Valar morghulis: Investigations into violence and nudity in the HBO television adaptation of G.R.R. Martin's Game of Thrones, Seasons 1-6
Spoilers (duh..)

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Abstract

There has been much discussion in the media about the portrayal of sex and violence in the HBO series Game of Thrones, and almost all of it has concentrated on the female characters. However none of the commentators have shown any attempt to actually look at the frequency or type of violence experienced between the sexes in the show, nor the frequency and types of nudity. This paper observed strict criteria to measure the frequencies and types of nudity and violence portrayed in the show with respect to gender and also the type of character experiencing it (main or supporting characters). We found that the violence was overwhelmingly experienced by the male characters (90.5%). This was not found to be due to male only war scenes which only comprised 16% of the total violence over the six seasons. We found that the nudity was also predominantly male (66.6%).

Keywords: Game of Thrones, Martin, HBO, Nudity, Gender, Feminism, Sex, Violence

Introduction

“All men must die” is the subtitle for season four of the popular HBO television series Game of Thrones (GoT). For those not familiar with the show, GoT is set in a mythical realm called Westeros in a medieval fantasy period complete with magic, giants, and dragons, but is well and truly produced in a modern politically correct period. It is particularly noted for its fantastic title sequence, conspicuous nudity, frequent graphic violence and the unexpected killing off of main characters.

GoT has prompted copious discussions about its portrayal of sex, nudity and violence. Almost all commentators, journalists and bloggers have focussed exclusively on the violence experienced by the female characters and the female nudity. Indeed some online forums have produced videos complaining that they want more male nudity (CollegeHumor, 2013) and applauding sexual violence against the male characters as "a welcome break (from the norm)” (Comic Book Girl 19, 2013).

There have been some attempts to 'statistically analyse' the violence in GoT but they have used highly questionable techniques. Tafkar (2015) claims to have found 50 'rape acts' in the television series. However, looking at the methodology, it seems she counted every consensual sex act that contained some aspect of power imbalance as rape. She also counted every mention of rape or suggestion of a mention of rape as an act of rape. If it was mentioned that a character was about to be gang raped, that was counted as 10 'rape acts'. If, over the course of the series, the same individual attack was mentioned three times, that was counted as three acts of rape.

The main problem with the type of advocacy research done by Tafkar is that it produces Orphan Statistics. Numbers that mean nothing without comparison numbers. Using the technique Tafkar used one could also say that GoT contained 9250 castration acts and had dragons filling the skies simply because they were mentioned.

It is unfortunate that this type of 'research' gets taken at face value and reported as accurate. It was
reported without question by Gizmodo (Anders, 2015) which was, in turn, reported as fact by ABC News Australia (Hartnell, 2017), thus perpetuating the narrative that GoT singles out women for violent acts.

In 2015, GoT showed an emotionally tense but graphically very mild scene of a female character being made to have sex with her husband on her wedding night. This became known as The Rape of Sansa and caused quite a commotion in newspapers, social media and blog sites. So many fans claimed to be 'rage quitting' the show that the phenomenon was being covered all over the internet (Faherty, 2015) (Whitney, 2015). Some sites have even refused to promote the show after it subjected one of its female characters to sex with a man (Pantozzi, 2015) while they embraced the violent and sexual brutalisation of hundreds of male characters. There have been a few articles calling out the hypocrisy of those GoT fans (Harry, 2015) but by and large the commentary has been highly gender biased.

This one sided discussion has even prompted cast members to speak out about how unbalanced the reviews are, pointing out that the male characters are also sexualised (Child, 2016) and subject to violence and deprivation. Indeed Conleth Hill, who plays the eunuch Varys, pointed out in a panel discussion at Comic Con 2015, that the male characters were more likely to experience violence, particularly sexual violence (Flicks And The City, 2015).

In the series, the phrase “All men must die” is meant to be a ye-olde aphorism in Westeros like “Death and Taxes.” It is meant to mean: “nobody lives forever.” However, in episode three of season three (e3s3), one of the main characters, Daenerys Targaryen, uses the term in a decidedly gender specific way. She reneges on a deal to purchase a large number of male slave-soldiers by having her dragon incinerate their previous master. She imperiously belittles her loyal male advisors (who have each saved her life on numerous occasions) and makes them walk behind her as a mark of submission while she walks in front with a newly purchased female slave-translator whom she is suddenly treating like an equal. She warns the slave girl that war is coming and there is a possibility she (the slave) may die. The slave girl replies resignedly “valar morghulis” (all men must die) and Daenerys replies: “Yes, but we are not men.”

If she had replied: “I am not a man,” one might have presumed she was talking about being high born, or even a magical person. She might have meant that she was an immortal or had a specific destiny that did not include a war time death. However, she said “we”. Us girls. She said it to and about a slave girl she had just met. She clearly meant: only males must die.

The rest of season three was scene upon scene of men being butchered, tortured, and sexually mutilated while the female characters remained unscathed. In fact, it was not until the penultimate episode of that season that any female character was hurt on screen at all.

This did not fit with the popular narrative, that women were being unfairly singled out for violence and objectification. The endless opinion pieces about the rape scenes and sexual violence against the female characters all focussed on the misogyny of HBO, but the actual violence on the screen was the exact opposite. There is a thirty minute video on You Tube showing all the deaths in seasons one though six (TheEuropeanGirl, 2016) and to say it is heavily male biased would be an understatement. Clearly something was amiss. Were women being unfairly treated by the series? Were the commentators, in fact, showing their own personal biases?

We decided to check.

In circumstances like this it is very important to reduce confirmation bias as much as possible. If violence was going to be measured, it must be restricted to actual violence. There must be a very strict rubric and it must be rigidly adhered to, and all acts of violence must be recorded, not just those against a particular sub-group.
**Methods**

Each episode was reviewed for particular pre-defined events and each of those events recorded.

**What constitutes a Main Character?**

There were an abundance of characters in *GoT* and we had to draw the line somewhere. We decided on the following criteria: a Main Character was one who appeared for more than four episodes, had a name and more than four lines of dialogue.

**Nudity**

This was broken down into toplessness, buttocks, pubic hair and full genitalia. It was then subdivided into genders and whether the character in question was a main character or an extra.

What constitutes nudity? Is a breast exposed in feeding a baby the same as a breast exposed in sexual congress? For our purposes, yes. Those breasts were exposed according to a running sheet and directorial decision.

**Topless:** for our count, somebody was topless if you could see their nipples, not in silhouette, not through gauze, not under boob, not side boob, but fully exposed.

Should male toplessness even count on the nudity list? Many woman will freely admit that a well muscled, well tanned, healthy, topless man is considered erotic. Also toplessness is treated differently in different cultures. For some cultures male toplessness is the norm. In other cultures both sexes are topless. In the west, both sexes are covered up in public. To avoid cultural bias we treated the sexes equally in this regard.

**Buttocks:** full cleft all the way to the bottom of the cheeks. Side bum or the top of the butt crack was not counted.

**Pubic hair:** only counted if one could actually see the hair. A full frontal shot with the crotch area in shadow did not count. Lower belly hair also did not count as pubic.

**Genitals:** The shaft of the penis or the labia (but the slit must have been visible). If the genitals were seen, the count moved from Pubic Hair to Genitalia to prevent doubling up.

Why the distinction between pubic hair and full genitalia? When a light covering like a towel or a loin cloth is so low as to display pubic hair the intent is usually quite clearly to titillate, but complete genital nudity belongs in a different category. It requires a commitment on the part of the writer, cinematographer, director, actor, and editor. There is nothing accidental in a genital shot and it was respected as a separate category for that reason.

Is it fair to compare showing a penis with showing labia? Yes, there is nothing else with which it *can* be compared. The adult movie industry has demonstrated clearly that it is not difficult to capture labia on film and the producers of *GoT* have often demonstrated that they do not shy away from gratuitous close ups.
Multiple shots of the same nude character

The question of what accurately constituted a second count came into play for characters that were topless for multiple scenes. An example being; if a character was topless and they appeared in two back-to-back scenes, did that count as two topless events? How about if the scene was separated by an unrelated scene in a different location? If the topless character briefly put a top on and took it off again later in that same scene, was that two topless events?

For our purposes we counted a topless character in two different scenes (separated or not) as two events, and a topless character who was topless multiple times in the same scene as one event.

Body Doubles

Did it matter if stunt bums were used? No, it was the characters we were interested in, not the actors. If a displayed bum was meant to be that of a particular character then that is what we recorded it as.

Violence

The Violence was likewise broken down into sub categories; serious, minor, suggested and sexual violence. It was also subdivided into genders, main, and extra characters.

Serious Violence

Any violence that could do damage or cause serious pain was counted as 'serious'. Examples of this include; throwing somebody to the stone floor, striking them in the face with a stick, anything that drew blood or would leave a bruise, dismemberment, and decapitation.

Minor Violence

Any strike or blow unlikely to leave a bruise or cause significant pain was counted as 'minor'. Examples include; pushing someone down onto grass, restraining somebody, a slap with a stick meant to rebuke or taunt only.

Sexual Violence

Physically forced sex, genital mutilation or violent genital abuse were recorded as 'sexual violence'. Examples include; forced sex where the victim unambiguously rejects it, castration, a blow to the genitals (either sex).

Suggested Violence

Sometimes during a beating there was a shot of an attacker's face as they repeatedly rained down blows on someone off screen. As we knew they are delivering a beating we did not need to see the blows connect to know what was happening. However as HBO had decided not to show those blows land we counted each impact as one count of 'suggested violence'.

Once again the subject of 'second counts' occurred. If there was a scene where somebody was punched once in the face it was easy to count that as one act of serious violence. What if that event was part of a fight with multiple blows? Does one count each blow as a separate act of violence?

Nudity can be an ongoing thing while violence, by it's nature, occurs in explosive single events. For the sake of this paper we tried to count each blow as a separate act of violence.
The Grey Areas of Death and Violence

Descriptions of deaths in the past did not count, we only counted deaths that occurred at the time, in that scene. So a messenger entering a castle proclaiming that 400 of their fellow soldiers had been killed did not count at all.

A lot of shouting and the sound of clanging swords on a battle field also did not count as depicted violence. A sword hitting another sword is not violence against a person.

A silhouette of one man stabbing another man through the fog counted as on-screen suggested violence.

Poisoning

If it was a peaceful, non-painful death, then it counted as one minor violence. If there were painful spasms and blood then it counted as one serious violence.

Things that were not counted as violence

Threats, intimidation, swearing, imprisonment, harsh language, a perception of disapproval, hurt feelings, infidelity, or refusal to hand over money.

Set Piece Violence

*GoT* is an adult series dealing with many adult topics and it pulled no punches in terms of graphic violence. A man being decapitated in the distance is a very different image to a man having a spear pushed through the back of his head and out through his face in close-up and full lingering detail. Like genital nudity, this was a very conscious decision by the producers of the series and required a huge amount of time and effort. It was likewise be respected as a separate category.

Gendered Conflict

As a curiosity, we also looked at gendered arguments. When a man and a woman were in conflict (as a man and a woman, as opposed to as a soldier and a monarch) who won? Who was humiliated and slunk away in defeat?

What made an argument a gendered argument? Male and female characters came into conflict all the time in *GoT*. Most of the time the argument was about political manoeuvring. However, when the conflict was personal and denigrated the masculinity or femininity of the subjects, or placed one above the other due solely or primarily to their sex, then it was gendered. Who won was not up to the viewer or the weight of the arguments, it was up to the producers. They were telling the story and they went to some lengths to make it clear who they thought won the argument. If neither side backed down, it was not counted as a win for either side.

This section is by far the most fuzzy of all the data and most subjective. Take it as you will.
Results

All the raw data collected over the sixty episodes can be seen in Appendix 1.

Deaths

There were 124 main characters over the sixty episodes, with a surprisingly high mortality rate for a mini-series. Fig 1 shows the relative numbers of male and female main characters and how many were still alive at the end of season 6 (Appendix 2).

The relative number of deaths related to main characters was surprisingly even. A little over 50% of leading women were still alive by the end of season 6 compared to about 40% of the leading men. Some of the main character deaths were neither on-screen nor suggested, they were merely mentioned and thus not counted.

The deaths of the non-leading characters was something quite different. While male leads were just as likely to be considered expendable as female leads, female extras were not. There was a staggering difference between the mortality rates of male extras and female extras (fig 2).

The difference would have been even more remarkable were it not for the final episode of season 6 where the Septum exploded and 21 women were killed in a flash (1 female lead and 20 female extras). Without the septum scene the results would have been 975 to 9. That was about one female extra for an entire season.

Combining extra and main character deaths for male and female characters gives us a full mortality picture in fig 3.

Set Piece Violence

Every season had it's fair share of graphic gore. A total of 51 set piece violence scenes were identified and there were 49 male victims and 2 female victims.

Mention must be made here of four of these special effects power plays because they involved no actual violence towards any of the characters. They were flayed bodies shown after the fact. They were included in the tally because HBO had spent so much time and effort on creating the cadavers and their musculature. Two of those cadavers were female (or the same one shown in two different scenes).

If the tally were to reflect actual Set Piece Violence then the tally would be 47:0.
Gendered Conflict

Of the 72 gendered conflicts identified, 55 were won by women and 17 were won by men.

Violence

Every individual act of violence was recorded over the 60 hours, from the first slap of Joffrey to the unfortunate man in the final episode for whom the bell tolled.

*GoT* turned out to be a very violent series. The male to female ratio of victims was; 2476: 260, or 9.5:1 (*fig 4*).

Just to put the numbers into context, there were 60 episodes and this was the break down for men *per episode*.

26 serious violent acts, 4 acts of minor violence, 11 suggested acts of violence (almost always serious) and every 6th episode one man or boy was sexually abused.

For women per episode it was; 2 serious violent acts, 1 minor violent act, every second episode there was a suggestion of violence (usually a slap), and every one and a half *seasons* a woman or girl was sexually abused.

The violence in *GoT* will be detailed in the discussion section.

Nudity

The differences in the *number* of nudity instances were not as marked as those of violence (*fig 5*). There were, however, some interesting questions that arose around female pubic hair.

Another area of interest was the distribution of nude events with respect to main and extra characters and the levels of nudity as the series progressed.

These too will be discussed more in the discussion section.

What happened in which Season - The highs and lows

What follows are the nudity and violence results for the series broken down by season.
Nudity (fig s1.1):
The male toplessness was bolstered in this season by the Dothraki and their traditional dress.

Violence (fig s1.2):
This season was one of the least violent and even had an army battle that was largely free of on-screen violence.

Typical violence for this season was consensual sword fights and slaps to the face.

Set Piece Violence: 6
Examples:
* lance through throat
* shield to face
* knife to eye
* boiling a man's head in molten gold

Gendered conflict: 10
Women won gendered conflicts in 8 out of 10 cases.

Deaths of note:
Viserys Targaryen
Robert Baratheon
Khal Drogo
Eddard 'Ned' Stark
Season 2 - 2012

Nudity *(fig s2.1)*;
The nudity this season was very even handed with extras not being much nuder than the higher paid leads.

Violence *(fig s2.2)*;
The difference in violence became more pronounced this season with the depictions of violence against men almost doubling.

Most of the violence this season occurred in episode 9 with the attack on King's Landing.

Set Piece Violence: 4

Examples:
* Lance through face
* An arm being pulled off

Gendered conflict: 14
Women won gendered conflicts in 12 out of 14 cases.

Deaths of note:
Renly Baratheon
Rodrik Cassel
Maester Luwin (Stark Medic)
Nudity (fig s3.1);
The nudity this season was less even-handed with full male genitalia featuring for no adequately explored reason.

Violence (fig s3.2);
Major violence sequences were the torturing of Theon, Daenerys crucifying innocent men, and the Red Wedding.

Violence against female extras fell off the chart this season. There was one single event at the Red wedding where Roslin Frey was killed by Catelyn Stark.

Set Piece Violence: 7
Examples:
* nipple removal
* finger flaying
* amputations

Gendered conflict: 6
This was the only season where men and women won gendered arguments in the same rates. Although, it was always Tywin Lannister that won the conflict.

Deaths of note:
Roz (prostitute)
Robb Stark
Catelyn Stark
Talisa Stark
Nudity (fig s4.1);
In this season female extras took on more of the nude aspects. Still no female genitalia.

Violence (fig s4.2);
It becomes very apparent this season that the female characters are being deliberately spared most of the violence and deaths experienced by the male characters.

Major violence sequences in this season were the wilding attacks on villages and the battle at Castle Black.

Set Piece Violence: 5
Examples:
* eye gouging
* sword through face
* pickaxe through head
* flayed man (post)
* head crush

Gendered conflict: 16
Women win in 14 of the cases, with overt sexist overtones.

Deaths of note:
Joffrey Baratheon
Locke (Bolton’s man)
Oberyn
Shae (off screen)
Tywin Lannister
Nudity (fig s5.1);
The nudity this season was less even handed with full male genitalia featuring once again for no real reason.

Violence (fig s5.2);
Major violence sequences in this season were the slave riots in Meereen, the Faith Militant, and the battle at Hardhome.

Set Piece Violence: 12
This is the first and only season where there were Set Pieces involving women (both post flay).

Examples:
* throat cut
* flayed people (post)
* sword through throat
* beheading
* spear through head
* man cut in half

Gendered conflict: 14
This season was more even. Men won 5 of the conflicts. Snow declines a seduction, Ramsey tells off his girlfriend and Sansa, and Bron patronises the Sand Snakes.

Deaths of note:
Shireen
Selyse
Myrcella
Jon Snow
Season 6 - 2016

Nudity (fig s6.1); The nudity this season was bolstered by all the topless and oiled male slaves in Meereen and the Dothraki.

Violence (fig s6.2); By far the major contribution to the violence in this season was the Battle of the Bastards in e9 and the explosion of the Septum in e10.

Set Piece Violence: 17
Examples:
* spear through face
* pulling a man's face off
* decapitation
* axe to chest
* axe to groin

Gendered conflict: 12
Women won 8 of the conflicts. Notable exceptions being Ramsey vs Osha and Balon vs Yara.

Deaths of note:
Doran
Roose Bolton
Rickon Stark
Ramsey Bolton
Lancel Lannister
Margaery Tyrell
The High Sparrow
Tommon Baratheon
Walder Frey
Discussion

During the review of the six seasons, several things became self-evident;

#1. *GoT* has the best 1:52 seconds of opening credits ever created.

#2. From the beginning of the first massed battle it became obvious that choosing to count *individual* acts of violence had been a bad idea.

#3. Unarguably the four greatest characters in the show are Tyrion Lannister, Lord Varys "The Spider", Margaery "If it's got a crown on it, I'm down on it" Tyrell, and Davos "I can only count to four" Seaworth.

#4. The letter "Y" appears in a disproportionate number of names in Westeros.

#5. Catelyn Stark is the most whiny, self-pitying narcissist in the history of fantasy.

#6. Only 33.3% of the nudity was female.

#7. Only 9.5% of the violence was towards female characters.

#8. HBO has a definite feminist agenda in its reworking of the books.

HBO was adding significant amounts of violence against men, male nudity and male sexual abuse and was even laying down feminist revenge fantasies. Yet media opinion pieces were all about how bad it was for women.

Then why do we perceive it as the other way around?

There are numerous explanations for why we, as a society, care more about the safety and portrayal of women than men. A definitive answer to this question is outside the scope of this paper but it may include;

- Our species having evolved to be gynocentric,
- The Women are Wonderful effect (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989; 1993).
- Female In-Group bias (Rudman & Goodwin, 2004).
- Any treatment of women short of deferential being seen as Hostile Sexism (Yeung, 2012).
- We're just not used to seeing violence against women, so any instance of it is jarring.

Or it may simply be that people who regularly broadcast their opinions form them using more emotion than evidence.

The Violence

The violence and deaths in *GoT* came fairly consistently across seasons (*fig 7*). The season started slowly, establishing that year's theme. At around episode 4 there was a small spike in violence and then at around episode nine it became a bloodbath of male extras being slaughtered. The final episode concluded with mopping up and revenge as main characters were unexpectedly dispatched.

Just a small note on the White Walkers: there were problems with the battle between the White Walkers and the Wildlings at Hardhome; many of the White Walkers were so decayed that one couldn't tell their sex.
It may have been reasonable to continue with the standards as had been displayed thus far, by adding up the total incidences of violence and distributing them according to the existing gender ratios. However that would have been a rough estimate at best. So acts of violence against entities with no obvious sex were not counted.

Displays of violence in different episodes have been fairly consistent over six seasons. This is no criticism of HBO, it is simply the way drama seasons work. It is a roller coaster ride. There is simply no better way for a season to work from the emotional point of view of the viewing audience.

What was significant were the types of violence HBO chose to show on-screen. Figs 1 and 2 show the mortality rates of main and extra characters. HBO was bound by Martin's books regarding the deaths of main characters and fig 1 shows that to be reasonably even. It was entirely up to HBO to decide on the deaths of extras (fig 2) and that is where HBO started to show its bias.

Many people have observed that HBO is not afraid to pull any punches in terms of showing graphic details. However it was shying right away from portraying violence against women. The different way it portrayed violence experienced by the sexes was most pronounced.

Typically when a male character died it was graphic and violent. He was screaming and bloody and we experienced the full and agonising moment of his death. Indeed all of the Set Piece violence deaths (47) were of male characters.

A male character could expect to die from;

- a lance, axe, sword, spear, pickaxe or shield edge through the skull, throat, chest, groin or face.
- a knife through the eye
- having his brain boiled in gold
- having a limb pulled off
- having his head crushed or smashed against a wall
- having his throat cut
- decapitation
- being cut in half (vertically or horizontally)

Typically when a female character died, it was not even on the screen. She would be pushed over the edge of something and we either saw the impact from a great distance or not at all. Or she would be killed off screen and we only see her peaceful dead body afterwards, if at all.

Two notable examples of off-screen deaths were Ros being shot by a crossbow (s3e6), and Shae being strangled by Tyrion (s4e10). We never saw Ros writhe in agony, screaming with every impact of the bolts. We did not see Joffrey's joy of torture as he reloaded, all the while tormenting his helpless victim with callous taunts. We only saw the aftermath, with Ros peaceful, silent and still.

Later when Tyrion was fighting to the death with Shae he was forced to strangle her. The camera actually panned away from Shae as she died and concentrated on the suffering of Tyrion. Only after the struggling stopped did the camera make the one foot adjustment to show Shae peaceful and still.

HBO has chosen to never show female suffering as entertainment while positively rejoicing at male suffering. Everyone remembers the Red Wedding (s3e9) because it was the first time a female character was killed on-screen. It was three seasons in. One hundred and eighty three men had died on-screen by this time.

Fig 8 shows the tiny amount of on-screen deaths for GoT female characters. Twenty of those on-screen deaths were in the 1/10th of a second explosion in the Septum in s6e10.

There were only four times in 60 hours of show that we saw a graphically violent female death. Two women got their throats cut in the Red Wedding, Ramsey killed Osha, and one woman was stabbed in the fighting pit riots. It is this last one that needs some comment.

The Sons of the Harpy revolt in the fighting pits (s5e9) took place with a stadium full of viewers and it held roughly even numbers of males and females. To the keen observer it became quite clear that the apparently indiscriminate slaughter was in fact very discriminating. Only one woman was killed, in a very special separate sequence that seemed designed to show that a woman was killed too. She was picked out of the crowd for a close up and was centre frame as she was stabbed twice through clothing. Was this to show that women too were victims of the Sons of the Harpy? Or was it to show that the Sons of the Harpy were the bad guys? Crucifying hundreds of men did not cause a blip on the sympathy radar, but stabbing a single woman marks a group as evil and ripe for violent retribution. Perhaps it was it filmed and added afterwards when HBO realised that only men had been killed in the entire revolt?

It is quite clear that HBO has made a conscious decision that violence against men is suitable for entertainment, while violence against women is not. In fact violence against children is more likely to be shown in the series than violence against women.

![Figure 8. On and off screen deaths](image-url)
There was one stand-out exception to the on-screen violence rule of HBO; The death of Stannis Baratheon. When Stannis was killed by Brienne in s5e10 the camera only showed Brienne. This was the very first case of a main male character dying off screen. As he had just been persuaded to kill his own daughter, been abandoned by the woman who convinced him to do it and also lost his wife and all of his army, maybe HBO decided the audience may not have taken as much delight in his death as they could have. On the other hand HBO may not have had a choice. Martin has left Stannis' death unconfirmed in the books. This exception to the male-graphic-death rule may have less to do with finally showing some compassion to a male character and more to do with covering eventualities.

**Comparing fuzzy apples and fuzzy oranges**

The violence was broken up into four categories (serious, minor, suggested and sexual). Having the violence recorded in these different groups can make analysis easier but it also can make some comparisons deceptive.

There were 2,476 violent acts against males and 260 against females, almost an order of magnitude difference.

Even this is not the whole story. The category 'suggested violence' contained very different types of violence for male and female characters. The suggested violence for males was predominantly serious, compared to the females which was largely minor.

Examples of minor violence: *slaps, peaceful poisoning, hit with sticks (non-facial), pushing, spanking, being hit by fruit*.

Examples of serious violence: *impaling, crucifixion, painful poisoning, stabbing, cutting, crushing, punching, kicking, burning, dragging behind a horse, head boiling, amputation, pulling a limb off, hanging, flaying, biting, eye gouging, head crushing, throat cutting, finger and forehead cutting, decapitation*.

**Bias due to army battles**

What about the large battles? Did they not skew the results? Were not only men and boys 'allowed' to be forced from their homes to die horribly in war?

The big battle sequences occurred in **s1e8** (Dothraki), **s1e9** (Tyrion), **s2e9** (Blackwater), **s4e9** (The Wall), **s5e8** (Hardhome), **s5e9** (Gladiators), and **s6e9** (Bastards).

Some background must be given here for each battle. They were not necessarily as gender segregated as one might imagine and did not affect the numbers too greatly.

**s1e8** (Dothraki): The Dothraki tribe under Drogo and Daenerys attacked and completely obliterated a village. They were not attacking another army but a village. There should have been a fair percentage of female casualties, there were not.

**s1e9** (Tyrion): Tyrion went into battle with his 'Savages' and was trampled underfoot. Virtually no acts of violence were seen in the whole battle.

**s2e9** (Blackwater): This was the first actual battle between two male armies. Eighty nine acts of serious violence and sixty eight suggested acts were recorded.
**s4e9 (The Wall):** The Wildlings from the North attacked Castle Black. While the tiny troop of defenders at the Wall were all male, the Wildlings had every healthy adult fighting. Strangely, only a single woman experienced a single act of violence in the whole of the battle.

**s5e8 (Hardhome):** Two mixed sex armies did battle. The White Walkers were an army made up of everybody killed by other White Walkers - men, women and children. They attacked the villagers at Hardhome; men, women and children. Once again there should have been a large female casualty rate, but, in fact, we saw more children slaughtered on-screen than women.

**s5e9 (Gladiators):** There was a violent rebellion at the fighting pits. Half of the crowd was female but only 3% of the violent acts were against women.

**s6e9 (Bastards):** This was the second proper army battle, and by far the most graphically violent. This was actually gender segregated and would skew the results. There were a total of 240 violent acts and all were against men.

Only two of the large battle sequences could be classified as 'for men only'. Removing these two enormous army battles from the score decrease the male tally by 16%. The ratio moves from 9.5:1 to 8:1.

This study was not concerned with how much violence actually occurred to the genders in 10th century Europe, but with how much violence (and to whom) the HBO producers were willing to show on television. It was easily possible to have a great battle between two armies without showing any gore, or indeed the battle at all. It is consequently clear that, even adjusting for army battles, HBO have chosen to portray 90% of it's day to day non-battle violence as being against men.

**Why was there so little violence against women?**

According to the main GoT discussion thread on Reddit (r/gameofthrones - 825 thousand participants) and the Trivia sections on IMDB for each episode, HBO has been taking a lot of liberties with the violence compared with the books. They have been vastly multiplying the violence against the male characters, and even creating it where it never existed, while at the same time removing the violence against the female characters.

An excellent example of created violence is the torture of Theon Greyjoy throughout season 3. Here, the constant graphic violence actually started to become excessive even by GoT standards. The books did not portray any of that violence. Theon was captured by the Boltons and was assumed dead. He returned some time later as a broken man. All of the graphically brutal torture was a complete addition by HBO.

Another example is the cutting of the stars into the foreheads of only the males in the Faith Militant. This is another HBO invention. In the books both sex members were only required to paint a star on their bodies.

On the other side, HBO chose not to show any of the retributive violence against the Septa Unella. Cersei Lannister is well known for exacting violent revenge against all her enemies, and Septa Unella had really hurt and humiliated her. Had Unella been male we would have been presented with a long and cruel, graphically violent retribution. However Unella was female and so all we were shown was a couple of glasses of wine thrown into her face and then her being left with an unmasked Gregor Clegane.

There was much speculation about what she would suffer but the only thing we knew for sure was that
she had been forced to look at Gregor's face. According to Lena Headley (Cersei) in an interview with Entertainment Weekly (Hibberd, 2016); “The (septa) scene was meant to be worse, but they couldn’t do it. This is like the tame version. It’s pretty bad still though.” Clearly HBO could do it, they had done it many times before, but only with male characters. Headley does not make it clear whether HBO could not do it because of time constraints, moral reservations or orders from higher up.

Even Cracked magazine (Cracked, 2015) noticed that HBO had been "pulling its punches" with regards to the violence against female characters. In its article entitled: "5 Game Of Thrones Scenes That Are More Shocking In The Books" all 5 of the scenes are ones in which far more violence was originally written for female characters.

It seems that Martin made his books more or less gender equal. It is HBO with the feminist agenda.

**But who are the perpetrators?**

Another question to explore was which sex perpetrated the violence.

With a question like this it was difficult not to get into the subjectivity of who, ultimately, caused the violence. When Cersei Lannister ordered Gregor Clegane to kill some boys, was it Gregor or Cersei who perpetrated the violence?

It is all too easy to fall into the trap of 'blaming Kevin Bacon'; tracing an event back to a group or individual you might want to blame. How far back do you count for proxy violence? When Catelyn Stark kidnapped Jaime Lannister knowing full well it would result in the deaths of thousands of men, was she the perpetrator of all that violence? When Joffrey orders Ros to beat Daisy with a cane, who was perpetrating that violence? Does a monarch or general who orders an army into battle relieve all those soldiers of their culpability?

**The Nudity**

Men were 100% more likely to be shown nude than women (fig 9). That is an important point. For every 1 partially or fully nude woman there were 1.99 partially or fully nude men.

There is the need to reiterate here that male toplessness counts as nudity just as much as female toplessness does. Cognitive dissonance comes into play here. In certain contexts we accept a bare male chest and thus do not think of it as nudity. However, if a man stands up in a meeting or walks around a shopping centre without a top we would describe him to the police as being half naked.

Of the 11 genitalia shown, 100% were penises. Not a single vulva made it onto the screen, and there were plenty of opportunities for their appearance.

![Figure 9. All character nudity](image)
We know that so far there had been 89 leading male characters and 35 leading female characters. However very few of the main characters were required to do nude scenes. It was interesting to note that, by and large, HBO only showed it's attractive main characters in the nude.

For the men it was: Jon Snow, Hodor, The Hound, Grey Worm, Jaime, Lancel, Loras Tyrell, Theon, Ramsay, Robb, Daario, Olyvar, The Mountain, and Khal Drogo.

For the women it was: Daenerys, Cersei, Missandei, Melisandre, Ygritte, Tyreen Sand, Osha, Talisa, Margaery, Ros, Irri, and Shae.

It was notable that male nudity was shown incidentally, in the context of humiliation, torture, humour and eroticism. While female nudity was shown almost exclusively for erotic effect (except for Cersei's walk of shame).

With the character numbers about even for the sexes there are a few ways to express this data;

- HBO shows twice as much male nudity as female nudity. (covering all the data)
- Leading actors are four times as likely as the actresses to be in a nude scene. (covering only nude scene main actors as a percentage of all actors)
- Leading actresses are slightly more likely to be in a nude scene than leading actors. (covering all leads - including the unattractive ones and adjusting for numbers)

All are technically correct.

What isn't correct is that there is "more female nudity". The only area where females were more nude than males was in the buttock department.

It is interesting that there isn't more incidental female nudity. The Dothraki men and the male slaves of Meereen walked around topless all the time. In real civilisations of that type, female nudity was just as common. While female gladiators were fewer than male ones, they were not uncommon either, and they fought topless in the Colosseum.

The calls for even more male nudity clearly had an effect as there were a total of 11 penises shown. Some were just glimpsed, others took up most of the screen. Almost all of them were completely unnecessary for the scene. Of particular note was the young tragedian whose penis was held up front and centre (s6e5). This seemed a very obvious case of HBO just showing gratuitous male nudity.

**Why no on-screen snootch?**

One could argue that it is harder to capture the vulva. However, there were a number of scenes where it would have been completely appropriate to show labia;

- When Tyene Sand enticed Bron in prison.
- The wedding where the dancer did a back arch.
- The Dothraki rape of the villagers.

In fact there were a couple of scenes where close-ups of labia were conspicuous in their absence;

- The birth of the shadow demon.
- The seduction of Podrick where the same dancer (as a whore) did a back arch.
In fact the scene with Tyrene Sand (s5e7) looked like the labia had been filmed and edited out afterwards. She exposed her breasts. Then her thigh. Then she unfastened her tunic and held it open. The camera started on her face and began panning down. In the middle of the pan the camera cut away in an uncharacteristically jarring way. The editors on GoT usually do an excellent job. A smooth pan starts stationary or at least very slow, speeds up and proceeds to its destination and comes to a smooth stop. This pan was prematurely cut. This strengthens the idea that the order had come down from upstairs that the characters were to be intentionally treated differently based on sex.

The Sexual Politics

So far we have seen that the male characters were far more brutalised; both much more often and exceedingly more graphically. We have also seen that there was more male nudity especially at its most extreme and gratuitous.

GoT is set in a turbulent world with fights over control of great empires. Yet very little of the story was actually warfare. The vast majority of the story was about political intrigue, interpersonal conflicts, and family.

If there was so little actual warfare, why were less than half of the characters female?

Why are there fewer female characters?

In our current society where a producer is liable to be criticised for almost anything to do with female characters it becomes difficult to have them at all, at which point one is criticised for not having enough.

Any female character who is not 'strong and independent' will get the producer branded with the label of misogynist. To avoid this, producers seem to end up creating female characters that are perfect. It happens so often that there is a common term for this type of character: a Mary Sue.

Regardless of the period, a Mary Sue always holds the very latest politically correct opinions. She is stronger and a better fighter than every highly trained male around her. She never loses. Her one flaw is that when the bad guy turns up, she becomes an instant helpless damsel, until she decides to stand up for herself, whereupon she beats him easily.

The other problem producers face is what they are allowed to do to female characters. They can not hurt them, or treat them like idiots, or chide them for their abusive behaviours, or torture them, or use them as arrow fodder.

If all the female characters must be identical and writers can not do anything with them outside of very narrow guidelines, it severely limits how many females they can have. If they want to have a fool, and characters to torture and kill, characters to portray as pure evil that audiences can take delight in seeing mutilated, they have to add more males.

The three controversial 'rape' scenes, and the one that nobody commented on

By far the most commented on violence in GoT was perceived sexual violence against women. A Google search of "game of thrones" and "rape" turns up 639,000 results. The general arguments are that HBO were treating the rape of women as entertainment. One must bear in mind that there were 8,002 genitaly mutilated characters in the show and they were all males. This fact did not seem to bother anybody. When Theon Greyjoy was emasculated (s3e7) there was an enormous spike of jokes and online memes celebrating the fact. Yet each time there was a 'rape' of a female character the
papers and commentators all screamed misogyny and vowed to rage-quit if HBO did not start treating the female characters even better.

The general claim of these critics is that the rape of female characters was designed to titillate the male viewers. However the Nielsen ratings suggest that about 45% of GoT watchers are female and most of the 'rape' scenes seemed to be designed for them. Let us examine the three contentious 'rapes' in more detail. The scare quotes are there for a reason.

The rape of Daenerys Targaryen (s1e1); She was a young, naive girl on the verge of womanhood, sold into marriage to an amazingly handsome and muscular king from an exotic land who did not even speak her language. After an extravagant wedding where she was made 'Queen', he took her to a beach at sunset and with remarkable tenderness removed her clothes before gently bending her over. That was it. That was the whole scene. It was their wedding night and they were about to have sex.

This scene in the book used the words "slowly and tenderly", "slowly, carefully" and "gently but firmly". It was clearly written for the enjoyment of its female readers and there was no question that she was a willing participant. The only real difference between the book and the series is that Daenerys cried a little from anxiety on TV.

The text was reminiscent of the best selling 50 Shades of Grey although more gentle. It was 'chick-porn'. This would only count as rape, in the latest modern sense of the word, because she did not have pompons to do her 'continuous enthusiastic consent' cheer: "Give me a D!".

The rape of Cersei Lannister (s4e3); She was in the crypt with her brother/lover beside their dead, psychotic son Joffrey. Cersei had been teasing and tormenting Jaime for a while and continued here. They were both in mourning and vulnerable. They hugged each other. They kissed passionately. She pushed him away, rejecting him again. He said that she was a "hateful woman" (to reject him like this right now) and decided he was going to take her anyway. During the struggle she said "not here" and "it's not right" but also reciprocated the passionate kissing briefly. Her objection seemed to be more the location than the act. In the modern technical sense of the term, she indicated that she was disinclined to have sex right there at the time so he should have taken the refusal yet again and slunk off. However, she did not seem to be upset about the sex at the time, nor afterwards. So, in a real world sense, it is an ambiguous scene.

The rape of Sansa Stark (s5e6); Sansa got married to a well muscled, unconventionally handsome Lord of the North. It was their wedding night. He did not hit her, or beat her, or even threaten her. He was clearly insane and insensitive and demanded that his servant Reek stay to watch. In those days it was expected that the wedding must be consummated and there was much less squeamishness about privacy. It was tense and nerve wracking but it seemed like nothing particularly bad happened to Sansa compared with the violence and humiliation meted out to other characters in the series.

Reek, on the other hand, seemed wracked with torment. We did not see Sansa in any kind of pain or discomfort. The camera only showed us Reek's anguish as we heard the sounds of Sansa in the background. She did not even sound like she was being hurt. It sounded more like discomfort and anxiety. The audience knew that Ramsey was a violent psychopath, but Sansa thought he was reasonable guy up to that point.

The (unremarked) rape of Brienne of Tarth (s3e3); This one received the least amount of criticism from the press and it was an actual attempted rape. Jaime Lannister and Brienne of Tarth were captured by Lord Bolton's men. Brienne was dragged off screen by several of them and it was clear they intended to rape her. We heard the sound of her panicked screams and her fighting to defend herself. She was soon brought back unharmed and un-raped.
That was it. In 60 hours of *GoT* we have yet to actually 'see' a rape. Yet this series has a reputation for showing a tremendous amount of sexual violence against women.

On the other hand ...

**Just ... so ... much ... violent sexual abuse of men and boys**

*GoT* was riddled with references to male genital mutilation. There were a total of 8002 emasculated male characters, not to mention threats of emasculation, jokes at the expense of the victims, magic that required emasculation and whole industries based on genital mutilation.

Varys, a eunuch and spy, was made fun of for his condition throughout the series. Theon Greyjoy, who was mutilated under the most cruel of conditions, was then ridiculed and tormented by everyone who knew about it, including his own sister. Daenerys threatened to "geld" male diplomats with whom she was negotiating. Pirates threatened to emasculate Tyrion and sell the product to a "cock merchant". Apparently emasculating men and boys was a viable business in Westeros. Ygritte threatened Jon Snow several times with emasculation and went into detail about what she would do with the severed member. She also joked about having done something similar before. A common punishment for any male who forced a woman to have sex was castration and it was mentioned from the very first episode onwards. In fact emasculation seemed to be the go-to punishment for men in Westeros for everything from betraying a trust to infidelity to simple disrespect.

There **were** three times over the course of the entire series that a tiny amount of sympathy was shown to these victims. These instances of sympathy were in no way acknowledgements that these were crimes only experienced by men any boys, or that it was a violation worse than anything that could happen to women. The first time was in s3e4 when Varys told Tyrion about when he was "cut". It was a heart breaking story about being sold to a Mage as a boy and subsequently mutilated and left to die of blood loss. It was a story that, at least, conjured some sympathy for the little boys being mutilated, if not for the men.

The second time sympathy was shown was in s5e1 when a member of the Unsullied, an army of 8000 boys who had all been emasculated, visited a brothel in Meereen. The prostitute tried to take his pants off but he stopped her. He was only there to be held in a maternal way by a woman. He was clearly damaged, but HBO did not explore this, they used his vulnerability to showcase how graphically they could slit his throat.

The third hint of sympathy was in s6e2 when Tyrion was in conference with Varys, Greyworm and Missandei. He said to Varys: "If I lost my cock, I'd drink all the time". Then he realised that there were two emasculated men in the room and the joke may not have been appreciated. He looked briefly apologetic.

These moments were tiny compared to the slatherings of sympathy shown to female characters undergoing far less, but at least it was an acknowledgement.

Threats against female genitals came up only once. In s5e10 Myranda told Sansa that Ramsey planned to do some horrible but undescribed things to her genitals at some indeterminate time in the future. Within seconds Myranda was killed by being pushed off a wall (no blood, no screams of agony). This was a common theme in *GoT*; threatening a female equalled feminist revenge fantasy.

**A note on Threat Narratives**

Simply put, a Threat Narrative (Tieman, 2013) is a story used to escape censure when attacking
somebody. This works on the interpersonal, group and even national level.

Primates have a built-in instinct for keeping peace in the tribe. When a member of the tribe has been wronged, all sorts of rules will be bent and broken to right that wrong. It is this instinct for justice that is being manipulated in the Threat Narrative.

In fig 10, person A wants to attack person B (either verbally or physically). However, there will be a backlash from their tribe. Person A can not just attack someone and escape censure, people will rush to Person B's defence and A will be ostracised as the 'bad guy'.

In constructing a Threat Narrative, A needs to convince the tribe that B has lots of agency and bad intent while de-emphasising their vulnerability, thereby creating a 'villain'.

At the same time A stresses how little agency and bad intent they have while exaggerating their own vulnerability, thereby creating a 'victim'.

By constructing a Threat Narrative, A can break all sorts of tribal taboos in their treatment of B and it will appear to the tribe as justice.

A Threat Narrative can be a real thing or a constructed thing. For the Jews in National Socialist Germany it was a very real thing. The Nazis were in control of the government and army (high agency), they wanted to exterminate the Jews (bad intent) and there was very little that the Jews could do in terms of retaliation (low vulnerability). The rest of the world responded to this genuine Threat Narrative so forcefully that it is still considered acceptable to 'punch a Nazi' simply on the accusation of Nazi sympathies.

On the other hand, when the Nazis wanted to get away with attacking Jews, they had to construct a Threat Narrative. Propaganda posters, literature, and education programs showing how dangerous (agency) and evil (bad intent) Jews were, started to flood the country. Next came stories about how invulnerable they were. This removed their humanity and allowed all sorts of 'justifiable' atrocities.

Germany was not alone in this. Every country has used these tactics against their enemies during war. In peace time it has conducted them against various 'out-groups'; male homosexuals, communists, blacks, whites, capitalists, and men.

In real life one can tell when somebody is trying to create a Threat Narrative against a group or person. They will start by labelling the individual as something objectionable: "Racist, sexist, anti-gay! <Person B> go away!". If you ask the question: "please give an example of something sexist, racist or anti-gay <Person B> has done" and there are no real world examples - Person A is trying to construct a Threat Narrative.

In fiction it is easy to construct a Threat Narrative because you can actually create characters that have those characteristics. Then the author can justify any amount of violence against them and readers will delight in it.
Feminist Revenge Fantasies

The Threat Narrative is the basis of Feminist Revenge Fantasies (FRF). FRFs have one common theme; a male does something to damage, hurt or even just offend a female thus allowing her to mete out some wildly disproportionate violence proving that it is always morally justified for women to do this to men. It is essential to the FRF that she dispense this violent revenge with ease.

Hundreds of Psychological studies over the decades all demonstrate that women have a much lower threshold for risk taking than men (Byrnes, Miller, Schafer, 1999). A conflict between a woman and the man she is attacking that contains significant risk to the attacker does not satisfy the Feminist Fantasy requirement. She wants to enjoy the feeling of power over a man and the inflicting of sadistic violence without the fear that he may fight back. This is where the 'with ease' comes into play. FRFs are motivated by a pathological inferiority complex which creates a desire to have power over the people perceived to have 'all the power'.

The proliferation of the FRF in modern media has a profoundly negative effect on society as it normalises and even celebrates female violence towards men. This has real world effects as even the most vulnerable men who are mutilated in the most intimate ways are treated to the same callous mockery as Theon Greyjoy. They are denied assistance and even the most basic of human compassion.

In 2011 a man who was seeking a divorce from his abusive wife was drugged, stripped and bound. She waited until he regained consciousness before hacking off his genitals and dropped them into a disposal while making him watch. When news of the story was picked up by The View (a midday woman's show), Sharon Osbourne made jokes about the mutilation and the entire panel and audience laughed. This was not a self selecting sample of man-hating feminists, this was a cross section of women in America. It was all the more chilling because the laughter was so casual and accepting.

It is the cinematic Threat Narrative that briefly turns Mary Sues into innocent, helpless victims so they are then justified in all the dehumanising violence that comes next. The Mary Sues need to briefly display an utter lack of agency and high vulnerability in order to activate the Threat Narrative.

However, Threat Narrative only works in one gendered direction. There will never be a film produced where a woman has sex with a drunk man, or calls him a name, and he (as the sympathetic protagonist) gets his revenge by tying her upside down and pouring battery acid into her vagina, or ripping out her uterus with a squid-jag. It is just never going to happen.

GoT threat narratives are very easy to spot. When a male character turns up and slaps a woman’s behind, or is rude to them or threatens to rape one of them, you know that his grisly death is just around the corner. A woman can threaten any man with anything, that's entertainment.

Examples of GoT FRF using Threat Narrative;

s2e10 - The hanged tavern girls: This whole scene was set up by HBO. There was no encounter like this in the books. Three women were found hanged for sleeping with the enemy. Three purely evil men turned up (the executioners). They laughed at Brienne for being a woman in armour (sexist), they bragged about raping one of the women (agency, bad intent) and there were three of them (invulnerable). Brienne was then justified in easily defeating all three of them and even delivering a sadistic final message as she slowly killed the last one.

s3e2 - The easy win of Brienne over Jaime: Jaime was known as the greatest sword fighter in Westeros, but as is always the case in modern fantasy, any woman can beat any man at anything. The producers made a particular point of showing how easily she beat him.
s6e4 - Danearys vs the Khals: In the most unrealistic scene in the entire series - Danearys stood amid seasoned and proven fighters in a reinforced tent. She tipped over a brazier and instead of rushing forward and killing her, or putting out the fire, or breaking through the walls, or leaving through one of the many windows, they ALL cowered and screamed like children. Once again a woman defeated much stronger and more highly trained men easily. Thus proving, to people who do not think about it too much, female superiority. HBO had again created this FRF scene out of whole cloth. Even Martin has come out and said that Danearys is not fireproof and that the scene made no sense.

s6e10 - Ramsey being eaten by dogs: Ramsey was actually evil so the Threat Narrative did not need to be constructed. He was also a Lord so he had invulnerability and had demonstrated his agency on many occasions so he was the perfect character for Justifiable Violence. Even though he had done worse to Jon and infinitely worse to Theon, it was Sansa who dealt out the sadistic and fatal revenge. Once again, she did so easily.

s6e10 - Arya killing Walder Frey: In the final episode in the series Arya managed to slaughter an innocent serving girl and skin off her face (off screen) and kill the two Frey boys (off screen) whom she jointed and prepared in the kitchen to make them into a pie so that she could serve them up to their father to eat. She then declared herself as Arya Stark, said what she had done and that she intended to kill him and then actually killed him with only a pretence at resistance. It was of no surprise that the camera never budged once from showing us the pain and suffering of Walder as he died. HBO also showed Arya's clear delight in watching a man die in agony. Even small girls can execute convoluted revenge fantasies against grown men with ease. Once again this scene was largely HBO pandering to FRF. In the books, Arya had nothing to do with the death of Frey's sons.

FRFs aren't just restricted to violence. They are also about verbally degrading men who fall short of perfection and seeing them cower in shame in the face of righteous women. In s6e5 Sansa and Brienne piously condemned Petyr for Sansa's "woman's suffering". HBO really laid it on thick in this scene. They were the virtuous women shaming the weak man for allowing Sansa to be put in harm's way. They even threatened his life for not keeping her completely free from any harm. This is a privilege no man experienced in Westeros. Sansa really expounded on how much she had suffered, and how dreadful it was. Yet she had no cuts, no bruises, nothing missing, and was fully intact. It appeared the two women believed that being forced to have sex was the worst thing that could happen to anyone. This seems a little self indulgent considering what both of them knew very well happened to the men around them.

The gendered conflicts revealed the same thing. Through six seasons of GoT the ratio of women to men winning gendered conflicts was 54:18. Also, most of the men who won were Tywin Lannister. This appeared to be more about being Tywin Lannister than about being male, he was the exception.

In Westeros, women won against men almost every time they competed against them. This is more an artefact of western politically correct culture than accurate history or even faithfulness to the events in Martin's books. In the books, things were much more evenly balanced.

When Nathanson and Young (2001) started investigating gendered conflict in the media for their new book, Spreading Misandy, they were stunned at how uneven the results were. They had been told that the media was deliberately bashing men, but up until that time they had, themselves, not noticed it. So they sat down and started documenting comic strips, Harlequin romances, sitcoms, movies, soap operas, greeting cards and commercials for a 20 year period (1980-2001). They found that in a staggering 96% of gendered conflicts the woman won. And convincingly, and with ease, and with contempt. This was in such conflict with any sort of distribution you find naturally that there seemed to be a definite agenda.
Nathanson and Young concluded:

‘The [mass media] productions cannot be dismissed by anyone with moral and intellectual integrity as ‘nothing more than entertainment’ .... there is nothing trivial about popular culture. It is the folklore, the conventional wisdom, of an urban, industrial society’.

Their research was duplicated in a study done in 2005 at the University of Western Sydney focusing on reality media instead of entertainment.

"The study involved collection of all editorial content referring to or portraying men from 650 newspaper editions (450 broadsheets and 200 tabloids), 130 magazines, 125 TV news bulletins, 147 TV current affairs programs, 125 talk show episodes, and 108 TV lifestyle program episodes from 20 of the highest circulation and rating newspapers, magazines and TV programs over a six-month period. Media articles were examined using in-depth quantitative and qualitative content analysis methodology.

The research found that, by volume, 69 per cent of mass media reporting and commentary on men was unfavourable compared with just 12 per cent favourable and 19 per cent neutral or balanced. Men were predominately reported or portrayed in mass media as villains, aggressors, perverts and philanderers, with more than 75 per cent of all mass media representations of men and male identities showing men in one of these four ways. More than 80 per cent of media mentions of men, in total, were negative, compared with 18.4 per cent of mentions which showed men in a positive role."

With so few positive male role models in fiction and reality reporting, the young male suicide rate and educational disparities swim into focus. It is truly disturbing that a popular show, such as GoT, with such a sexist and anti-male bias is only ever criticised for its treatment of women.

There is a problem with using the media (both GoT itself and its critics) to gauge what the population is feeling. This is because people who are drawn to professions based on fame and adulation typically have a particular mindset that is not representative of a population where public speaking is the most common fear. Typically the actors in Hollywood may all profess the same ideas and find that the rest of the country does not share them (Trump vs Clinton, 2016). This goes for fiction writers and the more artistic departments of production companies as well.

Before we lay the blame entirely at the feet of HBO we must also consider the role of the advertisers. In a podcast on the blogtalkradio site around 2012, a former television executive joined in on a debate about whether television stations had a feminist agenda for the changes they made to sit-coms and other types of series. He listened politely to various theories until he was eventually asked for his version of what went on at boardroom meetings. He told them they were completely wrong. It was all about the money. A station's money comes from advertising. When a show becomes successful, the station can charge more for advertising during that broadcast. This brings in the big-buck advertisers who each want the show to appeal even more to their own demographics. The advertisers suggest small changes and the station complies because that is where their money comes from.

Nielsen ratings show that women are the majority watchers of television in every time slot and they also command between 70-80% of discretionary spending in the US. No matter what conflicting changes the advertisers want, they can all agree that they want to appeal to women more. If they can
get the happiness hormones into a woman's system and then put their product in front of their eyes, that means increased sales. The former executive explained that this is why successful shows all start looking the same by about season 3. Unfortunately, as we have seen with The View, it seems that one way to make the average western woman happy is to hurt men physically and emotionally.

**Emotionally abusive relationships**

There were three long term relationships in *GoT* that were largely defined by being emotionally abusive. The couple were together for multiple episodes and the abuser would belittle and degrade the other repeatedly while the victim would take it, apologise, and try to appease their abuser.

There was the relationship between Ramsey and Theon, but that was a little different. HBO made it clear (with lighting, camera angles and music) that Ramsey was wrong for behaving this way. HBO treated the other three abusers as though their abuse was acceptable.

* cersei and Jaime: In multiple episodes, Cersei belittled and humiliated Jaime, only treating him with any kindness when she wanted something. At every turn she guilted him for every perceived failing. The only time it is ever suggested that this might be bad behaviour is during her 'rape' when Jamie called her a "hateful woman" before professing his love for her.

* Shae and Tyrion: Throughout multiple seasons Shae would abuse, belittle and accuse Tyrion of any number of misdeeds, all the while he was being scrupulously honest and protective of her. Once again HBO treated this as an annoyance at worst that should never be called out as the abuse that it was. Never was there a scene where Tyrion stood up and said: "Enough! You are an abusive and ungrateful harpy! How can you treat me like this when I have been nothing but kind to you?"

* Briene and Podrick: This one was a little different in that, while Brienne behaved dreadfully to Podrick for several episodes, she *did* eventually stop being so abusive and started treating him like a human being. Once again the male victim simply took the abuse and no condemnation was ever made by HBO of the behaviour.

**The Misogyny of Westeros ... or ... the Misandry of HBO?**

With the feminist rewrite HBO made of the books, the totally and irredeemably evil male characters (Joffrey, Craster (incest guy), Kraznys (owner of the unsullied), the Dothraki Khals, the King's Guards, Burn Gorman (watch mutineers), Meryn Trant (paedo)) justified their existence. They were all marked by their cruelty to, or at least disrespect for, women. That was necessary if HBO were to justify all the sadistic violence to which they wanted to subject them in glorious technicolor.

The most unbelievable thing about Westeros was the sheer number of men who hated women there. In the real world, men who are complete strangers leap to women's defence in every situation, even when the women are clearly the aggressors and are in the wrong. There are thousands of videos about it on YouTube and they all follow the same thread; a woman abuses a man, she spits on him, she bashes him. Nobody says a word. He raises a single hand in defence and a dozen men rise up to protect her. It is hard-wired into the masculine psyche. Not in Westeros. In Westeros the majority of men hated women and wanted to hurt them and abuse them.

The society of Westeros seems to have been warped in this way so that the female characters can be shown as victims and that the men can be shown as callous. In Braavos (s6e7) Arya, a young girl, stumbled through the streets, wet and bleeding, after being stabbed in the stomach and not a single man stopped to help her. Modern social experiments have repeatedly shown that males are indeed
often left to bleed to death in the streets with nobody offering to help. However, a woman in need usually receives help in under six seconds.

Yet, in spite of all the reported misogyny, the men never seemed to strike women. Daenerys actually disrespected and ordered a Khal around in his own tent in front of his lieutenants and wives and she did not even receive a strike. In fact his wives would have treated her more harshly than the Khal. They were calling for her head the moment she walked in.

Some observations on The Mad Targaryen Queen

Daenerys Targaryen came from a long line of insane monarchs, and she seemed to be keeping up the family tradition. It was consistent that HBO chose to portray one of its most violent and sadistic characters in such a kind and forgiving light. She was, after all, a young attractive female. Their primary advertising demographic.

Let us look at her actual behaviour over the seasons. We begin with the statement that started it all. As mentioned before, she remarks that only men must die (s3e3), and HBO even named the entire fourth season "all men must die". When we look at Daenerys' history we can see that this is just what she is trying to achieve. In s1e8, when her Tribe attacked an agrarian village, we were shown images of men being slaughtered and boys bound to stakes awaiting an unknown fate. Daenerys discovered that the women of the village may be subjected to marriage or forced sex. She most pointedly demanded that only the women be spared any harsh treatment caring nothing for the men and little boys. This action ultimately resulted in the death of her husband and the decimation of her tribe.

In s3e9, Daenerys held council in her tent where she talked like she was a powerful and proven military leader. Yet she had never fought in combat, or even directed a campaign. She had always had men do all this for her and only ever sent men to their deaths while she stayed behind awaiting word of the outcome.

In s4e4, after her male army had taken a city with a two tiered society of masters and slaves, Daenerys ordered the crucifixion of 163 masters, but only male masters. Her advisor suggested not doing that with the phrase: "Sometimes it it wise to answer injustice with mercy". She replied: "I intend to answer injustice with justice". In this example though, the "justice" was in fact wanton cruelty to any male who was not a slave. The camera panned back from Daenerys through streets of men dying on crosses. It was a scene out of a nightmare and Daenerys was standing on the balcony smiling out over the scene, listening contentedly to the sounds of men screaming while they died in agony.

Two episodes later the son of one of the crucified men gained an audience with her and asked for his father's body. She was informed that she had crucified innocent men who actually fought against slavery but she didn't care. She even threatened the messenger. He begged for his father's burial and she arrogantly condescended.

In s5e5, Daenerys tormented and threatened male suspects with death by dragon and she took real delight in it. She even burned one alive and made the other men watch. It was not the first time she had shown enjoyment while she watched a man being burned alive. By now she was displaying genuine sadistic characteristics, while maintaining a paper thin virtuous facade. Indeed two episodes later when she was advised to kill all the old masters she virtue signalled with: "I'm a Queen not a butcher" in the face of all the evidence.

Down at the fighting pits (s5e9) Daenerys claimed that she was repulsed by two trained fighters volunteering to fight for her enjoyment, when a few episodes before she had ordered the crucifixion of dozens. Are the producers virtue signalling on her behalf? Do they think that the audience has
forgotten her sexist cruelty from a few episode before? *Had* the audience forgotten already? Then she condescended to criticise the gladiator owner for talking about fighting without ever having fought himself. She looked down at him smugly while she herself was far more guilty than he of exactly the same thing.

In the Sons of the Harpy revolt (s5e9) all the males (including the dwarf Tryion) were holding weapons and defending the two women (Daenerys and Missandei), who did nothing (lack of agency and vulnerability). The women held hands. Then Daenerys climbed on to her dragon and, instead of allowing it to save all her friends (several of whom had just saved her life) she commanded it to fly her away from the fray and leave them to their fate. Some might suggest she was doing it to save the dragon from a bit of pain (the spears were barely denting it) but it was clearly winning the fight and could have saved everyone. Not only did Daenerys display extreme sexism and sadism, she demonstrated that she held no feeling of loyalty to even her female companions.

In s6e5 Daenerys discovered that Jorah Mormont had grey scale (a terminal skin disease) and was looking forward to a short life of isolation and misery. She discovered this just after he had risked everything to save her life yet again. Instead of using some of her enormous wealth and power to cure him, she sent him off with nothing, ordering him to find a cure for himself with no help from her. She even tried to sound kind and magnanimous while cutting him loose.

During an attack on her city, Daenerys told Tyrion that her plan was to crucify all the masters and kill every soldier in all the kingdoms. Effectively murdering 75% of the male population under her influence. Tyrion had to talk her out of it.

Why, in spite of this violent and psychotic behaviour, is Daenerys still popular? What does she do? She swans about in her fine dresses and makes one dreadful decision after another. She does not draw up battle plans, she is cruel, irrational, incompetent and vain. Her sexism and ignorance in season one led directly to the destruction of her Khal and her tribe. She was given her dragons as a gift and did absolutely nothing to earn them. She does not fight, she does not strategize, she has no diplomacy skills and no loyalty. It is amazing what you can get away with as an attractive female. Especially with the right lighting and music. If HBO were to show Ramsey Bolton leaning on a railing at night being soothed by the sounds of 163 crucified and screaming women, they would have lit and scored it quite differently.

**Predictions for Season 7**

HBO has now caught up to Martin's books and even out-run his narrative in a few areas. We can count on a full and uninterrupted politically correct narrative from now on. The shows will become far more predictable and the producers will not even have to dampen the consequences to the female characters, they can just do without them.

**Violence**

With each season there has been a steady increase in graphic violence against the male characters. If the trend continues, season 7 should have between 400 and 500 graphically violent acts against men and about 40 against women (*fig 11*).
Season 7 Episode 9

This will not be a good episode to be a male extra. Episode 9 has traditionally held about 40% of the total violence content for a season, so there should be 200 acts of serious on-screen violence against men. This means we should be seeing about one male extra graphically hacked to death for our enjoyment once every 15 seconds for the entire sixty minutes. The average number of serious violent acts against women for episode 9 was 2.66. To be fair, one of those was usually a death.

Nudity

While violence against male characters has been steadily trending upwards, overall nudity actually dropped dramatically for season 6 (fig 12).

For this graph toplessness was removed because it was so much larger than the other categories it made the other groups difficult to read. However, even that dropped from 95 to 21 for men and from 17 to 11 for women for season 6.

Pubic hair and genitalia were combined to get an aggregate number for a rough comparison. HBO has been doing roughly what it wanted with male nudity, adding in full genitalia purely for nudity’s sake so we expect them to continue as they have begun. Without Martin’s plot to follow they can now do what they want with the female characters.

Based on the graph and with HBO allowed to follow their own course, we expect to see the following:
Toplessness will continue as it has for men, coming in at about 50 topless men after its season 5 spike of 95. Female toplessness will continue to fall to its season 3 level of 9.

With HBO in full narrative control we can expect a spike in both male genitalia and buttocks. Now that Westeros is a full Matriarchy (see below) we can expect to see the appearance of male brothels where the male prostitutes are treated far worse than any female prostitute has been to date. On top of this, they will be treated to degrading diatribes about women having been treated like this since the dawn of time (which for the previous 6 seasons they have not) and now it is time for men to experience it. This will be enforced by male guards, possibly emasculated ones.

Men will be forced to strip for the pleasure of the main female characters similar to Daario being made to strip in front of Daenerys in s4e7. Although this will be done purely for humiliation rather than appreciation and it will likely be celebrated in the popular media as 'equality'. Male characters like Jon Snow and perhaps even Petyr 'Littlefinger' Baelish will be made to do a nude scene, but for very different reasons. Female breasts and buttocks will fall to their season one and two levels of 2. We may see them in a lesbian scene.

**General Predictions**

The cliff hanger for episode 10 will be that one of the dragons is pregnant. The largest of the Dragons (Drogon) will die in episode 9 at the hands of the White Walkers.

Sansa Stark will come into conflict with Jon Snow. She will demand rule and complain that she has been oppressed by male rulers for too long. Jon will be too humble to refuse her, and will probably not mention that the worst Sansa has faced was unwanted sex, while he had actually been shot full of arrows, beaten to within an inch of his life and actually murdered.

There is only one evil male left that has not been subjected to sadistic violence, Yara's uncle Euron. His actions this season will demonstrate how much he disrespects women. Things will not go well for Euron, and it will be graphic and preachy.
The Matriarchy

At the hands of HBO, Westeros is now entirely a Matriarchy. Every realm (except the evil White Walkers) is ruled over by Queens.

- The Sand Snakes now rule Dorn. Their final statement was: "weak men will never rule Dorn again."
- Daenerys Targaryen is the unexplainable ruler coming with an army.
- Cersei Lannister sits on the Iron Throne, through a manoeuvre that her brother slayed a previous King for even suggesting.
- Sansa Stark is queen of the north. Jon may have done all the work, but Sansa is entitled, in every sense of the word.
- Yara Greyjoy is in charge of the Ironborn - Her Uncle Euron is in charge of some of them, but that will not last long.
- Olenna Tyrell is the Queen of Thorns - head of the Tyrell family.

When men were in charge, women were largely protected from the horrors of life. Now that women rule all of Westeros, things are going to change. HBO is going to double down and make lots of speeches about how hard things are for women, and really start turning up the Feminist rhetoric about how impossible it is for women to get to the top. The White Walkers may even come under female command.

There is precedent for this kind of action in real life politics when Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard gave a speech on 'the glass ceiling' at a time when the Monarch (Queen Elizabeth II), Prime Minister (Julia Gillard), Governor General (Dame Quentin Bryce), Attorney General (Nicola Roxon) and the richest person in the country (Gina Rinehart) were all women.

Unresolved Revenges

Revenge sub-plots are great television, but GoT has killed off all of the male targets already. It has only got female targets left. This poses a serious problem for HBO. On the one hand, the drama of women wanting revenge is one of the main draw cards for female viewers. On the other, it can not show violence against women. The revenges will have to be resolved in other ways.

Brienne of Tarth vs Melisandre - The red witch killed Brienne's true love and she still lives. Either she will be completely forgotten about or, if they do meet, Brienne will forgive the woman who killed her true love because of vague reasons. Sisters under the skin, only trying to do what is right, an innocent pawn of the Old Gods, etc, etc.

Cersei Lannister vs Ellaria Sand - Ellaria killed Cersei's daughter and has taken over Dorne. They will meet up in episode 3 in the presence of Olenna and will come to an uneasy alliance. Cersei will betray Ellaria in a later episode and she will die, off-screen, in episode 10.

Cersei Lannister vs Septa Unella - Unella tortured and tormented Cersei and, so far, has only had wine thrown at her and had to look at the Mountain's face without a helmet. Unella will never appear or even be mentioned again. Cersei is one of HBO's flagships of the strong, independent woman trope (who is utterly dependent on her army of male protectors). There is a conflict here between HBO's
A penchant for enacting graphic violence against any character that hurts a woman and HBOs utter refusal to show any graphic violence against a woman. Also Cersei can not be involved in violence against a woman herself lest the audience realise how evil she actually is.

Arya Stark vs what is left of Arya's List - Cersei Lannister and the reanimated Gregor Clegane are the only two people on Arya's list left alive-ish. Arya will find some method to *easily* dispatch the Mountain, somehow rendering him paralysed while she makes some self righteous speech. The absence of the Mountain will leave Cersei undefended, but Arya will fail to kill her, dying herself (off-screen) at the hands of the Faceless man.

**Conclusion**

"*All men must die*” was a very appropriate tag line for Game of Thrones. It is certainly not as applicable to the women of Westeros and they know it. HBO seem to be doing their level best to show the deaths and mutilations of men at a rate never before seen in a western television mini-series.

Societal opinions and its culture feed off each other. As our society grows more hostile towards a certain group (Jews, Blacks, Communists, Gays, Men) the more its art portrays that hatred. The more its art shows acts of violence against that group as acceptable, the more hostile that society becomes.

It is easy to miss noticing just how skewed perceptions can be until one sits down and actually starts counting. In this case the phenomenon thought to be over-represented based on what the loudest voices in the media were saying (violence against women) turns out the be the single least likely event to be seen on the show. The most common event (violence against men) remains unremarked.

The enormous amounts of sexual violence against male characters is not even unique to *GoT*. According to tvtropes.org the genital brutalisation of a male character (referenced as: Groin Attack) is one of the most commonly used tropes in the history of television and cinema. It provides copious examples of the trope in drama, suspense, crime, horror, and most unfortunately, comedy and children's programs. HBO is not the creator of this open hostility to men, but it is an excellent miner's canary for how bad it has become.

If HBO really wanted to generate controversy around the world they would produce series seven showing equal levels of violence against the sexes and get the back-arch girl on once more, but this time with no underwear.
References


TheEuropeanGirl. [YouTube] (2016) *Game of Thrones - All Deaths Compilation [Seasons 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6].* [Video file] Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7M2ddflw4_E (Removed by YouTube)


### Appendix 1 - Raw Data

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38
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