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Eloquent Rage: A Look into Modern Black Feminism

Eloquent Rage by Brittney Cooper focuses on the wonderful rage that Black women carry. For years many Black women have been stereotyped as angry, mean, or unsatisfiable leading to these women being offended or appalled when someone says that they are angry. Yet, Cooper states that this anger is beautiful, and beneficial, allowing us to speak on our oppressions and make real change in our societies as we have done for centuries.

Cooper begins the novel with a look into her beginnings as a Black feminist: she wasn't one. She describes an interaction with her friend Tracey, after "talking kinda crazy...and making some ignorant comments about feminism" (Cooper,15) Tracey suggests that Cooper reads some literature by bell hooks. Cooper calls this mediation by her friends a homegirl intervention that leads her on her path towards Black feminism and the fight for equality and equity for (Black) women and girls. Yet, the act of women straying away from or criticize feminism is a frequent response for many young women. In *A Black Feminist Statement* by the Combahee River Collective, the individuals pinpoint just how hard it is to convince women that feminism is for them, "we have found that it is very difficult to organize around Black feminists issues, difficult even to announce in certain contexts that we are Black feminists" (Kirk, 28). Often feminism is perceived to be a western white women's mantra, which makes sense as often the white woman's feminist agenda has been seen at the forefront of feminist movements while Black and POC feminism is often ignored or seen as less than. Not only is feminism tied to certain negative

connotations but feminism is also tied to the racist and bias ideals that many white feminists hold, straying young and old Black women from identifying as a feminist. Mathangi Subramanian, in *The Brown Girl's Guide to Labels*, also talks about her struggle with identifying with feminism due to its center around white women stating that she, had to discover “a strand of feminism that resonated with me (Subramanian) and did not require me (Subramanian) to compromise myself my past or my future” (Kirk,28). Subramanian reveals how she struggled to identify with feminism due to the stereotype that feminism was a white woman's struggle and movement, and the reality that white feminist thought was very rarely inclusive or catered to the oppression the BIPOC women face. Much like Cooper, she regarded feminism as a predominantly western and white development that catered only to and for white women and their desires, excluding women of color.

Often identifying as a feminist means that outsiders looking in deem one a lesbian, or automatically as part of the LGBTQI community. Cooper embraces the idea of queerness as a compliment to feminism stating that “Black feminism is and always has been a fundamentally queer project” (Cooper 28). What Cooper is insinuating by this is that within Black feminism the core is to live Black women deeply and fully in a world that often rejects and diminishes them. With this, the ideas of sexuality, and desire can often be intertwined especially when breaking down labels and boundaries that can lead to a disruption of the true goal. Cooper introduces the idea that often women reject the idea of feminism to secure their “straightness and options for getting chosen ” (Cooper, 29). While this may be a very surface start into the realism of sexuality it opens the pathway for a deeper dive into sexuality and gender fluidity. Daisy Hernandez also touches on sexuality from a feminist perspective in her writing *Even if I Kiss a Woman*. Hernandez notes the love of the women in her family. The women who “despite their dictates

about men...teach me that our primary ties are each other as women” (Kirk,154). Hernandez recognizes the deep affection, concern, and true love the woman in her family have for each other and as she grows she realizes that though she loves men, she can receive this deep kind of love similar to her family members from a woman in a romantic standpoint, “what is wrong with me? Why had it never occurred to me? A girl. I love kissing boys but a girl. I could kiss a girl” (Kirk, 153). Much like Cooper, Hernandez conceived the idea that loving women truly and fully, as is necessary for feminism, can lead to interactions between desire, love, affection, and sexuality.

Cooper touches on the idea of intersectionality as introduced by Kimberly Crenshaw. Kimberly Crenshaw has been one of the most noteworthy sociologists who has looked at intersectionality and the effects of it in modern times. Crenshaw defines intersectionality as “a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other,”. All inequality is not created equal yet many tend to talk about race, gender, and economic equality as being separate from one another when they are all intertwined. This is the premise of intersectionality in the eyes of Kimberly Crenshaw. Engaging in intersecting views also allows modern sociologists to recognize the historical factors that are present in generational oppression. Say Her Name is a movement that highlights the intersectionality of race and gender. Say Her Name is a movement broken off from the Black Lives Matter movement that focuses on the Black women who are affected by police brutality. Cooper, highlights the lack of regard for Black women's lives not only politically but also within our communities. Taking the actions of Barack Obama during his presidency Cooper points out the lack of consistency between the advocacy for Black men versus Black women, “President Obama had launched his My Brothers Keepers initiative, which was aimed at creating

mentorship programs and leadership opportunities solely for young men of color” (Cooper, 97). More often than not Black men are the focus when it comes to disputes and outrage about the excess use of violence, lack of opportunities for, and oppressive tactics used against people of color and in particular African American citizens within the United States. We often hear of stories like George Floyd and Erick Garner but names like Tanisha Anderson and India Kager are often overlooked and forgotten. Often this is because they are women and this is impactful to note, do we as a society value women's lives less than men? It seems so when looking at these disparities and intersectionality studies that allow users to view these disparities.

Sexualized violence includes but is not limited to the rape, abuse, battery, stalking, or sexual harassment of an individual. Sexualized violence is often used as a means to control women, LGBTQI, and gender non-conforming individuals in a patriarchal society, and Brittney Cooper is no stranger to the world of sexualized violence. Cooper writes about growing up with her mother who had increasingly dangerous relationships with men, that most often if not always ended in violence and trauma. Cooper reminisces on the days her mother spent with a man named Bob. Cooper's mother was dating Bob, yet decided to leave him after he began “not treating her right”, after seeing Cooper's mother with her new boyfriend named Mann he became filled with anger, feeling betrayed, “Outside, Bob shot my mother three times and Mann Once” (Cooper, 84). Comparable to many stories around the world, Bob felt as though he was entitled to control and therefore remove Cooper's mother. Leaving her not only physically injured but also emotionally and mentally traumatized for the rest of her life. Still, this is not an isolated incident. Around the world and very common within the United States, gender-based violence transpires and even thrives. In her writing, *Indigenous Women Have Been Disappearing for Generations: Politicians are Finally Starting to Notice*, Alleen Brown, a New York reporter for *The Intercept*

touches on the gender-based violence that has been occurring for years unnoticed and uninterrupted.

According to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, “84% of indigenous women interviews had experienced violence in their life, 56% of indigenous women had experienced sexual violence and between the years of 1992 and 2001 American Indians were twice as likely to as any other racial group to be raped or sexually assaulted.” (Kirk, 263).

Cooper also talks about the influence of media on feminist and how celebrities can cause mass debates about feminist topics. Copper touches on the feminist ideals that Beyonce has brought to life in her music and videos. Beyonce through her music provides empowering forms of feminism. In her song “Upgrade U” she focuses on how women brought a necessary component to critical times such as the civil rights movement. Although men like Martin Luther King and Malcolm X were seen as the most influential “leaders” during the civil rights movement there were also many women who supported and propelled forward the civil rights movement. When Beyonce says “Women keep the tempo” she acknowledges that without women many of the strides that have been made in the Black community since the end of slavery would not be possible without the influence of Black women. Ariane Cruz, too, talks about how mainstream media connects culture and feminist thought. In her article, *(Mis)playing Blackness: Rendering Black Female Sexuality in the Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl*, she talks about how Beyonce's song “Single Ladies” is very representative of Black women's culture, “As the phrase single ladies the title of Beyonce's 2008 hit song suggest... Black women's solitary romantic status is a hot issue in American popular culture. The low marriage rates of Black women..has received attention in the media and academia” (Kirk, 160). Cruz not only touches on music as representative but also on television shows such as Basketball Wives and Love and Hip Hop,

“wherein romantic relationship drama reigns, animosity prevails between Black women and their (Black) men” (Kirk, 160). Both Cruz and Copper touch on how the media can often feed off Black culture, and vice versa. Black culture often uses media and music to express and portray persistent issues within the Black community, both as a means of release (to get something metaphorically of the chest) and to show the world some of the struggles that the Black community, in particular, Black women face.

Eloquent Rage focuses on the oppression that the intersectionality of being both Black and a woman in modern America has on the Black woman. Cooper advocates for the rage that Black women feel to be used as an outlet for change in the fight against racism, sexism, and patriarchy, and offers insight into the topics of sexuality, militarism, gender-based violence, and Black feminist thought to further encourage the advocacy for Black women and girls, not only by women but by all people who desire a better future.

Works Cited

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Kirk, G., & Okazawa-Rey, M. (2020). *Gendered lives: Intersectional perspectives*. New York: Oxford University Press.