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RECENZJE | REVIEWS

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Bonnie J. Dow, *Watching Women's Liberation*, 1970. University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Chicago and Springfield, 2014.

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No Bras were Harmed in the Making of this Movement: Feminism in the News

On September 7, 1968, about one hundred women gathered on the Atlantic City boardwalk to protest that night's Miss America pageant. Protestors marched, sang, crowned a live sheep Miss America, and paraded a chained Miss America puppet down the boardwalk to protest feminine beauty standards. Despite the presence of network television crews at the pageant, none of the Big Three television networks covered the protest on their nightly news broadcasts. The 1968 protest of the Miss America pageant may seem an unlikely beginning for a book analyzing mass mediated coverage of the feminist movement in network news broadcasts of 1970. However, Bonnie Dow positions this absence of broadcast television news coverage within a broader feminist reading of media. Mostly perceived and remembered as anti-feminist, Dow uses archival footage to complicate the question of how the mass media discussed feminism in 1970, the year which Dow points to as pivotal to launching a movement aimed at "women's liberation."

The first complication discussed is factions within the movement. Liberal and radical feminist movements, Dow explains, had differing philosophies and approaches to both feminism and media coverage. The liberal arm of the movement, primarily represented by Betty Friedan and the founders of the National Organization for Women, were familiar with the media and maintained a working relationship, and understood how to frame stories for the medium. Therefore, they focused on goals, had spokeswomen familiar with the media and their methods, and in general came across as uniform, reasonable, and controlled. Alternatively, the radical arm of the movement, which visually if not actually appeared more diverse than its counterparts' visibly white middle class and middle aged constituents, viewed all hierarchy as patriarchal. Their consciousness raising efforts

shunned spokeswomen and leadership to define goals, preferring instead to focus on the individual woman's experience. This more radical wing of the movement produced many of the negative images of network coverage, in which women are seen sitting on the floor in a circle in consciousness-raising efforts which are undefined and therefore appear radical and dangerous. Dow argues network news failed to distinguish between the two approaches, complicating the liberal feminist attempts to influence coverage.

Second, Dow's discussion highlights a problem particular to the feminist movement; audiences, especially the white male audience assumed by the mass media of 1970, felt the woman's movement's concerns were superficial and trivial when compared to the more visible discrimination and turmoil of the civil rights movement. At the 1968 protest, activists threw bras, girdles, eyelash curlers, high heels, and stockings, as well as publications like *Playboy* and *Ladies Home Journal*, into a large "Freedom Trash Can" to raise objection to social dictates of women's appearance and proper place. As protests against the Vietnam War burned flags and draft cards, the activists on the New Jersey boardwalk discussed burning the trappings of femininity, which came to define and haunt the movement. Bra burning seemed trivial to a white male audience familiar with Civil Rights and war protests. She contends, "Feminist activities merited coverage because they were aberrant and could make for compelling television, but that did not mean that the coverage need be respectful, particularly given that the target audience for that coverage was presumed to be white men with little interest in the movement's grievances" (p. 169). Dow recognizes that her focus on the national news media necessarily defines the feminist movement through a heteronormative lens; the national news is much more interested in women's relationship with men than women's relationships with each other.

Third, Dow's in depth research and discussion of media coverage demonstrate that, rhetorically, positive coverage of the movement was much more inventive, creative, and interesting, as it necessitated more than merely exploiting violation of social constructs and conventional gender performance. The format of broadcast journalism provided voices sympathetic to the movement's cause a forum in which, through both documentary and the social problem story, they were able to draw attention to the goals of both liberal and revolutionary feminist groups without demonizing more radical factions. The few female journalists able to direct the conversation of broadcast news coverage stressed similarities between the feminist movement and the claims of the nonviolent civil rights movement, or framed sexism as a social problem and not merely a complaint of the feminists. The journalistic form here lent credibility to the movement. Perhaps the most persuasive rhetorical strategy that Dow points to is the use of voices unaffiliated with the

feminist movement calling attention to feminist claims, as feminists themselves were rarely seen as representative of the wider female public. These strategies adapted feminist concerns for an audience presumed to be white and middle-class to disabuse them of negative assumptions about feminism.

Fourth, these strategies also contribute to the marginalization of the radical branch of the feminist movement. Dow points to problems with both media coverage and radical feminism itself in its marginalization. While media coverage proved unable to successfully demonstrate or explain consciousness-raising efforts, the radical side's insistence on purity of movement, and refusal to compromise on ideals perhaps too idealistic, provided credibility within the movement yet not outside of it. For Dow, the sit-in at the *Ladies Home Journal* demonstrates that even protests which attempted to effect some of radical feminism's primary goals failed to live up to their idealized standard. However, the larger problem with the marginalization of radical voices in network broadcast coverage is the distortion of the second-wave movement as primarily a vehicle for white, middle-class women. Perhaps Dow's greatest contribution in her rhetorical history of women's liberation is her attention to the diversity within the movement. Dow's juxtaposition of media coverage and significant historical events of the women's liberation movement exposes the media's role in exacerbating if not creating the accusation of racism within the liberal arm of the movement, as journalists whitewashed meetings and ignored women of color important to the movement.

In all, Dow's work is an informed and meticulously researched exploration of network news' role in publicizing and framing the women's movement in 1970, and an important and captivating read. It stands on its own as a rhetorical history that well captures the diversity and tensions within the women's liberation movement, as well as the movement's attempts to harness rhetoric to create positive change for women. The book also contributes to a more nuanced accounting of how media, in particular broadcast news, frame movements, both with and without the movements' guidance and consent. Attempts to control how the media engaged their public by liberal feminists led to an acceptance of a dominant framing in which leadership was perceived as white and heteronormative, while a refusal to engage with the media on the media's terms by radical feminists created frames like "man-hating" which continue to haunt the feminist movement. Finally, the book offers deeper insight into feminist rhetorical theory by explicating women's position as a silent audience. Women excluded from the assumed audience of network news saw through condescending and patronizing coverage of feminist causes to understand the promise of the movement and join the fight for a brighter and more equal future.