**JUDGMENT CALL #1:**

## WHAT IS FEMINISM

Feminism is a very ambiguous word that means different things to different people. This has always been true. In the 1800s some people of both sexes saw the first wave of feminism as a movement for the rights women obviously deserved but had been denied in the United States. Other women and men saw feminism as an appalling movement that challenged both secular traditions and divine laws. The second wave of feminism in the United States, which began in the 1960s, was equally controversial and aroused equally disparate judgments—it was viewed as a virtuous liberatory movement and a contemptible affront to home, family, and the rightful roles of man and woman.

Opinions about feminists are every bit as divergent as those about feminism. Feminists are described as courageous crusaders for civil rights, man-hating bra burners, peace-loving people, and wreckers of tradition. They are viewed as confident and aggressive, brave and brazen, and moderate and extremist. There is probably no social movement in America about which opinions are more divided.

What do you think feminism is? Now that you’ve read about different branches of feminism, can you create an all-encompassing definition of what it is and what it stands for? The following website and prompts may help you think about this issue.

To learn how NOW, the most prominent mainstream feminist organization, defines feminism and feminist issues, go to: http//www.now.org/. Next, use a search engine to find terms such as “critiques of feminism” and “problems with feminism.”

* Identify recurrent criticisms of feminism.
* Do these criticisms seem valid in light of the information presented in Chapter 3 of your textbook?
* Do feminists offer responses to the criticisms (for instance, does the NOW website address any of them)? If so, how do feminists respond?
* Having read about many different kinds of feminism, can you identify any themes that weave through the range of feminisms? What, if anything, is common to the different branches of feminism in the United States?
* Is feminism needed as a movement in the United States today?
* Is feminism a social, intellectual, political, or philosophical movement, or is it a combination of these?

References

Feminist Agenda Homepage. <http://www.got.net/~elained/index.html>.

Whelan, I. (1995).*Modern Feminist Thought: From the Second Wave to “Post feminism.”* New York University Press.

**JUDGMENT CALL #2:**

**IS POWER FEMINISM FEMINIST?**

Power feminists such as Naomi Wolf and Katie Roiphe (discussed in Chapter 3) claim that they are feminists and that the principles and goals they advance are feminist. At the same time, they criticize mainstream feminism and feminists for encouraging women to see themselves as victims and for not urging women to take charge of their lives and quit complaining about discrimination, violence against women, and other forms of oppression.

Critics of power feminism argue that the movement is both anti-woman and anti-feminist. They claim that the women who advocate it are financially very well off, attractive, college educated and otherwise privileged. Critics charge that power feminism may work for women who are advantaged, but it doesn’t speak for or about women who do not enjoy privileges such as wealth and education.

Do you think power feminism is feminist? To answer the question, reread the discussion in Chapter 3 and then consider the prompts for reflection:

* Who defines whether a movement is feminist or not? Do people such as Naomi Wolf and Katie Roiphe have the right to call themselves “power feminists” if they choose to?
* What makes a movement feminist?
* Must a movement represent all women to be feminist?
* Does mainstream feminism encourage women to see themselves as victims as some power feminists claim?
* Can all—or most—women take charge of their own lives with the resources they command and current social structures and practices?
* What entitles someone to speak for others, or to claim to represent the interests of others? Wolf and Roiphe, for example, claim to speak for “women,” yet Wolf and Roiphe are atypically privileged financially, educationally, and otherwise. Does their privileged status affect the credibility of their claim to speak for women?
* In what ways is power feminists’ assertion that women should quit complaining about discrimination similar to charges that racial minorities should quit complaining about discrimination?

References

Hooks, B. (1994). *Outlaw Culture*. New York: Routledge.

Roiphe, K. (1993). *The Morning After: Sex, Fear, and Feminism on Campus.*

Boston, MA: Little, Brown. Go to Amazon.Com to read reviews of this book.

Wolf, N. (1993). *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How it Will Change the 21st Century.* New York: Random House. Go to Amazon.Com to read reviews of this book.

Wood, J. T. (1996). Dominant and muted discourses in popular representations of feminism. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 82*, 171-185.