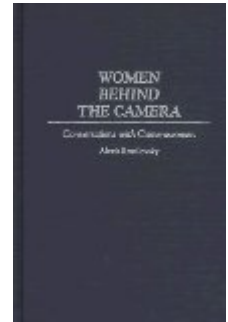




Alexis Krasilovsky. *Women Behind the Camera: Conversations With Camerawomen.* Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1997. xxviii + 213 pp. \$71.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-275-95744-5.



Reviewed by Christine Reeves-Hubbard

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Alexis Krasilovsky's *Women Behind the Camera* is a book which should never have been written—it should have been filmed. Krasilovsky's book focuses on camerawomen in the film and video industries—women who have been faceless and nameless in the past. As is the case in many groundbreaking books attempting to describe a previously neglected group, Krasilovsky's text leaves the reader with far more questions than answers. Krasilovsky knows these women, and she wants the reader to get to know them as well, but she does not provide enough information for the reader to do that. One leaves the book with a sense of the women's collective experience, but with little concrete information about the individual contributions. All of the women in Krasilovsky's book entered camerawork because of a love of the visual, yet her book provides only a small black and white photo of each of the women interviewed. What is missing from *Women Behind the Camera* is exactly what is important—the visual. We need to see these women working, and see the work they have done.

Krasilovsky's book consists of interviews organized into four groups: 1) the Pioneers: Starting Out Before 1970; 2) The Pioneers of Second-Wave Feminism; 3) The Second Wave: Starting Out in Independent Film; and 4) Emerging Camerawomen; and states that her goal in the book is to validate women's experiences by allowing them to "appropriate their own history ... [by] collectiviz[ing] their own experiences" (p. xxiii).

All of the women interviewed entered camerawork because they were attracted to the visual, and by a sense that, by controlling the visual aspect of film, they could achieve power. The women succeeded because they were determined to work, even in the face of discrimination by superiors, coworkers, and unions. They share an adventurous spirit, and enjoy the variety inherent in working on film projects worldwide. There are, however, significant sacrifices these women have made for success. Many of the women interviewed stated that, unlike their male coworkers who had the support of wives and families waiting at home, they had sacrificed marriage and children for their careers.

Krasilovsky uses a single set of questions in conducting her interviews, and, as a result, the book is extremely repetitive. It is difficult to differentiate one interviewee's response from another. This repetition, however, achieves Krasilovsky's goal--these women, who are most often isolated in working conditions surrounded by men, are relating almost identical experiences, and these experiences together create a collective history of camerawomen. A video format would function even more effectively by illustrating the collective experiences of the camerawomen as well as their individual personalities.

Women Behind the Camera is a valuable compilation of camerawomen's experiences, and would be an excellent supplementary text to accompany a documentary film on this subject. A number of additional texts could and should be written in this area. Especially helpful would be a history of these women's work with commentary on the significance of their contributions. In addition, a book could be devoted to women's struggles to enter film unions. Another could be devoted specifically to the camerawomen's association (Behind the Lens), which is mentioned in passing by many of the interviewees, but is not described in detail.

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