

Avery Spencer

Dr. Hüsing

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### Reframing Feminism: How Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie Makes Equality Relatable

There are very few words that invoke as strong an emotional reaction as the word “feminist” does. While some people associate that word with empowerment and justice, others link it with complete skepticism and judgement. This term does not usually exist without some form of strong opinion, and it carries with it assumption, tension, and the expectation of an argument. In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Ted Talk “We Should All Be Feminists,” she successfully confronts the discomfort by reshaping the definition of feminism. Through personal narrative, strategic humor, and minimalist performance style characterized by a lack of visuals, and rhetorical choices, Adichie reconstructs the stigma around feminism into something rational, and accessible.

In “We Should All Be Feminists” Adichie uses many elements of personal narrative to transform feminism from an intimidating political label into something that is recognizable and grounded in everyday experience. This makes the audience more engaged, and comfortable. The Ted Talk is opened up by not going into statistics and graphics, but a childhood story is told about the first time that she was called a feminist and learned what the word truly meant.

“I don’t remember what this particular argument was about, but I remember as I argued and argued Okoloma looked at me and said, ‘You know, you’re a feminist.’ It was not a compliment. I could tell from his tone, the same tone that you would use to say something like ‘You’re a supporter of terrorism.’” (Adichie 00.47)



*Adichie hangs her head with a smile after the crowd erupts in laughter.*

By comparing being called a feminist to an accusation of terrorism, Adichie is humorously exposing the extremely intense stigma within feminism. The hyperbole given after her personal narrative invites laughter, even from Adichie herself, but it works to highlight how heavily distorted the definition can be. When the topic of feminism comes up, it is widely misunderstood because of the detachment from the true, philosophical definition of the word. (Giomini) Adichie anticipates this discourse and misunderstanding and successfully disarms it by casual storytelling, and relaxed language. She establishes herself as someone who has been on both sides of the argument as a participant and an observer of how feminism is discussed, which establishes her credibility and relatability with the listeners. Her use of personal narrative creates great rapport with the audience, and shows them that feminism is not something abstract or difficult to comprehend, it is a natural response to ongoing social patterns. Beyond just entertaining the audience, Adichie uses humor rhetorically to create comfortability with the audience and lower the likelihood of audience members becoming defensive, or not listening to the very important message within the speech. Humor is a very beneficial way to lower conflict,

and does things like increase likeability, ease tension, and creates a feeling of familiarity with an audience. (Porter)

Another useful rhetorical strategy used in Adichie's speech is minimalism of many forms. This rhetorical strategy is seen all throughout Adichie's speech in her presentation tactics, as well as the diction and speech itself. Adichie makes the choice to not have any visuals, graphics, or powerpoints within her presentation to compliment the sense of comfortability within the speech. Adichie is not attempting to explain this subject in a hard to understand way, she is putting the idea of feminism in an easy to understand, and accessible context.

“But today we live in a vastly different world. The person more likely to lead is not the physically stronger person; it is the more creative person, the more intelligent person, the more innovative person, and there are no hormones for those attributes. A man is as likely as a woman to be intelligent, to be creative, to be innovative. We have evolved; but it seems to me that our ideas of gender have not evolved.” (Adichie 7.41)



*Adichie takes a pause during her speech and looks to the audience*

Adichie makes a lot of rhetorical choices within the lines of the speech, but one of the biggest examples is syntax and sentence structure to further showcase the minimalism throughout the

demonstration. The use of short, blunt sentences with no embellishment to get to the target point of the speech which is re-defining feminism in an applicable manner. This choice makes her very successful in this endeavor by having no distracting language, or code to decipher. The main controlling idea of the speech is out for all to see, which enhances the message for anyone in the audience no matter what their personal beliefs may be about feminism. Another great rhetorical choice is the minimalism behind her vocal delivery of these sentences. For this being such a controversial topic, Adichie provides a masterclass in speaking in a clear, calm, and concise manner. She even admits in the speech multiple times that the inequality between genders makes her angry, but she presents this anger respectfully, and explains to the crowd where the anger stems from, and why the audience should be angry too. This makes the listeners hang on more to everything she says in the speech, and further demonstrates the elements of minimalism, (Balakrishnan) while also further breaking apart the stigma involved with feminism. As Adichie explains in the speech, feminists are seen as angry, loud, out of control individuals, but this rhetoric is challenged by presenting her anger with such strong hope.(Krstevska) Throughout “We Should All Be Feminists,” there are strong components of accessibility, and relatability with the crowd, and these rhetorical choices made work to provide a strong sense of reachability. This makes it easy for any man, woman, or anyone else, to understand the main idea of the speech, and to hopefully begin to put it into practice.



*Adichie smiling as she begins to close out her Ted Talk*

Through using humor, personal anecdotes, minimalist language and presentation, Adichie transforms the intense stigma surrounding feminism and gender equality into something that is vital to put into practice daily. She explains it not as a political ideology, but as an entity completely separate from politics. She beautifully redefines feminism and what it means to the human race by putting it into context. By using these personal stories, she forms a genuine, special bond with her audience and opens their brains and hearts up to the contents of the speech. Not only does she achieve this through the personal stories, but through her consistent use of humor and sarcasm, she builds her credibility and likability as a speaker. This establishes such a strong sense of familiarity that any listener, feminist or not, will be engaged with the speech, which in turn starts to pick apart the broad assumptions about feminism. As the speech continues to progress, the many elements of minimalism are demonstrated, which creates a further familiarity between the speaker and the audience. Minimalism creates the illusion that this is just a relaxed conversational piece which builds Adichie's credibility with the audience. Adichie is able to produce an extremely persuasive, and engaging speech about feminism without using visuals, deeply political language, or analytics, which makes the message deeply personal and universally relevant. Ultimately the success of this speech comes from the visibility and accessibility. To be able to present such a complex idea so simply provides such an intense theme of inclusion, and equality. Adichie reframes the definition of feminism by using storytelling, humor, and clarity, which provides the listeners with the opportunity to understand the movement, but also to visualize themselves as participants in the overall progress of feminism.



*Adichie thanks the crowd as she closes out her speech*

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