
Reviewed by Caley Hewitt (Louisiana State University)

Published on Jhistory (December, 2023)

Commissioned by Zef Segal (Department of History, Philosophy, and Jewish Studies, the Open University of Israel)

“Media-ready feminism,” as coined by Andrea L. Press and Francesca Tripodi in *Media Ready Feminism and Everyday Sexism: How US Audiences Create Meaning across Platforms,* focuses on audiences and how they make sense of media narratives that push feminist goals in a media culture that restricts them. Press and Tripodi note three elements of media-ready feminism: first, it focuses on women already in the spotlight regarding media representation, similar to “popular feminism.” Secondly, it focuses on the individual as a unit versus the movement as a whole, similar to “neoliberal feminism.” Third, it adds to the conversation the understanding that media is pushing the boundaries and the roles that everyday sexism plays within media-ready feminism. However, everyday sexism still lurks in the background, shaping people's meaning and opinions of the media. Currently, society is at a stage where this is not addressed. Also, it does not now have a solution. Still, *Media-Ready Feminism and Everyday Sexism: How US Audiences Create Meaning across Platforms* brings forth this issue in our media system by looking at five cases that exemplify the negotiation of feminism and sexist presentations of women in the media. The authors look at the reception of the expressions through media-ready feminism. Although there is no solution to everyday sexism in the media, the authors note some steps the media can take to address these issues. Press and Tripodi do a fantastic job bringing their media-ready feminism theoretical framework using the example of YikYak in their introduction and the role that sexism and feminism played in “I don't regret my abortion,” which helped me better understand their analysis in further chapters rather than just writing about it. Media-ready feminism defined above is based on popular feminism, which legitimizes social inequality and thwarts participatory democracy. Press and Tripodi also define media-ready sexism as occurring “at the moment of reception in the cases where media break through the strictures of popular feminism and address structural sexism” (p. 3).

The authors’ first three examples of media-ready feminism focus on television shows: *Game of Thrones, Jersey Shore,* and *Desperate Housewives.* All these shows have one common theme: media-ready feminism versus the double standard of sexism within society. In *Game of Thrones,* they note that within the tones of feminism within the
show, women are presented as powerful rulers and female warriors who tend to outsmart the men around them. Still, sexual violence toward women is a regular part of the show's narrative as a part of everyday life. The show *Jersey Shore* has created this contradictory culture that promotes popular feminism but exists alongside everyday sexism, like the slut shaming of women for their sexual behavior. I appreciate how the authors used a variety of methods across the book and especially within the television shows, with chapter 1 using textual data from articles on seasons 5 and 6 collected by Sarah Johnson-Palomaki and forty interviews, while chapter 2 is based on four focus groups at a flagship state university. Two focus groups were white, while two others were racially diverse, but most students came from a high socioeconomic background. Chapter 3 looks at ten focus groups conducted by Press with both older and younger women from racially and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds. The authors also incorporate a study of three focus groups of approximately forty-five women that predated the *Desperate Housewives* show from 1999 to show longitudinal attitudes. Something noted across all three shows is the double standard created by media-ready feminism where, as in *Game of Thrones*, there were two ideals—transgressive feminism and regressive misogynism. Respondents in the focus groups for *Jersey Shore* talked about the double standard in episode 9 from season 2 and the episode's genuine dilemma. The media creates this environment where people are rightfully allowed to feel sexually liberated and avoid slut shaming and other forms of traditional sexism because of the “economy of sexual capital” within the media.

The authors look at *Desperate Housewives* through the lens of work-family balance and how media-ready feminism challenges the notion that it is not just women's problem to solve but a structural one. The authors find that people think work-family balance is a structural problem that women face in different ways that seem impossible at some levels. Generally, most women lack the vocabulary to describe the issues connected to work-family balance. Within their focus groups from *Desperate Housewives*, the authors find that this form of media-ready feminism does not resonate with less affluent women and their experiences because they do not face the same issues in trying to support their families. The authors note that women in the focus group of a minority background (African American women and a Latina immigrant woman) found the show unrepresentative both culturally and economically.

The last two examples in the book originate in the internet, precisely, Tinder and Wikipedia. The authors look at how Tinder pushes popular feminist ideas by framing online dating as a form of sexual agency, allowing women to assert control over their sexual partners by swiping right or left. In their study of a college campus and college-aged students alongside some undergraduate researchers, the authors use a variety of methods such as participant observation, focus groups, and interviews with their peers; they found that though Tinder allows sexual agency, it fails to override a “situational” sexual experience, which leads to the persistence of everyday sexism and violence against women. Media-ready feminism relates to Tinder because it allows women to control their sex lives. However, the “tacit consent” brings everyday sexism and violence against women to the forefront, with many young women on college campuses feeling pressured to consent. Finally, chapter 5 looks at “edit-a-thons” and Wikipedia’s “Articles for Deletion” using ethnographic observations. Wikipedia has a patriarchal system in which female editors feel uncomfortable adding information to Wikipedia pages. Secondly, there is a system of bias regarding women's accomplishments and whether they are deserving of a Wikipedia page. The authors note that these edit-a-thons are a form of media-ready feminism because they imply that the lack of women's Wikipedia pages owes to individuals not entering them.
into Wikipedia rather than a problem of a particular institution. However, the authors note that during these “edit-a-thons,” women practice what they call “stealth feminism,” where these women still edit Wikipedia pages but have stealth user-names and edit in small spaces to avoid harassment.

In the conclusion, Press and Tripody note that this coexistence of media-ready feminism and everyday sexism in media is not without consequence. The final event they mention is the 2016 presidential election and the media coverage of Democratic presentational candidate Hillary Clinton, where media-ready feminism framed Clinton's entire campaign. Still, the media did not account for the everyday sexism in Donald Trump's language. The authors still hope that the current participatory media system will eliminate the everyday sexism reflected in the media. However, the media needs to take notice of the underlying sexism in everyday conversations. If we can bring the critique of everyday sexism to the forefront, as a society, we can challenge these notions every day. Press and Tripodi do an excellent job of showing the mutual existence of feminism and sexism in the media in multiple media scenarios and suggesting potential ideas to change our media for a better representation of women and media-ready feminism.

Note

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at https://networks.h-net.org/jhistory
