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Vol 1 Issue 1

THE **BLK** WOMXN COLLECTIVE

Monthly Newsletter

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WE, THE COLLECTIVE...

We, **The BLK Womxn Collective**, call for open minds and open hearts. We recognize that there is power in vulnerability. We, the BLK womxn's Collective, are committed to each individual's personal journey to liberation through transparency and authenticity.

This **newsletter** serves as a space to address, analyze and affirm the lived experiences of all Black womxn*.

*womxn: Trans, Non-Binary and Cisgendered womxn's regardless of expression of womxn'shood and sexual orientation.



THE USES OF THE EROTIC

REFLECTIONS ON AUDRE LORDE

You Feel Too Deeply

BY ANGELICA ANDREWS

"The erotic cannot be felt second-hand."
--Audre Lorde

Black womxn have become dispossessed of our own bodies. Most recently, bodily dispossession was thematized in Jordan Peele's film *Get Out* (2018). However, the portrayal of this practice in the movie focused explicitly on Black male bodies and overly dramatized dispossession without considering the particular ways in which this has occurred to Black womxn's bodies.

Historically, the dispossession of Black womxn's bodies and the erasure of our sensations dates back to slavery. Today, dispossession occurs most notably through visual means and technologies of docility. For example, the media

industry is controlled by the (white) male gaze—they control what is seen, specifically how Black womxn are perceived. We are stereotyped as hypersexual and sexually deviant. Thus, referring to Patricia Mcfadden "Sexual Pleasure as a Feminist Choice", we find ourselves concealing and censoring our bodies: what we know about our bodies, expressing shame about our bodies, apologizing for our bodies and losing touch with what Alice Walker called, "the secret joy". Our sexuality is policed through social media, our clothing, our attitudes—all outlets of our expression. As Black womxn, we have become unaware of the ways in which the world tells us to be ashamed of our bodies and sexual desires. I urge you to no longer allow yourself to separate feeling from sensation.

If sexual desires and bodily expression are policed then we can never experience the full power of Black womxn's bodies. Shame renders us incapable of expressing bodily power by suppressing our emotions. Allow yourself to feel the sensation in everything, even in your work whether it be school, research, a career, etc. Black womxn should be able to feel the same pleasure out of a completed task that men are taught to feel. Picture a corporate board room. A tall, physically fit, brutish man is standing at the end of a conference table with his employees seated around him. He keeps himself well kept with a sharp haircut and perfectly tailored clothing. Standing tall with his hands on his hips-- his posture is seen as confident and demands attention. He's raving to his employees about his successes on a recently completed project. His ego is inflated by the awe on their faces. He soaks up the adulation. You can see it-- Better yet, *you've seen it before.*



THE USES OF THE EROTIC

REFLECTIONS ON AUDRE LORDE

You Feel Too Deeply

BY ANGELICA ANDREWS (CONTINUED)

"The erotic cannot be felt second-hand."

--Audre Lorde

Now, we as Black womxn shy away from this scene for ourselves. We deny ourselves that feeling of pleasure. So often we deny ourselves pleasure to enable the pleasure of others-- our partners, our friends, our families. If we receive the words of Audre Lorde, we will work to feel the erotic for ourselves. Another's happiness cannot be our own.

The erotic is bodily. It is the connection to emotion; the distinction between skin and flesh. Our thoughts and feelings are screaming to be felt deeply. Our bodies are begging to be seen as more than the physical. The erotic is not objectification. Move away from sight as a primary way of knowing the world—use touch. When you hug someone, become aware that there is a body in your arms. A body that experiences pleasure, pain, confusion—the experience of something as simple as a hug should evoke all that encompasses the erotic. The erotic is not pornographic. If intimacy is not created in our relationships, sexual and platonic, there is no living. You cannot live through another's experiences.

I am not calling for selfish acts or disregard for others. I am calling for us to incorporate our own humanity into our every action. I am urging us to stop dulling our senses for someone else's use. It is only through the realization of the erotic that this can occur. Reexamine your body in ways that transcend what has been previously presented to you. I want Black womxn to stand at the head of our "conference tables" and command the attention our emotions deserve. Let us rediscover "the secret joy." Or for some of us, we may only be discovering it for the first time.

Rediscover your secret joy.

Feel it.

Enjoy it.

Incorporate it into your entire being.

lil bougie sandwich Retweeted



sophie "watch klute" bee 
@pogform

i don't have guilty pleasures, why would i
feel guilty about pleasure

11:25 PM · 2/14/19 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

THE USES OF THE EROTIC

REFLECTIONS ON AUDRE LORDE



bby africa 🍒
@Niyyah__

women who constantly bad mouth
other women need to re-evaluate their
priorities and sense of self. s is wicked
and ugly, period.

6:54 PM · 2/25/19 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

9 Retweets 17 Likes



no label at all, stemming from my belief in the fluidity of my sexuality. However, the use of lesbianism in lesbian feminism transcends its one-dimensional employment as a sexual orientation. Let me clarify: Lesbian feminism recognizes the sexual aspect of lesbianism, but in broadening its definition it creates a close alignment with Audre Lorde's definition of the Erotic.

Sara Ahmed was very intentional when labelling this concept as lesbian feminism. By referring to this discourse as the relationship between lesbianism and feminism, the strong connection that is implied in the phrase, "lesbian feminism" would be diminished. The implied weight of these words is not to be misconstrued as a charge against non-lesbian feminists, but as a call to redirect the charge of energy and willfulness that has historically been misdirected at men, by shifting the focus to womxn. By simply existing in a society where men exist as the universal, becoming womxn is inherently shaped by how male culture defines us. Its definition is internalized and as a result, determines sexual and family functions in relation to men. Feminisms built on the fundamentals of acceptance, aspiring to be accepted by men or whomever they hope to redistribute power, they are not radical enough. Within those nuances of feminism, lesbians are still unacceptable; lesbianism symbolizes the "unacceptable" womxn who ventures on her own path to redefine in her own terms what is acceptable to men. Lesbian feminism is about revolting against the requirement to be in relation to men in order to be seen as human. It is a revolt against the pressure to be female relatives. It is the decision to withdraw from the foundation which requires her to make herself available to men.

Rethinking Lesbianism

BY KAYLA RUCKER

Before I begin, I must first acknowledge that the term "lesbian" is not all encompassing of womxn who are attracted to other womxn. However, that is the term that will be used to refer to those relationships. People have many reasons for not subscribing to lesbianism as a means to describe themselves. Historically, lesbianism has been whitewashed and lacked the representation of womxn of color. Reading about lesbian feminism has since sparked an internal conflict with my relation to the term "lesbian;" still when referring specifically to my sexual orientation, I most closely identify with "Queer/Queer Womxn of Color (QWOC)" or

THE USES OF THE EROTIC

REFLECTIONS ON AUDRE LORDE

Rethinking Lesbianism

BY KAYLA RUCKER

(CONTINUED)

To break ties between male culture and the socialized understanding of womxnhood, Ahmed calls for the feminist snap. In her book, *Living a Feminist Life*, she describes the snap as the moment at which a womxn shatters her bond “not only to an individual man as a sexual and life partner, but to the world that makes that bond that which demands the fullness of her attention. (Ahmed 10)” The refusal to identify with male culture and the withdrawal of energy from male relationships produces an energetic surge within her that allows her to allocate her energy into ethical relationships with herself and her fellow womxn, sexual or otherwise.

Similar to lesbian feminism, the Erotic does not and cannot abide by one definition. The Erotic is about arousal; however, it is not to be mistaken with the pornographic—which operates as the polar opposite of the Erotic by denying its essence as power and emphasizing sensation without feeling. The Erotic is present in any ethical and mutually beneficial relationship; it is the exchange of power in the form of pleasure, regardless if it is physical, mental, psychic, or emotional. The same workings of the male culture that give rise to the need for lesbianism has taught womxn to distrust this power within themselves and view the Erotic as a source of female inferiority.

The male world teaches womxn that her depth of feeling is only valuable when servicing him, disregarding the man’s inability and fear to discover what he seeks from womxn within himself. However, she must experience her own version of the feminist snap—for once she experiences the depths of her affectivity and power, to settle for anything less than the joy derived from self-actualization would be a disservice to herself. Womxn reaches her internal satisfaction when she discovers the third channel of knowing which is unattainable when relying upon the male gaze as her lens for world sense. This third channel derives from experience and rationality to form a new lens, known as the Erotic, empowering her to reclaim her love, life and every other aspect of her womxnhood.



mosaiceye



our friendship gives me life.

THE USES OF THE EROTIC

REFLECTIONS ON AUDRE LORDE

Affectivity, the Erotic and Fulfilling (Self) Love

BY JUNIKA HAWKER-THOMPSON



what does a fulfilling love
look like to you?

@THEBOOKOFLO

"What does fulfilling love look like to you?" I took a few seconds to reflect but refused to be consumed by my thoughts in an attempt to extract an answer of substance. I continued to tap and her next post read *"Have you ever loved yourself that way?"*



have you ever loved
yourself this way?

@THEBOOKOFLO

I did not expect to be bombarded with those questions. I did not come to Instagram to be paralyzed by the deafening effects of these intrusive questions. Yet, there I sat, slipping into deep thoughts, about my answers.

We always think of love in the context of an exchange between two people: mother and child, friend to friend, partner to partner, etc. So when I first read the question, I automatically thought, "How do I want someone else to treat me?" and "What can another person do for me that would ensure fulfillment?" I started to think about mutuality, emotional maturity and awareness, individuality and a mutual respect of boundaries. But these conceptions are inadequate to articulate my feelings in response to these posts. We treat love as "some-thing"-Is love a tangible object?- that can only be given to us, that can only be attained externally. Love is packaged in pretty wrapping paper and presented as a gift, only if we are deemed deserving. However, only recently are we being confronted with discourses that place love as something that can be obtained internally. There is a move to reclaim and center love within one's self that can serve as a source of love for other people. So, being asked the question "Have you ever loved yourself that way?" made me slow down and ask myself a few questions: "How can I expect a fulfilling love from another person when I am unable to provide that to myself?" and "How can I expect anyone else to see my worth when I am unable to clearly see my own worth?" I am an avid believer that you can not pour from an empty cup. I apply that to my work and my emotional, mental and physical availability but that belief conveniently does not apply with the relationship I have with myself.

THE USES OF THE EROTIC

REFLECTIONS ON AUDRE LORDE

Affectivity, the Erotic and Fulfilling (Self) Love

BY JUNIKA HAWKER-THOMPSON (CONTINUED)

When we hear the word “Erotic,” we automatically think of sex. The word Erotic is not typically associated with mutual or independent, non-sexual pleasure. The Erotic is rarely approached from a perspective that addresses what womxn, in this context, specifically speaking about and to Black womxn, find pleasurable within their everyday lives. The Erotic has been treated as subversive, as something to be hidden, or something that should only be tapped into when searching for sexual pleasure. However, in Audre Lorde’s piece, *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*, Lorde challenges the reader to explore and complicate their relationship to the Erotic. We, the Collective, have a shared understanding of the Erotic. To us, the Erotic is fluid and can be used as a source of power. The Erotic is more than sexual pleasure. The Erotic can be found in almost every aspect of our lives, as long as we have a deep understanding of our relationship to those various aspects. We understand the Erotic to be a different way of knowing. We believe that pure emotions and feelings, or the affect, is a valid source of knowledge.

We are told not to be angry. Not to be so emotional.

We are taught that affectivity is not a valid source of power to live life from. We are taught to, sometimes, neglect what brings us pleasure, especially when that pleasure is independent of what a man can provide for us.

When we tap into ourselves, the affect(ive) and the Erotic, we tap into the potential of becoming a self-loving life force. Lorde advises us to be mindful to no longer separate feeling from sensation. By viewing love as simply an exchange of services, we fall into the trap of treating ourselves as objects because we separate feeling from sensation. We build commodifying relationships with ourselves, and with other people, by simply viewing love as an unequal exchange. We need to move away from treating our body as a commodity that can be exchanged for the benefit of other people and shift towards more ethical relationships with ourselves and others. By shifting our understanding of love, we shift the understanding we have of ourselves.

While thinking through the questions @thebookoflo presented, I came up with some questions of my own:

What does fulfilling (self)love look like?

How can deploying the Erotic assist in creating an ethical relationship with ourselves?

THE USES OF THE EROTIC

REFLECTIONS ON ADVENTURES FROM THE BEDROOM OF AFRICAN WOMEN

BLACK WOMXN RESPOND

Black Womxn reflect on a post from the blog, *Adventures from the Bedroom of African Women*. (www.adventuresfrom.com)

Adventures from the Bedrooms of African Women

We think there is a serious lack of relevant and useful information about the sexuality of African women. This blog is a space for African women to share tips, experiences and more...

Loving a Black Woman is a Revolutionary Act

By Malaka - July 23, 2017

The sun had just come up, its rays filtering through the latticework of our bedroom window, settling on the face of the man I've been married to for eleven years now. I watched him through eyes slit just a hair, steadying my breathing as I feigned sleep. He was watching me and I didn't want to interrupt the moment with conversation. Finally the absurdity of my pretense struck me and I let out a soft, undignified giggle. He smiled.

"Good morning," he whispered.

I whispered back. "Morning, babe."

"I was just watching you in the sunlight. Your skin looks amazing. I'm so lucky to be married to such a beautiful BLACK woman." I smiled at the compliment, and then I paused, startled by a sudden thought. Eventually, I sat up straight and looked at him quizzically.

"Do you suppose other Black men lie in bed next to their white wives and profess how lucky they are to be married to beautiful white women?"

"What?"

His confusion was understandable. What did white women have to do with the tender moment being shared between us? Still, I wondered. Why was it necessary to extricate the fact that I was Black while telling me that I was beautiful? Of course I knew why, but I wanted to hear it from my husband's own lips. I repeated the question. He thought for a fraction of a moment before he answered.

"I don't know what other men say when they're in bed with a white woman. I didn't marry one. I married you."

Not the answer I was anticipating, but it was a perfectly acceptable one. I snuggled closer and gave our discussion more thought but ended the conversation. It was the weekend, and on weekends we as a family allow ourselves the space to take a break from wokeness. That's why we have Adventures!

Black beauty is a peculiar thing, because it only exists as an abstract construct in certain spaces. When I lived and was being raised in Ghana, where I experienced my first tastes of amorousness, desire and eventually sexual awakening, I was never pegged by a suitor (or a random passerby intent on paying me a compliment) as a "beautiful Black woman". In Africa – and certain parts of the diaspora, I would assume – Black women have the benefit of being what Yaba Blay has termed 'pretty. period.' It was only in America where I encountered the phrase "pretty for a Black girl" and the only place where I have had paramours express their delight/awe/appreciation of my strength and beauty as a Black woman, rather than as a woman. My African-American husband joins those ranks.

But why? Why is the color of my skin such a factor in the act of making and showing love? It's because historically, (or at least since the advent of the trans-Atlantic slave trade) femininity, virtue and beauty have been packaged and wrapped in whiteness. Until recently, we at least on the Continent were spared this indignity and the myriad injustices that stem from it and so it was not at all a radical act to love a woman whose skin was the color of burnt almond or the purest ebony. Systematic indoctrination now leads people to make all kinds of assumptions – generally the worse ones – about dark skinned/Black women. And we take these messages in, internalizing and battling against them wherever we find ourselves in this world.

Subconsciously, my husband and any other person who has made the choice to love and receive love from a Black woman knows that it is a radical act...because we are portrayed as unlovable. Our expressions of self-love...Black Girls Glows, Black Girl Magic, et al...are regarded as militant and extremist. All women glow and are the carriers of magic, says the dominant culture; and this is true. However All Women (TM) have not been programmed to believe that their hair is problematic, the verbosity of their laughter is threatening, or that their skin is a dirty thing that would benefit from an occasional bleaching. Who could love such a thing? A person who is not fucked in the head, that's who.

And that is precisely why loving a Black woman is a radical act.



Kai Davis
@KaiDavisPoet

Any Black person that finds Black people unattractive/not worth dating is battling some dark ass spiritual energy

2:54 PM · 2/25/19 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

BLACK WOMXN RESPOND

by Dr. Qrescent Mason (Haverford College)

My first thought upon encountering the title of this post was an eye-roll. I generally find myself wary of any claim that men make to ‘loving’ Black women qua Black women. I think there is a fetishization of Black womanhood that is currently rampant in digital spaces. It makes me cringe. I think many of us—both Black men and Black women—don’t really know what it means to love a Black woman because our ideas of Black womanhood are based in generalizations that, if unpacked, reveal that we don’t understand the complexity involved in doing so.

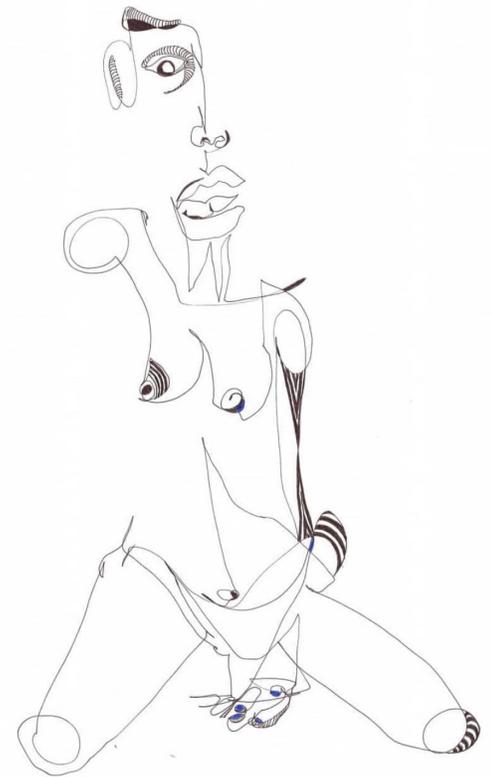
Reading Audre Lorde alongside this piece makes me feel this even more so. Recall that it is Lorde who, in *A Burst of Light*, writes, “Caring for myself is...an act of political warfare.” And in “Uses,” she calls our attention to the erotic as a source of power for the self—a way of mindfully attending to the pleasure and energy that we bring to our lives and our work. To feel this “capacity for joy,” not only in our partnerships, but also in the quiet, individual moments of our everyday lives—in “dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, examining an idea”—is what the erotic calls us to do.

Note that her formulation of the erotic does not depend on the love from another, but rather on a deep recognition of our own stores of energy and power. For (Black) women to love that which has been “vilified, abused and devalued within western society,” we must cultivate this love from within so that we don’t “end up merely settling for a shift of characters in the same weary drama.” We don’t need others to love our hair, our skin, etc. (and, for the record, the men I know who seem truly to love Black women don’t feel the need to profess as much). We have to take seriously the duty to love ourselves.

So perhaps a slight revision of the title is in order: “A Black Woman Loving Herself is a Revolutionary Act.”



uriahb



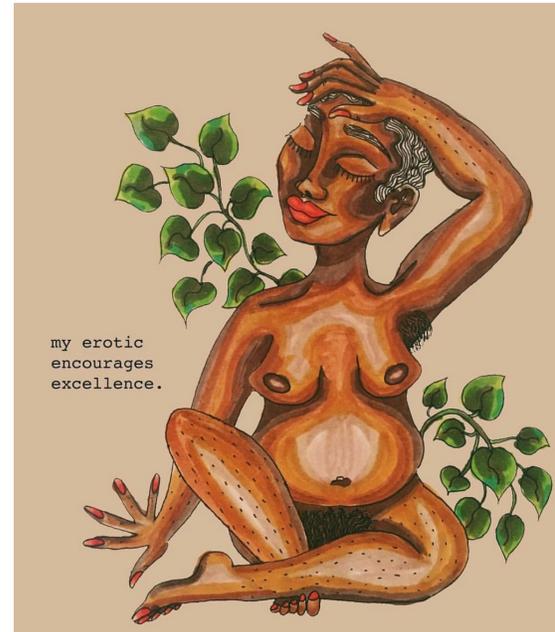
“*There is a fetishization of Black womanhood that is currently rampant in digital spaces.*”

by Dr. Rónké Òké (West Chester University)

BLACK WOMXN RESPOND

I kept returning to the exchange between the Black womxn and the Black mxn. I struggled to understand their innocence and the perversion of their exchange. I found myself entranced by the silence that hung in the air as Malaka paused, allowing his “compliment” to sink in. I imagined that suspended in that moment of tenderness was an ambiguity that provoked the question to arise in her: *am I loved only because I am a Black womxn or am I loved “in spite” of being a Black womxn?* Even in the tenderness of the erotic the Black womxn still arises as a question to herself, replacing the pleasure she derives from the moment—the ability to be fully naked before her partner—with layers of insecurities.

The ambiguity of the situation is matched only by the ambiguity of the answer. It is both (and not) the case that, as Black womxn, we would (or should) prefer either a love that is dependent on us remaining Black womxn or *in spite* of this fact. If loving a Black womxn is truly a revolutionary act, the act it revolutionizes is not the ontology of Black womxn but the *loving act* itself. Loving a Black womxn causes us to confront the fact that love is not a consensual act but a political one. If we only love Black womxn “in spite,” we do we not actual love *in hate*? We love Black womxn *in spite* (in hate) of a world that treats us as pure abject and values our bodies only when its mosaic features are reconfigured onto another body. We hate the world that creates the Black womxn *in spite* of Black womxn. We love Black womxn with the knowledge that loving us is an act of resistance—resistance to our presumed unlovability, resistance to an outer shell, thickened by a lifetime of resistance, self-sufficiency and unlovability. We even love ourselves as resistance. Without an allusion to resistance, could the Black womxn be loved? What does love mean when it is conceived as hate? And finally could Black womxn be loved even if we are not magical, subversive, radical --- *exhausted* and *vulnerable* (keep in mind we meet Malaka in bed in a tender moment)?



by Angelica Andrews

When first reading this piece, I found myself annoyed. I wondered, “Why is loving a Black womxn seen as revolutionary?” It should already be seen as the normal. Especially from Black men. However, I am well aware that is not and has not been the norm. We have not been loved. Not by our community, not by the world, sometimes not even by ourselves. Black womxn have had to consciously reaffirm ideas for ourselves because the world tells us in every way that we are not human—that we do not contain souls. We have tried learning to love ourselves through social movements like #BlackGirlMagic. We have found that our souls shine bright. Our souls display themselves in our hair, in our clothing, in our laughter, in our complexions, in our love. I see us working to embrace all of it for what it is. Unfortunately, this is a slow process considering we experience almost every -ism there is: racism, classism, sexism, etc. In our communities we are expected to carry the world on our back and always put on a strong face. In fact, I recall attending a seminar on the topic of Black womxn and stress. The speaker informed me that heart disease is the number one killer of Black womxn in the United States. With all that we do I don’t think loving us should be classified as “revolutionary”. To see Black womxn as having souls, expressing an emotion other than anger or bitterness seems like a new concept to so many. No one should feel like they are engaging in a new or special act. It should be seen as necessary. We deserve the same love we give to others. Some may find it daring or exciting to “love” a Black woman, I still find it irritating.

by Kayla Rucker

Although the *Adventures from the Bedrooms of African Women* article, “**Loving a Black Woman is a Revolutionary Act**,” depicts a heterosexual couple, there are still Black womxn to be loved in queer relationships and it is just as revolutionary. Lesbianism recognizes the concept of lesbian continuum, which groups platonic and sexual relationships between womxn together to redefine lesbian relationships. I could argue that an ethical lesbian relationship among Black womxn is the most revolutionary relationship of them all. In a culture that has internalized the racism of the outside world, some Black womxn succumb to the pressures of anti-blackness and eurocentric standards, motivating them to seek salvation in their proximity to whiteness. Some Black womxn are only familiar with the pseudo pride derived from degrading other Black womxn. Regardless of their momentary sense of “comfort,” these womxn will continue to search for the Erotic and never find it until they realize that they must live from within outward. In regard to living life in touch with the erotic within ourselves, Lorde writes in *The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power* that as we begin to allow “that power to inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us...we begin to recognize our deepest feelings, we begin to give up...being satisfied with suffering and self-negation...Our acts against oppression become integral with self, motivated and empowered from within. (Lorde 58)” It is through the use of the Erotic as their lens that these womxn will revolutionize the way in which they view themselves and all Black womxn. Only then, can they relinquish the internalized hate and secondhand pain to learn how to treat all Black womxn with the shared joy, love and respect we deserve. To be in touch with the Erotic is to feel empowered in the face of an anti-Erotic society.

BLACK WOMXN RESPOND

“*There are still Black womxn to be loved in queer relationships and it is just as revolutionary.*”

by Junika Hawker-Thompson

Black people have been socialized to believe that we are undeserving of love. In Mia McKenzie’s “Love, QPOC style,” she states,

As POC, we are taught by the people in power in this world that we are less, and are therefore less deserving of things like freedom and justice, education and employment, respect of our minds and consideration of our bodies, and, surely, the best thing of all—love.

Not until recently have I considered what it takes to truly love another Black person. In all relationships, not just romantic/sexual, have I become more intentional about my engagement with other Black people. I am now understanding what it means to see another Black person, to consider their full humanity. I have only recently been able to take the steps to become a better lover because I am now understanding and truly seeing myself. The act of loving a person with the compounding identities of Black and Womxn is indeed a revolutionary act. To extend pure love to another person, you first have to extend pure love and compassion to yourself. As a Black person, to extend love to another Black person is to see the humanness and worth within yourself. If we are unable to confront the ways in which oppressive power structures have convinced us that we are not worthy of functioning as full humans, all of what we do will be tainted by what we are taught by mainstream society. The idea that we are able to establish the concept of “Black love” is radical because we are taught that we do not have the capability to embody love and tenderness.



The erotic is not one thing.

The erotic is fluid, powerful.

Rediscover your secret joy.

Erotic(a)

UPCOMING EVENTS

MARCH 2019

ISSUE 02:
[UNGENDERING
GENDER]

APRIL 2019

"THE BLK WOMXN
COLLECTIVE PRESENTS...

**AFRO-FEMINISM
(A WORKSHOP)**

MONDAY APRIL 8, 2019
ANDERSON HALL 211
6:00PM - 8:00PM

PHI 201: Contemporary Issues

♡ Racing the Student Body ♡

Taught by Dr. Rónké Òké (MW 3-4:15pm)

This course treats "college student" as an identity category and explores how this identity is formed over a 4-year span. We will closely examine the Student-University relationship from multiple aspects, including whether the racial makeup of a college campus impacts a student's college experience.

Course themes: "institutional responsibility and critique," "social and civic campus engagement," "diversity initiatives," "conceptions of the student body," and "effective pedagogy."

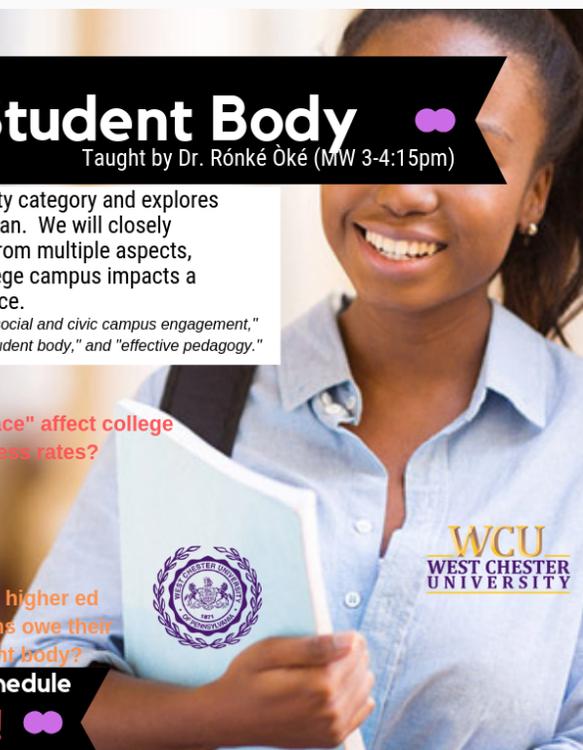
How does racial/gender bias affect SRIS scores? How does "race" affect college success rates?

Is WCU a "white space"?

As a student, what does my tuition "entitle" me to? What do higher ed institutions owe their student body?

Add this course to your Fall 2019 schedule

♡ REGISTER TODAY! ♡



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