Jonathan Gray, **Dislike-Minded: Media, Audiences, and the Dynamics of Taste**, New York: New York University Press, 2021, 269 pp., $29.00 (paperback).

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"As a society, I pose, we are disgracefully bad at understanding how dislike works" (p. 18).

Jonathan Gray is one of the first contemporary media studies scholars to systematically turn our attention to the role of dislike in the domain of content consumption. In his new book, ***Dislike-Minded: Media, Audiences, and the Dynamics of Taste***, Gray convincingly argues for the need to pay attention to this often-subdued emotion. The author uncovers several discursive strategies audiences use to talk about dislike and provides an interpretation of what their dislikes actually tell us. Based on 216 qualitative interviews, *Dislike-Minded* offers a thought-provoking analysis of the ubiquity of disliked media consumption, while paying particular attention to the voices of marginalized groups and the power dynamics of who is able to openly dislike and how. *Dislike-Minded* also foreshadows numerous paths for the future work of its own audiences: media, audience, cultural, and fan studies scholars.

The rationale for this book stems from two omissions: First, Gray contributes to a chorus of scholars who rightly point out that our media metrics tell us little about the reception of a text (Ang, 2006). For example, the media industry readily uses viewer metrics to equate watching with liking and the success of a product. Similarly, social media platforms predominantly offer metrics based around viewing, sharing, liking, and loving (van Dijck, 2013). Indeed, the media industry strategically leaves little room for the possibility of audiences disliking the content they consume. However, Gray departs from this line of critique to offer an original exploration of a second, equally notable omission: Despite the active audience and affective turn in media and audience studies, research too has left little room for the exploration of dislike (whereby dislike is ontologically distinct from hate). Thus, through conversation with Pierre Bourdieu's (1979/1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Gray sets up the need for *Dislike-Minded* and proceeds by exploring why academia has largely left dislike in the shadows before delving into an interwoven examination of eight case studies to illustrate some of its discursive mechanics.

Chapter 1 sets out to theoretically and practically legitimize the study of disliked media objects as well as those doing the disliking. To do this, Gray engages in a disentanglement of vocabulary by drawing distinctions between dislike and hate. Whereas the destructive passion driving hate goes so far as to seek the harm or elimination of the authors of a media text, dislike, its tamer and more rational cousin, often stops at a discursive critique of a text and its context or, at most, at the desire to eliminate the text. The book broadly defines dislike as a critical and often constructive emotion—not as an absence of like—whereby

listening to dislike "gives voice to a potential wealth of grievances that are about texts, representational systems, and ethics" (p. 7). This step toward logically and empirically parsing out conflated vocabulary is helpful for future researchers. It also builds upon the work of scholars of affect, such as Zizi Papacharissi (2014), who see affect as the pre-fully conscious, pre-linguistic structures of feeling of various intensities. By defining dislike as an emotion, Gray gives it a more conscious and vocal rendering—although I do wonder, for analytical and practical purposes, where the tipping point for Gray lies between dislike as an emotion and dislike as an act.

Chapter 1 also turns to a (re)definition of the texts that are subject to dislike by drawing on Roland Barthes' (1957/1973) definition of a text as encompassing more than the entirety of a single work. Through the study of dislike, which often presents textual consumption as involuntary, incomplete, and interwoven within whole genres and social contexts, Gray asks us to reconsider how we define textuality and, by extension, the act of audiencing to account for these elements of consumption, too.

Chapter 2 explores two common discourses encountered across the myriad of interviews: "worst-violator" and "letdown" narratives. This leads to the insight that, contrary to more traditional scripts offered by audience studies, discourses on dislike often focus on what is *not* there in a text versus what *is*. Notably, Gray points out that discourses of disappointment were particularly prominent among marginalized groups, and female respondents were generally more self-reflexive about voicing their dislikes. Gray also illustrates that people's responses offered a rich commentary on their understandings and expectations of media writ large and were frequently indicative of broader patterns of consumption.

Chapter 3 explores sequels, adaptations, and extensions of popular media products from the perspective of audiences and critics. This chapter applies refractive audience analysis, which examines critiques of the extensions of original media products in order to understand what was valued in their originals. Chapter 3 also briefly considers more toxic, racist, and sexist commentary that slides down the slippery slope from dislike toward hate.

Chapter 4 examines dislike as a performance of self and turns specifically to how its discourses construct race, gender, culture, and nation as markers of one's own identity. In this chapter, Gray also returns to the powerful intellectual legacy of Bourdieu's (1979/1984) *Distinction* and offers a more thorough answer to why dislike has been disliked by academia. According to Bourdieu (1979/1984), taste, and by extension dislike, become a social function for legitimating social difference and class. Gray argues that the canonization of Bourdieu has helped cultivate in us a suspicion of dislike as a negative act, predicated upon snobbery and further marginalization of already marginalized groups. Subsequently, this has often resulted in the unquestioning acceptance of like. Gray strives to reclaim dislike as a constructive emotion and to expand its purview by showing it serves as a broader marker of identity.

Chapter 5 explores the multiplicities of dislike. This includes instances where like and dislike comingle, such as the experience of pleasure in seeing spectacles of failure. It also includes layers of dislike and the overlapping, sometimes conflicting, reasons we give for its presence. Finally, the chapter briefly considers the sociality of dislike and acknowledges that despite the book's predominant focus on individual experiences, dislike is a deeply relational emotion, conditioned by social and cultural milieux.

Chapter 6 concludes the book by zooming out from the popular media texts examined throughout to consider the broader role of dislike in civic discourse and to ground it as a quotidian political act. This move serves to further justify the importance of studying dislike and highlights some of the implications of its silencing. It also nods toward presently popular topics such as hate speech and the polarization of political parties.

I personally would have been curious to see a return to the issue of how we understand textuality—one of the theoretical contributions of this book. For example, Gray argues that understanding dislike demands its own reading skills, approaches, and modes (p. 11); a synthesis of some of the discursive skills necessary to deal with dislike, and their broader place within theories of textuality, would have been a useful platform for future scholars. Nonetheless, one of the strengths of *Dislike-Minded* is that it sparks curiosity and hints at many interesting routes for future work; the aforementioned is just one such avenue.

In short, I liked reading this book. It was eloquently and self-reflexively written, and it entertained a certain air of humor about itself. The book also offers readers a useful backstage perspective of the author's own intellectual journey in the formation of this manuscript by critiquing and building upon his assumptions from previous publications. *Dislike-Minded* aims and succeeds in illustrating the dislike of media texts as a legitimate, complex, and often constructive emotion that fundamentally expresses one's yearning for what they perceive to be fairer media products and representations.

The book highlights the ubiquity of dislike, frequently felt most bitterly by marginalized groups, and illustrates that it is often the result of a perceived lack of control over media texts and their consumption. Importantly, *Dislike-Minded* sets the stage for future work by discursively disentangling dislike from its close relative of hate, arguing for a broader understanding of textuality and illustrating a spectrum of possible ways to stratify the study of dislike. I am sure readers will anticipate a sequel, and I hope future scholars heed Gray's call to contribute toward its writing.

References

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