

Mahagony Broxton
80C-1
mbroxton@ucsc.edu
Formal Essay 3
October 27, 2015

Coming to Voice About Social Inequity

Moving into college I knew it would be hard for me to adjust because as a black girl I knew the population of blacks in Santa Cruz was very small. The percentage of African Americans here at UC Santa Cruz is about 4%. I could already tell there is a disproportion between whites and the black population for some reason. Not letting that stop me, I moved in and fell in love immediately. However, I have never experienced a racist encounter until now. One of my roommates is Chinese and her family is very intolerant of blacks so me being her roommate made things a little awkward for her. We were having a conversation one night, and she said, "My parents want me to watch over my things to make sure you don't steal anything and nothing comes up missing because you know how black people are". I wanted to say, "No, I don't know how black people are, why don't you tell me" but I couldn't, I was too angry so I froze, confused about what was just said to me. I did not say anything because I did not want to make things worse by giving her the reaction she figured I was only good for: yelling and being angry. I kept quiet and just removed myself from the conversation. I then realized a few days later, not speaking up was the worst mistake I could have made at that moment.

Both Audre Lorde and bell hooks support the idea that speaking up about injustices such as this example of racism signifies truth and rage. With the use of language, racism will not have the same power it once did to oppress people of color. Allowing racism to continue through silence only gives oppressors the ego they need to remain on their high horse. The use of language such as movements like that of Black Lives Matter and the unity of all helps interrupt the cycle of oppression by creating a force of individuals who seeks to gain equality. These motives are powerful and show courage.

Silence and complicity have been a problem for a while now and as a trending issue, racism has caught the attention of many authors. Audre Lorde is an author who focused on issues surrounding civil rights and oppression. Oppression was a big deal to Lorde due to her years of unmovable silence. Because she was a lesbian African American women, she did not believe her views or voice to be important. Due

to this, she lived for a long time in silence. Instead of being overtly oppressed by others, her oppression was internalized. In her writing, *The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action*, Lorde encourages people who tend to be hesitant to voice their truths with others because there is only a period of time in existence. At some point, everyone will die so it was very important to Lorde that people, specifically people of color, speak up about oppression they face.

Staying quiet to all inequalities hurts the individuals who remains silent because once we die, we'll be silenced forever so she argues that now is the time to speak up. Lorde starts by telling her story about being diagnosed with breast cancer. She argued how after that news she had to reconsider the meaning of her life, and how she decided to live it. What she says is her silences betrayed her, and she did not know whether she was silent to wait for someone else to speak up or if she was just afraid to speak up. All she knew was it was time to finally speak up about racism even if it came with fear or judgment.

Not only does silencing oneself about racism harm the silenced individual, but it also harms anyone else who may face this injustice. Speaking up about racism is not only for the individual who has experienced it but for any person of color who may go through similar circumstances. Lorde says, "We can sit in our corners mute forever while our sisters and our selves are wasted, while our children are distorted and destroyed, while our earth is poisoned; we can sit in our safe corners mute as bottles, and we will still be no less afraid". Lorde is trying to emphasize the importance of speaking up because it will affect our loved ones in years to come. She is saying that we can be scared now and refuse to speak up, but we will still be afraid.

Rather than powerful, breaking silence about racism is thought to be scary due to judgment. The inability to voice our truths about racism is evidently a cause of fear. Having this fear not only keeps blacks invisible but it perpetuates racism. In most cases, blacks fear speaking up because, perhaps, they do not feel that racism will ever stop. This may be the case due to the stagnant reality of perpetual racism thus far. Instead, blacks tend to internalize the oppression. For example, I did not speak up to my roommate because at the time, I felt like it would be pointless. Her family is still going to have those views towards blacks so voicing my opinion would not matter much. In reality, if I would have spoken up, I would have shown more courage than fear. Had I spoken up, I would have shown how angry I was

about the idea of racism which could have possibly shifted the frame of reference of my roommate, if not her family. However, me refusing to speak up limited my chances at showing my strength.

Evidently, the fear of judgment is the root of all silence. People of color lack using language as a tool of strength against racism because they fear that danger might come to them. As Lorde says, “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”. Silence is rendered due to all the fear which blacks believe to be the outcome of speaking up. In the process of staying silent and complicit, people of color fail to understand how that is only harmful to them. Because they refuse to voice their truths, they internalize this way of life and due to these fears, racism has been perpetuated for a while now.

Internalized oppression is the result of an individual who comes to believe racial harassment is directed to them is okay. In some cases, blacks tend to allow racial harassment to occur when they feel like the racism cycle has no means of ending, let alone changing. In bell hooks, *Killing Rage*, she discusses her personal experiences encountering racism. bell hooks is an author, feminist, and social activist, whose writings have focused on the connection of race and gender. She describes the ability to produce perpetual oppression and class domination by showing the status of race hierarchy. An example she mentions is when her and a friend, K, try to get a cab to the airport, but the cab driver refuses to attend to her. K disregards it and suggests taking a different cab. The cab driver obviously denied them service because Hooks and her friend K were two women of color. Instead of speaking up against the racism they faced, allowing the cab driver to deny them service and getting another cab was a way in which they internalized oppression.

Hooks argument is that blacks have been conditioned to suppress their rage and deny the existence of injustice against them. She says, “...I feel that the vast majority of black folks who are subjected daily to forms of racial harassment have accepted this as one of the social conditions of our lives in white supremacist patriarchy that we cannot change. This is a form of complicity” (Hooks). What hooks means is that because people of color are commonly subjected to racism, they begin to accept it by remaining silent. With silencing their voices when experiencing racism, perpetual oppression is bound to occur.

The only chance at challenging silence and complicity towards racism is through the use of language. Speaking up about injustices makes it hard for issues like racism to go unnoticed. With the use of language, racism is minimized significantly because now people are aware of it so it can't be put on the back burner anymore. When there are issues surrounding racism, black people tend to silence themselves and their rage. However, if people can use language to show rage, language can help break the cycle of silence. Because language is fueled by rage towards racism, it allows individual to acknowledge these feelings. Bell Hooks quotes, "anger is better, there is a presence in anger"(Hook). She emphasizes how important it is to get angry about such an injustice because within that anger there is a voice. When a person of color feels rage towards racism and acknowledges this emotion, it typically leads to action. Allowing oneself to feel angry about racism breaks the cycle of internalized oppression which shows strength and power. Pushing anger aside however doesn't allow people of color to feel raged emotions. Acknowledging these emotions can allow them to voice the truth.

For those who do not push raged emotions to the side and have the power to acknowledge them, defines what it means to have strength. As exemplified above, it is not easy to confront feelings to racism, rather it is much easier to push them to the side. Historically, the use of language towards racist injustices has shown great strength. An example of language being very successful is the Black Lives Matter movement. BLM is an activist movement that campaigns against police brutality against African Americans. The BLM movement started with a few courageous people who could not stand the police brutality directed towards their race. Many black boys and girls have died at the hands of a police officer for some sort of "misconduct". The irony is that all of the officers were white. This clearly shows how disproportionate race is in the United States. Feeling the utmost rage, black victims' families and loved ones took matters into their own hands and spoke up about it. In doing so, they noticed a lot more people felt the same way they did about the corruption in police departments and they all joined in unison and stood in solidarity. The collaboration of people it took to start this movement exemplifies the courage as well as the strength it took to go outside of society's norms.

The collective voicing of this movement is one of the ways racism towards blacks by whites has been addressed. Due to this movement, people are now aware of the harsh reality people of color face. Whether or not society, which perpetuates white supremacy decides to do anything to change it, at least

they have analyzed it and now see what they are up against. No longer will blacks allow injustices to go unnoticed. People all over the world are now exposed to the malpractice of whites towards blacks. They can no longer ignore these issues. This national, global call aroused the rage of blacks all over the world and quickly led to a widespread issue. The use of language amplified the struggle of black folks in America. This movement showed great strength of unity because it amplified all of the stories of black youth killed at the hands of police officers. With little to no hesitation, people of color took a stance and were no longer silent and complicit.

Not acknowledging racism shows weakness in people. If someone can notice the faults of a system or group of people and still lack the use of language it is because they are not confident enough in what they are saying. However, not allowing racism to be perpetuated shows strength. Because silence and complicity has lead to an epidemic of racism, millions of blacks have suffered. Not until more people speak up about injustices will this world be equal. Some solutions to this ongoing problem of perpetuated racism includes designing more campaigns like Black Lives Matter, protesting against police departments and white supremacy, and finally the use of language.

Work Cited

Hooks, Bell. "Militant Resistance." *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*. New York: H. Holt, 1995. 8-20.
Print.

Lorde, Audre. "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action." *Sister Outside*.
Freedom: Crossing, 1984. N. pag. Print.