Audre Lorde: Unpacking Intersectionality and Oppression in Feminism

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Today’s generation gravitates toward movements that highlight society’s flawed systems where oppression is fostered. Specifically, movements such as, #MeToo and the Women’s March Movement focus on the oppressions women face under the patriarchy, however, these movements generally spotlight the same voices- white, heterosexual, upper class, female. Feminism that has consistently focused on white women has minimized the multifaceted nature that is “woman”. This lack of emphasis on those who fall within the category of marginalized is often excluded from the conversation, especially those who hold intersecting marginalized identities. The term “intersectionality” was coined by American lawyer and theorist, Kimberlé Crenshaw who currently defines it as, “a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects” (Crenshaw). In an interview, Crenshaw adds that intersectionality exposes the framework that erases the things that happen to people who hold many intersections (Crenshaw). Moreover, Crenshaw is not the only person who has mentioned intersectionality in conversation with feminism. Audre Lorde, born to West Indian immigrant parents, devoted her life to producing literary masterpieces in multiple genres, such as prose, poetry, and essays, and raising awareness of the intersectionalities of injustice and oppression. Lorde found a way to communicate and express her feelings through poetry at a young age which led her to teach in white academic spaces (Poetry Foundation). Lorde’s experiences as a queer, Black woman in these spaces allowed for her to gain insight into the way race, class, and gender intersect in life and society. Lorde looked at the way intersecting oppressions create institutions in which injustice is imposed even further on those with intersecting identities (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* p. 45, 115). Lorde spearheaded a conversation that would address the common denominator of most feminist movements- the fact that white women have more privilege than other women of intersecting identities. Intersectional
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feminism, according to Lorde, can be defined as the acknowledgment of intersecting oppressions- racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia- and understanding of mutual support despite these individual intersections to further the dismantling of patriarchy. Lorde’s definition of feminism challenged the Merriam-Webster dictionary definition (Webster), one that mainstream movements typically followed, as she called for the consideration of all women- the ones being erased from the conversation and the ones dominating it.

Although Audre Lorde used many mediums, such as essays, proses, and poetry, to voice her experiences with oppression, intersection, and feminism, Lorde called poetry a “vital necessity of our existence” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* p. 36). To build on this idea of poetry, Lorde described the woman’s place of power as “neither white nor surfaced; it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 37). Lorde describes the woman’s place of power as “dark” and “deep” because of the long history of oppression all women have faced as women. She emphasizes the importance of moving to a “non-European consciousness of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 37). In this non-European way of living we move away from relying “solely upon our ideas to make us free” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 37) and move toward cherishing “our feelings” and respecting “those hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge…and lasting action comes” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 37). Emotions, unlike ideas, are tangible and give a person the opportunity to connect with how they are feeling and how that can be personified. Lorde says, “women carry within ourselves the possibility for fusion of these two approaches” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 37), in reference to both creating ideas for survival and freedom and connecting on a deeper level to our
feelings and inner power. Lorde says, “we come closest to this combination in our poetry” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 37) and she makes a distinction in the meaning of the word poetry. Poetry, to Lorde, is the “revelatory distillation of experience” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 37) which essentially is the extraction of unknown knowledge that we obtain in our living experience. Lorde separates this form of poetry from distortion by the “white fathers” who defined poetry as, “a desperate wish for imagination without insight” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 37). This distorted definition fails to reflect experience on a deeper level and instead forces a form of “imagination” that lacks emotional perception. Lorde affirms the importance of poetry by describing the way it forms a light from “hopes and dreams toward survival and change” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 37). Poetry is a catalyst for emotions to become active by making ideas tangible to those listening and creating. Lorde calls poetry “the skeleton architecture of our lives” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 38) to reinforce its innate nature at the basis of our existence. In further detail, Lorde says it “lays the foundations for a future of change, a bridge across our fears of what has never been before” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 38). Through the personification of emotion, poetry allows for a limitless expression of ideas to be presented without the constraints of fear. A true poet, according to Lorde, says “I feel, therefore I can be free” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 38) and with the use of that language the poet can “charter this demand, the implementation of that freedom” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 38). Lorde reiterates that women are often forced to experience “falsely benign accusations…” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 38) whenever they express their emotions and the use of poetry can strengthen and amplify those emotions while
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muting the attempts to diminish or soften a woman’s expression and experience. Through a collective use of poetry, women can highlight their ability to survive while their “dreams point the way to freedom” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 39) and become transcribed into action (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 39). Lorde focuses on the importance of moving away from seeing poetry as a luxury because it takes away “our power, our womanness...the future of our worlds” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 39) when we gatekeep among each other. Every woman has the capacity to produce poetry and receive the courage “to see, to feel, to speak, and to dare” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 39) toward liberation.

An example of this liberation can be seen in 1978 when Lorde’s published a collection of poems titled “The Black Unicorn: Poems” which unpacks Lorde’s intersectional experiences as a Black mother, wife, daughter, and sister. Lorde’s poem “Black Unicorn” is a metaphor for the Black, female experience. A unicorn is a majestic creature that only exists in fantasies or mythology. Lorde describes the Black woman as a “unicorn” because their experience, like a unicorn, is mythologized, and narratives are created for them. Lorde describes the unicorn as “greedy” and “impatient” (Lorde, Lines 1-2 pg. 3), but follows with, “mistaken // for a shadow // or symbol // where mist painted mockeries // of my fury” (Lorde, Lines 4-9 pg. 3). Lorde uses the word “shadow” to highlight the way Black women are often disregarded or seen as background characters and the word “symbol” to highlight the projections of who Black women are by non-Black people. Mist often creates uncertainty by hiding or distracting what is really there, so in this case, the perception of Black women is created by this “mist” of stereotypes that are “painted” by others in an attempt to “mock” the experiences and emotions of Black women. In the final lines, Lorde uses the adjectives “restless”, “unrelenting”, and “not free” to draw a
contrast in the fact that while Black women are oftentimes forced to feel “restless” (Lorde, Lines 13-16 pg. 3) from the continuous cycles of oppression through racism and sexism, they still have this unyielding quality that does not break them completely down. While the Black unicorn is written as a caged, mythological creature, it is a metaphor for the resilient experience of the Black woman. Lorde follows up with the poem “A Woman Speaks”, which immediately connects this magical creature, the “Black unicorn”, with the entity of a Black woman. She describes herself as “moon marked” and “touched by sun”, in reference to her Blackness (Lorde, Line 1 pg. 4). She follows with “my magic is unwritten” to emphasize her previous point that the true essence of a Black woman is unvoiced or never heard (Lorde, Line 2 pg. 4). Lorde follows with, “but when the sea turns back // it will leave my shape behind”, to recognize that the influence from Black women remains within our society, yet they are never credited, therefore, leaving behind a shape but not a whole person (Lorde, Lines 3-4 pg. 4). In the final stanza, Lorde starts with, “I have been woman // for a long time” as a factual reminder to those who have chosen to forget that Black women are women too (Lorde, Lines 25-26 pg. 4). She follows with, “beware my smile // I am treacherous with old magic” (Lorde, Lines 27-28 pg. 5), to mockingly play into the stereotype that Black women are dangerous while alternatively sending a reminder that she is still a woman and still deserves to be acknowledged as such. She emphasizes that point by closing the poem with “I am // woman // and not white” (Lorde, Lines 32-34 pg. 5). The separation of the words “I am” from “woman” and “not white” allows Lorde to describe the intersecting identities she holds, as a woman and a Black person, and connect them together to highlight that her Blackness does not make her any less of a woman. It is also important to recognize that Lorde is calling out the systems that measure womanhood in whiteness. Another notable poem in this book is titled “Sister Outsider”, and would go on to be the title of a later
book. In the first line, Lorde writes, “We were born in a poor time // never touching each other’s hunger” (Lorde, Lines 1-3 pg. 106), to illustrate the “we”, being Black women, in a setting where depravity is normalized. The commonly shared emotion, “hunger”, is an expression of desire or craving for something. Lorde follows with, “never // sharing our crusts // in fear // the bread became enemy” (Lorde, Lines 4-7 pg. 106), to show how Black women receive so little to a point where it is not enough to satisfy their hunger nor enough to share with one another without someone being left with nothing. If a Black woman is left with nothing, then she is driven purely by her hunger which can be misdirected and wasted. The “enemy”, according to Lorde, is not one person, but rather oppressive systems that exist at the expense of Black women. If Black women are not using their hunger to dismantle these systems, then they continue to exist and Black women continue to be discarded. In the following stanza, Lorde speaks about how this experience translates to future generations who have to teach their “children to respect themselves // as well as each other” (Lorde, Lines 8-10 pg. 106). Black women have to remind their children to not let their “hunger” consume them and others around them in order to be protected from these oppressive systems. In the final stanza, Lorde says, “Now you have made loneliness // holy and useful // and no longer needed // now // your light shines very brightly” (Lorde, Lines 11-15 pg. 106). The suppression of this “hunger” translates into loneliness because these desires and cravings are never satisfied. These aspirations are tucked away and what little is given is tolerated. Black women have turned their loneliness into something “holy” and “useful” to distract themselves from the true and raw feelings of “hunger”. In these moments of distraction, there is “light” that shines through and this is an illustration of the resilience of Black women and their ability to have a sense of optimism for their children’s future. Lorde, however, encourages Black women to know their “darkness also // rich // and beyond fear” (Lorde, Lines
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17-19 pg. 106). Lorde has referred to womanhood as “dark, ancient and deep” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 37) because it accurately describes the capacity of immense power that women hold within themselves. Specifically, for Black women, Lorde is asserting that the power found in darkness is fearless and does not fear any enemy. Lorde wants Black women to channel both of these energies, light and dark, so they can feed their hunger in a productive way- one that will lead to the dismantling of oppressive systems.

Lorde reiterates the phrase “sister outsider”, through other mediums- essays and speeches, because she finds it to be an essential concept within her work. Published in 1984, “Sister Outsider” contained fifteen essays and speeches where Lorde discussed similar ideas from poetry previously published- oppression, intersectionality, and feminism. Despite using a different medium, Lorde continues to use symbolism and descriptive language to unpack weighted topics of racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia. In “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power”, Lorde continues the conversation of emotion by talking specifically about the “erotic”. Lorde defines the erotic as “a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane…the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 53). This definition is a different interpretation of eroticism because it centers the female experience and decentralizes sexual desire rooted in the patriarchy. The mainstream definition of the erotic devalues the inner source in which women can find power. Lorde says, “...the erotic offers a well of replenishing and provocative force to the woman who does not fear its revelation, nor succumb to the belief that sensation is enough” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 54). The use of the words “replenish” and “provocative” represent a symbiotic relationship in which the use of the erotic becomes a constant refill of strong, deliberate emotions. Lorde calls this “revelation” fearful because this
intense power is self-fulfilled and can transcend past a physical feeling. The erotic is often associated within the sexual realm and centers “sensation without feeling” which reduces the full capacity of the erotic (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 54). Lorde says, “...the erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing”, and once this combination occurs future endeavours become more attainable (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 54). This idea comes up again as Lorde breaks down the Greek origin of the word erotic to “the personification of love in all its aspects” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 55). Although Lorde mentions the personification of emotions, she is truly emphasizing the fluidity in which emotions can transform into physical action in all aspects of life. Previously, Lorde mentioned that the erotic is rooted in the female and spiritual plane which is intertwined and in a similar fashion, Lorde says “the dichotomy between the spiritual and the political is also false” because the erotic bridges the two together (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 56). Despite identity, we can all use the erotic to invoke something and this similarity in ability connects emotions between people, the self, and spirit. Lorde says, “...once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves…our life-pursuits…that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 57). The erotic doubles as a magnifying glass and once we looking through a lens of passion and true feeling we are then able to authentically look at the conditions in which we live and question whether they meet our standards. In order to truly dismantle systems, such as the patriarchy and racism, eroticism must be embraced and used to connect people and feelings together.

Different from the topic of power in emotion, Lorde continues to reinforce intersection through her discussion of the Black female experience. Black women are faced with a double
edge sword in life- oppressions of being a woman and being Black. In the wake of racism, Black women also have to deal with sexism that exists in the Black community, and the denial that their oppressions do not exist. Lorde cites Robert Staples, a Black sociologist, when he explains that “capitalism has left the Black man only his penis for fulfillment and a ‘curious rage’” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 61). In this instance, the violences perpetrated by Black men on Black women are justified because white society has given the Black man so little. But Lorde questions Staple by asking, “why isn’t that male rage turned upon the forces which limit his fulfillment”, to further disprove the justification that Black women have to be collateral. Black women, too, can hold rage, however, it is more detrimental if she uses this rage than it is for a Black man. Lorde goes on to say, “Black women traditionally have had compassion for everybody else except ourselves” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 62). Black women are assumed to take responsibility in uplifting everyone else without the reciprocated support and this diminishes the idea that Black women can have self love, care, and compassion for themselves. Lorde explains that this control over Black women, specifically by Black men, feeds into the “dominate white male disease of sexism” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 63). When the conversation surrounding oppression occurs, it is important to consider the chain reaction in which the oppressed becomes the oppressor. If Black men use their rage to then control and suppress Black women, they are only reinforcing the oppressive systems that keep both them and Black women subordinate. This behavior is considered a tragedy which “diminishes all Black people”, and should not be considered an issue that only Black women have to manage and solve. Lorde calls this “societal deathwish” a form of hatred that is absorbed by and passed through Black women which distorts
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the way they interact with each other (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 146).

Internalizations about skin color have fueled colorism and created a hierarchy in which lighterskinned Black women are above darkerskinned Black women, creating a newfound anger stemmed from the dehumanization of Black women in general. Similarly, featurism and texturism that does not align with Eurocentric standards are often degraded by Black women toward other Black women, creating this idea that “the pain of bloodshed becomes almost commonplace” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 156). The origins of a Black woman’s anger is misdirected causing friction and divide between other Black women and can be seen as “normal” because it is deeply rooted. Lorde says, “when we do not attempt to name the confusion of feelings which exist between sisters, we act them out in hurtful and unproductive ways” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 170). The desire to be “good enough” is rooted in whiteness and it impairs Black women’s ability to clearly describe and explain why they feel this desire. Projection of these unhealthy feelings does not accurately empower the Black woman, but rather it empowers the oppressive system that produces these feelings. Misdirection of anger and pain only results in an increase of those feelings, and Black women lose sight of the power that they hold. The only way for Black women to reclaim this self-love and unlearn these internalized emotions is through empowerment. Lorde says, “our strengthening in the service of ourselves and each other…will be the result of this pursuit” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 174). This pursuit, both self liberation and the liberation of Black women, is not easy or concise, but rather is a process that takes time and requires genuine introspection. Once Black women have mended the relationship between one another, can they then build authentic relationships with other women.
Conversely, as Lorde tackles the intersections among Black women, she begins to relate intersection to her interactions with other women. In her essay, “Notes from a Trip to Russia”, accounts for Lorde’s first time in Russia and her experience being there as a Black woman. Lorde describes how the people of Tashkent had an ability to “function in a multinational atmosphere…whether or not they are each other’s favorite people” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 22). Composed of both Asian and Russian descendants, the people of Tashkent work together to have a society that is not divided into opposing factions but rather one that works toward efficiency. This concept of “multinationality”, the inclusion or involvement of several countries or individuals of several nationalities (Oxford University Press), is parallel to intersectionality. This trip to Russia exposes Lorde's view of intersections between two racial groups and their ability to work against a nationalist and racist system. Lorde, not only witnesses this collaboration, but experiences it firsthand. Lorde recalls a moment during the trip where a woman approaches her in the market with her son. The woman tells Lorde, “she had never seen a Black woman and…just wanted to bring her little boy” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 26-27) to see if Lorde was a mother too. Lorde says they “blessed each other and spoke good words” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 27) to one another. Despite differences in race and language, Lorde connected with a woman over the common interest of motherhood- something many women of different intersections share. While Lorde made a connection, she also experienced a situation where intersection was dismissed. Lorde had a meeting with Madam Izbalkhan, the head of the Uzbekistan Society of Friendship, where she questioned her on why the oppressed people of Black America were not discussed. Lorde interpreted Madam Izbalkhan’s response as, “any time you want to get yours going, you know, be our guest, just don’t expect us to be involved” (Audre Lorde, *Sister
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This attitude Madam Izbalkhan exhibited is similar to the attitudes of the feminist movement. White, upper-class, heterosexual women tend to use this same rhetoric in response to other women who do not have these same identities. The distinction between “you” and “us” creates a separation in a cause that could benefit the collective group. In the case of Black Americans, Lorde began to realize that they “exist alone in the mouth of the dragon” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 30). Those who are unwilling to include other identities in the conversation of revolution and change, continue to reinforce stigma and oppression. Specifically, Lorde realizes that Black Americans are forced to fend for themselves in the wake of oppressive systems that continue to subjugate them. This trip to Russia exposes Lorde to the idea that negligence reinforces the dismissal of marginalized identities, which will never constitute progression.

Furthermore, as Lorde begins to highlight the importance of conversation she also emphasized the harm in staying silent. In another essay, “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action”, Lorde creates this understanding that “your silence will not protect you” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 41). Lorde encourages dialogue because in itself it brings people together. Lorde says, “...I had made contact with other women while we examined the words to fit a world in which we all believed, bridging our differences” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 41). Lorde’s ability to find commonality among women with different backgrounds created strength not only for her, but for the women she was having these conversations with. This contribution of “strength” and “concern” between women of different identities further proves this idea of “sisterhood” and the ability for a “sister outsider”, a woman with marginalized identities, to still be treated as a “sister” despite society’s view of her as an “outsider”. “Sister outsider” also comes to mind when Lorde says, “Black
women...have always been highly visible...and have been rendered invisible through the
depersonalization of racism” (Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches pg. 42). As a
woman first, there is always going to be this depersonalization by the patriarchy, however, Black
women become the outsider (of women) because they are Black. However, Lorde says there is
strength in being the outsider because that vulnerability is what creates sisterhood and unity.
Lorde says, “we can sit in our corners mute forever, while our sisters and ourselves are
wasted...and we will still be no less afraid” (Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches
pg. 42). Silence, according to Lorde, does not provide protection and comfort in the face of fear,
and will never result in any kind of change. Suffering will still occur regardless of whether you
are silent or have transformed your silence, however, the transformation brings hope and
possibilities to mutual understanding, judgment, and evaluation. This process allows for the
personification of emotions and “established perspectives” (Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider:
Essays and Speeches pg. 43). Silence can also pertain to white silence in the sense that remorse
and guilt in not speaking up, creates internal pain, but more importantly, the infliction of white
silence onto marginalized identities also creates pain. Lorde concludes that, “there are so many
silences to be broken” (Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches pg. 44) and this
transformation of language to action is essential for all identities in order to dismantle oppressive
systems.

In relation to the conversation surrounding silence, Lorde penned a letter to Mary Daly, a
known influence in the feminist community, and shared it with the community of women after
not receiving a reply. Lorde began her letter with compassion and kindness as she acknowledges
Daly’s book, Gyn/Ecology, and the work she has done at the University of Boston. Lorde writes,
“I write this letter to you now, hoping to share with you the benefits of my insights as you have
shared…with me” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 66). Lorde’s ability to offer complimentary words while also providing critiques, creates an honest dialogue and opens communication. Lorde begins to offer her insight by stating that history has shown that “white women are unable to hear Black women’s words, or [to] maintain dialogue” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 66). As she calls this experience “long and disappointing”, she admits that any assumption she makes about Daly’s lack of response connects to that historical experience and represents “an old pattern of relating, sometimes protective and sometimes dysfunctional” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 66-67).

Lorde’s use of the words “protective” and “dysfunctional” are universal experiences among women. Rather than attacking Daly, Lorde highlights a shared experience of womanly protection and the flaws in protective behaviors in an attempt to emerge from the pattern previously mentioned. In order for critical conversations to happen, it is important that women reinvent the way they relate to one another and view it as an opportunity to understand differences. Lorde takes that first step when she warns Daly that implying “all women suffer the same oppression simply because they are women” disregards the many tools of patriarchy at play (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 67). If intersecting identities among women are dismissed, then intersecting oppressions that accompany them are ignored as well. Lorde calls this “a tool of patriarchy” because it can be used by anyone- man or woman- consciously and unconsciously (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 67). Lorde calls Daly’s choice to focus on female European experience and silence the experience of non-European women “serves the destructive forces of racism and separation between women” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 69). Lorde emphasizes that “dismissal stands as a real block to communication” in reference to growing a community between women and moving
against patriarchy. As Lorde concludes her letter, she reminds Daly that “oppression of women knows no ethnic nor racial bound, but that does not mean it is identical within those differences” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 70). This is important to remember in the wake of dismissal because “to deal with one without even alluding to the other is to distort our commonality” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 70). Lorde says sisterhood can not exist while racism and patriarchy overwhelmingly surrounds it. If we truly want to work in a feminist fashion we must include all identities in the conversation.

Moreover, Lorde continues to highlight the importance of acknowledging differences in a speech titled “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” to a crowd of white, cis-gendered feminists. Lorde’s choice of delivery created a huge impact because she dared to challenge those who call themselves feminist but leave out input from “poor women, Black and Third World women, and lesbians” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 110). Lorde reiterates that the exclusion of these voices take away from the “need and desire to nurture” which is a woman’s “real power” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 111). Lorde says this maternal power is “not pathological, but redemptive” because the means in which women nurture their own is not out of compulsion but rather an act of salvation (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 111). Additionally, maternal power can bring women together out and give way to “a freedom which allows the I to be…in order to be creative” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 111). The transformation from “I”, a subject, to “be”, an action, is an example of emotions being personified. A woman who looks from within has the power to use that introspection and create dialogue between other women who are doing the same, regardless of difference in identity. In these conversations, Lorde says, “advocating the mere tolerance of difference between women is
the grossest reformism” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 111). Reducing the acknowledgment of difference to toleration dismisses the opportunity for accountability to occur. Discussions surrounding differences can dispel any existing ignorances as emotions are shared and understood among each other on a deeper level. Lorde says, “Only within [that] interdependency of different strengths…can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 111). Lorde is affirming this idea that once women have educated one another on their own experiences, they stop “settling for the convenient” and truly question whether the world reflects these experiences (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 57). Lorde says, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house”, to emphasize that women have to go beyond what the patriarchy gives them in order to truly dismantle it (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 112). In this case, holding feminist conventions without the voices of non-White, heterosexual women will never result in the liberation of women. The “master’s tools” can be seen as a convenience because no work is needed and uncomfortable conversations aren’t being held. It is a bare minimum that encourages “human blindesses” such as racism, sexism, homophobia, etc (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 45). Lorde concludes that “divide and conquer must become define and empower” in order for meaningful change to occur (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 112). Oppressive systems may differ among identities, but they intersect and work to suppress collaboration that could result in liberation for all.

In like manner, Lorde highlights a woman’s response to racism- “the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance, manifest, and implied” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 124). According to Lorde, when a
woman responds to racism it is a response to anger, “the anger of exclusion, of unquestioned privilege…of silence…betrayal” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 124). These are all products of racism that have been built upon by lived experiences. Those who inflict and experience these angers are doing so out of fear- “fear of contempt, of censure, of some judgment…of annihilation…the visibility” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 42). Rather than allowing fear to silence the important discussions, it must used to spotlight its root causes and allow for growth to occur. Lorde notes that this must be done “for corrective surgery, not guilt” because guilt is a “brick wall” and does not focus on long-term change, but rather temporary relief from true responsibility (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 124). Lorde connects this back to the way feminism is interpreted by white women, where there is an expectation for non-white women to resolve their own problems and the overall problem with sexism. There is an insincere effort to truly combat racism in these spaces, therefore, authentic dialogue becomes unattainable. Lorde says, “if women in the academy truly want a dialogue about racism, it will require recognizing the needs and living context of other women” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 126). If these feminist conferences and movements are dominated by white, wealthy, heterosexual women, then it dismisses the experience of women who do not hold those identities, rendering the conversation tactless and unproductive. Comparatively, all women experience anger and Lorde says, “everything can be used / except what is wasteful” when referring to anger as tool for liberation. But, white women use their anger differently than non-white women, and often times it is “wasteful”. A white woman’s anger is a form of projection that causes harm and is not useful toward liberation (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 127). Additionally, silence used by white women is a misuse of anger and therefore, becomes wasteful toward
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liberation. Similarly, a non-white woman can be wasteful with anger when she “assumes her struggles with racism are identical with her [my] own” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 128). Non-white women must hold themselves accountable in those spaces rather than use anger, in order to learn about the oppressions of their non-white counterparts. Lorde says, “every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 127). If anger is used constructively, then women can learn more about their differences and experiences as a result. If women fail to acknowledge these existing truths, the powerful tool of anger, and collective power, then they contribute “not only to each of their oppressions but also their [my] own” (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* pg. 132). When women are ready to look past guilt and embrace accountability, only then can feminism truly intersect and result in liberation.

In conclusion, through the analysis of Lorde’s published pieces of work, I determined that although Lorde used different writing styles, she personified her emotions and presented the same idea through different mediums, emphasizing her urgency for the reader to understand the importance of intersection. Lorde emphasizes the importance of poetry and highlights how every woman possesses the ability to express and acknowledge emotions that reflect their experiences as women. As these emotions become emphasized it opens up an opportunity for women to finally hear each other and to speak out against these intersecting oppressive systems. Emotions are spoken about more specifically when Lorde describes how useful the “erotic” can be toward liberation. The use of this inherently female emotion, allows for women to move past tangible feelings and toward a continuous flow of raw and deliberate emotions. The “erotic” is something that every woman possesses and can underline the intersections that exist among women of
different identities. Another emotion that Lorde also emphasized was “anger” and how anger can be used to drive our emotions into physical actions and change. Lorde cautions that anger can easily be wasted and further reinforces the patriarchy, however, when it is acknowledged through expressive forms it can expose systems that are often ignored. Lorde speaks further about the way patriarchal oppressions intersect with racial oppressions as she talks about the experiences of Black women. This analysis of the way Black women have to face these intersecting oppressions exposes the way they reinforce violence and division among Black women. Lorde calls for Black women to acknowledge the consequential results of racism and patriarchy in the same way she calls for other women to acknowledge oppressions that exist outside of the patriarchy. Lorde builds relationships with women who do not hold the same identities as her because she is aware that there is already a connection on the basis of womanhood. She uses this base connection to then learn and understand women who are different from her. She emphasizes the importance of having conversations rather than cowering in fear when faced with the topic of oppression. Silence has been proven to be more detrimental than helpful, and Lorde urges women to move away from it because it provides no progression. She specifically urges women who have privilege among certain identities that they must use their power to uplight the identities that are marginalized. Spaces that include only White, upper class, heterosexual voices, are not truly having the necessary conversations toward female liberation. These women must use these spaces to learn how they can use their privilege and power in ways that disrupt the patriarchy. Lorde also urges women with marginalized identities to also acknowledge the identities in which they have privilege, and speak up in the wake of oppression that occurs to another woman with marginalized identities. Her life's work reflected intersectional feminism, so those in the future generation could access the tools for true empowerment. In today’s
generation, women are beginning to model the framework that Lorde established as intersectional identities are being highlighted throughout society. However, there is still more work that needs to be accomplished as women continue their ongoing battle with the patriarchy. Nonetheless, when one becomes ready to engage with Lorde's work, one begins to engage with intersectionality and toward liberation.
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Works Cited


