



THE CORINTHIAN
The Journal of Student Research at Georgia College

The Corinthian

Volume 21

Article 3


5-21-2024

Audre Lorde, Feminism, and Love

Emee Port

Georgia College and State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://kb.gcsu.edu/thecorinthian>

 Part of the [Feminist Philosophy Commons](#), [Gender and Sexuality Commons](#), and the [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Port, Emee (2024) "Audre Lorde, Feminism, and Love," *The Corinthian*: Vol. 21, Article 3.
Available at: <https://kb.gcsu.edu/thecorinthian/vol21/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Research at Knowledge Box. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Corinthian by an authorized editor of Knowledge Box.



THE CORINTHIAN
The Journal of Student Research at Georgia College

The Corinthian

Volume 21

Article 3

2024

AUDRE LORDE, FEMINISM, AND LOVE

Emee Port

Follow this and additional works at: <https://kb.gcsu.edu/thecorinthian>



Part of the [Language Interpretation and Translation Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Author

This article is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Research at Knowledge Box. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Corinthian by an authorized editor of Knowledge Box.



AUDRE LORDE, FEMINISM, AND LOVE

Emee Port

The purpose of this paper is to take Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider* and connect its topics of feminism and intersectionality with love. I mainly would like to focus on the two chapters "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" and "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference." I am particularly interested in this book and these two sections because they allow me to connect systematic issues such as sexism and racism to love. If more people were open to loving others, there would be less oppression, inequality, and exclusivity. Because of this, I would like to explore how feminism can become more inclusive. I will be using Erica Gene Delsandro's article that discusses Lorde's desire to connect people across differences.

Lorde reasons that in American society, the responsibility often falls on members of oppressed groups to bridge the gap between them and the dominant group (*Sister Outsider*, p. 114). In order to remain safe, these oppressed people have to be aware of their surroundings and familiarize themselves with the language and mannerisms of the oppressors (*Sister Outsider*, p. 114). The responsibility always falls onto those secondary groups because the dominant group has the privilege to not see or recognize their dominance. You do not have to feel privileged to be privileged. People of color have to educate white people on their humanity; women educate men, and the LGBTQ+ community educates the heterosexual community (*Sister Outsider*, p. 115). Of course there are differences between race, class, gender, and age, but those are not the things that separate us. Lorde argues that our refusal to recognize the differences and to examine the causes and effects of certain behaviors is what separates us the most (*Sister Outsider*, p. 115).

Lorde specifically mentions the feminist movements of her time where white women only focus on the collective oppression of all women as just women, and they ignored race, sexual orientation, class, and age that makes women different (*Sister Outsider*, p. 116). Because of the privilege white women have due to their whiteness, they see their experiences as every other woman's experiences. It is easier to clump all women together and say that all of the experiences are the same because if people admit that there are differences, we have to face the reality of inequality still existing on the basis of race, class, and sexual orientation. Persisting inequality means that there has to be a superior and inferior group, and that recognition comes with guilt.

Lorde reasons that the literature by women of color is not discussed in courses because it disproves most of the existing stereotypes that are present in society today (*Sister Outsider*, p. 118). White women tend to ignore these differences because to admit that there is difference means to admit that there is a racial hierarchy. Women of color, especially black and brown women, that do not fit particular stereotypes makes white women feel guilty because it threatens the notion that all women experience the same things and are oppressed only because of sex (*Sister Outsider*, p. 118). While women of any race are oppressed on the basis of gender, white women are not oppressed by our race. Not all women experience the same struggles, and the willful ignorance of many feminist women make many women of color hesitant to call themselves feminists.

Many women of color refuse to identify with the feminist movement because it pushes their racial struggles to the side while only focusing on one aspect of their oppression. If we group all women together just because of gender, we willingly ignore the years of structural racism, segregation, slavery, and oppression that black and brown women have faced. It ignores the lack of rights that lesbians and trans women still face. It ignores that some women are not able to afford items that we take for granted. While the feminist movement seeks to join us together in the search for equality, it hurts the people it is supposed to help because so many people remain ignorant to the differences we all face.

Lorde continues to talk about these differences between black and white women by arguing that white women have the possibility of comfort within the patriarchy because they have more opportunities, resources, and rewards for doing so. Although women are an oppressed group, white women are less marginalized because of race. White women have more power to gain from perpetuating patriarchy, and they are able to be complacent within this system if they are pretty and kind enough, quiet enough, and marry the right man (Sister Outsider, p. 119). This comfort is only taken away in a few scenarios. It is because of this willingness to remain loyal to the patriarchy that many white women lose sight of other women who do not have the opportunity to be comfortable.

While white women can maneuver within patriarchy, black women and their children do not have that luxury. The violence and hatred that they face is seen so often and in so many situations that it is difficult for any white person to wrap their mind around. Lorde states that violence is seen every day in the supermarket, classroom, elevator, and from the salesperson, bank teller, and even the waitress who does not serve their table (Sister Outsider, p. 119). Although we share problems as women, racial factors often divide us even more because so many privileged women refuse to acknowledge that there is a difference in experience at all. Lorde concludes with the different fears that white and black women have. White women fear that their children will grow up to join the patriarchy and use it against them, and black women fear that their children will be dragged from their cars and brutally shot, all while the oppressors

remain willfully ignorant to the reason these hate crimes occur (Sister Outsider, p. 119).

Not only do black women feel hesitant to join the feminist movement because it focuses solely on oppression as women, they also feel conflicted due to the threat of disunity in the black community. Lorde argues that although the black community faces racism every day, differences within the community are a danger too. A black feminist viewpoint is often mislabeled as a betrayal of the common interest of the community (Sister Outsider, p. 119). Black men and women share the historical continuance of oppression and erasure, but there are many black women who refuse to see their oppression as women and that sexual violence against them is not only done by white racists (Sister Outsider, pp. 119-120). Black women are oppressed by race and gender, and the violence that they are faced with, along with their children, often becomes a measure of how masculine a man can be. These patriarchal and woman-hating acts are rarely talked about as crimes against black women because it is seen as a standard (Sister Outsider, p. 120).

Lorde further explains that black women are pitted against each other and their intersectional identities constantly. Lorde writes that she is a black, lesbian feminist and is comfortable with all aspects of her collective identity. While she is comfortable, she finds that she is often encouraged to ignore different aspects of herself but still present herself as whole (Sister Outsider, p. 120). She feels at her full potential when all parts of her are open and unrestricted. I cannot help but be reminded of W.E.B. DuBois' concept of double consciousness that most black Americans are faced with constantly. Intersectionality plays a key role in this theme as well. A person faced with double consciousness often feels that they are two different people with two different souls, two sets of ideals, and two bodies. Half of them is American and the other half is black. Double consciousness and intersectionality are constantly at fault with each other.

It is impossible to bring up race and gender without also speaking about class. White women, while not oppressed on the basis of race, can still be oppressed by class

position. Even so, women of color are the lowest paid workers in America (Sister Outsider, p. 120). Not only do black women experience occupational segregation, but they are also more likely than white women and Hispanic women to work low-income jobs. Hiring practices are often so biased that people with white sounding names have a much higher chance of being called back than someone who does not; this is shown from many studies. It comes as no surprise that because of the racism in our society today that people of color, especially black women, tend to have less class privilege than that of white women and men.

Race, class, and gender are just a few of the topics Audre Lorde writes about to understand one's social position. Erica Gene Delsandro's article, No More Missed Connections: A Lesson in Transpersonal Feminism with Virginia Woolf, Audre Lorde, and Adrienne Rich connects Lorde's writing to those of other feminist writers. For the purpose of this paper, I will only be focusing on her studies of Lorde. Delsandro begins her section about Audre Lorde by quoting her response to Mary Daly. As previously mentioned, Lorde's writing methods are often filled with aspects of intersectionality, and her status as a black, lesbian feminist is well known. In response to Daly, she argues that her exclusion of women of color creates a block between any real connection that exists between every woman (Delsandro, p. 87). She continues on to say that the dismissal of other ethnicities or heritages makes it easier for women to turn away from each other rather than trying to understand behind certain choices.

Daly's book only sees women from one perspective which creates a definition of women that is non-generalizable. Lorde argues that this view is invested with racist, imperial, heteronormative, and cisgender privilege (Delsandro, p. 88). Although those words are used more commonly in the current time period, it is obvious that Lorde believes that intersectionality and different experiences are absolute necessities in the feminist movements. It is unrealistic to believe that a straight, white, middle-class woman will have the exact same experiences as a queer, black, lower-class woman. It is easier to group all women together because, as Lorde states on page 117, the experiences of women of

color are often too difficult to comprehend (Delsandro, p. 89). Because of this, feminism often excludes women who it should be helping and silences women who have widely crucial things to say.

Finally, Delsandro makes note of Lorde's mission of define and empower rather than divide and conquer. Lorde believes that defining the differences and empowering women for recognizing them is an integral aspect of changing feminist culture (Delsandro, p. 90). Lorde mentions in her interview with Adrienne Rich that people talk around her all time, but never take the time to listen and understand their differences (Delsandro, p. 90). I argue that in order for us to take responsibility for the feminist dismissal of women of color and their experiences that we actually have to feel responsible for these differences in the first place. As Lorde writes in Sister Outsider, it is difficult for white women to admit that there are racial differences and inequalities because it brings guilt and shame (118). To take responsibility in a situation like this is to look at our connection to racial, class, or sexual inequality without being taken over by guilt.

Although members of dominant groups feel guilt and shame at times when privilege is brought up, it is easier for them to be able to ignore it. They are not often reminded of it, so it can be easily ignored. Another problem with guilt is that people take it personally rather than trying to understand the problem as a whole. It is important that rather than taking it personally, members of dominant groups should take that guilt and shame and make it a driving force for changing our society.

We are only individuals living in a much larger system, and we are often unaware of what we participate in. It is uncomfortable for any dominant group to become aware of its privilege, and this realization brings about denial and rationalization of whatever system we are participating in. Because of this, dominant groups tend to show the least amount of tolerance for experiencing guilt or shame. No one wants to be reminded that their privilege negatively affects other people; a vital part of that privilege is being able to ignore that it exists in the first place. In order for the

feminist movement to be more inclusive, and ultimately affective in the long run, the people involved need to take responsibility and ask why things are the way they are and what we can do to change them.

Lorde claims that women have been told to ignore differences and to see them as what separates them rather than forces them to change (Sister Outsider, p. 112). Difference is an unthreatening necessity that brings about change and understanding. Difference brings power and knowledge. If women continue to ignore the differences between one another, women as a whole will remain as divided as ever. Community is one of the most important things that we can have; without community there is no liberation (Sister Outsider, p. 112). Communal unity does not mean that we have to shed our differences or act like these differences do not exist at all. It is so important that women join together and respect each other's differences in order to make the most change. There will never be any change if only one type of woman is recognized and celebrated, and feminism will never become a community people want to join if there is exclusion and alienation.

To exhibit a more inclusive form of feminism, women of color, trans, non-binary, and other queer women, lower-class, disabled, and older women should be widely accepted and encouraged. Rather than only hearing white and middle-class women speak out, it is important that other feminists are given a voice in matters as well. I would argue that it is also important to note that feminism does not only involve women. Men can be feminists, and I reason that more men would be interested in feminism if other men stood up against the patriarchy and its values of male dominance and control (The Gender Knot, p. 7). Men's opinions of each other are more important to them than the opinions of women, and not only would changing patriarchy be beneficial for women, but men as well. It is important for men to make an effort to change patriarchy because it would lead to less violence in the future and hopefully allow men to express more emotions. Feminism should be open to everyone who agrees with the values and mission of it, including men. Men are the dominant group in this society, so shifting the culture around masculinity would have a huge impact.

Ultimately, love is what creates inclusivity and acceptance. Lorde reasons that the need to nurture each other is redemptive, and it is within this knowledge that we find and rediscover our true power (Sister Outsider, p. 111). To thrive in a patriarchal system that oppresses women we need to love and nurture one another in order to provoke change. It might sound cheesy that love is the answer to our problems, but love is powerful enough to cause change. Loving other people means that we are willing to listen to different experiences and realities despite what we have experienced. Racial, gender, class, sexual, and many other areas of oppression will never be forgotten because of love, but I argue that we can change society with it. A more loving society will be more beneficial to everyone.

I see that one of the reasons that people are afraid to love others and connect across differences is because there are misconceptions about how change happens. These myths stop people from moving forward and fighting for change. One myth is that this is how or society has always been and always will be. This is false because there have been goddess centered and matriarchal societies throughout history (The Gender Knot, p. 228). Another myth is that our efforts do not make a difference regardless of what we do. That is a bit of a "Dust in the Wind" perspective which can be hard to get out of. While my own personal effort does not make a difference, collective individual effort does. We are so much stronger together, and that is one of my biggest takeaways from reading Audre Lorde's book.

It is easy to keep things the way they are, which is why people should take paths of greater resistance because that is what makes a difference. Rather than ignoring patriarchy, racism, ableism, homophobia, or any other form of oppression in our society, we should acknowledge that these things exist. We should educate ourselves and be willing to listen to the people of non-dominant groups. We should make noise, make people uncomfortable, and promote change, and all of that starts with oneself. If more people acknowledge that these systems of oppression exist and fight to change it, we can shift the entire culture of these systems of oppression so that they lose their legitimacy and normalcy within our lives (The Gender Knot, pp. 235 – 239). I believe that ultimately that is how we can connect across differences, by being willing to change.

Feminist Audre Lorde's book *Sister Outsider* discusses how intersectionality and feminism are connected in different ways. Mainly focusing on the structural issues of racism and sexism, I connected them to the feminist movement with the help of an article by Erica Gene Delsandro. I also argued that the feminist movement could become more inclusive by recognizing

privilege, differences, and initiating change. Inclusivity stems from the love for other people, and in order to create a more accepting and kinder world, we should be proud and ready to love in any way that we can. Connecting across differences and changing systems might not come easily, but we should all love each other enough to try.

REFERENCES

Delsandro, Erica Gene. 2019. "No More Missed Connections: A Lesson in Transpersonal Feminism with Virginia Woolf, Audre Lorde, and Adrienne Rich." *Woolf Studies Annual* 25: 73–96.

Johnson, Allan G. 2014. *The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Lorde, Audre. 2016. *Sister Outsider*. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press.