

Rakow, L. F. & Wackwitz, L. A. (Eds). (2004). *Feminist communication theory: Selections in context*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Reviewed by: [Anne-Marie Tokley](#)

In *Feminist communication theory: Selections in context*, Lana Rakow and Laura Wackwitz set out to preserve and make available work and issues that might otherwise be lost over time (p. 1), which is the goal for a considerable amount of feminist work, as women's ideas have typically tended to disappear. When dealing with communication, it is possible to argue that the right for all ideas to remain intact and available is especially important. The editors offer a book that aims to provide a sample of writings that illustrates the diversity of thinking and perspectives that comprise and inform feminist theorizing involving communication (p. 2). Their objectives for the book include to expose readers (p. 9) to the diversity of work going on and to highlight the areas that need further research in feminist communication theory.

Feminist communication theory succeeds in providing readings that are without exception significant and interesting. Collectively, the readings show the breadth and strength of feminist research, ideas, and opinions. The editors admit that their selection may not be relevant to all readers, and that the point of the book may also be ambiguous. They also acknowledge that their selection will be criticised because of their location as white, middle-class, and American, which necessarily excludes the perspectives of many. However, in my opinion, the readings are a reasonable assortment of the important aspects of feminist work as it relates to communication.

As the editors acknowledge, all the articles in *Feminist communication theory*, though, have been written by authors outside the communication research field (for example, Luce Irigaray and Anita Silvers). Feminist research and communication theory are linked because women have struggled to achieve mass audience; women's voices have been silenced and so finding authority in communication has been essential for feminists. However, while the connection between feminism and communication may be obvious for feminists, the link may not be so obvious to those unfamiliar with feminist research. Although I cannot speak for others, or second guess their interpretations of this book, I have always thought that feminist work should reach those not ?in the know. Rakow and Wackwitz comment that Our teaching and our theories are richer, even transformed by the exposure we have to new perspectives and experiences, but the connection between academic circulation and political, public discourse is weak at best, nonexistent at worst (p. 95). Feminist theories should be accessible to everyone, but they are not, as admitted by the editors. Rakow and Wackwitz believe that naming the book *Feminist communication theory* is a political act, since theory is a male domain and traditionally excludes women. The title may deter some readers, though, in particular the people who would probably most benefit from reading it. The title perhaps sets feminist theory in opposition to other theory, bringing to the surface the old male/female, good/ bad, right/ wrong dichotomies.

Feminist theories, and that includes feminist communication theories, highlight a desire for social change. I would ask, exactly what impact will this book have on communication theory in general? What will its application be? Perhaps a comparison between other communication theories and feminist theories would have been useful, to further clarify why feminist theories are so important?

Personally, I enjoyed the book, and I thought that all the readings were valuable and insightful. *Feminist communication theory* was incredibly relevant to me as a feminist, but I would suggest that feminist communication theory in general is also enormously relevant to anyone trying to understand how and why people relate to each other, how people are shaped by their environment, and how what people see and hear affects behaviour and attitudes. I'm not sure that, in this particular ?package, that wider audience will be reached; but that's probably less a critique of the book itself than a comment on the general difficulty of disseminating feminist academic work more widely than scholarly audiences.

Purchase information: This book is available from all good booksellers, or can be purchased direct from Footprint Books at www.footprint.com.au.

About the reviewer:

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