Cultivating Feminism

Alyssa Spivey

JRN 101: News Media Analysis

Professor O’Neill

14 June 2018
Women have battled long and hard to overcome oppression. They had to fight for simple human rights like the right to vote, own property, run for office, receive equal pay, and pursue higher education. A woman’s value was once determined by childbearing and homemaking. Women were supposed to do what they were told and serve men. Women have climbed tremendous mountains to stand where they stand today. Are the foundations that women have built strong enough to continue fighting oppression? Should women sit back and trust the foundation that was built for them, or should they continue to fight to build more? What if women were forced to regress back to their former value? The television show, The Handmaid’s Tale, based off of Margaret Atwood’s novel, raises these questions by depicting a society in which women are forced to return to the former state of oppression.

There are many different messages to be taken from The Handmaid’s Tale. History is repeating itself as women are again seen as property. Handmaids are the only women fertile in this society, so they are forced to conceive children for others. They are raped by their mistresses husbands, locked away in rooms, beaten physically and emotionally, and have their children torn from them. The Handmaid’s Tale depicts a time in which women are once again fighting oppression (Gibson, 2018). However, despite the odds, a protagonist and everyday heroine arises from the oppression named Offred. Offred is a symbol of change and hope. Offred fights for her life and the lives of the other handmaids. She stands for what she believes in and she opposes those that seek to oppress the handmaids. Offred serves as the leader of the revolution and slowly builds her army with fellow handmaids. The main message to be taken from The Handmaid’s Tale is that no matter the circumstance, women should not remain silent. Women have to stand together to make a change.
The television show the Handmaid’s Tale is based off the novel by Margaret Atwood. Atwood is famous for her feminist writing and speculative fiction. Atwood maintains that speculative fiction is based in realism, while science fiction is based in romance and fantasy. Atwood writes to bring light to social and political issues (Winstead, 2017). It is through Margaret Atwood’s genius, that the writers, Bruce Miller, John Herrera, and Nina Fiore, were able to produce such a thought-provoking script.

My favorite creative technique being utilized in The Handmaid’s Tale is the use of symbolism. Everything that happens to the handmaid in the show is something that has happened to women in history. First, women lose the right to have their own bank account, the right to work or have access to birth control, then slowly they begin to lose all their rights. Women are locked away and used as sex slaves and baby makers. Women are mutilated in female circumcisions, to control them and take the pleasure out of sex, because in this society sex is only seen as a means to producing offspring.

Another creative technique in The Handmaid’s Tale is the use of imagery. Color is a huge aspect of the show. All the commander’s wives wear the color green, which is interesting, because green is the color of envy. These women in green gowns are barren and unable to have children. They invite women into their homes to have sex with their husbands to give them a child. Perhaps the color green is used to symbolize envy. The handmaids wear red capes and white bonnets. Red symbolizes danger, violence, lust, and love. While the handmaids are supposed to be used solely for producing children, they are often the objects of lust. There is also
nothing but danger, violence, and death that surrounds the handmaids. The colors used in the show are extremely purposeful and symbolic.

While the audience of The Handmaid’s Tale is aimed towards the youth, it is aimed more towards young woman. The Handmaid’s Tale is a story of heroism and feminism. The protagonist has to endure all the oppression of history. Young women view the symbolism and the pieces of history that are entwined within the story and view that as a cautionary tale. Young women view The Handmaid’s Tale and are encouraged to have a voice.

Media is always brimming with both obvious and hidden values. (Potter, 2016). The values and morals portrayed in The Handmaid’s Tale align with values of feminism. The story paints a haunting story of what can be taken from women and how important it is to keep it what has been taken. The handmaid's are stripped of their families and identities. They adapt the name of the man of the house, much like marriage today. The Handmaid’s Tale encourages young women to be aware of the dangers of society and become enlightened. The show seeks to warn young women and provide them with the inspiration to make a change.

The Handmaid’s Tale aims to educate viewers on the mistakes and misfortunes of the past, while showing how history can be repeated. It shows women the importance of their identity and voice. It seeks to inspire women to be humbled by how far they’ve come, yet warns them that to keep this freedom women must stand for what they believe in.
References

