them are white women, with the exception of Laena. While she is portrayed in a strong, non-stereotypical way, the viewer only sees her sporadically and she is killed off quite soon. Thus, *House of the Dragon* does perpetuate the view that it is mostly white women that get to be empowered and challenge gender norms (Sutherland & Feltey, 2017).

Solidarity amongst women and the conception of *power-with* (Sutherland, 2013) are also scarcely established in the TV show; appropriating the findings of Sutherland and Feltey (2017). The women in *HotD* mostly rival and/or dislike one another. Empowerment is constructed as an individual characteristic, instead of something that can be found in friendship and women supporting each other.

Following (and Respecting) the Female. Generally, *House of the Dragon* often utilizes the female perspective. The emotions and thoughts of female characters are conveyed actively to the viewer. All the while, the focus on the experience of women doesn't diminish the male characters' perspective. While *Game of Thrones* often utilized the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975) on women, especially during sex scenes, and displayed a lot of unnecessary gendered violence while focusing on the male experience (Evans, 2018; Schubart & Gjelsvik, 2016), *House of the Dragon* has taken a different approach. Women are not reduced to sexual objects but are either portrayed as sexual agents or their sexuality is a part of their storyline. There is no on-screen gendered violence in *HotD*, although the subject of sexual abuse is present but addressed in a considerate way, focusing on the experience of the female characters instead of displaying unnecessary sexual exploitation on-screen. The labor scenes do portray women in serious pain, but childbirth being a natural process (compared to rape) and portrayed mostly realistically, justifies it.

The importance of a more diverse team behind the scenes of a media production is realized as well: episodes which heavily feature sex (episode 4) and address sexual abuse (episode 8/9) are all directed and written by women (Appendix D). This supports the

findings of Yang et al. (2020) considering the positive relationship between good female representation and female crew members in high positions.

The Adverse Side of Motherhood. In contrast to *Game of Thrones*, motherhood is not represented as something that all women (should) want, as the only way for them to have power, nor as the defining characteristic of their personality (Ruf, 2020). While motherhood is considered to be a duty, fitting with the patriarchal norms in their society, not all characters desire it; the TV show doesn't shame women for not having maternal urges. *House of the Dragon* portrays the side of motherhood that constricts women without portraying mothers as sadistic women when they have goals and wishes that go beyond motherhood (Kaplan, 2000). Generally, by showing the negative features more prominently, the show actually nuances motherhood and portrays the concept as more complicated than the simple joy and duty of being a mother.

While the childbirth scenes in *House of the Dragon* do show a more diverse and complete picture of (the dangers of) giving birth, especially in different birthing positions, in contrast to most contemporary TV depictions (Cummins, 2020); the TV series do perpetuate other stereotypical birth media representations. The risks of childbirth are emphasized, reliance on technology is normalized, and women are portrayed as passive and without agency (Takeshita, 2017). The birth of Rhaenyra in the final episode is the only scene that really puts her in the position of a powerful women by showing her giving birth to a still baby all by herself. Thus, while there is some improvement on the representation of childbirth in comparison to other TV depictions, negative stereotypes are also perpetuated.

5.3. Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study illustrates the importance of studying multiple aspects of female portrayal in a television show as it creates a clearer overall understanding of how women are constructed on TV series. The findings from this research also underline the value of doing a multimodal analysis, as the different aspects that are analyzed create a more complete picture. As this is the first study that scientifically analyzes *House of the Dragon*, research can use these findings as a starting point for more in-depth analyses. Especially factors such as intertextuality and intersectionality can be explored further while using this research as a basis. Moreover, the results of this study show what non-problematic

portrayals of women on TV can look like, adding a different perspective than those of different stereotypes and archetypes. This may influence future research to focus more on how positive, realistic female portrayals are constructed.

As for practical implications, this study reveals that Hollywood can improve and that being critical of female representation is of value, as media producers can and want to use this criticism to improve (Muñoz, 2022). This research displays the different aspects of the construction of women and how they contribute to their overall representation as strong, capable female characters. Moreover, the distinction between the view that the world within a TV show has on women versus the message that it sends to the viewers is made, making the difference easier to ascertain for the audience.

Furthermore, the findings of this study can be utilized by the creators of *House of the Dragon* for the making of following seasons. It is also relevant for other TV makers, as these findings illustrate what to do and what not to do in the portrayal of female characters and femininity in general.

5.3. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

There are several limitations that come with this study. Firstly, due to the scope of this research, the analysis of the portrayal of women was limited to one TV show, making the findings of the study less generalizable for other TV shows. While the female representation on *House of the Dragon* is compared with *Game of Thrones*, the comparison comes forth from existing research on *GoT*, not from directly analyzing it. By using the criticism on female depiction in *Game of Thrones* as a base and frame for this analysis, there was less room for differing themes regarding the portrayal of women in *House of the Dragon* to appear from the data.

Due to the scope of this thesis, it wasn't possible to utilize other facets of feminist film theory and how they relate to *HotD*, such as intersectionality with class, race and queer theory. Furthermore, as there is only one season of *HotD* released thus far, the analysis cannot take any future happenings in the development of the characters or the plotline into account. Due to the TV show being recently released at the time of writing, no other research on *House of the Dragon* could be used to establish this study or to compare and contrast with.

Concerning future research, a more accurate comparison between *HotD* and *GoT* could be made by analyzing both shows simultaneously and comparing the findings. Studying *House of the Dragon* as an individual entity is also recommended, so that concepts and subject matter can emerge directly from the data. There are also several other topics that tie in with female representation and contemporary societal discourses that could be analyzed in *House of the Dragon*, such as the portrayal of different sexualities, the construction of identity and toxic masculinity. Especially black feminism and intersectionality would be interesting to study, for *HotD* distinguishes themselves from *Game of Thrones* by including black characters in the main cast. Studying this would give a more overarching overview of how characters and discourses are constructed on the TV show. Lastly, it would be interesting to conduct an audience reception study and find whether the takeaway of viewers is similar to the findings of this study.

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Appendix A. Example Plot Segmentation

Table 1. Plot segmentation episode 1

Time stamps	Scene	Description of scene/events	Power/sex/mother	Link to theoretical concepts/observations/notes	SS
00:00:15 - 00:02:10	1	The Great Council of King Jahaerys, deciding over his heir	Female power	Immediately establishes the theme of the patriarchy and female submissiveness	
00:02:12 - 00:02:48	2	Introduction text about HotD			
00:02:49 - 00:05:02	3	Rhaenyra flies around King's Landing on her dragon Syrax. She lands and talks to Alicent.			
00:05:03 - 00:06:21	4	Horse and carriage drives through King's Landing into the Red Keep. Alicent and Rhaenyra walk arm in arm through the castle halls.			
00:06:22 - 00:07:25	5	They arrive in Queen Aemma's chambers. Rhaenyra talks to her pregnant mother.	Motherhood	They have a conversation about the childbed being their battlefield.	1.1x - 1.3x
00:07:26 - 00:09:58	6	King Viserys and the Small Council talk about the Triarchy and the Crabfeeder. Rhaenyra walks in late to be the King's cupbearer. They talk about the Heir's Tourney. Viserys is convinced he is about to have a boy.			
00:09:59 - 00:12:01	7	Rhaenyra and Ser Harrold walk into the Throne Room. Daemon is sitting on the Iron Throne. They talk about Daemon thinking he is the heir. He gives Rhaenyra a Valyrian steel necklace.		Daemon and Rhaenyra talk in High Valyrian. Relative size: Daemon and Rhaenyra are portrayed similarly	1.4x
00:12:02 - 00:13:36	8	Rhaenyra and Alicent are outside, studying. Rhaenyra is worried		Princess Nymeria, the warrior queen, is mentioned.	1.5x - 1.7x

		about her mothers pregnancy.			
00:13:37 - 00:14:39	9	King Viserys sits in his chambers, his back uncovered, with a Maester looking at his wound from the Iron Throne. Otto tells the Grand Maester it must be kept secret.			
00:14:40 - 00:17:34	10	Queen Aemma is in the bath. King Viserys comes in and talks to her. Aemma tells him that this is the last child she will bear.	Motherhood	Aemma vulnerable and naked in the tub, while Viserys is fully dressed, sitting upright, over her.	1.8x - 1.12x
00:17:35 - 00:20:30	11	Daemon takes his City Watch into King's Landing. They round up murderers, rapers, and thieves, and punish them violently.			
00:20:31 - 00:23:48	12	Otto informs Viserys about Daemon's actions. They walk into the Small Council, where Daemon is waiting. Daemon defends himself.		"My bronze bitch" "In the vale men are said to fuck sheep instead of women" Female objectification as sexual objects by Daemon	
00:23:49 - 00:25:11	13	Daemon has sex with Mysaria in a pleasurehouse. Afterwards, she comforts him.	Sexualization	Both Daemon and Mysaria are displayed naked evenly.	1.1 - 1.7
00:25:12 - 00:31:35	14	Viserys announces that Queen Aemma started her labors at the start of the tournament. Daemon challenges Otto's son. Viserys leaves to go to Aemma.		Rhaenyra is late again, showing her to be rebellious and uncaring	
00:31:36 - 00:32:17	15.1	The Grand Maester tells Viserys that the infant is breech.	Motherhood		1.8- 1.10
00:32:18 - 00:33:22	15.2	Aemma is in pain. At the tournament, a violent fight breaks			

00:33:23 - 00:34:45	15.3	out between two knights. The Grand Maester tells Viserys that he has to choose: sacrifice Aemma or lose both her and the child.	Female power + motherhood	No female autonomy	1.11
00:34:46 - 00:35:54	15.4	At the tournament, Ser Criston Cole and Daemon tilt against each other.			
00:35:55 - 00:37:25	15.5	Viserys chooses to sacrifice Aemma, against her will. The Grand Maester cuts her belly open.	Motherhood + female power		1.12
00:37:26 - 00:38:23	15.6	Criston unhorses Daemon. The Prince challenges Criston in a contest of arms. They fight.			
00:38:24 - 00:40:14	15.7	A segment starts, intercutting scenes of Aemma's forced c-section and the fight between Criston and Daemon. The baby is taken from Aemma's womb. Daemon yields to Criston.	Motherhood	The intercutting of scenes from battle and Aemma's labor, reinforces the idea of the childbed as a battlefield.	1.13- 1.25
00:40:15 - 00:40:47	15.8	Criston asks Rhaenyra for her favour.			
00:40:48 - 00:41:49	15.9	Aemma is dead. The baby is a boy. He is named Baelon. Otto is spreading the news of Aemma's death at the tournament. The baby's breathing falters.			
00:41:50 - 00:43:58	16	Aemma's and Baelon's funeral. They are cremated by Syrax at Rhaenyra's orders.		Rhaenyra as strong person to cremate her mother and brother.	
00:43:59 - 00:47:42	17	Viserys enters the Small Council. Daemon is secretly listening. The members of the Small Council disagree on	Female power		

		who should be heir; Daemon or Rhaenyra. Viserys gets angry and exits.			
00:47:43 - 00:49:39	18	Alicent enters Otto's chambers. He tells her to go to King Viserys and offer him comfort.	Female power/sexualization	Alicent as chess piece for Otto.	
00:49:40 - 00:51:30	19	Viserys is working on his model of Old Valyria. Alicent comes in with a book. She tells Viserys that she is sorry.			
00:51:31 - 00:53:30	20	Daemon is in a pleasurehouse. He is asked to speech. The scene shifts to Otto, who is telling Viserys about this in the Small Council. We see Daemon speeching, and Otto telling the King what he said, namely that he called Baelon "the Heir for a Day".	Sexualization	Pleasure house showing naked men and women alike, as well as dressed men and women.	1.26
00:53:31 - 00:56:40	21	Viserys confronts Daemon in the Throne Room. They fight. Viserys tells Daemon to go to Runestone, and that he decided on another heir. Daemon leaves.	Power	Rhaenyra made heir not because of her competence, but because of Daemon	
00:56:41 - 01:03:21	22	Viserys and Rhaenyra are in the Crypt of Baelor. He tells her that she will be Queen. Images of Rhaenyra and Alicent getting ready for her coronation appear while Viserys is talking. Lords pledge fealty to Rhaenyra. Viserys tells her about the Dream of Aegon the			1.27

Conqueror, and the need of a Targaryen on the throne to survive. Rheanyra is crowned as heir. Daemon and Mysaria leave on Caraxes.

Appendix B. Example Textual Analysis

Red: word connotations
Green: overlexicalization
Blue: suppression
Orange: structural opposition
Yellow: lexical choices

Transcript episode 4

The throne room. Daemon is called in by Viserys.

GUARD The King demands an audience, my Prince.

DAEMON Take your fucking hands off me.

VISERYS My daughter. Won't you even deny it?

DAEMON I need to understand the charge before I can attempt to discredit it.

VISERYS You defiled her. Still, you say nothing. **Daemon as active, Rhaenyra as passive.**

DAEMON Oh, what does it matter, brother? **When we were Rahimyar's age, we fucked our way through most of the brothels on the Street of Silk.** **Comparing Rhaenyra to himself and Viserys.**

VISERYS We were **young men**. She is **just a girl**. Your niece! **Men as the norm, women as "the other".**

DAEMON Rhaenyra's a woman-grown. Better her first experience be with me than **some whore**.

VISERYS You fucking... **You have ruined her! What lord will wed her now?** In this condition? **Rhaenyra as passive agent, as an object. Synonym of her virtue as something that defines her worth as a person.**

DAEMON Who gives a fuck what some lord thinks? You are the dragon. Your word is truth and law.

VISERYS I have spent a lifetime defending you. But your heart is even blacker than I thought. I should disinherit her as I already did you and be done with it.

DAEMON **Wed her to me**. When I offered up my crown, you said I could have anything. **I want Rhaenyra. I'll take her** as she is, and wed her in the tradition of our house. **Rhaenyra as an object, something to be owned**

Appendix C. Example Visual Analysis

Denotation

- Setting**
- Dragonstone, on a bridge.
 - Rhaenyra is sitting on top of her dragon, Syrax. She has just landed there.
 - There is a building and rock behind her, which are obscured by mist.
- Objects**
- Rhaenyra is wearing a sturdy, black jacket. She is covered by the material completely.
 - Her hair is blown back by the wind
- Salience**
- Even though it is day, the shot is quite dark in colour
 - Light is coming in from the left side
 - Rhaenyra is in focus
 - She is positioned in the middle of the frame, taking up space
- Shot**
- Medium shot
 - Straight angle
 - Rhaenyra flies in on Syrax and lands. She keeps Syrax under control, then mounts off to walk towards Otto and Daemon



Connotation

Rhaenyra flying in on her dragon is an act of power. The frays on her shoulder and neckline look like dragon scales, symbolizing her being a Targaryen; not just a dragonrider, but a dragon herself. She is wearing dark, sturdy and covering clothes, in contrast to the gowns we have seen women in before, which are usually flimsy, revealing and more light. It shows her as a powerful person. Her body language, sitting straight up, shoulders back, head up, show that she is confident. Her position in the middle of the frame, with a straight camera angle show that she is someone of importance.

Appendix D. Information about the Series

Table 2. Information per episode season 1

No.	Title	Director	Writer	Air date
1	“The Heirs of the Dragon”	Miguel Sapochnik	Ryan Condal	August 21, 2022
2	“The Rogue Prince”	Greg Yaitanes	Ryan Condal	August 28, 2022
3	“Second of his Name”	Greg Yaitanes	Gabe Fonseca & Ryan Condal	September 3, 2022
4	“King of the Narrow Sea”	Clare Kilner	Ira Parker	September 11, 2022
5	“We Light the Way”	Clare Kilner	Charmaine DeGraté	September 18, 2022
6	“The Princess and the Queen”	Miguel Sapochnik	Sara Hess	September 25, 2022
7	“Driftmark”	Miguel Sapochnik	Kevin Lau	October 2, 2022
8	“The Lord of the Tides”	Geeta Patel	Eileen Shim	October 9, 2022
9	“The Green Council”	Clare Kilner	Sara Hess	October 16, 2022
10	“The Black Queen”	Greg Yaitanes	Ryan Condal	October 23, 2022