

Redefining Masculinity through Disability in HBO's *Game of Thrones*

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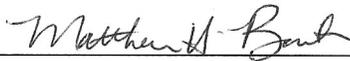
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Abstract

This research project aimed to examine the role disability plays in *Game of Thrones* in redefining heroism. Specifically, this research examined the relationship between disability and the male hero as it relates to, and redefines, masculine identity with the emergence of a new archetype: the disabled hero. Through use of Archetype theory, this research analyzed patterns and themes that emerged within HBO's *Game of Thrones* in order to examine the implications this new archetype has on cultural perceptions of masculinity, heroism, and disability.

Keywords: *Game of Thrones*, Disability Archetype, Hero Archetype, Archetype Theory, Masculine Identity, and Popular Culture

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Redefining Masculinity through Disability in HBO's Game of Thrones

The Game Begins

HBO's *Game of Thrones* occupies a unique place in popular culture as it is an adaptation piece, a product of the post-television movement, and its controversial themes of intense violence, sexuality, and other mature content. As a result, the series attracts a diverse audience, all of which have different expectations and desires for the series. This diverse viewership, arguably, plays a significant role in propelling writers and producers of the series toward the dramatic and often shocking plot twists and character developments that has made the show a hit. Among being praised for complex plot, dynamic characters, and willingness to push the boundaries of television, HBO's *Game of Thrones* has been commended for its inclusion of disabled characters as prominent figures in the series. This discourse is interested in examining how these disabled characters fit within the medieval setting of the series. Specifically, the role disability plays in relation to the male medieval hero is the focus of this discourse.

This thesis first covers the rationale behind this research endeavor and situates HBO's *Game of Thrones* as a significant artifact in American popular culture. Next, a review of literature dedicated to examining the roles of disability in popular culture, the medieval genre and medieval hero, and the use of Archetype theory in examining texts. Research questions will follow the literature review and the discourse will end with a section discussing the method of this research.

HBO's *Game of Thrones* in American Popular Culture

HBO and the Evolution of Television

The *Game of Thrones* series occupies a unique place in popular culture and, in this discussion of the series; it is significant to first acknowledge it as a product of the post-television or post-network age (Jaramillo, 2012). Both of these refer to the current digital culture age where technology and audience accessibility have revolutionized the television watching experience. Doherty (2012) titles this phenomenon Arc Tv, and explains the “revolution of television technologies” has led to increased accessibility for audiences (Doherty, 2012, para. 10). Doherty defines Arc Tv as “long-form” “episodic television,” which “underscores the dramatic curvature of the finely crafted, adult-minded serials built around arcs of interconnected action unfolding over the life span of the series” (Doherty, 2012, para. 3). Additionally, the “post-network” age where censorship has declined with the “revolution in television technologies” has made Arc Tv possible when we consider the inherent characteristic of the phenomena is the desire to “jolt” audiences with unexpected violence, sexuality, and other uncensored content (Doherty, 2012, para. 11).

The ability to access episodes *on demand* and on numerous devices such as iPads, laptops, and even cellphones has also allowed for the emergence of Arc Tv as “sophisticated narrative[s]” are now possible (Collins, 2013, p. 652). Prior to *on demand* and the digital technology revolution television creators wrote for mass audiences or, in other words, television creators had to write for a variety of audiences who may or may not be watching regularly (Collins, 2013). Episodes, then, needed to be accessible to a viewer with no knowledge of the show's plot or characters, which required static characters and simplified plots, or

unsophisticated narratives (Collins, 2013). In addition to having to write for a range of audiences, television creators were under obligation to abide by network regulations that limited content.

Jaramillo (2012) claims HBO to be the first non-network game changer and credits the emergence of HBO for fundamentally changing television as it introduced a space for “creative freedom” outside network cable regulations and censorship (Jaramillo, 2012, p. 168). Using the *Game of Thrones* narrative as an example, HBO purposefully crosses the line drawn by traditional cable networks when it comes to sexual content, violence, and shocking plot twists. Though an easy argument to make, it would be ignorant to say HBO's motive behind their controversial content is simply to profit off of sex and violence. For the meaning behind the sexual content and violence to be legitimized, each needs to be addressed within both the context of the multiple season narrative evolution and each individual episode. Placing HBO's *Game of Thrones* within the evolution of Arc Tv, a casual viewer would likely be overwhelmed or repelled by the violence and sexuality of the narrative as this is not a show that a person can throw on for leisurely entertainment. This is due to the complex nature of the plot and structure of narrative which requires commitment and familiarity on the part of the audience, in comparison with other television dramas which are created to appeal to mass audiences. Even seasoned viewers likely experience shock at some of the series' more controversial moments, yet they have developed fidelity to the narrative and are more likely to trust the sex or violence, or even sexual violence serves a purpose, even if that purpose is simply to acknowledge a darker side of humanity. Take the scene that has come to be known as the “Red Wedding” where in the span of seconds multiple main characters are gruesomely murdered on screen (“The Rains of Castamere,” Season

3). This scene shocked viewers and became an explosive topic on social media with the hashtag #RedWedding.

Often leading to content that pushes the status quo of what is appropriate for television, the evolution of narratives over multiple series combined with the freedom from network censorship sets HBO and other premium entertainment providers separate from traditional cable networks (Collins, 2013; DeFino, 2013; Jaramillo, 2012). Viewers, by paying for their subscriptions, do not have to deal with commercials, generic plots, and censored content. DeFino (2013) calls this the *HBO Effect* and discusses the ways in which HBO has influenced television and culture through “programs [that] challenge the conventional notions of “realism” and “political bias” as there is no pressure on HBO to appease sponsors or advertisers (DeFino, 2013, p. 3).

With the rise of Arc Television as the dominating force in the entertainment industry, Doherty (2012) explains that television series, such as HBO's *Game of Thrones*, have replaced the novel as the focus of critical and academic scholarship. With features mirroring the novel, such as “thick on character and dense in plot line, spanning generations and tribal networks and crisscrossing the currents of personal life and professional duty,” the need for active viewership and “deep involvement in the fictional universe” requires audiences to approach these series as they would a novel (Doherty, 2012, para. 9). The increased accessibility to episodes and seasons aid audiences in “track[ing] motifs” and plots, but also “encourages artists to more carefully embroider the details of their product” (Doherty 2012, para. 12). Ellis (2014) supports Doherty's claim and explains that the evolution of Arc TV and the HBO effect have led to the development

of shows such as *Game of Thrones*, which “reject old conventions such as narrative resolution and static characters” (Ellis, 2014, p. 3).

HBO's *Game of Thrones* as an Adaptation

Films and television shows adapted from other media sources pre-dates the post-television or Arc Tv era (Lev, 2009, p.1), but adaptation theory plays a crucial role in understanding both the Arc Tv phenomena and critical implications of HBO's *Game of Thrones*. At the forefront of adaptation theory is the question of whether or not the adapted text should remain “faithful” to the original or be treated as autonomous from the original (Brown 2009, p. 148). The “doctrine of fidelity” suggests the success of an adaptation is to be judged by “the extent they are “faithful” to the original work,” yet according to Lev (2009) this sets an unrealistic expectation (Lev, 2009, p. 1). Brown (2009) discusses scholarship from Geoffery Hartman (1996) and Joy Boyum (1985) who depart from the doctrine of fidelity and instead treat adaptations as interpretations (Brown, 2008, p. 156). In this sense, an adaptation should be treated as autonomous, yet its relationship to the original text should be always acknowledged.

Adaptation theory is relevant to the discussion of HBO's *Game of Thrones* as the series is an adaptation of George R. R. Martin's *Song of Fire and Ice* novels. The focus of this discourse is on HBO's version of the *Game of Thrones* narrative, but included in discussion will be references to Martin's source text and academic scholarship pertaining specifically to the source text and not HBO's adaptation. Though television has become a source of diverse topics in academic scholarship, as argued by Doherty (2012), there is an unexplainable absence of published critical analysis of HBO's *Game of Thrones*. This absence has led me to consider scholarship focused on Martin's novels and apply these existing arguments to my study of

HBO's adaptation. Because the source text and the adaptation share common storylines, themes, and motifs, I feel scholarship solely focused on Martin's novel will still provide relevant information and perspective on HBO's adaptation.

The differences between the source text and the adaptation provide another avenue of critical analysis. These differences are significant as they indicate where the writers and producers of HBO's *Game of Thrones* chose to deviate from the source text. Noting and analyzing why the changes were made will supplement the focus of this discourse on the role disability plays in regard to the development of masculine gender identity in the television series.

The Medieval Genre

Some of the most common film adaptations evolve from fantasy and medieval narratives. These two genres, fantasy and medieval, are often grouped together as Driver and Ray (2005) explain, these genres are innately popular because they appeal to contemporary audiences whose understanding of the fantasy and medieval worlds are "mediated by the culture [they] inhabit" (Driver & Ray, 2005, p.5). In other words, the contemporary understanding of the medieval world is largely informed by the audience or viewer's culture, rather historical evidence. These two genres take on allegorical properties as they allow for the desires, fears, and expectations of contemporary audiences to manifest in the narrative indirectly. Though films of these genres often depict alien or foreign worlds, mediated through the storylines is the *familiar*, or "the values and behaviors of the time" (Driver & Ray, 2004, p. 9). Salo (2004) discusses *Lord of the Rings* author Tolkien's design of blending the familiar with the exotic so "the familiar may be rediscovered and appear newly strange against the background of the alien" (Salo, 2004, p. 25). The medieval background provides the opportune canvas for such device, as audiences are

able to place their contemporary cultural values and ideology onto the film under the guise of experiencing a separate world.

The medieval and fantasy genres are also popular as they allow for imaginative diversion from the contemporary reality for audiences. Class systems, courtly love, magic, and knightly heroism are motifs that continuously appear in fantasy/medieval films, and generally offer an escape (outside reality) for audiences (Johnston & Battis, 2015; Kozinsky, 2015; O'Leary, 2015; Driver & Ray, 2004). Yet, these depictions are rarely accurate and rather fit what Martin calls a "sort of Disneyland middle ages" (Hibberd, 2015, para. 5). This appeals to audiences, for they are guided to "accept the illusion on screen as a convincing version of the medieval world" (Woods 2004, p. 38). The film experience allows both nostalgia for the past (Pheasant-Kelly, 2013; Driver & Ray, 2004; Salo, 2004; Woods, 2004) and the experience of "communal fantasy," defined as a construction of the medieval world which "writers, directors, viewers, and even historical consultants" of the film participate in creating (Woods, 2004, p. 39).

Unlike most within the fantasy/medieval canon, George R. R. Martin is credited with refusing to participate in a romanticized and nostalgic version of the medieval period (Johnston & Battis, 2015). Rather, Martin's novels shatter the conventional expectations of a fantasy/medieval genre (Johnston & Battis, 2015). Considering Martin's unique approach, the development of Arc TV, and the evolution of HBO, it is clear why Martin's novels were adapted into a television series. Just as Martin's novels push the boundaries of the fantasy genre, HBO's adaptation pushes boundaries of television (Johnston & Battis, 2015; Kozinsky, 2015; O'Leary, 2015; Ellis, 2014). In this context, boundaries refer to the *status quo* of what is considered appropriate or favorable television content.

Martin himself explains, though his books do not directly depict reality; they are “strongly grounded in history” and he set out to “show what medieval society was like” (Hibberd, 2015). Kozinsky (2015) argues that Martin recreates heroic fantasy with the inclusion of “corporeal realities” and “grotesqueries” that stand in strong juxtaposition to the conventional romanticized notions of chivalry, kinship, and loyalty (Kozinsky, 2015, Kindle Location 3550). Rather than follow the traditional fantasy/medieval narrative, Serwer (2011) notes Martin’s design of illustrating the ambiguity of humanity: “Just as humanity makes Martin's villains both less monstrous and more terrifying, his epic heroes don't live happily ever after--they become old bullies who father litters of children out of wedlock, or fools crippled by honor and Hamlet-like indecision” (Serwer, 2011, p. 2). Johnston & Battis (2015) and Bleisteiner (2014) note that Martin’s work does include allusion to well known medieval texts such as *Beowulf* and stories within the Arthurian tradition, yet does so in “unexpected” terms by selecting the unromantic elements such as “the blood-curdling horror of *Beowulf*, the dark satire of *Don Quixote*, and perhaps even the liminal magic of Gilgamesh” (Johnston & Battis, 2015, Kindle Location 99). If the premise that the medieval text is a site for popular culture attitudes and values to be reflected, Martin’s ambition to illustrate a more honest representation of the medieval period can be framed as his effort to inspire a more honest understanding of popular culture and the contemporary human condition.

Disability, the Medieval Hero, and Archetype Theory

The next section will first discuss literature related to disability and the medieval hero as it pertains to this research. Next a history of archetype theory and importance it holds in popular culture analysis will be explained, along with a discussion of previous research using archetype

theory as a methodology. Within that section, the archetypes of the disabled character and the medieval hero will be identified and evaluated in terms of their past and contemporary presence in popular culture. I will focus specifically on the symbolic significance of both archetypes and the implications each has popular culture and the human condition. This will be done through an analysis of previous research pertaining to each archetype. Following will be the method section of this research, where I will explain how I will apply archetype theory to the *Game of Thrones* narrative.

Disability in Popular Culture

Altschuler (2014) defines disability as “a political term that groups individuals not through physical commonality but through the common experiences of exclusion and oppression” (p. 245). Her research on the emergence and development of disability in the American novel suggests that disability is more present in texts during certain periods than others, and she credits this to the political and cultural conditions of the time (Altschuler, 2014). Mogk (2013) explains the role of disabled characters in texts to be more prominent than typically recognized:

[T]here are many more disabled characters than most viewers realize in film and television, they have more culturally critical roles than we recognize. Beyond disabled characters themselves, disability contributes to characterizations of nondisabled, it shapes storylines on a range of topics, facilitates genre and metaphor, reflects deeply held social beliefs and values, and constructs difference across a range of matrices (p. 1.)

Mogk makes an argument that disability is prominent in film and television, yet it operates on a subconscious level as symbol, metaphor, and genre, which explains why its “prevalence in popular culture” is generally unrecognized (Mogk 2013, p. 1). Disability acts as a “narrative device” and is arguably “among the most powerful vehicles of expression and narrative structure” available (Mogk 2013, p. 1). Common themes associated with the inclusion of disability in texts is the identification of those with disabilities as “other” with negative connotations, concept of disability as an impairment leading to maladjusted people, and the feeling that people with disabilities are a burden to society (Altschuler, 2014; Black & Pretes, 2007). The use of disability as narrative device is in direct conflict with the portrayal of disability as a normative illustration of reality. In their research on the “Representation of Physical Disability on the Silver Screen,” Black and Pretes (2007) found:

[...] filmmakers are making efforts to portray characters with disabilities as having more depth, demonstrate heightened awareness of internal feelings, motivations, and desires of individuals with disabilities [...] disability is [still] rarely depicted as part of the natural variation in the human condition (p. 81.)

This conflict within Disability studies is illustrated in the divide within relevant scholarship. There are those such as Kozinsky (2015) and Norden (2000, 1994) who approach disability as narrative device. On the other side of the spectrum are Black and Pretes (2007) who approach disability in media not through a literary lens, but by examining the interpersonal relationships of the characters with disabilities and their social integration.

The issue lies in the use of disability as narrative device perpetuating a collective negative view of disabilities. Norden (2000) argues that media shape a negative view of

disabilities by reinforcing the negative theme prevalent in literature and media that disability is symbolic of evil or villainy. When media do portray disabilities as negative or villainous audiences are likely to adopt this “lens” (Black & Pretes, 2007; Norden, 2000, 1994; Nelson, 1994). Black & Pretes (2007) suggest “media can play an active role in challenging society's fear and misunderstanding of disability by consciously seeking to portray characters with disabilities realistically, fairly, and frequently” (Black & Pretes, 2007, p. 82). Yet, more often than not, the presence of disabilities in films and other media is overwhelmingly negative, as the perpetual use of disability as narrative device dictates this portrayal (Black & Pretes, 2007; Nelson, 1994). An example of disability being used negatively as narrative device is made by Adelson (2005) who tracks evolution of people with dwarfism in both history and media and explains that traditionally the only role available to people with dwarfism were those of freaks and spectacle, such as circus acts or court jesters. Their alienation within society and this typecasting has left people with dwarfism little other options but to seek employment as actors in roles that only further projected this stereotype (Adelson, 2005). Black & Pretes' (2007) analysis of Hollywood films argue the convention of portraying disability as negative is largely reinforced by the exclusion of those with disabilities from normalized daily life. George R. R. Martin and HBO answer Black and Pretes' (2007) call to action as both the novels and HBO's *Game of Thrones* adaptation collectively depict a surplus of characters with disabilities, both physical and mental who provide ample opportunity to engage with, and challenge, existing discourse.

Though the majority of scholarship on Martin's work (and HBO's adaptation) is occupied by the rampant incest, women's gender issues, and the sex and violence of the narrative, there is limited criticism that deals directly with Martin's inclusion of people with disabilities. The

amount of literature available that deals directly with the *Game of Thrones* narrative stands in stark contrast to the number of disabled characters present in the series. The lack of discourse on disability in both the book and television adaptation is astoundingly illustrated in the absence of any mention of Martin, the narrative, or the HBO's television series in *Different Bodies: Essays on Disability in Film and Television* (2013), a collection of research that is specifically focused on Disability Studies (Mogk, 2013). In fact, the same year of the publication of this book (2013), HBO's *Game of Thrones* received a Media Access Award that applauded their treatment of disability as "promoting awareness of the disabled experience" (Ellis, 2014). This absence may be attributed to the conflict in scholarship regarding disability studies. Possibly HBO's *Game of Thrones* has yet to be approached critically as its treatment of disability is unlike any seen before.

What is present in terms of academic scholarship pertaining to the presence and role of disability in the *Game of Thrones* narrative can be defined as fitting into one of two categories. The first category being discourse that focuses on how the representation of characters with disabilities deviates from stereotypical and past inclusion of disabled characters in texts. The second category is based in literary criticism as disability is treated narrative device, or specifically as a metaphor for the shift of identity in characters.

Ellis (2014) provides an interesting review of the *Game of Thrones* narrative as she combines scholarly criticism with online blog reviews from readers/viewers of the narrative, some having disabilities themselves. Ellis explains the narrative allows for characters with disabilities to develop "outside discourses of tragedy and inspiration," the two terms she uses to sum up the usual stereotypical roles disabled characters fulfill (Ellis, 2014, p.4). Ellis (2014), along with the online bloggers she cites, credit the narrative for humanizing characters with

disabilities. Part of this humanization is the sexualization of disabled characters that is equal to that of non-disabled characters (Ellis, 2014; Meeuf, 2014).

In an interview with Peter Dinklage, the actor who portrays Tyrion Lannister, writer Meeuf (2014) and Dinklage discuss the evolutionary role of Tyrion in regard to little people and people with disabilities in general. Dinklage is quoted, stating: "Nobody gives them a romance. Nobody gives them fully formed personalities, and Tyrion is one of the richest characters I have ever come across. He's a human being" (Meeuf, 2014). Meeuf (2014) discusses the practice of desexualizing people with disabilities in media and states Dinklage (and the *Game of Thrones* narrative) "signals a new era of inclusion in Hollywood" (Meeuf, 2014, p. 206).

Kozinsky (2015) also focuses on how Martin "resists the long tradition of using injury as a mark of moral corruption" which falls into a stereotypical representation of disability in literature (Kozinsky, 2015, Kindle Location 3479). In her critical discourse on Martin's novels, Kozinsky (2015) focuses on the loss of limbs in characters and argues Martin "den[ies] the body's role as moral sign" and instead "invites new interpretations on the malleable form and substance of his characters" (Kozinsky, 2015, Kindle Location 3550). Using the loss of limbs to signal shifting identity and the evolution of character, Kozinsky (2015) credits Martin with using this physical disability to illustrate the relationship between the body and identity. As he refuses to use "injury" or disability to indicate "moral corruption," Kozinsky (2015) argues Martin shifts the perception of disability in his novels by not defining them by a singular identity. The characters that lose hands/limbs, such as Jaime Lannister, come to illustrate Martin's take on character evolution (Kozinsky, 2015). Kozinsky's (2015) discourse is limited, though, as it

focuses specifically on characters that lose limbs and does tackle the other prevalent types of disabilities in the text.

I agree with Kozinsky's (2015) analysis that disability is connected with identity, but looks to push this idea further. Academics and fans alike have noted the series' unique treatment of disability (Kozinsky, 2015; Ellis 2014; Patheal, 2013). Yet, discussion of the use of disability has been limited to praise for featuring protagonists and prominent characters with disability, which departs from traditional marginalization of such characters (Ellis, 2014; Patheal, 2013) or analyzing the use of disability as literary device to symbolize character evolution (Kozinsky 2015). Though both of these topics illustrate the significance of disability in the series as meriting attention, there is no academic scholarship that can be found which discusses disability in the *Game of Thrones* narrative in connection with the development of masculine gender identity.

The lack of academic scholarship in regard to disability and male gender identity is surprising when the dominance of male heroes in medieval/fantasy texts and the number of disabled male characters in the *Game of Thrones* narrative. This being stated, this new direction of research will bring new understanding to the shift ongoing in popular culture regarding attitudes toward heroism. Additionally, this absence in scholarship is surprising, as the medieval genre has traditionally served as a foundation for the identification of gender norms. Specifically, scholarship on the topic of masculine heroism has historically "privilege[d] the masculine experience" (Driver & Ray, 2004, p. 8). Fayer (1994) argues both the term "hero" and the heroic narrative favor masculine heroes and narratives, with female heroes being the exception and not the norm (Fayer, 1994, p. 30). This privileging of the male experience needs to be evaluated in

terms of the effect this type of narrative has on informing and perpetuating cultural gender expectations.

Considering the importance of the “heroic experience” as indistinguishable from the audience’s experience, as described by Woods (2004): “the way in which the action is oriented by the subjectivity— the identity, abilities, background, problems, and desires—of the film’s hero” (p. 43) and the prevalence of disability in the *Game of Thrones* narrative, disability needs to be examined as an undeniable factor in the development of masculine gender identity. The implications of this relationship between disability and masculine gender identity are significant, as they indicate a shift in attitudes regarding both disabled and male characters in texts. The merger of traditionally marginalized disabled characters with themes of medieval heroism in the series illustrates an unfolding development in western popular culture.

Masculinity and the Medieval Hero

In discussion of male gender norms, it is relevant to bring in the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which is a critical theory of male gender that emerged in Connell’s 1987 discourse (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity refers to the establishment of a “ruling class,” which would be male in this instance, which “maintains its domination” by “persuasion of the greater part of the population, particularly through the media, and the organization of social institutions” and “through punishment for non-conformity” (Donaldson, 1993, p. 645). As explained by Donaldson (1993), media become an outlet through which ideas of gender social norms are communicated and maintained. This is relevant to the discussion of the medieval film genre as Henthorne (2004) credits the “neomedievalism in mid-to-late twentieth-century America” as a “reaction to the social transformations” following World War II

(Henthorne, 2004, p. 73). Henthorne (2004) argues medievalism became the frame through which “traditional values,” specifically regarding gender, were reaffirmed through the “idealiz[ation]” of the Medieval Period (Henthorne, 2004, p. 73). If we are to agree with Donaldson (1993) and Henthorne (2004), then the medieval film’s prevalence in American popular culture is primarily due to its adaptability to fit hegemonic constructs of male gender identity.

In the medieval genre, the definition of a good knight is conflated with the definition of masculinity. It is not a stretch to connect the traditional definition of male gender expectations in America to those found in medieval texts: “male norms stress values such as courage, inner direction, certain forms of aggression, autonomy, mastery” and “adventure and considerable amounts of toughness in mind and body” (Sexton, 1969, as cited in Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1987, p. 562). The medieval hero in traditional texts from the Middle Ages would reflect chivalric values such as loyalty, chivalry, faith and courage, while also privileging physical ability in war and swordsmanship (Henthorne, 2004; Sainato, 2004). Often medieval narratives would be framed around a knight’s quest to prove his loyalty and the accompanying test of their moral fortitude. This is the plot of most Arthurian Romances, notably *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* where the named knight had to overcome worldly temptations to fulfill his quest and redeem his honor.

Driver and Ray (2004) echo Henthorne (2004) as they argue the Medieval Hero is used to appeal to “the beliefs and values of mass audiences in late twentieth-century America” (Driver & Ray, 2004, p. 5). The Middle Ages are reimagined in order to create a medieval hero with “a hodgepodge of traits derived from a mixed understanding of what is medieval and of traits we

value in heroes of postmillennial Western Culture” (Driver & Ray, 2004, p. 6). For example, though most medieval knights are “aristocratic men,” more relatable to the American culture is a hero “not born into wealthy or noble families. (See, for example, the Lancelot of *First Knight* or William Thatcher of *A Knight's Tale*)” (Sainato, 2004, p. 134-5). Contemporary medieval films mirror traditional plot lines yet there are notable changes made to appeal to contemporary desires and expectations. Sainato (2004) explains “[o]ur modern expectations of what “knights” or heroes should be are not as delineated as medieval notions of knighthood” (Sainato, 2004, p. 134).

Though texts from the Middle Ages often deal with knights undergoing quests that test their moral fortitude, traditional medieval heroes for the most part fit what Hartman (2014) calls an archetypal perfect hero. Hartman (2014) explores this concept through the medieval epic hero, Beowulf, as she discusses, in her pedagogical article, her students’ reactions to what they consider to be a static character:

I have found that the poem’s lack of concern with its hero’s development may be one reason why it alienates so many modern readers. To some, Beowulf simply does not come across as a fully realized and relatable person. [...] Students have often expressed to me their belief that good authors strive to make their characters “relatable” and that the way to do so is to include a degree of inadequacy and moral uncertainty that most people feel at some point in their lives. This belief seems to result from a cultural construct of the hero as a flawed individual who is able to grow (p. 52.)

The concept of a flawed hero, though not new by any means, does suggest a shift in expectations for a medieval hero and film. Hartman's (2014) observation that her students prefer the "cultural construct" of a flawed hero mirrors Sainato's (2004) explanation that "concepts of heroes are constantly being reshaped" (Sainato, 2004, p. 135). Though the medieval film is still a popular part of American culture, considering Hartman (2014) and Sainato's (2004) observations, the medieval hero archetype has shifted over this period of time.

Borrowing from the superhero genre, a good example of the evolution of a hero is that of Batman, whose shifts in character are results of the shifting attitudes of the American audience. Howard (2008) explains that superheroes are recyclable because they are used to meet the desires of their audiences "within the context of the times" (Howard, 2008, p.164). The Batman of the 1950s placated American anxieties surrounding the Cold War and Communism by adapting a "family friendly" borderline campy persona (Howard, 2008, p. 166). However, the Batman of the contemporary period has a much darker persona, more willing to break the rules to punish criminals, often argued as a response to Post 9/11 anxieties (Treat, 2009; Howard, 2008). Hartman (2014) mentions that her students referenced Batman as a preferred hero because "at least [he] has some flaws that make him seem human" (Hartman, 2014, p.51). In terms of the *Game of Thrones* narrative, the evolution of the heroes should be considered as indicative as a shift in cultural needs and desires that match the context of the contemporary audience. As Hartman's (2014) students admired a Batman with flaws, and a darker persona, the *Game of Thrones* audience is looking for a flaw through which they can use to identify themselves with the heroes.

Sainato (2004) explains desire for flawed heroes illustrates the ongoing shift in heroes of medieval films. The flawed hero more adequately represents the human condition according to Sainato (2004) and Hartman (2014), making it a popular choice for contemporary audiences who want a hero with which they can identify. This being said, though medieval heroes are embodying the flawed hero archetype favored in American culture, there is little discussion on how this shift affects the masculinity of these heroes.

Pascoe (2015) in his study on the representation of masculinity in action and romance films found that the genre influenced the portrayal of masculinity. He argued that if “character representations are considered social constructions” then masculinity is dependent on the culture within which it is defined (Pascoe, 2015). The significance of cinema, then, is that each representation of the male constructs the social understanding of masculinity. Pascoe identified how masculinity is portrayed differently in romance films and action films, and argues this is predominately due to the audiences’ expectations for men in these roles; “From emotional to stoic, from placid to aggressive, from dependent to independent,” Pascoe polarizes masculinity in romance films and action film (Pascoe, 2015, p. 22). This research is relevant to this discourse as it supports that the male hero in the medieval setting is likely held to different expectations than other male figures.

Returning to the *Game of Thrones* narrative, this shift in the medieval hero is pushed to a new extreme as the flawed hero is now conflated with the disabled. This is an unprecedented development in the medieval genre as heroes have previously been seen to have flaws, but they are traditionally in character rather than physical or mental disabilities. This complicates the American “version” of the middle ages as:

[In] our version of the Middle Ages [...] men are manly, women are feisty but ultimately doubly adherent to traditional roles; good and bad are easily distinguished... The typical medieval hero's maverick behavior temporarily alters the status quo, and the net result is reversion to comfortable conservatism (Jewers, 2004, pp. 193-94.)

As discussed previously, a disabled hero is not a common feature in American media, let alone the medieval genre. Factoring in disability calls into question the traditional definition of medieval heroism and, consequently, the definition of masculinity. As suggested by Jewers (2004), typically in the American medieval genre “men are manly” and narratives end in “comfortable conservatism.” Pascoe’s (2015) stance on how genre influences a cultural understanding of masculinity also supports the analysis of how disability affects the portrayal of masculinity regarding the medieval hero. Alsford (2006) explains “what a culture considers heroic and what it considers villainous says a lot about the cultures underlying attitudes—attitudes that many of us may be unaware that we have” (Alsford, 2006, p. 2). As I am interested in the cultural implications of the *Game of Thrones* narrative in relation to disability and male gender identity, examining the conflicting treatment of disability (as negative) and heroes (as positive), the conflation of the two within a text will likely lead to significant cultural implications. It is my belief that examining the merger of disabilities with the medieval hero in HBO’s *Game of Thrones* will likely challenge the hegemonic definition of masculinity and, as a result, redefines both masculinity and the medieval hero.

Archetype Theory

The use of archetypes in understanding the human condition, arguably made famous by Carl Jung, has evolved outside the realm of psychology and psychoanalytic theory into other fields including literature, history, and communication studies. Günther (2003) defines archetypes as “archaic patterns inherent to the collective human psyche and which may be expressed through recurring figures and motifs in mythology, literature and, in a more contemporary context, the cinema” (Günther, 2003, p. 84). Implied by “archaic” is that these patterns through which archetypes emerge are established throughout time and across cultures. Popular, or commonly discussed archetypes include the Mother, the Warrior, and the Trickster, yet there is no all-encompassing list.

Billions (1994) uses archetype theory as her methodology in her study of activist Phyllis Schlafly. Though Billions (1994) predominately uses the Great Mother archetype in her analysis, this research study provides insight on how to implement archetype theory as a methodology. Billions (1994) bases her justification for the use of archetype theory as method by addressing the function of archetypes: “the archetype serves the function of synthesizing sense material through its elementary or transformative character and utilizing this energy to create an image which the unconscious can relate to appropriately” (Billions, 1994, p. 153). This energy is created through the recognition of an archetypal element in an image. Billions' (1994) explanation of archetypes synthesizing content into a comprehensive image is echoed in the later research of Lindenfeld (2009). Both Billions (1994) and Lindenfeld (2009) identify the act of recognition of the image on a conscious level as what triggers the meaning to emerge from the subconscious.

Based in Jung's concept of the collective unconscious, Lindenfeld (2009) explains the "existence of a common process of symbolization" which "tends to join together rather than differentiate, to telescope diverse material into single images" as the characteristics that makes archetype theory a valuable method of research regarding the collective human condition (Lindenfeld, 2009, p. 228). Though symbolism is generally considered "culture bound," Lindenfeld (2009) elaborates on the work of Jung and others by arguing the shared or collective unconscious connects all people regardless of culture, generation, or location (p. 223). The shared need for image or "an emotionally charged unit-idea" which "synthesizes" content "into a single powerful mental entity" traverses cultural boundaries explaining the existence of archetypes (Lindenfeld, 2009, p. 223). Through the synthesis of symbols and meaning the archetype emerges as an identifiable form "into which desires are fitted to create fantasy images held in common" (Bates & Garner, 2001, p.144). These *desires* are universal and emerge as archetypes. Desires for understanding appear to be a common thread in archetypes, such as the desire to understand the human condition and the individual's role in life. Though most archetypes are seen as manifestations of human characters (such as the warrior) also included are archetypes that refer to conditions or situations.

Campbell (2008) suggests archetypes emerge into existence as "spontaneous productions of the psyche" (p. 2). Psyche in this instance refers to the collective unconsciousness, an idea at the heart of psychoanalysis, where the desires and shared experiences exist. This is important because it supports the claim that archetypes do not have to be overtly recognized in order to have a psychological effect on the viewer. In Billions' (1994) discussion of Campbell's work she argues the function of archetype on a cultural level is to form a "cultural myth" which serves the

function of “validation for the moral order, harmony with ones self, harmony with the universe, and understanding contemporary conditions” (Billions, 1994, p. 156). Archetypes often emerge from myth as collective frames of human nature and consciousness. In fact, Campbell (2008) is arguably most famous for his identification of the *Monomyth*, which encompasses the entirety of narrative into one expansive plot line. Narratives that remain faithful to these traditional archetypes continue to strengthen their validity as representations of the human psyche. My question, then, is whether or not it is possible for a new archetype to emerge from the collective consciousness? And if so, what cultural and psychological developments must occur for this to happen?

Though Campbell's discussion of archetypes is largely based in the context of mythology, in the context of this research traditional mythology is only one source for the identification of archetypes. Though cinema is at the forefront of the list, other media forms such as written texts and television shows become premium spaces for archetypes to emerge as the viewer or reader transcends into the liminal space between consciousness and unconsciousness; participation in these activities “allows the mind to engage a fictive reality even as the body remains at rest, film may be considered a shared dream and collective trek into the unconscious” (Bates & Garner, 2001, p. 143). Reading or viewing a text is an experience outside the tangible or physical reality as it is an internal experience. As a result, archetypes generally recognized within the internal or inner space rather than an externalized reality.

Lindenfeld (2009) explains Jung's theory of archetypes as not simply unconscious images, but ones that emerge in specific situations. A contemporary example is the emergence of the Trickster archetype in periodical articles discussing suicide bombers (Berkowitz, 2005). The

concept of suicide bombers is not one that easily traverses cultural bounds, yet the archetype of the trickster does. Berkowitz (2005) argues the Trickster archetype emerged in the texts about suicide bombers as a way to placate anxieties and bring understanding to Westerners for whom the concept of suicide bombers was unfathomable. Interesting to note though, is that an entirely new phenomenon occurred; the archetype that emerged was one that could be traced back to the very foundation of myth and narrative.

Bates and Garner (2001) argue that only in “liminal zones between consciousness and unconsciousness” do archetypes emerge (p. 143). Their examples of these liminal zones are myth, dream, and cinema (Bates & Garner, 2001, p. 143). Yet, as shown by Berkowitz (2005) who illustrated archetypes appear outside of the mentioned zones and into other forms of human communication, Bates & Garner (2001) fail to acknowledge how archetypes have evolved beyond these zones. Both Günther (2003) and Hockley (2001) explain that archetypes are identified by examining patterns that emerge in texts. Hockley (2001) connects archetypes to genre theory and explains that meaning is created when “character, themes, and image” build upon one another as patterns and are “located in their archetypal contexts” (Hockley, 2001, p. 190). Though Hockley (2001), like most other researchers, discuss archetype theory in relation to cinema or film, this argument is very applicable to television series, such as HBO's *Game of Thrones*. Possibly this argument on the role of archetypes in the creation of meaning and understanding is more relevant to a discussion of series such as *Game of Thrones* as archetypal patterns have more time to develop. Yet, I was unable to find any research that discussed the *Game of Thrones* narrative (either the written text or television text) through archetype theory.

Driving Research Questions

- What is the relationship between disability and masculinity in the series? How is this relationship established?
- What patterns emerge regarding male disabled characters and male heroes? Are these patterns connected in any way?
- In what ways does HBO's *Game of Thrones* follow typical expectations of male gender norms and in what ways does it break or redefine them?
- In what ways does HBO's *Game of Thrones* address the traditional negative portrayal of people with disabilities? Do they corroborate or challenge this portrayal?

Method

The choice to use archetype theory as my methodology emerged as I considered the diverse viewership of the *Game of Thrones* series. The wide-spread interest and fandom of *Game of Thrones* suggests that whether it be the plot line, characters, or setting, there is something about the series that appeals and to viewers of diverse backgrounds. I believe this popularity extends beyond the ease of accessibility thanks to the evolution of the television watching experience, or the complexity of the plot line, both ideas discussed in the first section of this paper. It is my belief that the *Game of Thrones* narrative connects to audiences across generations, cultures, and tastes because of archetypes and the shared collective unconscious. As explained by Campbell (2008), the collective unconscious is not cultural or spatial bound, rather it is shared “[t]hroughout the inhabited world, in all times and under every circumstance” (Campbell, 2008, p. 1). Applying this to the *Game of Thrones* narrative, its expansive popularity supports the application of archetype theory as methodology.

The diverse viewership that reaches across the globe, as well as transgresses genres and generations, suggests the *Game of Thrones* narrative contains elements that appeal to a diverse array of viewers. It is unlikely that the narrative is composed of a confusion of different themes, stylistic choices, or other elements that appeal to multiple individual niches of viewers. Rather, it is more believable that the narrative has core elements that resonate universally within the shared collective conscious of contemporary viewers. Therefore, these elements can likely be identified as archetypes. Because this research is interested in examining the relationship between disability and masculine heroes in *Game of Thrones*, I sought prior literature that approached the topics through archetype theory or in a way that I could connect to archetype theory and expand.

Biklen and Bogdan (1977), as cited in Irwin and Moeller (2010), identified ten stereotypes portrayed in media regarding people with disabilities, and Nelson (1994) narrowed it down to seven stereotypes, which will be used in this research study. A complete list of Biklen and Bogdan's (1977) stereotypes, as cited in Irwin and Moeller (2010) can be found in Appendix A. The following are each of the stereotypes of disabled persons discussed by Nelson (1994) and Black and Pretes (2007) with a brief description of each:

Pitiable and pathetic.

This refers to people with disabilities as “childlike, incompetent, and in need of care or cure from nondisabled people” (Black and Pretes, 2007, p. 67). Nelson (1994) uses the example of fund-raising marathons or telethons, which “feature syrupy mixtures of tearful appeals from Hollywood stars and the appearance of those with disabilities” as “objects of pity” (Nelson, 1994, p. 5). The key focus is on the incapacity of the disabled.

Supercrip.

Using the superhero word play, Nelson (1994) explains this to be the illustration of “a heartwarming struggle of someone likeable facing the trauma of a disability” who either “triumphs or succumbs heroically” (Nelson, 1994, p.6). The issues with this classification is that it perpetuates a harmful notion that if a person with disabilities does not triumph or succumb heroically, they are not worth the empathy (Black and Pretes, 2007).

Sinister, evil, and criminal.

This category is illustrated by the use of disability to heighten villainy or monstrosity. Black and Pretes (2007) explain the consequence of villains having disabilities is the reinforcement of three stereotypes: “disability is punishment for evil,” “people with disabilities are embittered by their “fate,” and people with disabilities resent the nondisabled and would, if possible, destroy them” (Black and Pretes, 2007, p. 67). Nelson (1994) argues the relation between disabilities and evil is “a holdover from medieval attitudes, [though] through the centuries the media have done more than their share to perpetuate the fear and loathing that have accompanied such stereotypes” (Nelson, 1994, p. 7).

Better-off-dead.

Though likely self-explanatory, this stereotype suggests that a disabled person is better dead than having to live with his disabilities. Black and Pretes (2007) explain, “this stereotype promotes the idea that disability means total physical dependence, misery, and deprivation of autonomy and self-determination” (Black and Pretes 2007, p 67). Nelson (1994) refers to the cultural attitudes regarding disability as “unwhole and incapable of living a fulfilling life” or “the sight of serious disability is an unpleasant reminder of mortality and vulnerability (Nelson, 1994, p. 7).]

Maladjusted—his own worst enemy.

Black and Pretes (2007) explain the root of this stereotype to be in the belief that disability is “primarily a problem of emotional coping” (Black and Pretes, 1994, p. 67). Nelson (1994) describes the media’s representation of the maladjusted disabled person to be “bitter and full of self-pity” as they have yet to learn how to “handle their disability” (Nelson, 1994, p. 8). This stereotype is harmful as it fails to acknowledge societal responsibility in promoting prejudices or failure to help those with disabilities live functioning lives (Black and Pretes, 2007; Nelson, 1994).

Burden.

Burden implies both a stain on their family and on society. Black and Pretes (2007) suggest this stereotype shifts focus away from the person with disabilities to the family or caregivers and “bestows near sainthood” on them (Black and Pretes, 2007, p. 67). Nelson (1994) argues this stereotype dehumanizes the person with disabilities, as they become a prop to highlight the charity of their caregivers (Nelson, 1994).

Unable to live a successful life.

Nelson (1994) explains media and society views people as defined by their disability. Media rarely depicts people with disabilities in roles of those without disabilities: “workers, members of families, lovers, teachers or students” (Nelson, 1994, p. 9).

Cited by multiple researchers since this time, including Black and Pretes (2007), these seven stereotypes are proven to be relevant in the analysis of contemporary media portrayals of disability. As media generally reflects reality, these stereotypes indicate views and judgments outside the realm of media into real life experience.

Though these seven categories are identified as stereotypes, I suggest they are more accurately elements that create/define the disabled archetype. Stereotype and archetype are generally considered as separate entities. Stereotype refers to an overly simple idea or image, whereas an archetype provides a foundation from which a plot or narrative can expand beyond the key identifying characteristics. An archetype can be considered a starting point for unique expansion, and a stereotype can be considered an end-point. I acknowledge this is not always the case, yet often times stereotype is associated with a negative connotation and finds company with irony and satire. In regard to disability, stereotype is overwhelmingly accompanied by a negative connotation (Black and Pretes, 2007; Nelson, 1994). Archetype is generally accompanied by more positive mental image, likely due to its place in scholarly theory. As discussed previously, disability is overwhelmingly accompanied by a negative connotation in literature and media. Dismissing this negative connotation as stereotype, ironically, has the effect of oversimplifying the significance that can be taken from this treatment. Considering disability has seemingly always been perceived as negative, regardless of culture, suggests this to be a response triggered by our collective consciousness. This negative response has been constructed over generations of people and narrative to form an identifiable archetype. To be clear, I am not qualifying this response as valid or reasonable. I am acknowledging the consistency in which disability is seen as negative deserves more consideration than the term stereotype allocates.

I would like to suggest the seven classifications identified by Biklen and Bogdan (1977) (as cited in Irwin and Moeller, 2010) and Nelson (1994) to be elements of a collective archetype of the disabled figure. The repeated appearance of disability in media as one of these seven classifications fits with both Günther (2003) and Hockley's (2001) identification of how

archetypes emerge in texts; through patterns and repeated images/motifs (Günther, 2003; Hockley, 2001). The consistency in which these seven classifications appear in texts supports the need for identifying them as elements of an archetype that continues to manifest in popular culture texts; when one or more of these seven classifications emerge within a text so does the disabled archetype. The degree of which this archetype is culturally accepted is illustrated by the ease in which these so called stereotypes are perpetuated in media as accurate portrayals of disability.

As I am interested in not only the portrayal of disability in HBO's *Game of Thrones*, but also the treatment of masculinity and heroism, I want to consider the medieval hero archetype as well. This archetype is established through a combination of two frames: the traditional hero archetype discussed in connection with the work of Campbell (2008) and the archetype of the medieval hero that emerges from western popular culture. Campbell (2008) discusses the traditional hero to be more than human, or "[endowed] with extraordinary powers from the moment of birth" (Campbell, 2008, p. 274). These powers set the hero apart from the ordinary, and give him the agency to overcome whatever enemy must be overcome. Alsford (2006) agrees with Campbell (2008) that heroes generally occupy a space outside of "the world we know," or in other words are in a position of "otherness and distance" (Alsford, 2006, p. 24). Yet, unlike the disabled archetype, this position of otherness or distance is generally self-ostracism. With the disabled archetype, the designation of otherness is not one given out of respect or awe, but a product of fear and intolerance.

Strate (1994) argues that though the hero is "as universal to human societies as communication," there will be variance in the elements of heroism as "[i]t is through

communication that we come to know our heroes, and consequently, different kinds of communication will result in different kinds of heroes” (Strate, 1994, p. 15). This justifies the use of two frames of hero archetypes in this study, as we are dealing with a traditional archetype found in written texts and one that has emerged in film and popular culture. Strate (1994) explains that the evolution of communication has changed the function of heroes; basically the form of communication affects the function of the hero. His argument echoes that of Collins (2013), DeFino (2013), Doherty (2012), and Jaramillo (2012) who cite the evolution of television as catalyst for the evolution of narrative.

As well reasoned as Strate's (1994) argument is, Campbell (2008) would argue there are still core elements that appear across heroic narratives regardless of culture, generation, or communication form. I agree with Campbell (2008) that there are definitely differences in the form a hero can take, generally unique to the culture or the time, but there are still core elements that a hero poses in order to be identified as a hero. Campbell (2008) identifies these core elements to be present in hero narratives predating the written word. At the forefront of these elements is the Hero's Journey, famously paraphrased to *separation or departure, initiation, and return* (Campbell, 2008). A heroic narrative generally follows the trials and tribulation of the hero on his or her path to self-discovery and maturation.

Within these three parts of the hero's journey are events or milestone, for a complete list see Appendix B. I will use this as a guide for identifying the hero archetype in HBO's *Game of Thrones*. In addition to using Campbell's (2008) hero's journey, I will also look for features distinct to the medieval hero archetype, or rather the culturally constructed perspective of the medieval hero archetype that has emerged in contemporary popular culture. Taken from previous

research and observation of other texts within the medieval genre, such as *Robin Hood* (2010), *Beowulf* (2007), and *A Knight's Tale* (2001), I have identified elements of a hero that are perpetuated in Western popular culture. I spent time previously discussing the expectations of the medieval hero in Western culture, but will briefly reiterate them again. At the pinnacle of the medieval hero archetype is overt masculinity. Masculinity is portrayed, generally, as a hyperbole of hegemonic gender traits; Pascoe (2015) characterizes male heroes in action films to be stoic, aggressive, and independent. In addition, "male norms stress values such as courage, inner direction, certain forms of aggression, autonomy, mastery" and "adventure and considerable amounts of toughness in mind and body" (Sexton, 1969, from Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1987, p. 562). These traits will be used in this study to identify characters that fit the hero archetype.

As discussed previously, the "flawed hero" is also a big trait of the hero archetype in Western culture and will be another aspect that I will look for in character development. Additionally, having sex appeal and the desire to overthrow a tyrannical force are two elements heavily leaned upon in the western medieval hero archetype. Campbell (2008) explains the role of the hero to be one whose "enemy is great and conspicuous in the seat of power" or in other words the tyrant ruler or the keeper of power (Campbell, 2008, p.289). The tyrant is the keeper of "status quo" or in other words hegemonic control, and the hero's function is to overthrow his control (Campbell, 2008, p. 293). It is ironic to consider this role of the hero comparison with the use of the heroic narrative to enforce hegemonic ideals, discussed previously in the section titled *Masculinity and the Medieval Hero*.

Using the seven classifications, developed through the work of Biklen and Bogdan (1977) and Nelson (1994), as grounds for the disabled archetype in combination with the

medieval hero archetype established by Campbell (2008) and other sources, I examine HBO's *Game of Thrones* to determine whether or not the portrayal of disabilities and masculinity in the narrative fits within the established archetypes. I decided to cover all five of the published seasons, as I want to do as in-depth of a study as possible. I believe the archetypes will have had time to fully emerge and develop over five seasons. Also, I believe this scope of text allows for two additional factors to be considered: (1) any sudden or unusual shift in pattern regarding the archetypes may be considered as the show's writers/producers respond to viewer criticism/ desires; and (2) as HBO's narrative reaches the point of complete departure from Martin's narrative, the choices HBO's writers/producers make to the narrative will provide further evidence to the significance of the disabled and hero archetypes.

My analysis of the first five seasons will not be completely inclusive of every episode, nor will it be random. I first will examine the first season as a pre-test of sorts. Using the first season as my baseline, I will first look to establish the presence of both the disabled and hero archetypes in the characters and interactions of the series. I will discuss the emergence of archetypes in terms of dominant themes regarding both disability and heroism. Once established, I will then move forward to my analysis, which will include all five of seasons. In this section, my primary focus will be on characters that fit either the disabled archetype, hero archetype, or both. Scenes that do not involve these characters or archetypes will be disregarded, as my specific interest is in how these two archetypes interact with one another, and whether or not this influences a shift or change in the established archetypes. I will discuss how the disabled and hero archetypes emerge within each character, and the resulting implications in regard to disability and male heroism.

Emergence of Archetypes: An Examination of Season One

This section focuses on season one of HBO's *Game of Thrones* and is organized by two major themes identified: (1) Death of the old breed of hero archetype and, (2) start of the *Hero's Journey* for three of the main male characters. The first section, Death of the Old Breed, deals directly with the traditional hero archetype. The second section is strongly tied to the emergence of the disabled archetype and its juxtaposition to the traditional hero archetype. These two archetypes are analyzed in connection with the two main themes identified as significant to understanding the function of heroism and disability in connection with male identity.

Death of the Old Breed

Extremely overt in the first season of *Game of Thrones* is the theme of the old breed of male authority being replaced by the new. The old breed fits into what I have defined as the traditional medieval hero archetype exemplified in both foundation texts such as Arthurian Romances, and idealized portrayals in contemporary popular culture discussed previously. This theme is epitomized by the deaths of Jon Arryn, Robert Baratheon, and lastly Eddard (Ned) Stark, who come to represent the old breed. Each of these characters held a powerful place in the ruling class of Westeros, the kingdom in which the majority of the narrative takes place. I would first like to note these three characters have an intertwined relationship with one another: Robert Baratheon and Ned Stark were childhood best friends and Jon Arryn was both their mentor and father figure. Together they overthrew King Aerys II Targaryen, whom is referred to as the "Mad King." Their role in the rebellion fits with Campbell's (2008) explanation of the role of the archetypal hero, which is to overthrow the tyrannical ruler of the status quo. The Targaryens had been ruling for generations before the revolt, termed "Robert's Rebellion" ("The Kingsroad").

Together, these three characters led the war and took power; Robert Baratheon became King and Jon Arryn the Hand of the King, or in other words his right hand advisor. Ned returned to his home in the North and continued to manage that part of the kingdom as his family has done for generations.

Though these three characters are arguably successful male leaders and rulers, they lack one important skill; the ability to *play* the game of thrones. The “game of thrones” refers to the power struggle between the ruling houses and key players in Westeros. Considering the HBO series takes its name from this game, its importance to the plot of the narrative is blatant. Cersei Lannister’s encapsulates the degree in which competency in the game matters: “When you play the game of thrones you win, or you die. There is no middle ground” (“You Win or You Die”). This means fighting, stealing, betrayal, and manipulation are qualities inherent to success; the chivalrous need not apply. Referring back to Hibberd (2015), George R. R. Martin does not participate in a romanticized “Disneyland” middle ages, and HBO remains faithful to his narrative (Hibberd, 2015, para. 5). Though Jon Arryn, Ned Stark, and Robert Baratheon had honorable intentions for leading the rebellion against the “Mad King,” their idealism was unrealistic and proved to be the catalyst to their deaths. Their deaths are also symbolic, in that they crush any viewer expectations that this narrative follow the traditional archetype of knightly tales of chivalry where goodness always triumphs evil.

The death of Jon Arryn sets the *Game of Thrones* narrative in motion. Though never alive in the series, it is revealed that he has a large role in revealing the corruption among the Great Houses of Westeros. Jon Arryn is described as a man of honor and loyalty (“Winter is Coming”). He instigated the rebellion against Aerys II Targaryen, the “Mad King,” in order to protect

Robert and Ned, and was a proven warrior in battle (“Lord Snow”). Based on the descriptions of Arryn by other characters, he fits the traditional frame of a medieval hero archetype: loyal, honorable, fit warrior, and leader. Additionally, Robert describes Jon Arryn as the one who kept him in line and taught him how to be a knight, alluding to Arryn’s role as father for Ned Stark and Robert (“The Kingsroad”). Arryn’s pursuit of truth regarding the incestuous relationship between King Robert’s wife, Cersei, and her twin brother, Jaime Lannister, also supports the classification of Arryn as a traditional medieval hero as he puts honor and righteousness above what is advantageous for himself. Though later revealed to be of a different cause, the events of the first season suggests the Lannisters are responsible for Arryn’s death as he was trying to reveal the truth of their incest. It is revealed in season four that Arryn was killed by his wife for another man, Littlefinger, in a plot designed to gain Littlefinger power in court (“Mockingbird”). The suspected reason for his murder (revealing the Lannister’s secret) and the actual reason (Littlefinger and Arryn’s wife’s betrayal), both suggest that Jon Arryn was incapable of playing the *game* of thrones. His pursuit of truth and mistrust in his wife exhibits his naiveté; Arryn did not realize there are no rules in the game in which he was a key player.

Robert Baratheon in his youth fit the idealized image of the medieval knight archetype: “Every girl in the Seven Kingdoms dreamed of him [...] lean and fierce and black-bearded” (Cersei Lannister, “You Win or You Die”). His role in overthrowing the “Mad King” led to his appointment as king where he ruled for seventeen years. In this time, Robert learned how the game was played. Yet, Robert arguably gave up the game, which cost him his life. Robert’s awareness that Westeros and court is not a chivalric fantasy is illustrated when he lectures Ned on what it takes to maintain power: “Do you think honor keeps them in line? Do

you think it's honor that's keeping the peace? It's fear! Fear and blood!" ("The Wolf and the Lion"). Ned, as mentioned, lives outside the court life in the north of the kingdom, and as a result is distanced from the power struggle that is life at court. Robert's marriage to Cersei Lannister was a move made not out of love, but out of strategy to ensure his power in Westeros shows his awareness that it takes more than *honor* to maintain power. His frank conversation with his wife, ironically on backstabbing, also demonstrates Robert's knowledge on how the game is played: "Backstabbing doesn't prepare you for a fight and that's all the realm is now: backstabbing and scheming and arse-licking and money-grubbing. Sometimes I don't know what holds it together" ("The Wolf and the Lion"). In spite of his knowledge of the unscrupulous nature of the game, Robert repeatedly makes blasé choices; such as ignoring the fact his children look nothing like him and his wife spends an indecent amount of time with her brother.

With the kingdom is at the point of bankruptcy and his absentee attitude when it comes to ruling, Robert shows no interest in being king ("Lord Snow"). In fact, the only aspect of court and ruling Robert shows interest in is jousting at the tournament he threw for Ned Stark's appointment as Hand of the King. Sadly, Robert's term as king has led him to a life of drinking, whoring, and other gluttonous behavior, leading to him being too fat to fit into the armor of his youth and being able to participate in the joust ("The Wolf and the Lion"). His drinking leads to his death as he ends up fatally injured on a hunting trip when his drunken reflexes are too slow to avoid a boar's tusks ("A Golden Crown"). Juxtaposing his knowledge of how the game is played to his actions, it is clear Robert metaphorically gave up his seat of power somewhere along the line. His death comes right at the moment Ned Stark was ready to reveal Cersei's betrayal and

the illegitimacy of Robert's heir and other children. This timing symbolizes Robert's final departure from the game of thrones as his death frees him from the casualties of the game.

Ned is arguably the main heroic figure in the first season of *Game of Thrones*, and the season closely follows him and his family. Ned is framed as a man above reproach from the first episode of the series. His honor and sense of righteousness is illustrated in his first scene in the series where he beheads a deserter of the Night's Watch. Ned tells his son Bran: "The man who passes the sentence should swing the sword" illustrating Ned's honor that he does not evade the consequences of his actions ("Winter is Coming"). His honor and humility is also illustrated in his recognition of his bastard son, Jon Snow. Though it put an immense strain on his relationship with his wife, Ned did not abandon his bastard child; though doing so would not have brought him criticism by his peers. These qualities paint Ned Stark as the ideal medieval hero archetype in both the traditional and contemporary frame. Jon Arryn's death brought Ned Stark into the game of thrones. As mentioned, Ned was relatively sheltered from the politics of court life in his northern home, Winterfell. When Arryn died Robert came to Ned, asking that he replace Arryn as Hand of the King. The letter sent by Lysa, Arryn's wife, accusing the Lannisters of murdering her husband sealed Ned's ill-fate as he felt obligated to accept Robert's offer in order to discover what happened to Arryn.

His choice to become Hand of the King was filled with unexpected consequences for Ned. His honor and life outside of court made him ill-suited for playing the game of thrones. Unlike his competitors, Ned had moral boundaries he was unwilling to cross; such as killing Daenerys Targaryen and her unborn child to prevent a future threat to Robert's claim to the throne ("The Wolf and the Lion"). Ned's ineptitude leads to his death as he underestimated the

Lannisters and failed to realize they do not abide by the same moral boundaries. Though he agreed to falsely admit to treason in order to save his daughters' lives, Joffery Lannister betrayed their agreement and had him beheaded. Ned being beheaded on Joffery's orders but not by Joffery's own hand is an ironic representation of the futility of Ned's code of honor ("Baelor"). The last scene of Ned alive in the series has an uncomfortable parallelism with Ned's first major scene, where Ned beheads the man he condemned to die with his own sword ("Winter is Coming").

Though Ned fit the medieval hero archetype, his death and those of Jon Arryn and Robert Baratheon illustrates this does not qualify their place in the *Game of Thrones* narrative. Ned, Robert, and Jon Arryn represent the Old Breed or traditional hero archetype and their deaths signal a shift in heroic archetype: for a hero to prevail they must be able to play the game, or in other words, a hero must be able to cross moral boundaries and exhibit cunning and strategy. For the *Game of Thrones* audience, the deaths of these three characters in the first season indicate a departure from the traditional heroic narrative archetype, where the struggle is between good and evil, and good always prevails. This theme of the Old Breed dying out restructures our expectations as an audience, and lead us to anticipate *Game of Thrones* diverging from the heroic narrative to which we are accustomed.

Start of the *Hero's Journey*

The first season of *Game of Thrones* presents a number of characters that exhibit characteristics of an archetypal hero. The structure of the narrative to follow multiple characters and storylines results in the presence of multiple hero figures, or possible hero figures. This leads to multiple heroes on multiple journeys. The shifting nature of the structure, and the fact that the

narrative is just beginning to develop in the first season leads to uncertainty in characters who will develop into leading heroes and those that will not. The most striking example of the ambiguity of this narrative is the death of the cookie cutter hero Ned Stark in the second the last episode of the season, "Baelor."

Of those who survive the first season of *Game of Thrones*, there is a strong contrast between those who seemingly fit and those who actually fit the hero archetype. This contrast is divided between two factors: (1) Those who have the outward or external legitimization to be a hero archetype, and (2) those who have the inherent qualities of a hero archetype. These two factors are almost mutually exclusive in the first season. Those who have the outward legitimization to be a traditional archetypal hero meet the expectations in terms of lineage, social acceptance, appearance, yet lack the inner qualities needed. In reverse, those who exhibit the inner qualities, meaning they are both brave and honorable while being able to *play the game*, generally do not have the outward ones generally seen in an archetypal hero.

There is only one character who almost fully matches the idealized hero archetype, meaning he contains both the legitimate background and inner qualities to meet all of the elements of a hero defined though the traditional hero archetype outlined by Campbell (2008) and contemporary popular culture depictions/expectations. This would be Robert (Robb) Stark, eldest son of Ned Stark. In regard to the traditional hero archetype, Robb accepts his call to action and begins his *Hero's Journey* by leading the Northern men to war against the Lannisters to revenge his father's death at the end of the first season. He is later victorious on the battlefield, exhibits himself to be a strong leader of men, and is intent on overthrowing the tyrannical rule of the King Joffrey Baratheon, Robert Baratheon false heir. Considering the elements of a

contemporary popular culture hero, Robb fits these expectations as well. He is classically handsome with his dark curls, blue eyes, and enough facial hair to give him the rugged American sex appeal. Robb ultimately chooses true love over duty, a storyline that is inherent popular to narratives in Western culture.

Though Robb fits perfectly into the hero archetype, like his father, his fatal flaw was his trust in the old ways of honor and loyalty. This leads to the murder of his wife, their unborn child, and himself in the infamous Red Wedding episode ("The Rains of Castamere," Season 3). Though Robb makes it more than halfway through the series, his death counts him out of the running as a lasting hero or truly recognized hero in the *Game of Thrones* narrative. For the same reasons that his father was killed, Robb is cut from the *Old Breed* of heroism. His death was caused by his underestimation of the game, and failure to anticipate who were his enemies. If it was not made clear enough by the shocking death of Ned Stark, the even more ghastly killing of Robb Stark and company during the Red Wedding establishes that the heroes of the *Game of Thrones* narrative are not the expected ones. As an audience, we have learned, or should have learned, from the deaths of Ned and Robb that any expectations we may have, which are based on the previous heroic or medieval narratives will likely lead us to abrasive disillusionment.

As we cannot truly count Robb Stark as a hero of the *Game of Thrones* narrative, due to his death and inability to play the game of thrones, we must look to the other characters as the leading heroes. My analysis of season one has led to the identification of two other male characters who begin their *Hero's Journey* in season one: Tyrion Lannister and Jon Snow. These two characters lack the outward legitimization of hero qualities, such as right to a family name, social acceptance, and in Tyrion's case, the physical appearance of a typical hero, as Tyrion is a

person with dwarfism. Tyrion and Jon lack the outward legitimization because their external identity is completely indistinguishable from their disabilities: Tyrion as a dwarf and Jon as a bastard, which in this instance acts as a biological disability.

Though Jon's disability is not as outwardly apparent as Tyrion's, both characters are introduced in the series by their disabilities first, and personalities second, fitting with the disabled archetype features identified by Nelson (1994). Jon is always the bastard child, and Tyrion is always the dwarf or some other demeaning name. When Tyrion is first mentioned in the first episode, "Winter is Coming," Catelyn Stark refers to his "stature." Another example is Sandor Clegane calling Tyrion "little lord," a term generally reserved for young lords, not mature men ("The Kingsroad"). Disability is established as inseparable from Tyrion's character. He is referred to throughout the first three episodes as dwarf, little beast, half-man, little lord, imp, and grotesque, and each of these terms carries a negative connotation.

Because Tyrion and Jon are identified by their disabilities before any other feature, it is at first difficult to presume they fit the hero archetype. When set along side the likes of Ned and Robb Stark, it is almost comical to presume Tyrion and Jon to be the heroes of the *Game of Thrones* narrative: Tyrion is first seen in the series while sleeping with a prostitute, and Jon fits the role of sulky teenager more so than hero. Yet, their departure and start of their individual *Hero's Journey* begins long before Jon's half-brother, Robb, begins his own. Tyrion and Jon leave Winterfell together to venture to the northern boundary of Westeros, marked by a giant ice wall. Jon is seeking an identity by leaving for the Wall to join the Night's Watch, a group of men who guard the northern boundary of the kingdom. Tyrion joins Jon's journey to wall as he wishes to have a new experience and *peer* off "the edge of the World" (Tyrion, "The Kingsroad").

Though for largely different reasons for heading north, it is significant that Tyrion and Jon make this journey together. Their joined journey further supports the claim that their disabilities make them equals in the narrative.

Tyrion compares Jon and his own place in society to be one and the same: "All dwarves are bastards in their fathers' eyes" ("Winter is Coming"). This comparison indicates that both Tyrion and Jon lack the legitimization needed for them to be accepted into society and proudly carry their family name. As a result, they occupy a liminal space in both their families and society. Tyrion and Jon are seen as unwanted in the eyes of their fathers and civilization, and as a result both outsiders because of their disabilities. Additionally, the negative connotation of Tyrion being a "bastard" in his father's eyes suggests that he is not a true son or pure son; as if his dwarfism symbolizes some type of inherent sin. The alienation of Jon, because he is a bastard child, is an example of how cultural attitudes enforce perceptions of a disability; being a bastard is not a disability unless society decides it is one. Having more years of experience under his belt, and a more caustic relationship with cultural attitudes, Tyrion tells Jon "never forget what you are. The rest of the world will not" ("Winter is Coming"). Rather than deny his disability, Tyrion counsels Jon to "wear it like armor" so it "can never be used to hurt you ("Winter is Coming").

The externalization of Jon's disability is illustrated in the first episode of season one when Ned Stark and his sons come across dire wolf puppies in the woods. Jon Snow counts five puppies at first, and claims they were meant for the children of Lord Stark, referring to his five half-siblings as the legitimate children of Ned Stark ("Winter is Coming"). A sixth puppy appears, but it is an albino with red eyes, marking it as different from its siblings. This wolf

becomes Jon's, a subtle reminder that though he is Ned's son, he is marked as *other* because he is not legitimate. The wolf's albinism is also metaphorical for Jon's biological disability. The wolf is different from its siblings because of its lack of pigment and red eyes, which in reality would denote seeing impairment. Jon is different from his siblings because he was born out of wedlock, which denotes him as unwanted and illegitimate. This indicates the wolf's albinism is an external manifestation of Jon's internal disability.

Though Campbell (2008) and Alsford (2006) note the hero archetype generally occupies a liminal space, of "otherness and distance" (Alsford, 2006, p. 24), this is the case as generally a heroes' powers and abilities mark them as unearthly (Campbell, 2008). In the case of Tyrion and Jon, it is their disabilities that mark them as other and different. They are seen as *subhuman* rather than *superhuman*. Their status in both the world of Westeros and as characters in a heroic narrative is complicated by the fact they are so heavily burdened by their disabilities, making their emergence as heroes in the narrative conflicting with the hero archetype. Yet, each displays inner qualities and actions in the first season that are well grounded in the hero archetype. Tyrion uses wit and cunning to escape death multiple times, and Jon begins to find strength of character and leadership in the Night's Watch. Though neither Tyrion nor Jon exhibit undeniable traits of the hero archetype in the first season, the foundation is laid that they are two pivotal characters in the *Game of Thrones* narrative. The discussion of Tyrion and Jon will be further expanded in the following section of this research, where other seasons add to their development as both disabled and hero archetypes.

Because this section of research is looking solely at the first season, it is premature to draw conclusions regarding the hero and the disabled archetypes. But what can be said is the

death of the old breed of hero and the strong emergence of the disabled archetype in season one of *Game of Thrones* suggests the subsequent seasons will exhibit a shift in the hero archetype away from the expected features. The lack of a definitive hero at the end the first season is likely purposeful; by refusing to nurse audiences' expectations regarding an archetypal hero and narrative, *Game of Thrones* challenges from the culturally constructed hero archetype. The overt treatment of disability in the narrative suggests *Game of Thrones* also challenges the disabled archetype enforced in popular culture.

Disabled Heroes: Analysis and Discussion

The extinction of the old breed of heroism, illustrated in season one, indicates we must look for heroes through a different perspective. My analysis of the collective *Game of Thrones* narrative resulted in the emergence of four main male characters that qualify as heroes, though a different breed than, for example, Ned Stark. What emerged from the text is the amalgamation of the hero and disabled archetypes; the disabled hero archetype. Rather than maintain the traditional antonymous relationship, I found the features of these two archetypes to function in a mutually beneficial partnership; the features of one archetype facilitate the features of the other. Tyrion Lannister, over all characters, emerged as the key disabled hero archetype. The other three characters, Jon Snow, Brandon Stark, and Jaime Lannister, also identify as the disabled hero archetype, though more equivocally. These characters will be discussed in more depth, though the majority of focus in on Tyrion Lannister as he comes to epitomize the disabled hero archetype for two reasons. The first is that he has the most obvious physical disability and has dealt with the negative effects of this disability for the entirety of his life. Second, Tyrion functions as

mentor and aid for the three other characters in regard to dealing with their disabilities, as he is the authority on the subject.

This section will discuss each character individually and in their relationship to one another. These four characters are connected by more than the fact they all have some disability. Tyrion and Jaime are brothers, as are Bran and Jon. Just as Tyrion and Jon's disabilities are inherently connected to one another as are Bran and Jaime's, considering they are the cause for each other's disability. As mentioned, Tyrion is connected to each of the other characters and helps them learn to accept and function with their disabilities, which ultimately leads to their development into heroes. This interrelation between these four characters presents additional layers of meaning in regard to defining heroism and masculine identity within the *Game of Thrones* narrative.

Tyrion Lannister

As discussed in the previous section, Tyrion Lannister is a man with dwarfism. He is referred to as a dwarf throughout the series, indicating he is dwarf first and man second in the eyes of the culture he occupies. Unlike other medieval fantasies, such as J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* series, in the world of *Game of Thrones* dwarfism is not a separate race or species from humans; it is a deformity, a disability, a stroke of bad luck. My analysis of Tyrion's character using the seven classifications of the disabled archetype identified by Biklen and Bogdan (1977) (as cited in Irwin and Moeller, 2010) and further developed by Nelson (1994) led to definitive results, as I was easily able to identify Tyrion within the disabled archetype. As mentioned previously, I was also able to identify Tyrion within the hero archetype through his actions and role throughout the narrative. Before diving into the implications regarding the merger of the

hero and disabled archetypes in the character Tyrion, I want to first establish Tyrion as both the disabled and hero archetypes through separate analysis. I will then move into the discussion of how his dual immersion into both archetypes simultaneously challenges and enforces the culturally constructed meaning of each archetype.

Tyrion as disabled archetype.

Tyrion does not easily fit into the classification of “pitiable and pathetic” (Nelson, 1994). As he purposefully “wears” his dwarfism as “armor,” he refuses to allow others to find him either pitiable or pathetic. This is largely done through humor and sex. Tyrion’s wit and sexual escapades become the armor he uses to fend off the judgment of others. His constant indulgence in prostitutes illustrates Tyrion openly defying the cultural perception that as a dwarf he is incapable of engaging a woman and satisfying her sexually. None of Tyrion’s sex scenes suggest him to be pitiable or pathetic. Rather, Tyrion is framed as a capable lover whom women enjoy and he implies multiple times that his skill in bed compared to his small size should make normal men feel inadequate. Yet, Tyrion does engage in self-pity after he is injured during the battle at King’s Landing and during his trial for his nephew’s murder. Tyrion tells his lover, Shae, that the long scar that he received across his face during the battle makes him both “monster” and dwarf (“Valar Morghulis”). In response to his father’s lack of affection, Tyrion lashes out at his brother that regardless of Jaime’s failings he will never lose their father’s love, whereas Tyrion never had it in the first place:

Tyrion: He knows I'm innocent and he's willing to sacrifice me anyway.

Jaime Lannister: He's willing to sacrifice any of us.

Tyrion Lannister: Not you! You're the golden son! You could kill a king, lose a hand, fuck your own sister, you'll always be the golden son!

(“Mockingbird”)

I would argue this self-pitying is really the only time Tyrion is framed as pitiable or pathetic.

This highlights the degree in which disability, specifically dwarfism, is treated in the world of *Game of Thrones*.

Rather than frame Tyrion as pathetic or pitiable, he is demonized for his disability. Tyrion overwhelmingly fits the classification of “Sinister, Evil, and Criminal” (Nelson, 1994) in terms of how others treat him. Tyrion is repeatedly referred to as a monster by various characters, suggesting he is both evil and inhuman. Oberyn Martell, a character from the series describes to Tyrion the rumors floating around regarding what Tyrion looked like as a baby: “all anyone talked about was the monster that had been born to Tywin Lannister. A head twice the size of his body, a tail between his legs, claws, one red eye, the privates of both a girl and a boy” (“Mockingbird”). This gross exaggeration illustrates how Tyrion’s dwarfism is demonized in the world of *Game of Thrones*.

Though he obviously does not have a tail or any of the other features described in the rumors, Tyrion continues to be the victim of public opinion. The people of King’s Landing automatically believe it is Tyrion who is behind Joffery’s cruel behavior because he is a dwarf, and therefore inherently evil (“Ghost of Harrenhal”). This illustrates Tyrion’s disability informs others perceptions of him. Tyrion lashes out at this unfair treatment: “I saved you. I saved this city... and all your worthless lives! I should have let Stannis kill you all” (“The Laws of Gods and Men”). Even when Tyrion proves himself to be heroic, he can’t escape the negative

perception of his disability. Tyrion argues that he is only being persecuted for Joffery's death because he is a dwarf:

Tyrion Lannister: I'm guilty of a far more monstrous crime: I'm guilty of being a dwarf!

Tywin Lannister: You are not on trial for being a dwarf.

Tyrion Lannister: Oh, yes I am! I've been on trial for that my entire life!

(“The Laws of Gods and Men”)

Tyrion recognizes that his dwarfism has made him an alien in the world and is the reason he is continually perceived as sinister, evil and criminal. Tyrion's pain comes from his desire to be accepted and loved by both his family and the culture in which he is an unwelcome guest. He exclaims, “I wish I was the monster you think I am!”, suggesting it would be easier if Tyrion was inherently evil as he would not to suffer from the mistreatment and alienation.

Tyrion's excessive drinking and sexual escapades fits the classification of “maladjusted—own worst enemy” (Nelson, 1994). It also accompanies “Unable to live a successful life” (Nelson, 1994), as it is suggested that Tyrion is reliant on both alcohol and prostitutes for satisfaction. As an adult, Tyrion has only been with prostitutes, which implies he is incapable of having a functional relationship or one based on mutual affection. Though Tyrion is painted as a capable lover, regardless of his dwarfism, prostitutes being his sole company fits with the disabled archetype which implies a normalized romantic relationship is not possible. Tyrion's overt sexuality may affirm his masculinity, but it also affirms that he is unable to maintain a traditional romantic relationship, which fits with the negative classifications of the disabled archetype.

Though other characters engage in drinking and sleeping with prostitutes, Tyrion's habits are emphasized in the series, specifically the first season. These traits, along with his dwarfism, are used to illustrate Tyrion is a "burden" to his family. His father, Tywin, implies Tyrion's dwarfism is a punishment: "To teach me humility, the gods have condemned me to watch you waddle about wearing that proud lion that was my father's sigil and his father's before him!" (Tywin Lannister, "Valar Dohaeris"). Because he is a dwarf, Tyrion is a mockery to his family's name as it suggests a stain in their family line. Additionally, Tyrion's mother died during his birth, which further classifies Tyrion as burden to his family. It is mentioned multiple times that his sister, Cersei, never forgave Tyrion of killing their mother and considers it an unfair trade that she lost her mother in return for a dwarf brother.

Unlike Nelson's (1994) explanation that this classification shifts focus away from the person with disabilities onto the caregivers who are then seen in a sympathetic light, the framing of Tyrion as a burden only emphasizes the cruelty with which Tyrion is treated. As Tyrion is capable of fending for himself, in both body and mind, his family and those around him do not benefit from the excuse that taking care of Tyrion is truly burdensome. Rather, their treatment of Tyrion is framed as catalyst for his drinking and sexual escapades, suggesting if they had not alienated Tyrion as a child they would not have had to deal with his reckless habits as an adult. This supports the classification of "better off dead" where both Tyrion's father, Tywin and Cersei, suggest they would have been better off if they had killed Tyrion as a child. Tyrion himself recognizes the only thing that kept him alive as child was that he was born into a family of status, and therefore his father's reputation would not allow such common behavior ("Kingsroad"). The classification of Tyrion under "better off dead," cumulates with his father,

Tywin, sentencing Tyrion to die for a crime he did not commit. This illustrates that Tywin would rather have Tyrion dead over finding out the truth of Joffery's death. In regard to the final classification, "Supercrip" (Nelson, 1994), Tyrion does fit the elements of the disabled character fighting against their condition in the sense he is constantly battling the negative perception and treatment of him as a dwarf. Yet, for Tyrion there is not heartfelt ending or triumph. Regardless of his heroic actions or personal victories over those who seek to berate him, Tyrion has yet to overcome his trauma.

Tyrion as hero archetype.

Tyrion's classification as within the hero archetype functions on two levels. The first is the development of his plot line that fits with Campbell's (2008) *Hero's Journey*, and the second is related to the characteristics developed in foundational and contemporary heroic narratives.

Campbell (2008) identifies the Hero's Journey by three major plot features: departure, initiation, and return. Within these features are multiple other plot points where features of the hero archetype are defined. A full list can be found in Appendix B. In regard to Tyrion, I will discuss his Departure, Initiation, and Return, along with other elements such as: Call to Action, Belly of the Whale, Road of Trials, Temptress, Magic Flight and Rescue from Without (Campbell, 2008).

Tyrion begins his journey with his *Departure*, to the Wall ("Kingsroad"). This trip to the wall is the catalyst for Tyrion as he leaves his family and travels beyond the familiar. From here Tyrion ends up kidnapped and finds himself in the *Belly of the Whale*, or "swallowed into the unknown, and would appeared to have died" (Campbell, 2008, p. 74). It is only through the aid of the sword-seller, Bronn, that Tyrion is able to escape his would be death ("A Golden Crown").

This leads to Tyrion's *Road of Trials*, which describes his trip back to King's Landing and time in Joffery's court where he sees battle multiple times, is betrayed by his family, and ultimately framed for his nephew, Joffery's, murder. This *Road of Trials* is the first part of Tyrion's *Initiation*, and is defined by Campbell (2008) as where the hero "must survive a succession of trials" where he is "covertly aided by the advice, amulets, and secret agents" (Campbell, 2008, p. 81). Tyrion receives aid from multiple characters including his brother Jaime and an ambiguous character Varys, both of whom help Tyrion escape execution for Joffery's death.

Shae, Tyrion's prostitute lover, fits the characterization of the *Temptress*. Campbell (2008) explains women function on two levels in heroic narratives, either as "victory" and "fulfillment" or as "defeat" and "sin" (Campbell, 2008, p. 101-2). Shae started off as *Goddess* for Tyrion, but comes to represent "sin" for Tyrion as he realized Shae is tainted by the evil of his father. Tyrion's *Atonement with Father* happens on unlikely terms where Tyrion kills his father and frees himself from his control ("The Children"). This moves Tyrion into the next part of his journey, the *Return*, where Tyrion goes on his *Magic Flight* by leaving Westeros. With the knowledge of his family's corruption and by killing his father, Tyrion has become dangerous with the power to upheave the status quo of Westeros. His flight from Westeros is necessary to both preserve his life, and maintain the power he has over the status quo. The need to escape Westeros leaves Tyrion disillusioned, as though he now is free from his father and family he is also dealing with the betrayal and abandonment of both his family and community. Tyrion's decision to find Daenerys Targareyn represents the *Rescue from Without*. Tyrion never expected to find himself turning to Daenerys for protection nor does he expect to become an advisor for her:

Daenerys Targaryen: If you are Tyrion Lannister, why shouldn't I kill you to pay your family back, for what it did to mine?

Tyrion Lannister: You want revenge against the Lannisters? I killed my mother, Joanna Lannister, on the day I was born! I killed my father, Tywin Lannister, with a bolt to the heart! I am the greatest Lannister killer of our time!

Daenerys Targaryen: So I should welcome you into my service because you murdered members of your own family?

Tyrion Lannister: Into your service? Your Grace, we have only just met. It's too soon to know if you deserve my service.

(“The Gift”)

The violent history between their families, as it was Jaime's brother who killed Daenerys' father, illustrates the unlikely nature of Tyrion receiving aid from Daenerys. This fits Campbell's (2008) description of *Rescue from Without*, as it is an unexpected source coming to aid a “reluctant” hero (Campbell, 2008, p. 181). This is as far as Tyrion's *Hero's Journey* as ventured in the *Game of Thrones* narrative, but likely we will see additional elements in season six and so forth.

Tyrion's classification as a hero archetype is further developed when the characteristics of his persona are examined in relation to those found in traditional and contemporary hero archetypes. Though contemporary heroic narratives characterize the hero archetype through physical feats of bravery and strength, foundational heroic narratives define heroism through the concept of chivalry. This category defined by the theme of heroic chivalry, often illustrated in Arthurian narratives. Tyrion has multiple instances where he illustrates chivalric values of humility, etiquette, boldness and wit.

An example of this is when Tyrion rebukes his nephew and future king, Joffrey, for not paying his respects to Catelyn Stark after her son, Bran, was injured:

Tyrion: Before you go you will call on Lord and Lady Stark and offer your sympathies.

Joffrey: What good will my sympathies do them?

Tyrion: None. But it is expected of you. Your absence has already been noted.

Joffrey: The boy means nothing to me. And I can't stand the wailing of women.

Tyrion: One word and I'll hit you again.

Joffrey: I'm telling mother!

Tyrion: Go! Tell her. But first you will get to Lord and Lady Stark and you will fall on your knees in front of them and tell them how very sorry you are, that you are at their service, and that all your prayers are with them. Do you understand?

(“The Kingsroad”)

Tyrion shows that he not only is knowledgeable on courtly etiquette, but a boldness to correct the future king for his wrongdoings. He not only verbally rebukes Joffrey, but physically hits him as well. In this instance Tyrion takes on the role of teacher for Joffrey as no one else has instilled in him chivalric vales.

Tyrion also teaches Jon Snow a lesson in humility when he saves Jon from being attacked by other Night's Watch recruits. Jon blames jealousy for the reason why he was targeted, but Tyrion corrects him:

Jon: They hate me because I'm better than them.

Tyrion: It's a lucky thing none of them were trained by a master-at-arms like your Ser Roddick. I don't imagine any of them ever held a real sword before they came here.

(“Lord Snow”)

Tyrion teaches Jon humility; as though Jon is a bastard he is still privileged in his place in life. Through Tyrion's influence, Jon changes his perspective that he is better than everyone there and instead begins to help others with their fighting skills (“Lord Snow”).

Tyrion, though not a warrior like his brother Jaime, Lord Stark, or even Jon Snow, he values knowledge and intelligence. Along with honor and bravery, reason has traditionally been associated as a knightly virtue. Tyrion refers to his brother as the handsome one, and himself as the “clever one” (“Winter is Coming”). When asked by Jon why he reads so much Tyrion responds, “my brother has his sword and I have my mind. And a mind needs books like a sword needs a whetstone” (“The Kingsroad”). Tyrion implies that because he is a dwarf he is unable to meet certain chivalric expectations, such as swordsmanship. To make up for this he uses knowledge, reason, and wit to meet chivalric expectation. Additionally, Tyrion's ability to outwit others, especially those who want to kill him (“Valar Morghulis”), gives Tyrion a purpose in life.

Within his siblings, Tyrion stands out not only because of his disability, but because of his honesty and intellect. Jaime and Cersei's incestuous relationship, cruel nature, and self-conceit set them apart from Tyrion, whose blunt reason and awareness of how very fragile their status is in the world paints him as a more identifiable and sympathetic character. Referring back to Tyrion's comparison of himself to his brother Jaime, suggests that while Jaime meets the physical expectations of a medieval hero, he does not necessarily meet the internal ones. Tyrion's

trip to the wall symbolizes this difference as he goes without his brother to peer off the “the edge of the world” (“The Kingsroad”). Tyrion’s desire to journey to the wall that separates the kingdom of Westeros and the North displays characteristics common to heroes in contemporary versions of heroic narratives; contemporary culture values a hero who takes risks and seeks adventure.

Tyrion’s sexuality places him outside the foundational hero archetype into the contemporary one, though he is pushing the accepted boundary through his sexual engagement with multiple partners. In Tyrion’s first scene on camera, he is engaging in sexual acts with a prostitute. This scene is very graphic as the camera pans from Tyrion’s face to his abdomen where the top of the prostitute’s head is visible as she performs oral sex on him (“Winter is Coming”). Reference to Tyrion’s sexual escapades continue as there are many references to his genitals and activities with prostitutes; Tyrion jokes that he is the greatest hunter as his “spear never misses” (“Winter is Coming”). This sexualization is unique as generally disabled people and characters are not seen as sexual beings (Black & Pretes, 2007). Yet, Tyrion’s sexuality is almost as overt as his disability.

We could question the reasoning behind his sexual prowess to be a result of his family’s financial and power status or because his disability plays into fetish fantasies. Yet, it is impossible to ignore that Tyrion’s sexuality is equal to that of any other man in the series, if not more so. I suggest that rather than diminish the meaning of this sexualization due to the above mentioned explanations, we consider Tyrion’s sexuality to be representative of his inherent masculinity. Though he is disabled, Tyrion is still a man with desires and functioning sex organs. His overt sexuality serves to balance out his overt disability, which emasculates him in the eyes

of others. Tyrion's sexuality also serves to set him apart from both the foundational and contemporary hero archetype as normally the male hero from both enters into a monogamous relationship within the narrative. Tyrion is both seen with multiple women and is referenced having slept with many women prior in life.

As his sexuality simultaneously alters what is to be expected from a traditional disabled archetype and hero archetype, it is suggested Tyrion is breaking the boundaries of each and instead developing into a new archetype. Tyrion is depicted as a sexual masculine being capable of engaging in sexual acts with women, regardless of his role as disabled or hero. This trait defies his sole categorization as disabled or as a hero, as both of these categories fail to include men who engage in recreational sex with multiple partners.

Tyrion the disabled hero.

HBO's *Game of Thrones* introduces Tyrion Lannister as a new archetypal character. The strong themes discussed indicate that not only does Tyrion have characteristics that traditionally resonate with both the disabled and hero archetypes, his dual resonance to these traditionally disparate archetypes supports his development into a new archetype: the disabled hero. This dual immersion into both archetypes is significant, as the culturally constructed meaning derived from each is inherently at odds with the other. Disability is traditionally accompanied by negative images, whereas the hero is perceived through positive ones.

The merger of the disabled and medieval hero archetypes indicates a change to traditional cultural expectations of male identity. As the traditionally emasculated disabled character and the hyper masculinized medieval hero merge within Tyrion, his character alters the cultural perception of what it means to be disabled, a hero, and a man. The dynamics of his character, his

strengths, weaknesses, and otherness make for an honest representation of the diversity and fragility of the human condition.

Jaime Lannister

Jaime Lannister is Tyrion's older brother and member of the Kingsguard, a group of knights sworn to protect the King. He killed the "Mad King" Aerys, which earned him the nickname "Kingslayer." Jaime Lannister does not enter the narrative as hero or a disabled character. Rather, Jaime is portrayed completely malevolent in the majority of the first and second seasons of the series. His initial introduction into the series is through his incestuous relationship with his sister, Cersei, which leads to him throwing Brandon Stark off a tower in order to hide their secret ("Winter is Coming"). It is not until the second season where Jaime, uncharacteristically, saves Lady Brienne from being raped does Jaime show any admirable or sympathetic behavior ("Walk of Punishment"). It is interesting to note that this uncharacteristic behavior is immediately followed by Jaime losing his sword hand, as it is hacked off by his and Brienne's capturers ("Walk of Punishment"). In reference to George R. R. Martin's narrative, Kozinsky (2015) argues the loss of limb signals a shift in identity for Jaime. By using a loss of limb, Kozinsky (2015) maintains Martin uses "malleable form" of the human body to illustrate soul evolution (Kozinsky, 2015, Kindle Location 3550). I agree with Kozinsky's (2015) analysis of Jaime's loss of limb, but would like to connect it directly with that of the disabled and hero archetypes.

It is significant that Jaime first shows a shift in character and then loses his hand. This implies that Jaime's body no longer matches his internal condition. Jaime is known for the handsomeness of his appearance and skill in sword fighting. His first act of selflessness in the

narrative results in the loss of both this physical perfection and sword hand. Building on Kozinsky's argument that: "the amputation is not the destiny of a character becoming himself; it is simply the beginning of a new role for the character," I suggest this new role for Jaime is that of the disabled hero (Kozinsky, 2015, Kindle Location 3516-3517). Before this point in the narrative, Jaime could neither identify with the hero archetype or the disabled archetype as he failed to fall under either classification. Until he lost his limb, Jaime perpetuated belief that a cripple is "better off dead": "Even if the boy [Brandon Stark] lives, he'd be a cripple. Grotesque. Give me a good, clean death anyway" (Jaime, "Kingsroad"). Jaime, having a whole body, never had the privilege of experiencing the world from his brother's perspective, as an unwanted outsider.

Though Jaime fits the physical attributes of the hero archetype (handsome, fit, and skilled in battle), he lacks the internal characteristics. Jaime reveals to Catelyn Stark the extent of his disillusionment regarding what it means to be a knight or supposed hero figure: "Defend the King, obey the King, obey your father, protect the innocent, defend the weak. But what if your father despises the King? What if the King massacres the innocent? It's too much. No matter what you do, you're forsaking one vow or another" (Jaime, "A Man Without Honor"). His time as a knight of the Kingsguard was spent witnessing corruption and violence, rather than honor and goodness, which left Jaime bitter and nihilistic. This is a stark contrast to Arthurian narratives or other medieval romances where knights are characterized as moral heroes. Rather than be celebrated for ending a tyrant's rule, Jaime is condemned as *a man without honor* for breaking his vow to protect the King by stabbing him in the back. This reputation haunts Jaime as he is introduced into the series. Jaime tells Brienne that he is referred to as "kingslayer" and

"oathbreaker" more than his own name, which causes him immense pain ("Kissed by Fire"). Jaime is the opposite of Ned Stark; He lacks the qualities of the hero, but is well informed on how to play the game of thrones.

Returning to Jaime's loss of hand, I would like to propose that Jaime would have likely returned to his malevolent ways after saving Brienne from being raped if he had not lost his hand. Yet, this was not the case and losing his hand forced Jaime into a new perspective, which brought him both humility and compassion. We can consider Jaime's loss of hand to be the trigger to his *Hero's Journey*, as Jaime is forcibly departed from all he knows into a new liminal existence as disabled. Features that mark this change in Jaime include his ability to share his anguish and reveal himself as vulnerable to Brienne, which likely something he would have never done before the loss of his hand. Jaime is also willing to risk his life to return to save her from torture, though he is basically helpless having just lost his hand, also very out of character for Jaime who puts himself and his family name above all else ("First of His Name").

Jaime begins to rebuild his sense of self by learning how to fight with his non-sword hand and takes a noticeable step back from the corrupt actions of this family. His brother, Tyrion, plays a huge role in helping Jaime cope with his disability and their relationship grows because of their mutual dependence on one another. This period can be seen as his *Road of Trials* (Campbell, 2008), as Jaime is forced to learn his new body and new identity. His relationship with this lover and sister, Cersei is strained during this time, as is his with his father, Tywin as both struggle to accept the new Jaime. Jaime attempts to save his brother, Tyrion's, life by dealing with their father and breaking him out of jail when he is sentenced to death for murdering Joffery ("The Laws of Gods and Men" and "The Children"). The events of this period

lead to Jaime venturing off to save his daughter, Myrcella, who is being held by a rival ruling family from a different country. In the last episode of season five, Jaime is ultimately unable to save Myrcella, and it is suggested she dies in his arms ("Mother's Mercy").

What is significant about Jaime's character is that he does not atone for his sins nor does he completely shift in persona. Though Jaime exhibits traits of the hero archetype and the disabled hero archetype, he is still a flawed character who is willing to lie and kill for this family. Rather than epitomize him as a sinister disabled archetype, or rebuke as a hero archetype, the two merge together to balance out Jaime's failings with the honesty of his character. He is now a character with which the audience can sympathize with and admire, whereas before he was a villain. In regard to his masculine identity, through his disability Jaime comes to redefine his identity to include that aspect of himself. He is not emasculated by the loss of his sword hand, rather Jaime learns to cope with his disability and arguably becomes a stronger male character in the narrative.

Brandon Stark

Brandon (Bran) Stark is Ned Stark's second youngest son. As mentioned before, Bran was not born with a disability. Rather, he was pushed off a tower by Jaime Lannister and crippled by the fall ("Winter is Coming"). Prior to his fall, Bran dreamed of becoming a knight and bannerman for his eldest brother, Robb Stark. He is first seen in the narrative practicing shooting a bow, symbolic of his desire to become the warrior hero figure ("Winter is Coming"). After his fall, Bran remarks he would rather be dead than not able to walk or ride a horse ("Lord Snow"). As with Jaime, Bran considered a disability to be as good as a death sentence as it meant he could no longer become a knight. Bran's entire perception of masculine identity is tied to being a

knight. Bran is only ten years old at the start of the narrative, which supports his disability to be seen as a tragedy. This fits with Nelson's (1994) classification as "Pitiable and Pathetic" as it is the perception of all those aware of his disability, including himself, that his life has been ruined. Jaime Lannister throwing him off the tower is symbolic, as Jaime outwardly represents all Bran wishes to become. Bran's childhood idealism is shattered when this knight, a man of supposed honor and chivalry, throws him off the tower in a murder attempt. When he wakes from his coma, Bran falls into a depression that is not lifted until Tyrion visits him and brings plans for a special saddle that would allow Bran to ride despite his injuries ("Cripples, Bastards, and Broken Things"). This brought Bran some comfort as it suggested he might have some independence.

The most significant aspect of Bran becoming disabled is that his injury triggered his gift of sight or visions. As his visions did not start until Bran became crippled, the narrative implies his disability acts as catalyst for his greater destiny. Bran's visions lead him to his *Hero's Journey* where he leaves his home and ventures across the Wall into the virtual unknown. It is indicated that Bran's visions will be the key to defeating the threat of the White Walkers, an ancient monster that poses a danger to all people. Bran's *Hero's Journey* is easiest to identify as he literally departs on a journey that lasts the entirety of currently released narrative. Once he reaches the destination for his journey over the Wall, the Three Eyed Raven, Bran begins training. He is absent from all of season five of the narrative, but it is implied he is training with the Three Eyed Raven in order to return and save everyone from the White Walkers.

Though he has yet to fully come into the hero archetype, Bran already exhibited elements beyond the *Hero's Journey* that classify him as a hero. He saved his brothers Rickon and Jon Snow, willingly ventured into danger, and took on a great deal of responsibility for a child of his

age. Rather than be limited by it, Bran's character developed outward from his disability. As he is yet to reach maturity, Bran's masculine identity will be largely formed by his disability and consequential experiences. As explained by Bran's teacher, the Three Eyed Raven, Bran will never be a knight as he will never walk again, but he will "fly," suggesting his is not limited by his disability ("The Children"). Rather, his disability brought him to a greater heroic destiny that reaches beyond any idealism of knights and banners.

Jon Snow

Unlike the other three characters, all of whom have physical disabilities, Jon Snow's is biological. Some may argue being a bastard does not count as a disability, but considering it fits well within Nelson's (1994) classification of disabled stereotypes, I believe treating it as such is justified. A bastard child is generally unwanted. This leaves them often without a home or framing them as a "burden" for whomever decides to take care of them. In the case of Jon Snow, it is depicted as burden in the sense that his presence disrupts the ideal image of the Stark family. Catelyn Stark remarks that every time she looks at Jon she sees her husband's infidelity ("Dark Wings, Dark Words"). As he is unwanted, Jon's presence at Winterfell and comparison to his true-born siblings makes him a pitiable character.

Though the extent to which being a bastard carries the classification of "better-off dead," is minimal compared to that of physical disability, it is still suggested in the narrative that bastard children are unwanted consequences of sex and therefore it would be easier if they weren't around. Though Jon is not characterized as "sinister, evil, or criminal," being a bastard ties him with sin. This connection undermines any authority Jon has and forces him to fight for his place in the world. This is seen most clearly in Jon's struggle to find a place for himself and maintain

his role as leader in the Night's Watch. More than the other three figures, Jon fits into the "Supercrip" classification. His struggle at the Night's Watch is rewarded when he is elected Lord Commander ("The House of Black and White"). When Jon is ultimately betrayed by some of his brothers in the Night's Watch, and apparently stabbed to death ("Mother's Mercy"), we the audience watch horrified as our *supercrip* "succumbs heroically" (Nelson, 1994).

Identifying Jon as a hero is even less challenging than placing him within the classification of the disabled archetype. Already discussed briefly is Jon's *Hero's Journey*. This begins with his departure to the wall and initiation into the Night's Watch, though I argue his actual initiation does not come until he is elected Lord Commander. Other elements of Jon's Hero's Journey include his call to action where Jon goes to leave the Night's Watch to revenge his father's death, but ends up staying to fight the Night Walkers ("Fire and Blood"); his meeting with the Goddess/Temptress, Ygritte with whom he loses his virginity ("Kissed by Fire"); and the Apotheosis, where he sacrifices himself to save the Wildling people of the North, earning him the betrayal of his brothers in the Night's Watch ("Mother's Mercy"). His continual self-sacrifice, and willingness to protect not only his own people, but the Wildlings as well, further develops Jon's character to be both sympathetic and heroic. Additionally, as Jon's disability does not mark his outer features, he fits into the contemporary hero archetype of masculine sex appeal.

It is when Jon learns to accept his biological disability that he becomes a hero figure. As discussed previously, Tyrion taught two valuable lessons: (1) Don't forget that he is a bastard and wear it like armor, and (2) be humble in your life as you do not know the struggles of the man next to you. Jon took each of these lessons and developed from an immature boy with a chip on

his shoulder, to strong leader who is capable of seeing beyond culturally perceived limitations and weaknesses. Jon embodies a strong masculine leader in the narrative, and his status as bastard does not take away from the glory of his character.

The question lies in whether Jon stays dead in the narrative. If so, then it can be argued Jon was not the hero that will end the narrative, and met his timely death like his father and brother, Robb. Yet, there is a lot of speculation that Jon will be rising from the dead in season six, which would suggest his *Hero's Journey* is not over. In this instance I would like to identify the symbolism of his death on two levels. The first is that Jon rising from the dead would instill a very Christ-like plot development onto the narrative, which would of course have its own implications. The second is that Jon has a characteristic that his father and brother did not possess. This characteristic justifies having Jon resurrected and continue as a key figure in the narrative. If this is the case, I believe it is Jon's dual occupation as both disabled and hero archetype that qualifies his importance to the *Game of Thrones* narrative. Because Jon experienced the darker side of both people and nature, it makes for a more rounded and developed hero than his father or brother were capable of being.

Redefining Masculinity

The focus on Tyrion, Jaime, Bran, and Jon indicates there to be an emergent pattern in the *Game of Thrones* narrative regarding disability and male heroes. Tyrion and Jon are born with their disabilities, and are the first two male disabled characters to exhibit traits of the hero archetype. Jaime and Bran each develop their disabilities later in life and on screen, which acts as a catalyst for their classification within both the disabled and hero archetypes. None of these characters immediately fits the hero archetype; rather this is developed through their interactions

and relationships toward one another. At the center is Tyrion, who aids the other three in adapting to their disabilities and recognizing they are not *better off dead*, nor are they helpless or incapable. The fact that we are dealing with two sets of brothers is interesting as well. So is the fact that Jaime and Bran's disabilities are tied to one another as Jaime caused Bran's, which set in motion Jaime's own disability. The emphasis that Tyrion and Jon are treated equally as unwanted children, *bastards in their fathers' eyes*, connects these two characters to one another. Additionally, their *Hero's Journeys* begin together as they depart to the Wall together.

Through each of these characters development into the hero archetype, the narrative redefines both that of the hero and the disabled. As eluded to previously, disability becomes both enabler and indicator for male heroes in the narrative. This association of disability to heroism works to neutralize the negative perception surrounding disability, which is present in the culture of *Game of Thrones* and that of the real world viewers of the series. Disability is no longer indicative of helplessness, moral corruption, or waste of life. Rather, disability embodies humanity, compassion, and triumph over obstacles.

These heroes would not have been made without their disabled experience driving them forward. Unlike Ned and Robb Stark, these four disabled characters have experienced the darker side of humanity, where there is neither honor nor code of conduct. Tyrion and Jon spent their entire lives with the disdain of their cultures on their backs. Whereas, Jaime and Bran had their idealism regarding knighthood shattered when they realized the corruption of the world. This has prepared each of them for how the *game* is played, which has led to their development into heroic figures. Their disabilities become both their superpower and their flaw. They are only able to save others because their disability has taught them compassions and sacrifice. Yet, their

disability places them at odds with the traditional and contemporary hero archetypes were disability is traditionally a marker of victim or villain.

This incongruity opens the doors for a new archetype to emerge in the narrative, the disabled male hero. This new emergent archetype fits the classification of both the disabled and the hero, yet do so in a way that neutralizes any negative perceptions regarding either archetype. Tyrion, Jaime, Bran, and Jon may be disabled, but they are key characters in the narrative and earn the audience's sympathy and attention. This does not equate them to Nelson's (1994) "Supercrip," as they do not need to overcome their disability and trauma in order to be a hero. Instead their disability is an inherent aspect of their heroism. The focus on the development of these characters supports my claim that the *Game of Thrones* narrative is privileging the male disabled hero experience over that of the male non-disabled hero experience.

These four male characters come to redefine not only heroism, but also masculinity. As key male characters, the mere existence of their disabilities and subsequent attention given to their struggles as disabled people alters the hegemonic idealism surrounding masculine identity. These male characters do not fit into the cookie-cutter portrayal of masculinity, as previously stated, their disabilities are at odds with both the traditional cultural attitudes surrounding masculinity which rejects male characters who are damaged. Established is the need for a contemporary hero to have a flaw, such as Superman's kryptonite. Traditionally unwelcome is a flaw that suggests instability or emasculation, which the negative connotation surrounding cultural perceptions of disability would suggest both instability and emasculation. Yet, the *Game of Thrones* narrative does not emasculate these four characters because of their disabilities. This suggests the narrative's message to be one that which challenges the cultural perception of what

it means to be disabled, a hero, and a man. The dynamics of these four characters, their strengths, weaknesses, and otherness make for an honest representation of the diversity and fragility of the human condition and of masculinity.

The popularity of the *Game of Thrones* narrative and diversity of audience suggests a shift in cultural perception of disability, heroism, and masculinity. As an audience, we have accepted Tyrion, Jaime, Bran and Jon as disabled heroes. The act of watching the series, season after season, makes us co-creators in the *Game of Thrones* narrative as we have accepted this new archetype, and in turn, accepted this new perception of masculinity. I question what change occurred in the shared consciousness that led us to accept both the *Game of Thrones* narrative, for all its sexuality and violence, and the change in male hero. George R. R. Martin's novels never reached the success of his British counterpart, J. R. R. Tolkien, yet HBO's *Game of Thrones* narrative has swept the world. Possibly, living in a Post 9/11 world has led us to desire more realistic heroes, imperfect heroes, with whom we can identify. Or we may credit the evolution of television and the internet allowing for more developed narratives, more diverse plots, and more complex characters, all of which led to a shift in the depiction of masculinity. I leave these questions in hopes of motivating future research on HBO's much deserving *Game of Thrones*. Whatever the exact cause of this shift in cultural perceptions of male identity may be, it is clear HBO's *Game of Thrones* has led the evolution and deserves more attention as it is still relatively uncharted waters in the terms of academic scholarship and discourse.

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Appendix A

Biklen and Bogdan Stereotypes in Portrayals of Disabled People in Media

- Pitiable and pathetic: Tiny Tim in *A Christmas Carol*
- Object of violence: Audrey Hepburn's character, who is terrorized as an individual who is blind in *Wait Until Dark*
- Sinister or evil: Captain Ahab, who has one prosthetic leg in *Moby Dick*
- Atmosphere: Individuals who are background characters, such as "blind musicians"
- Super Crip: The private detective who used a wheelchair in the television show *Ironsides*
- Laughable: Mr. Magoo, who had a visual impairment
- His or her own worst—and only—enemy: Those who are portrayed as whiners who could succeed if they tried harder
- Burden: Those who appear to others as "helpless" and being in need of care
- Nonsexual: Those who appear "as totally incapable of sexual activity"
- Incapable of fully participating in normal life: Those who are presented as unable to be included in activities as employees, brothers or sisters, students, etc.

(Biklen & Bogdan, 1977, as cited in Irwin & Moeller, 2010)

Appendix B

Listed is the complete steps of the Hero's Journey (Campbell, 2008):

1. Departure

- The call to adventure
- Refusal of the Call
- Supernatural Aid
- The Crossing of the First Threshold
- The Belly of the Whale

2. Initiation

- The Road of Trials
- The Meeting with the Goddess
- Woman as Temptress
- Atonement with Father
- Apotheosis
- The Ultimate Boon

3. Return

- Refusal of the Return
- The Magic Flight
- Rescue from Without
- The Crossing of the Return Threshold
- Master of the Two Worlds
- Freedom to Live

Appendix C

Complete list of episodes referenced:

Title of Episode	Director	Writer	Episode No. & Season	No. in Series
"Winter is Coming"	Tim Van Patten	David Benioff & D. B. Weiss	Ep. 1 Season 1	1
"The Kingsroad"	Tim Van Patten	David Benioff & D. B. Weiss	Ep. 2 Season 1	2
"Lord Snow"	Brian Kirk	David Benioff & D. B. Weiss	Ep. 3 Season 1	3
"Cripples, Bastards, and Broken Things"	Brian Kirk	Bryan Cogman	Ep. 4 Season 1	4
"The Wolf and the Lion"	Brian Kirk	David Benioff & D. B. Weiss	Ep. 5 Season 1	5
"A Golden Crown"	Daniel Minahan	David Benioff & D. B. Weiss	Ep. 6 Season 1	6
"You Win or You Die"	Daniel Minahan	David Benioff & D. B. Weiss	Ep. 7 Season 1	7
"Baelor"	Alan Taylor	David Benioff & D. B. Weiss	Ep. 9 Season 1	9
"Fire and Blood"	Alan Taylor	David Benioff & D. B. Weiss	Ep. 10 Season 1	10
"The Ghost of Harrenhal"	David Petrarca	David Benioff & D. B. Weiss	Ep. 5 Season 2	15
"A Man Without Honor"	David Nutter	David Benioff & D. B. Weiss	Ep. 7 Season 2	17
"Valar Morghulis"	Alan Taylor	David Benioff & D. B. Weiss	Ep. 10 Season 2	20
"Valar Dohaeris"	Daniel Minahan	David Benioff & D. B. Weiss	Ep. 1 Season 3	21
"Dark Wings, Dark Words"	Daniel Minahan	Vanessa Taylor	Ep. 2 Season 3	22
"Walk of Punishment"	David Benioff	David Benioff & D. B. Weiss	Ep. 3 Season 3	23
"Kissed by Fire"	Alex Graves	Bryan Cogman	Ep. 5 Season 3	25

Title of Episode	Director	Writer	Episode No. & Season	No. in Series
"The Rains of Castamere"	David Nutter	David Benioff & D. B. Weiss	Ep. 9 Season 3	29
"First of His Name"	Michelle MacLaren	David Benioff & D. B. Weiss	Ep. 5 Season 4	35
"The Laws of Gods and Men"	Alik Sakharov	Bryan Cogman	Ep. 6 Season 4	36
"Mockingbird"	Alik Sakharov	David Benioff & D. B. Weiss	Ep. 7 Season 4	37
"The Children"	Alex Graves	David Benioff & D. B. Weiss	Ep. 10 Season 4	40
"The House of Black and White"	Michael Slovis	David Benioff & D. B. Weiss	Ep. 2 Season 5	42
"The Gift"	Miguel Sapochnik	David Benioff & D. B. Weiss	Ep. 7 Season 5	47
"Mother's Mercy"	David Nutter	David Benioff & D. B. Weiss	Ep. 10 Season 5	50