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Gender and Feminism

### On Anger

1. Choose a claim from one of our readings or films that you have not already written about. Make sure the claim you choose is one you find *challenging to understand, intriguing, and insightful*. Open your reflection with a quote capturing the claim. Then reflectively interpret the claim, exploring why you find it difficult, intriguing, and insightful.

If asked to argue for the strongest, most powerful, emotions the two that rise to the forefront are love and anger. In some ways the emotions are polar opposites, you fight for the ones you love, and against what angers you. However, they are also uniquely connected, all too often anger turns love to hate as a couple walks the tightrope of such intense emotion. Society tends to stifle anger, arguing it's unbecoming and uncontrollable, we preach the morality of love and its power to bring people together. However, many philosophers such as Srinivasan and Lorde argue that anger is a valuable tool in the fight against oppression. Also, many times society demonizes anger in order to silence people that are rightfully angry. In her essay *Uses of Anger* Lorde argues, "Every woman has a well stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being. Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change". While I see the uses of anger in enacting change I feel a lack of nuance in these arguments for anger-driven change that overlooks just how careful one must be when playing with fire.

Without anger, we'd live in a spineless world. People wouldn't care if others walked all over them. Anger arises when taking a stance, drawing a line in the sand, and not allowing people to cross it. Without anger, those in charge would carry on however they pleased without any repercussion, oppression would continue endlessly. To be angry about something means you care, and this is where the value in anger lies. When racism is directed at you, to not feel anger is to succumb to the racist remark or action and not hold any value in yourself. Anger is a personal validation that you were wronged and that this was not right. In this manner, anger identifies problems but also energizes an individual to do something about it.

Anger is a cheap emotion. Racism and sexism make me angry, but so does Royal Jacket on a daily basis. While we don't like to admit it, human emotion is rather easily evoked, the advertisement industry is centered upon this idea. Anger, in particular, can be readily elicited, and hard to control once we are sitting in it. Lorde and others argue for moral anger, one that acknowledges intolerance and declares that I won't stand for this. She makes it clear that she is not arguing for hatred which she distinguishes from anger, "Hatred is the fury of those who do not share our goals, and its object is death and destruction. Anger is a grief of distortions between peers, and its object is change". Yet so easily anger can slip into hatred. Lorde, in explaining to a white woman that she is angry and not just taking the moral high ground, retorts, "Yes, I am Black and Lesbian, and what you hear in my voice is fury, not suffering. Anger, not moral authority. There is a difference". Yet notice how she slips into the fury that only a few paragraphs ago she correlated with hatred. It's understandable but also demonstrates my fear of advocating anger as a tool for change. Humans are all too susceptible to reactive emotion, blind emotion that is more reflex than a decision.

The intensity of anger makes it a dangerous reactive emotion, without thought it readily slips into hatred. Hatred looks for no resolution, it's bent on destruction and serves no use to anything productive it's what defined racism, the holocaust, and 9/11. The problem with hate is that it feeds on anger. When people hate each other they look to get angry. When I let my anger at my brother turn to hate, I stalk him waiting for him to trip up, and do something I could justify as a slight on me, before I pounce in rage. Illogically, hate doesn't want the situation to change to appease the anger, it wants you to continue to be angry, it works to justify more anger. Anger comes from being disrespected or hurt and why would any logical person want that to continue? Hatred should only ever be directed towards itself. While tied to the brutal human travesties I referenced above, hatred can be much more subtle, it's this subtlety that is truly insidious. Hatred is not necessarily loud or violent, more often it's cold and suppressive. As though most of the time hatred lies dormant slowly building pressure before it erupts. I see hatred in refusing to communicate, belittling another group, and failing to acknowledge each other's humanity. It pains me to say it but I see hatred in the national dialogue, turn on CNN or FOX and there is little meaningful dialogue between opposing groups, the other side is barely human, and if human the worst kind. These demonstrations of hate are acceptable in society but so very harmful.

Anyone owning a gun must understand the danger it wields. Advocating for anger without acknowledging its pitfalls is reckless, so if arguing for anger one must outline what appropriate anger is but also, maybe more importantly, what inappropriate anger, hate, looks like. Anger itself is readily triggered, its intensity drives it to mutate into hate, and because hate can quietly tear us apart we cannot allow anger to arise reflexively, it must be a conscious decision. Take a stance but don't let the anger consume you, be able to articulate exactly what you are

angry at as to not let the anger spillover. In this manner, one can access the strength, and passion of moral anger without allowing hate to stifle the change we want to see.

## Prompt 2

- Carefully consider a question we have addressed in class, drawing closely on at least one of our course materials. Explore the question, taking a stand on it. You may agree or disagree with the author(s) whose work you are considering. Make a case for your own position.

Thinking about the gender binary, what considerations have weight for you on the positive side of the ledger – what positive reasons do we have for continuing to sustain the gender binary?  
What considerations have weight on the negative side – what reasons do you believe weigh in favor of disrupting or abolishing the gender binary?

Despite the increased public discourse, most people walk through life having never given serious and extended thought to the gender binary that permeates our society. The gender binary dictates how we dress, what activities we are involved in, the way we communicate, and countless other facets of our lives. Yet, most people have never had to articulate their opinion on the gender binary, they just inhabit it. If pressed to defend whether the binary is positive or negative I believe most people would argue: I don't know. Obviously, gender holds both pros and cons but after a semester of analyzing, critiquing, and occasionally calling for its abolition I'd like to try and articulate an argument in favor of the gender binary. The gender binary serves two

useful functions, as a strong uniting factor in our increasingly individualized society and as a roadmap through a life full of endless possibilities.

First, to be clear, I'm viewing gender as Dembroff labels it the "social position" view of gender" or gender as, "the social meaning of sex". Judith Butler further describes this view of gender as, "The tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders". To what extent these social tells of gender arise naturally from sex is up for debate. On the biological front, we see men and women share with their gender distinct physical similarities such as genitalia, or physical experiences such as balding for men and menopause for women. These physical similarities allow for a deep seeded commonality amongst men and women, over which they can share experiences, concerns, and questions. I find these shared sex based traits important, but I'm not arguing that sex and gender are the same thing, rather that we act out sex by the way we dress or the way we socialize, and there are positive benefits to this performance.

Following our membership to humanity, gender is our second largest social group. While one could argue the halving of humanity into men and women is divisive, having shared experiences with every other person allows people to bond. On the societal front, I confess, gender walks a fine line between encouraging boys to play sports and forcing boys to partake in chauvinistic masculinity. Yet whether you enjoyed it or not almost all boys played youth sports and now share that connection with a majority of American men. The same can be said for the clothes young girls had to wear to school, or the types of books young boys were given to read. Thus gender provides uniting common experiences and develops common interests that foster a group identity which I think many people can take comfort in.

One could argue that these gender-based shared experiences aren't necessary, that they could arise across sex through natural interest, however, gender provides commonality. In a

genderless world, most people might have one or two similarities, but gender organizes a plethora of shared experiences and interests for a wider and deeper range of similarities amongst people of the same gender. As the world starts to become more individualized we lose the inherent shared experience of gender, boys aren't expected to like sports, and girls aren't swayed from pursuing interests in STEM. This doesn't mean that without gender we couldn't bond with new people but the benefit of gender is that it lowers the cost of entry into many shared experiences over which relationships develop.

As humans continue to break expectations, to dress as they please, to partake in wherever activities fancy them, the gender binary offers a set of interests and ideals that provide an outline to life. Attending a public school I never had to wear a uniform, I could wear whatever I liked, every single day, 180 days a year, to the scrutiny of hundreds of classmates. I loved the freedom but there were plenty of days where I was envious of the mindlessness of a uniform. In a world where we now have so many options to how we want to present ourselves or what we want to do in life, in many ways gender offers a desirable preloaded set of character traits that one can subscribe to and fit unobtrusively into society. By subscribing to the binary, men and women have a roadmap to follow through life. There is no shame in allowing yourself to follow the roadmap of a stereotypical gender role, it's straight forward and one can derive pride and fulfillment from it. In particular, as young adults grow into themselves, stressed and overloaded with new experiences, gender can offer insight into confusing situations. Dates can be scary as hell, but men can take solace in the fact that gender offers guidelines to be a good date: offer his date a seat and pay for the check. He doesn't overthink these things because gender has told him how to act, it alleviates the pressure of uncertainty. The binary is built upon such ideals, ideals that people who don't want to go through the confusing and sometimes failure prone process of

developing their own ideals, can subscribe to. Men should be brave and women caring, and focus on meeting these ideals rather than spending a lifetime defining them.

With all of my arguments, I can feel the dark side of the binary pulling at the seams. Are the ideals of the binary a beacon to guide us along or a gun held to our back forcing us towards a predetermined destination? As a child, one of my mother's main teaching points was, "everything in moderation". I don't mean to delegitimize anyone's intense run-ins with the binary, but for me, gender has never been that big of a deal. I didn't particularly love playing soccer as a kid but it was something to do and I got to make friends, so I went along with it. As I grew up, and maybe this is indicative of my parents, I didn't allow myself to feel trapped by the binary, frequently breaking it with my interests and activities such as music taste and dramatic endeavors. Thus I think the binary is best consumed in moderation, a tool to fall back on and utilize, not a strict set of rules to follow.

## Work Cited

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