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Emmah Keller

Use that F-word Already

Unfortunately, “feminism” is an extremely misunderstood word. In Ngozi Adichie’s book, *We Should All Be Feminists*, she includes several definitions that others have provided for feminism. On one hand, some people argue that feminism is not something to support, and “feminists are women who are unhappy because they cannot find husbands” (Adichie 8). On the other hand, some claim that all feminists must despise men (Adichie 11). Either way, neither of these complicated and specific definitions seem to truly capture feminism’s intent. As a result, society typically has a negative connotation concerning the word due to an ambiguous definition that supposedly threatens men. Fortunately, Adichie combats these ideas, proposing that feminism is simply any person who recognizes gender inequality as a problem in society (Adichie 48). Ultimately, *We Should All Be Feminists* redefines feminism, clarifying that it is something both men and women should embrace; however, until people stop limiting gender roles, it will be nearly impossible to create such change.

The underlying obstacle surrounding feminism is that society tends to let gender define people rather than people define gender. At one point in the book, Adichie includes the differences between the way society, in general, raises boys versus girls. She writes, “We teach boys to be afraid of fear, of weakness, of vulnerability” (Adichie 26), yet, “We teach girls to shrink themselves, to make themselves smaller” (Adichie 26). In other words, society has created very strict guidelines that separate males from females. Instead of welcoming individual identities, society limits one’s potential by instilling a belief system in which boys and girls have more differences than similarities. Fortunately, Adichie challenges people to reject this kind of

belief system and start looking at people based on their capabilities rather than limiting people based on their labeled gender.

Another reason feminism does not have the support it should is that society does not give it enough importance. Possibly, this is because some people are not willing to recognize the issue as a gender problem. In fact, Adichie admits that it can be uncomfortable talking about gender; consequently, some people wonder why a feminist does not just label themselves as a human rights supporter. However, Adichie refutes this by stating, “Because that would be dishonest...to choose to use the vague expression human rights is to deny the specific and particular problem of gender” (Adichie 41). In other words, by choosing to use the word “feminism”, society recognizes that the issue is specifically about the inequalities women face. Ultimately, while society may consider it “normal” that women are not equal to men, it cannot be labeled that way if people want to see productive change.

While the fight to raise support for feminism is certainly a pressing matter, it is important to remember that this is not the first time society has seen such a struggle. In 1926, Langston Hughes, a renowned African American poet, published the poem, “I, Too” (Hughes). In it, he points out the inequalities between African Americans and white Americans, even though he is confident that one day, African Americans will be considered equal. At the beginning of the poem, Hughes writes, “I, too, sing America” (Hughes). What is crucial to note is that Hughes recognizes that African Americans matter. He takes a stand by claiming that one day, people will realize that African Americans and white Americans are more similar than they are different. In relationship to *We Should All Be Feminists*, Adichie also takes a stand by acknowledging that, yes, there are differences between males and females biologically, but society overemphasizes

those differences through gender expectations (Adichie 35). Therefore, society must recognize that females matter just as much as males in order for feminism to gain the necessary grounding it requires.

Perhaps the strongest argument Adichie presents in *We Should All be Feminists* is that feminism is not an ideology that only females can support. In fact, this cannot be the case if gender equality is the ultimate goal, considering part of society's problem is that boys are not raised to actively consider how they treat women (Adichie 42). Rather than "emasculating" men by only removing female gender roles, feminism seeks to free men from gender roles. At the end of the book, Adichie finally puts feminism into her own words, writing, "My own definition of a feminist is a man or a woman who says, yes, there's a problem with gender as it is today and we must fix it, we must do better. All of us, women and men, must do better" (Adichie 48). It is important to note that she addresses both genders. Instead of challenging people to view feminism as a female effort, Adichie encourages society to view it as an everyone effort. Change is tremendously easier when people work together.

It is clear from Ngozi Adichie's book, *We Should All be Feminists*, that while there is a continuing problem surrounding gender equality, there is still hope. If people really consider feminism's intentions, it is actually quite simple. Society merely needs to decide that all people are equally capable of greatness. However, in order to create such a transformation, people have to be confident enough to change. Everyone, not just a few individuals, must open themselves up to a different way of thinking in order to undo some of the automatic beliefs that have infiltrated their minds from a very young age. Simply put, it is time for society to start using the f-word.

Works Cited

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