

Rhetorical Feminism and This Thing Called Hope, by Cheryl Glenn. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2018. 273 pp.

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Historically, the dismissal of women's voices has created a culture of silence, preventing women from speaking at all, or, if they do speak, they may face social backlash. The public response to the #MeToo movement, with its prominence in the news and social media, is just one example of the impact of women's rhetorical power against silence. Rhetorical feminism—a method used to “disidentify” feminist rhetorical studies from “hegemonic rhetoric” (4)—develops an intersectional and inclusive space in rhetorical studies, despite the silencing of women in the historically masculinized canon (Hawkesworth 444; Glenn, “Rhetoric Retold” 2; Lunsford 6). As rhetorical feminism marches forward with hope, the need for scholarship that promotes the individual and collective voices of *all* women is crucial not only to academia, but also to the current political happenings in the world.

Rhetorical Feminism and This Thing Called Hope by Cheryl Glenn explores the multi-faceted dimensions of rhetorical feminism, interweaving the historical waves of feminist movements with rhetorical studies and recovery work. Her purpose is clear: to create a “guide” to rhetorical feminism (2) and solidify rhetorical feminism within the field of rhetorical studies as a “stance” that disidentifies “with hegemonic rhetoric” (4). She integrates the history of feminism within the United States from the 19th century onward, defines rhetorical feminism's methodology, examines issues of identity and activism, and presents theories of rhetorical feminist study from the 1970s forward. The poignant examples of women who embody rhetorical feminism, like Gloria Anzaldúa, establish the presence of the work within the field and a consciousness of intersectionality. *Rhetorical Feminism and This Thing Called Hope* is a vital read for anyone involved in researching, teaching, and/or mentoring within the fields of rhetoric, writing, and composition.

Glenn begins with an introduction outlining her purpose, focus, and each of the eight chapters. The first four chapters of the book reflect on the historical movements of rhetorical feminism and emerging methodologies and theories, using the work of authors and researchers in the field as illustrations. The final four chapters are dedicated to the practice of rhetorical feminism in the spheres of teaching, mentoring, and administrating.

In her first chapter (“Activism”), Glenn discusses the religious feminist rhetors of first-wave feminism called “Sister Rhetors” (6). These women, empowered by their positions of influence within the “quasi-public sphere” of religious organizations, became key orators of 19th century feminism (10).

They created numerous humanitarian organizations, established literacy education, and enacted social reform. Glenn names several key women—Maria W. Miller Stewart, Angelina Grimké, Lucretia Mott, Sojourner Truth—whose contributions led to the Women’s Conventions of 1848 (Seneca, New York) and 1851 (Akron, Ohio). Their early rhetorical feminism included themes of disidentification, caring for the marginalized, respect for wisdom and experience, slavery and abolition, and gender inequality. This chapter effectively establishes the historical boundaries and roots of rhetorical feminism.

Glenn opens chapter two (“Identity”) with her objective, “to make rhetorical studies more representative and inclusive,” and focuses her writing on the identity politics of those allowed to speak, those allowed to speak for others, and the pressing question of “who merits an audience” (25). While referencing the second-wave of feminism of the 1960’s and 70’s, Glenn illustrates how “middle-class white heterosexual feminists failed rhetorically” (30) when they claimed to speak for all women, when they should have recognized intersectionality and addressed the diverse experiences and needs of women of color and the working class. The chapter concludes with a discussion of these issues in the third and fourth waves of the feminist movement (1990s and 2010s).

Rather than focus on individual theorists in chapter three (“Theories”), Glenn categorizes the work of several key rhetorical feminists: “disidentification, transformation at transaction, reconceptualization of rhetorical appeals, [and] expanded notions of delivery” (51). Rhetors (Anazaldúa, hooks, Daly, Starhawk) who influenced the category of disidentification wrote on themes of confronting racism and resistance while writing accessible prose. Transformation at transaction focuses on how feminist rhetors (Minh-ha, Foss and Griffin, Gearhart, Campbell) transformed rhetorical tools to meet their own purposes. In the final categories, Glenn expounds on these themes as they apply to discourse and argument. This approach effectively synthesizes the theoretical convergences of rhetorical feminism and speaks once again to Glenn’s focus on intersectionality.

In chapter four (“Methods and Methodologies”), Glenn outlines methods and controversies of rhetorical feminist research. She distinguishes the importance of transparency in rhetorical feminism over traditional “objectivity” and emphasizes the focus of researchers’ personal connection to their research subjects. With a goal of “helping to regender the study of rhetoric,” Glenn cites Royster and Kirsch’s foundational categories (critical imagination, strategic contemplation, social circulation, and globalization) as being key to the development of rhetorical feminism’s methodologies (100). Historiography is another key methodology, but Glenn argues that the work produced from research within historiography must do more than interpret the past and recover “lost” rhetors. In order to change the field of rhetoric, it must also change

“masculinist rhetorical studies” (103). Other methodologies for invigorating the field include historical research, ethnographic or “naturalistic” studies, and possibilities of future methods to transform the field (117).

“Teaching,” chapter five, discusses the teaching tradition of rhetoric with the intersection of rhetorical feminist pedagogy and explores how such an approach can transform student retention. The most influential factor in student retention is a teacher who is skilled in the subject matter, a good communicator, and able to successfully develop course materials (130). Feminist pedagogy, Glenn argues, can provide hope for systemic change while authoritatively supporting students in the classroom through positionality, engagement, and ethics; feminist rhetorical pedagogy can also nurture this hope when an instructor uses historical and political feminist texts. Glenn concludes this chapter with a demonstration of feminist pedagogies at work.

In addition to teaching, the rhetorical tradition also carries with it a history of mentoring. In chapter six (“Mentoring”), Glenn describes the characteristics of an effective feminist mentor and the various methodologies associated with feminist mentoring—some of which include disidentifying with the masculine, hierarchical modeling of mentoring, and committing to equality. She explains that “the goal of mentoring is a relationship” and that women often seek out “mutual mentoring” where mentor and mentee talk, listen, and support each other as they break down hierarchies of power (155). Glenn acknowledges that while a fully-invested mentor is crucial, taking on too many mentees can challenge relationship dynamics and create affective labor (170). With proper attention to the needs of the mentor and mentee, these relationships generate hope for productive relationships through empowering interactions that can open up professional opportunities for all involved.

In chapter seven (“Writing Program Administration”), Glenn addresses the unique history of writing programs and the contributions that feminists make and have made to pedagogy, curriculum, and administration in those spaces. She confronts the powers and limitations of WPA work, demonstrating moments when women are “pushed to the margins” by a masculine academy that views the profession of teaching and administering English as women’s work (177). While a WPA can “actively work against that code,” Glenn demonstrates that as an administrator, a feminist will also need to navigate and perform according to the system they are in. She shares her own experience working as a WPA at Penn State University, along with the difficult decisions she had to make providing adequate classes without overburdening contingent faculty.

Finally, in chapter eight (“This Thing Called Hope”), Glenn outlines the future potential of rhetorical feminism as she reflects on the current political discord in the United States. The hope for a woman to “shatter the presidential glass ceiling” is tempered with the concerns of those who would listen when

she speaks, given the historical marginalization of women (197). She warns that division and exclusivity amongst feminists will worsen the “splintering” and inhibit the work of politics and rhetoric (200). She calls on all to “bridge serious differences” in fields of study and activism (204). In the end, Glenn concludes that an engaged, connected, inclusive, and intersectional approach to rhetorical feminism is worth working towards to build a future in which *all* voices are listened to, and where *all* are committed to feminism within the political and social spheres.

Glenn’s work is simultaneously inspirational and inciting. The implications of her writing reveal that despite the forward momentum of rhetorical feminism, the same needs have existed since the beginning: the need to listen to the diversity of women’s voices and understand women’s needs. In order for this movement to grow, feminists (of all genders and colors) need to be present in their research and conversations with the intent to include and build bridges so that we may all continue to march forward—with hope.

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Works Cited

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