

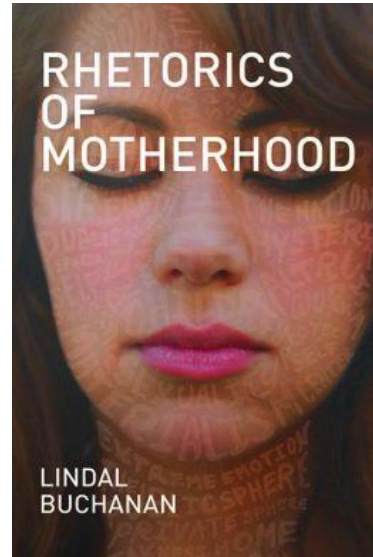
Lindal Buchanan, **Rhetorics of Motherhood**. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013, 200 pp., \$35.00 (paperback).

Reviewed by

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In *Rhetorics of Motherhood*, author Lindal Buchanan, assistant professor of English and women's studies at Old Dominion University, interrogates motherhood from a rhetorical perspective and argues that the deployment of maternal appeals can "not only benefit women, giving them authority and credibility, but also impede them, always/already positioning them disadvantageously within the gendered status quo" (p. 5). Justifying her approach and theoretical framework, Buchanan suggests that rhetoric has been absent from examining motherhood and has only "begun to explore the topic" (p. 11). As such, the text observes motherhood as a rhetorical constraint and analyzes the "slippery rhetorical terrain for women" (p. xvii), defining maternity as an obstacle in certain circumstances and as an advantage to employ in others. Buchanan explores three case studies utilizing a rhetorical theoretical frame and draws from a variety of feminist scholarship on motherhood.



The first two case studies, of Margaret Sanger and Diane Nash, respectively, highlight two historical examples of female rhetors making efforts in social advocacy and detail the divergent rhetorical outcomes each experienced by employing maternity into their discourse. The final case study takes a slightly different approach by illuminating deliberation of rhetorics of motherhood in definitional arguments about personhood. Each case study connects rhetorical theory to the practical implications of public usage of the "code of motherhood" (p. 5). In the introductory pages, Buchanan uses the terminology "code of motherhood" to refer to cultural understandings of motherhood based on the Woman/Mother continuum (i.e., woman/devil term, mother/god term). In Chapter 1, Buchanan elaborates on the motherhood code and practical ramifications of circulating the code in public discourse.

Buchanan begins Chapter 1 with a familiar example of the deployment of maternal rhetorics by Sarah Palin at the 2008 Republican National Convention. The author observes Palin's strategy of "foregrounding motherhood to demonstrate fitness for public office" as "decidedly unconventional" because "maternity is not normally equated with political authority in America" (p. 1). Through the example of Palin, Buchanan introduces readers to two important themes: (1) using maternal appeals to enhance credibility, and (2) the importance of analyzing both verbal and visual arguments. Employing verbal tropes of motherhood in the speech, Palin spoke about her family and her role as mother. Visually, Buchanan suggests that when Palin brought her son Trig on stage and positioned him to face the audience, this was an example of a crafted "visual rhetoric that reinforced maternal ethos and communicated a pro-life message to viewers" (p. 2). Highlighting Palin's deployment of motherhood, both

verbally and visually, on this occasion introduces readers to the themes of ethos construction and the fluidity of maternal appeals, which Buchanan explores through each subsequent chapter.

In Chapter 2, Buchanan traces Margaret Sanger's movement from "wild woman writer" to "mother of two" in order to demonstrate a case study of a female rhetor using maternal appeals that worked to enhance her credibility and achieve her social advocacy aims. Buchanan suggests that Sanger's rhetorical work made possible her "public transformation" and enabled her to gain "mainstream respectability" (p. 27). Conceptualizing motherhood as a rhetorical constraint, Buchanan begins this chapter by establishing Sanger's rhetorical problem of image due to her radical feminist efforts in advocating birth control. Sanger's arguments about birth control were censored and "she faced grand jury indictments on three counts for publishing obscenities" (p. 25), both of which pushed her into exile in 1914. Her exile, however, led her to become an activist who "relinquished all other radical concerns and dedicated herself to creating a broad-based movement for birth control in the United States" (p. 26). Buchanan analyzes Sanger's verbal and visual rhetoric (post-exile) in this chapter and suggests that Sanger "constructed maternal ethos" (p. 45) through her dress and visual performance (i.e., Sanger's respectable choice of clothing and promotion of a maternal image through photographs of herself with her two sons) and in her public discourse by aligning "contraception with motherhood" (p. 56). Buchanan poignantly argues that Sanger's maternal appeals did more than just reformulate her rhetorical ethos: her efforts brought the topic of birth control into the public sphere for deliberation.

Chapter 3 explores the intersection of motherhood, race, and cultural memory through a case study of civil rights activist Diane Nash, who was sentenced to two years in jail for teaching nonviolent protesting techniques. In contrast to the Sanger chapter, the Nash case study demonstrates motherhood as a rhetorical obstacle because although Nash invoked motherhood in a press release upon going to jail, she did not exploit "the available means of persuasion afforded by her pregnancy" (p. 64). Buchanan suggests that Nash's pregnancy caused her to be "pushed . . . into the background of movement history" because of the way she was re-appropriated by historians as a "courageous, committed, pregnant activist" (p. 64). In short, Nash solidified her place in public memory as a mother "rather than a strategist or leader" (p. 65). Buchanan's representation of Nash's obstacles and resources illustrates the rich complexity of mixing maternity with race, class, and public memory and suggests that invoking rhetorics of motherhood do not always help female rhetors achieve social advocacy efforts. In this case, motherhood ran counter to Nash's social advocacy efforts and impeded her image as a civil rights activist.

Chapter 4 shifts from exploring discourse of female rhetors to observing configurations of rhetorics of motherhood conceptualized in contemporary public discourse. Buchanan argues that this chapter "addresses the construct of motherhood but focuses, in particular, on its changing figuration in the political forum and potential consequences for women" (p. 90). She does so by examining definitional arguments of personhood discussed in "house and Senate deliberations concerning the UVVA" (p. 90). Buchanan argues that through the public deliberations over UVVA, the deployment of maternal rhetorics "proved central in advancing regressive politics and policies" (p. 116). More specifically, Buchanan reveals the two-person construct of pregnancy (i.e., mother's rights versus fetal rights) used in personhood arguments undermines women's bodily agency. In this chapter, Buchanan points to the fluidity of

maternal constructs and instructs the pro-choice movement to revisit the "one-person construct of pregnancy" (p. 113) in order to keep up with changing rhetorics of motherhood.

In the concluding chapter, Buchanan proposes that scholars should not study women without interrogating motherhood because of its prevalence in public discourse and its undeniable presence in "culture, society, and politics" (p. 115). In this chapter, Buchanan brings the text's case studies together to demonstrate "the god-term Mother and devil-term Woman operate as poles on a continuum that affords rhetors means for praising or blaming women, practices, and policies" (p. 115). In addition to revisiting the code of motherhood, she concludes the book by summarizing her findings around themes of (1) culture, code, and emotion; (2) ethos: substitution and erasure; (3) rhetorical practice; (4) praise, blame, and the continuum; and, finally, (5) contingency and change. Under the subheading "ethos: substitution and erasure" Buchanan's concluding remarks about maternal ethos are especially insightful because she teases out both empowering and disempowering discourses that are perpetuated in the motherhood code and summarizes the different consequences for women rhetors who employ rhetorics of motherhood "revealing its dual capacity to benefit and undermine women" (p. 119).

Overall, Buchanan makes both rhetorical methods and the topic of motherhood appealing in her deconstruction of the constraints that maternal rhetors face in building their own ethos. Through her case studies, Buchanan goes beyond identifying textual flaws and addresses practical/social implications. Given this, Buchanan's text has a broad reach in audience appeal. Among those who would find this text valuable are individuals interested in discourses of motherhood and feminist rhetorical analysis. Beyond specific topics and methodological angles, scholars will find this text replete with rich examples capable of inspiring future scholarly attention directed at ethos construction in similar rhetorical situations concerning social advocacy efforts. Additionally, this text would be useful in the classroom for a scholar using the case studies to demonstrate rhetorical analysis, the rhetorical situation, and/or ethos and persona construction. Buchanan's usage of rhetorical theory creates an accessible text for rhetorical scholars at all levels as well as academics interested in issues of social advocacy and/or motherhood.