

A Discussion of Audre Lorde's Work on Black Women, Hatred, and Anger

by

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Introduction

Audre Lorde, the self-described “Black, lesbian, warrior, mother, poet” was born in Harlem, NY, in 1934 and died in 1992 on the island of St. Croix in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Lorde was an award-winning feminist, academic and activist whose work had a tremendous impact on debates around race, gender, and feminism in the U.S. – and her strong legacy remains relevant to this day. Almost 30 years after Lorde’s death, her writing and lectures continue to inform present-day arguments linked to race, gender, and sexuality. In her work Lorde theorized the “overlapping of various social identities,” and in this sense, paved the way for what would later be coined by the civil rights advocate and critical race theory scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw, as intersectionality. Indeed, one of Lorde’s key contributions was to make her contemporaries aware that social and personal identities are closely interconnected, while also demonstrating the fact that a range of varied factors intersect to shape the self. When stating “I am a Black Feminist,” Lorde makes it clear that “I mean I recognize that my power as well as my primary oppressions come as a result of my Blackness as well as my womanness, and therefore my struggles on both of these fronts are inseparable” (“I am Your Sister,” *I am Your Sister*, 58).

Lorde’s popularity in Black feminist and feminist circles in the U.S. should not take away from the fact that she also played a key role abroad. For example, her active presence in Berlin (where she sought alternative cancer treatment) is credited for spearheading the Black German feminist movement. Activist film-maker Dagmar Schultz, and one of Lorde’s personal friends, released a documentary in 2011 about her long-lasting impact on the women’s movement in Germany. Schultz notes that Lorde was the mentor and catalyst who helped ignite the Afro-German Movement while she challenged white women to acknowledge and constructively use their privileges.

Part of Lorde's ongoing appeal across time and place – in Germany, the United States and beyond – lies in her ability to both challenge and inspire an audience. Lorde encourages her audience to free their thinking while inspiring them to unearth women's power through poetry and self-acceptance, and to take action through advocacy. In this way Lorde remains, to her many audiences, a fortress of strength, wisdom, love, and courage. Some of Lorde's statements and strategies still resonate, even now, for women like myself and those of my generation. For instance, participants to the recent Women's Marches in 2017 held up homemade signs displaying Lorde's powerful assertions. I was moved upon seeing various quotes in images of the marches, such as "Your silence will not protect you" and "I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own." These powerful statements, borrowed from Lorde's essays "Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger" (1983) and "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism" (1981), succinctly summarize Lorde's belief in listening to one's anger and speaking freely for oneself, as well as for the rights of other women.

Juxtaposing these two essays, my senior project will discuss one of Lorde's key concepts: the value of anger as experienced by Black women and women of Color. Lorde powerfully argues about the potential that lies in using one's own anger as a tool for social change. Her works illuminate how a deeply personal emotion, like anger – one often feared if and when it is expressed – can be put to political use. It can be reclaimed to foster more unity among politically like-minded women. The path forward is full of promise, Lorde argues, because understanding the roots of our anger, *why* our anger arises, offers a way to overcome the fear of differences that helps condone so many forms of discrimination.

Various questions have guided this research; for instance, what is the relationship between Anger and Hatred (capitalized in her writing) and their meaning and role as catalysts of

social change in Audre Lorde's essays? How do these emotions manifest, how are they used and in what way(s) are they theorized across the essays? In Part I: Understanding Hatred and Anger, I analyze Lorde's essay "Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred and Anger" (1983). More specifically, I discuss the differences between Hatred and Anger and how they manifest for Black women in their daily lives. Taking examples from Lorde's own life and her experiences with other Black women, I focus on the interpersonal and consider questions, such as: How does silence factor into hatred and anger? How do Black women interact with each other? Are the interactions positive, negative, or neutral? How can the Black woman reclaim this emotion for the purpose of healing, strength and growth? How does this emotion aid in their survival? Here I argue that Black women are often prone to internalizing what Lorde refers to as the "poisonous seepage" of hatred which they are subjected to and in turn subject each other to its resulting anger ("Eye to Eye," 146).

In Part II: From Silence to Anger to Power, I focus on "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism" (1981). Analyzing this essay helps to shift the focus from the interpersonal to the structural and systemic realms. I analyze the microaggressions Black women experience and society's responses to and expectations of Black women. Again I ask the question, what role does silence play? Taking the example of Serena Williams, arguably the most visible and talented female tennis player of our time, I examine an incident at the 2018 US Open during which Williams stood her ground during a match when she was accused of cheating. In my analysis I determine what this type of outspokenness means for Black women and how it reveals that their anger can be politicized but also used as a political tool.

In Part III: From Wrong to Righteous, I explore other views on anger by examining secondary sources that deal with themes similar to those in Lorde's work. I concentrate on

examining the works of the theologian and religious studies professor, Vincent Lloyd, and the theories of philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum. These theorists rely upon an understanding of anger that differs from Lorde's own views and by acknowledging this I hope to understand their arguments and integrate the contributions these sources may offer as part of my own understanding of her work.

Part I: Understanding Hatred and Anger

In “Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred and Anger” (1983), Audre Lorde discusses the nuanced nature of Black women’s relationship to their anger and to each other, all while examining the impact anger, along with hatred, has within these women’s communities. Throughout this section I will detail the subtle differences between Hatred and Anger, and I examine the hidden role of silence in relation to both themes. In the beginning of the essay, Lorde writes: “EVERY BLACK WOMAN in America lives her life somewhere along a wide curve of ancient and unexpressed angers” (145). Lorde goes on to develop the idea here — one which also appears in her other works of prose — is that deep within the Black woman there exists a gourd of energy both positive and negative that helps them to survive. A “molten pond” which exists at their very core and is fed by hatred and, consequently, anger, fuels their power (145).

The “ancient” forces within Black women are fostered early in childhood because from birth onward they face what Lorde refers to as “that societal deathwish,” which is Hatred accentuated by a capital H, and is aimed at Black women from the moment they are born “Black and female in America” (146). Lorde reminisces on a moment from her own early childhood when she took “the AA subway train” to Harlem with her mother (147). She writes:

On one side of me a man reading a paper. On the other, a woman in a fur hat staring at me. Her mouth twitches as she stares and then her gaze drops down, pulling mine with it... She jerks her coat closer to her. I look. I do not see whatever terrible thing she is seeing on the seat between us — probably a roach. But she has communicated her horror to me... And suddenly I realize there is nothing crawling up the seat between us; it is me she doesn’t want her coat to touch. “Eye to Eye,” 147

This memory stands out to Lorde because, at the time she says she “had no tools to dissect it, no language to name it” (147). The use of “it” here is significant in emphasizing the feelings of

rejection and otherness caused by the experience of being looked down upon and singled out for one's difference. This is very much in line with the feeling of alienation recorded by many other Black intellectuals, including Frantz Fanon and W.E.B DuBois. These feelings of cancellation and hatred, and the sensation of being likened to a roach likely remained with Lorde throughout her life with those feelings being awoken every time similar occurrences happened when she was forced to view herself through the eyes of whiteness. Another such blatantly racist incident happened while Lorde, by then an adult and a mother, was grocery shopping with her young daughter, Elizabeth, who was still a toddler at the time. As she relates:

I wheel my two-year-old daughter in a shopping cart through a supermarket in Eastchester in 1967, and a little white girl riding past in her mother's cart calls out excitedly, "Oh look, Mommy, a baby maid!" And your mother shushes you, but she does not correct you.
 "The Uses of Anger," 126

These two examples help to portray some of the earliest occurrences with hatred that Black children often and still face. In the first example, Lorde captures the way in which Black children are easily othered. These experiences as she points out in "Eye to Eye," makes them think that they are the cause of the racism directed their way: "[c]hildren know only themselves as reasons for the happenings in their lives" (146). In the second incident the cause of racism is shifted away from the Black child, and even the white child, and attributed to the white adult, and her passive condonement of racism. We are able to understand that it is not the fault of the child in the cart that there is a dynamic of learnedness to hatred; it is actually the fault of the mother who shushes but does not correct the child, losing an opportunity to teach them about racism.

The alienating "it" continues to haunt Lorde's adult life, as shown in *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982). Lorde writes about her encounter with a woman screaming for help late at night on a Staten Island street. Upon reaching Lorde's car and seeing that she was a Black

woman the “pale girl” wailed “Oh no!... Not you!” as though the driver should be any person who did not look like Lorde (5). To make sense of this encounter, Lorde questions: “What could she have seen in my Black face that was worth holding onto such horror? Wasting me in the gulf between who I was and her vision of me” (5). These instances reveal how a split within the self is created between how one sees themselves and how they perceive being seen by others. Having to manage and be fully aware of this duality at all times calls to mind W.E.B DuBois’ concept of the Black person’s “double-consciousness”: the feeling one encounters is that the outside and inside of the self has to constantly be policed so as to match expectations that are hidden even from the self. DuBois more eloquently describes this feeling as being “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (215). While these encounters alienate us from ourselves, our understanding of them allows us to get by in our day-to-day life, especially when we channel these feelings into transformative and political emotions.

Lorde discusses both “personal and institutional” oppressions which range from the silencing of oneself to the oppressions of systemic structures, including, but not limited to, the segregation of educational programs or the restriction of access to social programs (“Uses of Anger,” 127). As always, Lorde reminds us about the reality of intersecting systems of oppressions, showing that these existing barriers are further compounded by other identity markers, such as social status, among others. For example, Lorde directly references an experience during the 1981 National Women’s Studies Association conference where poor women and women of Color were unable to attend because of discrimination that took the form of a steep registration fee. As Lorde pointed out, the fee could have been the difference between spending money on the conference and a meal on the table (126). Were the organizers serious

about the impact of the conference they could have waived all fees and embraced the true purpose of such a gathering: the betterment of all women, regardless of their socio-economic status.

As a result of constantly facing institutional racism, overt racist behavior and microaggressions, Black women slowly develop anger. But anger is different from hatred, a concept equally important to Lorde. Hatred and anger may seem like the same emotion with varying degrees of separation, but they are not. Lorde takes the time to define these terms and warns us that, “[t]his hatred and our anger are very different” (“The Uses of Anger,” 129). She writes that Hatred is “an emotional habit or attitude of mind in which aversion is coupled with ill will” (152). Hatred is further defined as “the fury of those who do not share our goals [and whose] object is death and destruction” (“The Uses of Anger,” 129). Anger, on the other hand, is described as “a passion of displeasure that may be excessive or misplaced but not necessarily harmful,” it is “a grief of distortions between peers, and its object is change” (129, 152). By comparing these two definitions we are left with an understanding that Hatred functions as an action that is done to another person; while anger, is a “distortion,” a subtle shift in perspective creating a space of difference between two people, a skewed viewing of similar events that does not destroy but leads to personal and political change. This change is likely to appear, Lorde says, once Black women are able to recognize their differences as a force for collective creativity.

According to Lorde, the survival of the Black woman is only possible because “to survive in the mouth of this dragon we call america, we have had to learn this first and most vital lesson – that we were never meant to survive” (42). From the beginning, we were expected to perish in the grips of society’s relentless “deathwish” of Black women and, in this context, a means of

survival for us is to learn from a young age how to form a husk of self-protection around ourselves (146). In addition to the incident on the Harlem subway, Lorde relays several more examples from her childhood where this learned and ingrained knowledge kept her safe. She writes about being singled out by the nuns at school for wearing braids and the feelings that came from being examined, “poked and prodded,” by doctors who belittled her three-year-old existence (148). In relation to these memories, she writes: “I don’t like to talk about hate, I don’t like to remember the cancellation and hatred, heavy as my wished for death” (147).

Yet, for Lorde, the lessons of how to survive these experiences, each meant to create alienation in the Black woman for her perceived difference, were instilled by her mother, Linda, a no-nonsense woman whose approach to these situations was silence. Lorde goes on to explain that her mother’s “silences also taught [her] isolation, fury, mistrust, self-rejection, and sadness” (149-150). These feelings are significant because despite a certain resentment towards the mother’s approach, there is also an understanding that her own survival was possible because of these silent lessons. Through “oblique reference,” these lessons taught her that the “outside shouldn’t oughta be the way it was” (150). I believe that this is a message we have all received to some degree as our parents struggled with the outside world and with barricading themselves and their children against its intent to destroy them. However, as much as silence has helped many survive, Lorde offers a powerful alternative: transformative anger.

Once these silences pile up, they become a form of self-injury because the response is turned inward or upon those close to the object of hatred, who then internalizes the self-harming hatred:

As children we absorbed that hatred, passed it through ourselves, and for the most part, we still live our lives outside the recognition of what that hatred really is and how it functions. Echoes of it return as cruelty and anger in our dealings with each other. For

each of us bears the face that hatred seeks, and we have each learned to be at home with cruelty because we have survived so much of it within our lives. "Eye to Eye," 146

In this passage Lorde makes it clear that from our very early years we are inundated by this hatred and, due to its relentless assault, we have learned unhealthy ways of dealing with it. Lorde elaborates on a similar point in a 1981 interview with the lesbian feminist poet, Adrienne Rich:

When a people share a common oppression, certain kinds of skills and joint defenses are developed. And if you survive you survive because those skills and defenses have worked. When you come into conflict over other existing differences, there already is an additional vulnerability to each other which is desperate and very deep. And that is, for example, what happens between black men and women, because we have certain weapons we have perfected together that white women and men have not shared... When you share a common oppression you have certain additional weapons against each other, because you've forged them in secret together against a common enemy. It's a fear that I'm still not free of and that I remember all the time when I deal with other black women: the fear of the excomrade. (Rich, 728)

These skills that Lorde refers to starts with the acceptance of one's situation and a development of methods in order to cope with it. It is these very methods that Lorde says she fears because these "weapons" once forged are used against the common enemy but then also turned inward against the self, but also towards our fellow unsuspecting sisters. This lashing out towards others is inherently learned as we metabolize our angers or pains and hold them within ourselves rather than releasing them in more productive manners. Instead, we direct these angers at each other for the purpose of hurting each other because the face of another Black person and the face looking back at me from the mirror is the same, and this fact both terrifies and angers me. To this point Lorde writes:

Other Black women are not the root cause nor the source of that pool of anger. I know this, no matter what the particular situation may be between me and another Black woman at the moment. Then why does that anger unleash itself most tellingly against another Black woman at the least excuse? Why do I judge her in a more critical light than any other, becoming enraged when she does not measure up? "Eye to Eye," 145

Black women direct the hatred they feel from the world toward each other, and consequently, expect more of each other, and therefore judge each other more harshly. This plays into society's hopes, which is to keep Black women isolated and at each other's throats, ensuring that they remain disenfranchised.

When Lorde writes, "I know this," it is an acknowledgement of truth but also an admission of guilt. Guilt, which Lorde says "is a response to one's own actions or lack of action" in any given situation (130). So, in these moments, and despite knowing that the "boiling hot spring" of anger is caused by everything except another Black woman, their existence within the vicinity of that anger makes one react as if it had been caused by them (145). As a Black woman I am familiar with this experience and the overpowering feelings it evokes in me; for instance, the indignation and mistrust which show through specific gestures and body language, such as the cut/side eye, the sucking of teeth, the subtle but unmistakable eye roll, all aimed in my general direction. In judging others like her, the Black woman is judging herself because it is the self who is perceived as not measuring up and is seen as inadequate. In doing this, she reproduces toward herself and her kin what society inflicts on her.

This theme of self-loathing translating into the rejection of other Black women is recurrent in Lorde's writing, most notably in the poem "The Dozens" published in *COAL* (1976):

Nothing says that you must see me in the street / with us so close together at that red light
/ that a blind man could have smelled his grocer- / and nothing says that you must / say
hello / as we pass in the street, / but we have known each other too well / in the dark / for
this, / and it hurts me when you do not speak. "The Dozens," Lines 1-10

There is an understanding of a degree of intimacy that is folded into the interactions between Black women, an understanding of its complexity, which includes the disdain that is held for one another. What Lorde ultimately communicates is the pain these experiences cause Black women

because if “we have shared so many similar experiences,” she then questions: “[w]hy doesn’t this commonality bring us closer together instead of setting us at each other’s throats with weapons well-honed by familiarity?” (153). As noted above, the answer is simply because the other Black woman is the face of one’s own fears and anxieties, the face that mirrors one’s own experience. Here we shine a light on the “loathing and contempt” referenced in these passages, the special sort reserved for “whatever is female and Black” from Black women themselves (151). It is the hatred that is forced upon us from society that we embody and then redirect onto each other. We suckle upon the anger as though our life’s blood because as Lorde explains “[i]t is easier to be angry than to hurt... It is easier to be furious than to be yearning...” (153). This is all because it is easier for us to remain separated, perpetuating society’s status quo than it is for us to band together and break apart the structures meant to destroy us.

Lorde writes of this secret longing, a yearning, that could allow Black women to seamlessly exist in the same spaces without fear of reproach or judgment. She states in her writings that she is “hungry for Black women who will not turn from [her] in anger and contempt even before they know [her] or hear what [she has] to say. I am hungry for Black women who will not turn away from me even if they do not agree with what I say” (165). As such, what she longs for is endless acceptance and unconditional understanding. Lorde writes that we ought to understand our heritage as “African women” who “know, in our blood’s telling the tenderness with which our foremothers held each other,” women who “healed each other’s wounds, raised each other’s children, fought each other’s battles, tilled each other’s earth, and eased each other’s passages into life and into death” (152-153). The chance of finding this is rare, but Lorde is eager because it could mean having the support of other Black women and bringing about a changed world. It is possible to view this as an over idealization of the African motherland but Lorde’s

message still rings true, as it calls for a decolonial space for Black women that can potentially exist outside of structural and state-sanctioned racism and misogyny.

But, instead, we hoard our angers,

we avoid open expression of them, or cordon them off in a rigid and unapproachable politeness... We are stuffed with furies, against ourselves, against each other, terrified to examine them... And yet always that hunger for the substance known, a hunger for the real shared, for the sister who shares [remains]. "Eye to Eye," 167

For Lorde, this need can only be filled by another Black woman, by a "sister" who is willing and open (167). However Lorde writes that these kinds of sisters are considered "*naïve* – meaning [they are] not programmed for defensive attack before inquiry" (157). These "sisters," precisely because they are open, are considered soft pushovers. However, this openness signifies strength because it allows the Black woman who is considered naïve to act in the opposite manner, because they approach without caution and make appraisals of other Black women that lack the sharpness and suspicion that is otherwise expected (157). This "naïve" Black woman is in fact in control of her anger, as she has an understanding of herself and has attained a level of self-love – and of "mothering," that is necessary for accepting her fellow Black women (173). "Mothering" as Lorde means it is an important element of the Black woman's acceptance of and openness to her fellow "sisters," for it means that:

I affirm my own worth by committing myself to my own survival, in my own self and in the self of other Black women... as I learn my worth and genuine possibility, I refuse to settle for anything less than a rigorous pursuit of the possible in myself, at the same time making a distinction between what is possible and what the outside world drives me to do in order to prove I am human. It means being able to recognize my successes, and to be tender with myself, even when I fail. "Eye to Eye," 173

To "mother" is to provide nurturing and care. Lorde refers to the care that one should afford themselves much in the same way they might a helpless infant. By hanging onto a sense of self-worth and looking inward or to other Black women for strength one would be able to

overcome the biggest challenges. The largest challenge of all, according to this passage, would be attaining the level of self-acceptance that allows one Black woman to accept another. Through Lorde's encouragement we can fight back against hatred, we can take our anger caused by it and transform it into positive more impactful action.

Part II: From Silence to Anger to Power

As we continue to explore Audre Lorde's work we discover instances in which the writer and subject become inseparable, as she revealed in the essay "Self-Definition and My Poetry," "I write my living and I live my work" (*I Am Your Sister*, 156). This statement stands for truth because Lorde embodies the message and shares her complex analysis in such a manner as to ensure that the reader, whomever they are, can access the information she is sharing and pass it on. According to literary and cultural studies scholar, Flávia Santos de Araújo, Lorde's work "allow[s] for an exploration of the deepest sources of knowledge within the self" (11). This is because she awakens in her readers a strong curiosity, or the need to understand beyond the surface the ways in which society attempts to hinder their growth and progress as individuals operating within its systems. Here, I hope to examine the existence of anger in Black women as a response to social injustices taking place within an interlocking system of multiple oppressions, which Lorde implies is designed to crush us.

In "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism" we find Lorde at the 1981 National Women's Studies Association Conference addressing a crowd of fellow activists and feminist thinkers. Lorde imparts a warning to her listeners by calling their attention to the harsh realities of racism and its byproducts. In doing this, Lorde makes the declaration that "*women respond to racism*," meaning that in general women ought to offer a response to this issue much like their responses to other societal issues (124). Lorde goes on to write, "My response to racism is anger," here this is a clear declaration of her refusal to conform to societal expectations (124). This response is significant because the expression of anger, especially, by a Black woman is frowned upon in society and this response taking place at all means that the Black woman is deciding to take a stance against injustice.

However, the Black woman who expresses anger or any other emotion, is often, systematically demonized and caricatured as the Angry Black Woman. Instead of acknowledging her legitimate fury at the injustices and “societal deathwish[es]” targeting her, society ridicules and undermines her as one who is unstable, irrational, loud-mouthed and unnecessarily opinionated (146). The Angry Black Woman, or the “Sapphire,” as she was originally known came into being through the *Amos ‘n’ Andy* radio show which ran from the late 1920’s to 1960 and portrayed white america's idea of African Americans. Having the cultural status it did, the *Amos ‘n’ Andy* radio show became a television series in the mid-1950’s and according to the Ferris State University’s Jim Crow Museum it brought into the home of white folks the embodiment of Black women as “domineering, aggressive and emasculating shrews” (Pilgrim). This is the magnifying glass through which the Black woman is still viewed and judged. This opinion of the Black woman is a “social control mechanism that is employed to punish black women who violate the societal norms that encourage them to be passive, servile, non-threatening, and unseen” (Pilgrim, “The Sapphire Caricature”). The Black woman’s anger or rage is viewed as “useless and disruptive,” the “two most popular accusations,” that are meant to belittle their experience, as Lorde notes (127). It is because of this that many Black women (such as my mother or Lorde’s mother, Linda) sit and exist in their anger in silence, “afraid of the weight” and its potential for harm (124). But Lorde says in defiance of the anger, “My fear of anger taught me nothing. Your fear of that anger will teach you nothing, also” (124). Being afraid of the anger and recognizing that fear allows us to have control and to decide what actions to take in response to those fears. We can then decide whether we will remain silent and let the fear crush us and lay waste to our visions, or whether we will persevere through the harsh and scary places where that fear exists.

Fear shrivels us and we fall into a state of self-denial and self-imposed silence that we believe will ultimately keep us safe. However, this hope is elusive and such silences are dangerous: for Lorde, these silences amount to a mass, much like the cancer she was diagnosed with – a mass that erodes the body, ultimately making it uninhabitable. Oftentimes these silences are the direct result of societal influences. These silences prevent the self from being whole and once ignored “it gets madder and madder and hotter and hotter, and... one day will just up and punch you in the mouth from the inside” if it is not given voice (“Transformation of Silence,” 42). Here, Lorde makes us aware that there is no space in which we are safe because “Your silence will not protect you” (41); and, again, there is no space in which we are not marginalized because,

In the cause of silence, each of us draws the face of her own fear – fear of contempt, of censure, or some judgment, or recognition, of challenge, of annihilation. But most of all, I think, we fear the visibility without which we cannot truly live. Within this country where racial difference creates a constant, if unspoken, distortion of vision, Black women have on one hand always been highly visible, and so, on the other hand, have been rendered invisible through the depersonalization of racism... For to survive in the mouth of this dragon we call america, we have had to learn this first and most vital lesson – that we were never meant to survive.

“The Transformation of Silence,” 42

Lorde’s analysis is still current and illuminates the longstanding dynamics behind recent, and highly mediatized, incidents involving race, gender and anger. One example of this feared visibility or anger took place at the 2018 US Open during a historic match between Naomi Osaka and Serena Williams. In this match Williams was defending her title in the hopes of winning her 24th Grand Slam while Osaka, the newcomer, hoped to defeat her idol. Williams was accused of cheating throughout the match and made the argument that the umpire, Carlos Ramos, was choosing to attack her character for the simple reason that she is a Black woman, and an outspoken one at that. Ramos’ position was to deduct points from Williams’ score, issuing two code violations, one for racquet abuse and another for verbal abuse or “berating” the umpire. As

Williams pointed out during the match, these exact two behaviors are exhibited by fellow white male athletes across the sport without them facing the same consequences. During the duration of the match, the commentators can be heard making comments, such as: “She’s near tears,” or “And, she’s still not finished though,” as if to imply that Williams should somehow sit down, shut up and be quiet. Rather than backing down – as she is clearly expected to by the sports’ “experts” – Williams stands her ground, even at the risk of losing the match: she taps into the depths of her Black woman’s place of power and fights back against the umpire’s attack on her character. Addressing criticisms of her actions in a 2019 Harper’s Bazaar essay, Williams writes, “[t]his incident... exemplified how thousands of women in every area of the workforce are treated every day. We are not allowed to have emotions, we are not allowed to be passionate. We are told to sit down and be quiet...” As women, we are subjected to an unfair and imposed silence and the price is double for Black women.

One way of fighting this imposition of silence either by society, our loved ones or the self is by acknowledging the truth of our fears. This acknowledgment can go a long way in unsilencing us and can ignite a power within that forms “[e]very woman[‘s]... well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being” (127). And, like Lorde, I believe that once this force, powered by anger, is honed “it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change” (127). This is because within each woman’s arsenal there exists a well of power “a dark place within where hidden and growing [their] true spirit rises...” this “woman’s place of power within each of us is neither white nor surface, it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep” (“Poetry Is Not A Luxury,” 36-37). The well serves as a source of strength for the Black woman throughout their daily lives, lives that are marked by hardships ranging from the most basic of microaggressions to acts of

racist annihilation. This is the type of strength that Serena Williams drew upon during her debacle at the US Open, and it is the same strength that enabled her to declare to Ramos, “I don’t cheat to win. I’d rather lose” (Bazaar, 2019). Microaggressions or acts of hatred faced by the Black woman exist as “one of those many sudden, stunning, or despiriting transactions that mar the days of women and folks of color... [they are] small acts of racism consciously or unconsciously perpetrated” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2). The fact that these acts can either be consciously or unconsciously perpetrated means that it’s harder for the Black woman to call out these experiences as they are happening because both the perpetrator and the Black woman are steeped in racist structures that make these acts invisible. It is often afterwards that these acts are recognized for what they are: racism. By immediately reacting to Ramos’ racist acts and demanding the respect that she deserves, Williams shows that she recognizes and calls out the racist structure in which she has to live, becoming even more worthy of our admiration.

Vincent Lloyd refers to the dormancy of these angers and the joint effects of silence as “anger constipation” (3). Lloyd argues that the individual's inability to express their anger is caused by the ideological and societal forces stacked against them. For instance, he states that when women express anger the “patriarchy makes it such that this anger is often dismissed as unwarranted or exaggerated” but throughout we see that this dismissal extends beyond women since generally minority groups’ expressions of emotion, even those that are not anger, are viewed as expressions of anger (3). For Lester C. Olson, this is the outcome because “[f]or marginalized populations, anger can sometimes seem emblematic for the entire group. Anger becomes an existential condition or an immutable characteristic, a stereotype, not transient experiences or a warranted affective response to unfair treatment” (289). Consequently, this build

up of unexpressed emotion, this “anger constipation,” “can turn inward, [and become] focused on the self, and so become self-hatred, [or] perhaps resulting in depression” (3).

For the Black woman this takes many forms as it is common to blame oneself or internalize the anger caused by hatred. This, according to Lorde would be a waste of resources because “*Everything can be used / except what is wasteful*”; and, the truest form of waste in this context is the silence caused by this lack of expression; alternatively “Anger can be prismatic” and multidimensional as it is “loaded with information and energy” and therefore should be used towards some purpose for change rather than towards the self for destruction (Olson, 284; 127). Lloyd goes on to show that there are many sides to anger and examines the subtle difference between this state of being and hatred by applying William Galston’s definition of the two emotions. He writes that, “Anger is directed to agency, hatred to identity” and explains further that “[w]e feel angry because of what someone has done, hatred because of who someone is” (2).

This very simple but effective synopsis is similar to Lorde’s theory of these two emotions. Let us remember that Lorde provides slightly varied definitions for both terms as a way to signify the depth behind these emotions. Within the context of “The Uses of Anger,” anger is defined as “a grief of distortions between peers” and hatred as “the fury of those who do not share our goals” (129). The idea here is that hatred would be actions done to a person because of who they are. These actions include, racial discrimination, for instance. While “[a]nger... has the tendency to miss the mark. Sometimes [it] is simply a matter of misperception” (Lloyd, 3). Lloyd describes these “misperceptions” as simple instances of misunderstood norms due to cultural, social or psychological differences between individuals that we may later come to recognize as innocuous (3). There are certain questions that we must ask ourselves, one of them being: What are these misperceptions when applied to racism? Would

these misperceptions appear in the form of a work colleague's off-colored or stereotypical comments? Or, in the moment that a colleague arrives late to a meeting? During her 1981 keynote speech, Lorde shares that the NWSA conference was talked down in the local Connecticut papers as being solely about issues surrounding lesbian housing, as the editors willfully ignored the true subject of the talk, which is: racism. Lorde writes that the underlying purpose of this divisive tactic used by the papers is hatred. This is because to acknowledge that the talk is about racism is to make evident the fact that "[w]e are not here as women examining racism in a political and social vacuum..." but that instead, "women are in fact attempting to examine and to alter all the repressive conditions of [their] lives" (128). Further, Lorde asks a striking question: "[w]ho profits from all this?" (129). In other words, who is to gain from this apparent separation or from women's failure to discuss racism and anger? The answer is simply, the system; and, the system gains just a bit more reach when we as Black women are unable to actualize our truths.

Throughout "The Uses of Anger" Lorde brings up examples of encounters she had with other women that ranged from misunderstandings to clear evidence of bias. According to Olson, these encounters help to examine Lorde's contributions "to communication scholars' understanding of human biases" (284). One example that is shared during the keynote on racism, as Lorde describes it, happens because she was asked to do 'the work' of interpretation, which is so often the role foisted upon Black women. She writes,

After I read from my work entitled "Poems for Women in Rage," a white woman asks me: "Are you going to do anything with how we can deal directly with *our* anger? I feel it's so important." I ask, "How do you use *your* rage?" And then I have to turn away from the blank look in her eyes, before she can invite me to participate in her own annihilation. I do not exist to feel her anger for her. "The Uses of Anger," 125

Lorde puts it plainly that it is not her job to do ‘the work’ for the white women she interacted with, nor is it the job of any Black woman, or woman of Color, to tend to the white woman’s emotional labor. For this would surely be “wasted energy” because in this one interaction, and many others like it, Black women and women of Color are made to be ‘other’ by the distinction between the pronouns *our* and *your* which denotes some magical landscape where Black women hold all the answers (70). There is purpose in the white woman’s ignorance and society, Lorde says, is invested in it because, “[m]ainstream communication does not want women, particularly white women, responding to racism. It wants racism to be accepted as an immutable given in the fabric of your existence...” (128). The “It” Lorde refers to is a placeholder for society whose goal is keeping a distance between us or between people who share a common vision as a way to perpetuate hatred, anger and silence, thereby maintaining the structural status quo. To drive a narrative of helplessness, and to keep us “docile and loyal,” society thrives on keeping Lorde’s collective WE from expressing and translating their angers “into action in the service of [their] vision and [their] future” (127). Indeed, using anger to fuel our action would be a “liberating and strengthening act of clarification” for this is how we would know to identify those we can trust from those who are “our genuine enemies” (127).

Another example that showcases a need for ‘doing the work’ is Lorde’s feud with the feminist author Mary Daly. Daly wrote *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978), in which she discusses women’s oppression within patriarchal society and their expressions of power, and attempts to reclaim that power. Despite promising herself that she would no longer explain racism to white women, Lorde does respond to this text negatively and writes a direct letter to Daly in 1979, to which Daly did not respond. Lorde’s view of the book was that Daly made grand generalizations about women and their powers, and that it focused on

discussing “only white, western european, judeo-christian” women (67). In doing so, Lorde denounces the fact that Daly missed a great opportunity to challenge the unspoken assumption that all women that matter are white. She writes:

What you excluded from *Gyn/Ecology* dismissed my heritage and the heritage of all other noneuropean women, and denies the real connections that exist between all of us... to exclude this aspect of connection from even comment in your work is to deny the fountain of noneuropean female strength and power that nurtures each of our visions. It is to make a point by choice. “A Letter for Mary Daly,” 68

What Lorde highlights here is the common experience of Black women and other women of Color, that of oppression and being made invisible and written out of “herstory” as Daly, like many other misguided feminists, make “the assumption that the herstory and myth of white women is the legitimate and sole herstory and myth of all women to call upon for power and background” (69). In other words, Daly had written a history of white women by selectively ignoring the existence of non-”white, western european, judeo-christian” women (67). The point of ‘real connection’ that Lorde alludes to is another relevant fact ignored by Daly, which is that “the oppression of women knows no ethnic nor racial boundaries” (70). So, “[i]f you and I were to walk into a classroom of women in Dismal Gulch, Alabama, where the only thing they knew about each of us was that we were both Lesbian/Radical/Feminist, you would see exactly what I mean” (70). Here we see Lorde leveling an explanation to Daly that her experience of privilege would only hold up so far. ‘Take a walk in my shoes’ is what Lorde is prescribing here, where the commonality of the experience is that they would both be shunned and othered. This attempt by Daly to obliterate the Black woman’s experience sparks feelings of indignation and reveals to readers that “radical lesbian feminist” circles, can uphold patriarchy too, and thus be the oppressor as well (69).

Part III: From Wrong or Righteous

It is hard to envision a world in which Audre Lorde's message is no longer relevant. The fact that I am unable to envision such a future says a lot about the state of things in today's society. At the moment of my writing this yet another Black man was gunned down by police during a traffic stop 'gone wrong' in Minnesota. More than wrong. This young man, Daunte Wright, now joins the seemingly never-ending list of names of Black people who have been killed, maimed or injured through acts of police brutality and violence. Given the events of these past few weeks, I'd like to ask the question: If you are a Black person and you are not angry then what are you? "You're damned mad" says the singer, activist Nina Simone; because, to exist in this society and to not be moved to emotion or action is ludicrous (Judd, 191). It is for these same reasons that Lorde's work resonates today, during a time where we still endure sexism, racism, classism, colorism, homophobia and transphobia. Not only does it resonate in our daily life, but it continues to produce politically productive conversations, including via the work of contemporary writers and intellectuals. In this section, I highlight the themes and messages found throughout Lorde's work on Anger and Hatred in relation to other contemporary work. I plan to reexamine articles written by these contemporary writers to determine how Lorde's and their beliefs stack up against each other.

Lloyd

First, let us revisit Vincent Lloyd's argument about the righteousness of Black rage in his article "The Ambivalence of Black Rage" (2019). Lloyd begins by stating that rage can be explored as both a "language of emotion and [a] felt emotion" meaning that it is both logical and raw, and can be "revalued" for understanding (2). He implies that the purpose for Black rage is

change. This is similar to Lorde’s belief that “anger is loaded with information and energy,” that when focused it can result in the kind of change that is not only a “temporary lessening of tensions” but “a basic and radical alteration” in our daily lives (127). These multilayered aspects of anger run concurrently with arguments of racism, sexism, hatred, classism, homophobia, transphobia, misogynoir, etc. As noted earlier, Lorde writes that, “[t]his hatred and our anger are very different” this is to say that the anger caused by these societal issues is incited by the kinds of hatred that curls the blood (129). The very same kinds of hatred that results in 10-year-old Clifford Glover being shot in the back by police while running to safety in 1973; or Sean Bell being ambushed and shot to death by police on the morning of his wedding in 2006; or, 12-year-old Tamir Rice being gunned down in 2014 in a Cleveland park; or, 18-year-old Michael Brown being gunned down by police, again, in 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri; or, Sandra Bland’s 2015 death while in police custody; or, Korryn Gaines’ murder by Baltimore police during a standoff in 2016; or, Daunte Wright being gunned down by police on April 11th, 2021... At this point I feel the need to ask the question: Are we just target practice?

“Anger,” Lorde says “is the appropriate response to racist attitudes,” the very attitudes that have led to these atrocious deaths (129). For Black anger and rage to be taken seriously it must first be “revalue[d]” for “with this new discourse of black self-assertions, black Americans can own their rage... can direct it properly against the forces of white supremacy” (2). Through the recognition of one’s own power and Black Americans’ collective power, we can fight back by redirecting our rage at the source of the problem – racism, and in doing so can succeed in enacting change: police reform, racial and gender equality, etc. Despite the reality as we are reminded by the seemingly endless growing list of names, this is the hope.

Lloyd analyzes Lorde's views, which he seems to agree with, but hints to there being a "difficulty" with them (5). In the article Lloyd focuses on the section of "The Uses of Anger" where Lorde described how our angers are harmoniously orchestrated so as to keep us together as individuals and as a people. She writes:

Women of Color in America have grown up within a symphony of anger, at being silenced, at being unchosen, at knowing that when we survive, it is in spite of a world that takes for granted our lack of humanness... And I say *symphony* rather than *cacophony* because we have had to learn to orchestrate those furies so that they do not tear us apart. We have had to learn to move through them and use them for strength and force and insight within our daily lives. "The Uses of Anger," 129

I find it necessary to quote this section to present Lorde's message in full and in juxtaposition to Lloyd's interpretation. To summarize his thoughts on the use of these angers Lloyd mentions that when the anger of the dominated is symphonic it "can motivate engagement in ordinary life... and, it can conjure a new, better world" (5). When the anger of the marginalized is symphonic, they "know that the travails they face do not represent the way the world is supposed to be, that they are unjust; the world could be otherwise" (5). The use of "dominated" and "marginalized" here calls attention to the difference of experiences of one group over the other. Why is it that a new, better world would be created for the dominated and not also for the marginalized? One may argue that the dominated are marginalized or that the marginalized are dominated, but what remains clear is the sense that one group maintains an assured level of agency while the other does not. Here I would imagine an instance where the marginalized, or those at risk of facing police brutality and violence band together to create the change they want to see.

Having presented this as his main argument Lloyd goes on to state that the "difficulty" with Lorde's position is that:

[T]he more opaque the world of the dominated is from the perspective of the dominant, the less that can be said about what happens in the world of the dominated from outside that world. The vision of a new world that Lorde suggests symphonic anger can generate,

motivating the marginalized to imagine radically otherwise, is made possible by incommensurability, but this same incommensurability renders the content of their imaginings inaccessible. “The Ambivalence of Black Rage,” 5

What I believe Lloyd is attempting to communicate is that there is an unfairness to the system that keeps these worlds (dominant vs. dominated) divided. The understanding of what may be keeping these worlds divided is that the anger that is expressed comes in varied forms. Lloyd uses an explanation provided by Maria Lugones who draws a clear line between the types of angers. The first being “first-order anger” or anger that “tracks wrongs within a normative world,” and “second-order anger,” meaning anger that “is essentially opaque and interrupts the normative world” and is “often dismissed as irrational” (5). What this means is essentially that first-order anger exists for the dominant or more rationally functioning world, while second-order anger, more similar to the anger or rage that is meant by Lloyd and Lorde, belongs to the dominated or marginalized groups. The border dividing them creates misunderstandings and a disproportionate burden on the marginalized in society to produce change. This equates to a pessimistic view where they may as well give up any hope or expectation of change. It’s almost as though Lloyd is saying that Lorde is falsely giving people hope for change. It is a blind spot preventing the dominant from being able to envision the daily lives of the dominated or marginalized group. Lloyd is suggesting that they believe in making change happen but because of the disproportional gap between the world of the dominant and the dominated, the marginalized are not able to actualize their visions, “from the margins” (5). For instance, when the NWSA held their conference in 1981 Lorde chastised their oversight and lack of understanding that for women from various socio-economic backgrounds to have the opportunity to participate and attend there would need to be a lessened entry fee, or more simply, no fee. What happened instead, Lorde says, was that the association kept their prices and bemoaned the

fact that no women of Color or poor women ‘wanted’ to participate or attend. This seems to me, a gross example of not being able to see to the other side of the fence.

Lloyd suggests a fix to Lorde’s argument of orchestrated “furies” (129). This fix would mean the required aid of a “framework” that would allow for anger to be fully understood, and for any readings of anger to be done “rightly” (4). But, what exactly does it mean to read anger “rightly”? What Lloyd suggests is that the use of a lens, such as feminism, would allow for any necessary change to be readily accepted into society. This change would be accepted because “the more robust the framework, the more it can resist attempts to mute, channel, or commodify anger” because the system of domination or the dominating community functions so that they can take from the dominated their anger (4). The removal of this power (anger/rage) is how the dominant aims to win. But should the rerouting of anger and rage through the framework of feminism work, only then can these emotions be seen as “reasonable,” and only then would the outcome of change be possible (4). I believe that this stance taken by Lloyd is problematic because it diminishes the strength of Black anger and rage, and it appears that he thinks that getting to a state of recognition for being “reasonable” is all that is wanted by marginalized or dominated persons. The suggestion of reasonability is what is implied when a Black person is stopped or harassed by police officers, or when a person is passed over for a promotion on silent account of their age, race, sex, religion, gender, etc. Be reasonable. Allow these more powerful forces to strip you of your dignity and personhood.

Nussbaum

It’s necessary for one to imagine another outcome from anger, one where it is not idealized as a source of power, but is viewed as a signal that there is something wrong with the

individual. According to the blogger Maria Popova, the brainchild behind the website *Brainpickings.org*, philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum believes that anger has a long history of being seen as morally good and “justifiable,” that it is “a useful signal that wrongdoing has taken place... [that] it is a normatively faulty response that masks deeper, more difficult emotions and stands in the way of resolving them” (Popova, 2016). For Nussbaum, this anger appears justifiable to the individual, righteous even, but keeps hidden the person’s true subconscious reactions. An example of this would be someone getting cut off at a checkout line. The anger that this person might feel happens as a result of the loss of control on the situation and may hide more immediate and base feelings like humiliation, shame or annoyance. Nussbaum suggests that anger is unnecessary and damaging to the individual because it blinds them, it is purposeless and involves feelings of “pain and pleasure” and is both “poisonous and popular” (Popova, 2016; Nussbaum, 1). Nussbaum appears to be a fan of catchphrases. One way to explain these contradictory terms is to say that the pain of anger comes from the wrong that is inflicted upon the individual, wrong that has to have a measure of intentionality and therefore accountability; pleasure, when the wronged individual hopes for what Aristotle referred to as “the expectation of revenge” (*Rhetoric*, pt. 2); anger is poisonous because it affects the individual’s overall state of being and is most damaging to “intimate relationships” (Popova, 2016); it is popular because anger is one of the core emotions that we experience as humans and that we most immediately resort to. This would imply that anger is the emotion of a person wearing blinders, they are only able to see and engage with their anger as something that is worth having. But for Nussbaum that kind of anger is worthless because of the damage it causes the individual. What Nussbaum refers to as “status injury” where the wrongdoer or person intentionally causing the anger inflicts a shame upon the person being wronged so as to establish a form of hierarchy (Popova, 2016).

Nussbaum digs into the poisonous angle with the belief that intimate relationships suffer the most from modes of anger. This is because anger requires a certain amount of trust that calls for a person's "inevitable vulnerability" and "involves opening oneself to the possibility of betrayal, hence to a very deep form of harm" (Popova, 2016). However, Nussbaum does not specify the types of relationships she is referring to, nor is she taking into account the socio-economic or racial position of the individuals in question, or the power dynamics between the individuals involved. Lorde on the other hand does take these power structures into account, and explores the ways in which anger affects Black women's relationships to other Black women, to white women, to women of Color and to white and Black men all across socio-economic lines, and within a broader societal structure. It is possible that Nussbaum would completely disagree with Lorde's views on anger because she may see them as too indulgent or based solely on the person's ability to feel through their emotion rather than theorize about the feeling. This idea is actually somewhat comical and ironic in light of Lorde's statement, as suggested by another "sister" that "'white people feel, Black people do'" ("Eye to Eye," 171). The idea here being that "in america white people, by and large, have more time and space to afford the luxury of scrutinizing their emotions. Black people in this country have always had to attend closely to the hard and continuous work of survival in the most material and immediate planes" (171). This immediacy could be illustrated by an unlikely but pertinent example: a childhood game called "The Dozens." In this game the main object is to unleash the harshest of insults and criticisms against one's opponent and to, in turn, receive the same amount of verbal abuse; or worse, until one player cries or "loses" in a similar way. In this game it is necessary to think, act and do quickly, but never to show emotion. This illustrates the expectation placed on Black people, and especially on Black women in society, to act as though emotions are an

afterthought. It's a tough road to walk because despite the expectations of people like Nussbaum or Lloyd, a person's reaction to hatred in any of its varied forms may just be anger and this righteous anger exists regardless of whether theories approve of its existence or not. Perhaps the onus should be put on Lloyd's "dominant world" and the root cause of anger in Nussbaum to respond to that anger.

Conclusion: Finding Lorde

As I have established throughout the paper, Hatred and Anger go hand in hand. They function on a pendulum and feed on each other. While writing this paper I sought to reexamine my understanding of Lorde's message and to come to an understanding of my relationship to it. I found Lorde through a forced reckoning with my own anger. And man was I angry: angry at myself, at the world, at my family, at the unsuspecting Black woman walking down the street with her head held high. I was a volcano a few tectonic shifts away from explosion because I wondered "why not me," and judged my existence and self-worth against other sisters' worth. Finding Lorde's body of work helped me realize that my anger could be focused with purpose, that it did not have to be my silent killer or my own personal hurricane laying waste to my life. I saw my experiences written on the pages of her writings and marveled at how simply she seemed to find the words to explain the feelings that I felt.

In the time since finding Lorde's work I have learned to accept and manage my anger, rather than succumb to its total control of my life. Using what I have learned I would like to propose that one way of managing anger is to take full responsibility for it and to harness it for power and growth like Lorde suggests, because "[t]o search for power within myself means I must be willing to move through being afraid to whatever lies beyond..." ("Eye to Eye," 147). It is through that fear of change that I managed to find the end of the tunnel that was my anger. Having found this beyond, I am able to better determine the causes of my anger. For instance, I can tell the difference now between anger that is caused by distortion or displeasure and anger that is in reaction to external societal triggers, like acts of racism or sexism. I can tell that the unsuspecting Black woman on the street is not deserving of my anger nor my judgment because

she is different from myself, and because she is different I should accept her much like I want to be accepted. Lorde asks of her readers in “Eye to Eye:”

“Why do Black women reserve a particular voice of fury and disappointment for each other? Who is it we must destroy when we attack each other with that tone of predetermined and correct annihilation?... (159)

I was especially moved when reading these words, and I began to question this within myself and the unsettling emotions that ensued are the driving force behind this project. I wondered how often I had reserved and acted upon a voice of fury or disappointment towards another Black woman, or how often it was that my very presence caused within them some form of discomfort. I decided that to understand the why of the thing I must take it apart, deconstruct, scaffold and rebuild it. Lorde’s work makes it possible to perform these tasks in a safe and nonjudgmental space: by understanding that the “cruelty between us, ...is a piece of the legacy of hate with which we were inoculated from the time we were born” we can arrive at the first step – a place of self-acceptance (160). Through this step of self-acceptance I have discovered that I am empowering other Black women while being empowered myself when I acknowledge her in the street; this is the second step, where through steady work, we become “the sister who shares” as Lorde describes in “Eye to Eye” (167). This act would be revolutionary as it highlights Lorde’s idea that by viewing our differences for what they are, even through anger, they can be clarified and examined for “creative exchange” (152; 169).

There is a power to Black women’s anger that guides us through the hardest of hardships and the way that the individual woman deals with these experiences varies. Some face it head-on while others may endure it in silence, where it is likely to result in some form of dormant, festering anger. In learning about Williams’ struggle at the 2018 US Open I sought to think of any personal experiences where I stared down the self-imposed silence that Black women are

expected to maintain and was reminded of an incident that took place during my time at Purchase College. I had attended a dorm room party where I was compared to Beyoncé, this person's exact words being: "You look like Beyoncé!" This was said to me by a white male student in a room of mostly white students, the exception being that there was one other Black person in the room; we exchanged mortified looks of disbelief and cringed. I immediately wanted to respond by telling this guy that he reminded me of Jesse Eisenberg, or some other equally famous white male actor but I held my tongue, swallowed the insult and the stream of comebacks that ran across my mind. I remained silent, mostly stunned by the comment, but also quiet out of fear of being seen as being unable to take a 'compliment,' or of being further judged by a room of white people as a joke.

Another experience that comes to mind happened when I attended a haunted house with my white roommate and her friends. I was singled out upon entering the house by the guide who piped up when the lights cut out and said something to the effect of "Oh, I couldn't see you standing back there," following which was a chorus of nervous and not-so nervous giggles. This feeling of being othered and singled out is familiar to me as it is to Lorde with her experiences with the hysterical woman running through the streets, or the woman of her childhood.

As Lorde says you lack the language to even begin to process how you feel as a Black person when these moments happen, and because of these occurrences you begin to wonder if there must be something wrong with you as you are. The appropriate emotional response in these scenarios according to Lorde is anger, which is then followed by a splitting of the self for self-preservation. These splits pile up over a lifetime, so much so that the incidents bleed into each other and become indistinguishable. The hurt and pain that linger form a keloidal scar that, throughout one's lifetime, grows larger than the original hurt. This experience of pain "must be

recognized, named, and then used in some way in order for the experience to change, to be transformed into... strength or knowledge or action;” in other words, it must be fully processed by the individual at all levels (171). Overtime, the pain is accepted into the self and internalized, if it is not processed. It is then fostered until used against the only other person in the world who understands – another Black woman. This cycle is perpetuated time and again as we endure what Lorde terms as “suffering,” or the “nightmare reliving of unscrutinized and unmetabolized pain” (171). We absorb the cruelties that are meant to make us tough but the fact that this pain is unprocessed means that it cannot be transformed into power, or be used for strength and growth; it becomes stuck and a “waste” of one’s energy.

It is necessary to highlight the fact that Black women are prone to absorbing their experiences with anger to the extent that they inflict harm upon themselves. Lorde poses a crucial question in “Eye to Eye,” as she asks of her readers: “[w]hat other creature in the world besides the Black woman has had to build the knowledge of so much hatred into her survival and keep going?” (150). The nature of this kind of existence is known to many and having lived through my own personal reckoning I feel that I am better able to understand Lorde’s position on all of this. By transforming anger into power it is taken from being a silently brewing force, one that’s often turned inward, and into a generative function within one’s life.

Lorde recites a few lines from her poem, “Need: A Choral of Black Women’s Voices” during a 1981 interview with Adrienne Rich which she then explains ““How much of this truth can I bear to see / and still live / unblinded? / How much of this pain / can I use?”” (733). The truth that Lorde refers to in this moment is the daily reality that we face as Black women, the never-ending stream of racist or sexist incidents; it is the mountain that gets piled on our backs from the moment we are born Black and female. By considering how much pain it may be

possible to bear and use I hoped to explore this truth as it was revealed by Lorde as being caused by anger in response to and because of hatred.

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