

Excerpt from “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference” by Audre Lorde (1984)

Somewhere, on the edge of consciousness, there is what I call a *mythical norm*, which each one of us within our hearts knows “that is not me.” In America, this norm is usually defined as *white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financial secure*. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society. Those of us who stand outside that power often identify one way in which we are different, and we assumed that to be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around difference, some of which we ourselves may be practicing. By and large within the women’s movement today, white women focus upon their oppression as women and ignore differences of race, sexual preference, class, and age. There is a pretense to homogeneity of experience covered by the word *sisterhood* that does not in fact exist....

Refusing to recognize difference makes it impossible to see the different problems and pitfalls facing us as women....

Some problems we share as women, some we do not. You fear your children will grow up to join the patriarchy and testify against you; we fear our children will be dragged from a car and shot down in the street, and you will turn your backs upon the reasons they are dying.

The threat of difference has been no less blinding to people of color. Those of us who are black must see that the reality of our lives and our struggle does not make us immune to the errors of ignoring and misnaming difference. Within black communities, where racism is a living reality, differences among us often seem dangerous and suspect. The need for unity is often misnamed as a need for homogeneity, and a black feminist vision mistaken for betrayal of our common interests as a people....

The future of our earth may depend upon the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference.

SOURCE: Audre Lorde, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference,” 1984. In *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: Voices of Resistance, Reform, and Renewal; An African American Anthology*, edited by Manning Marable and Leith Mullings, 538-544. New York: Bowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000.