

Analysis of zami a new spelling of my name: struggles of living with stigma

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In a *Zami a New Spelling Of My Name*, Audre Lorde is not only the author but also the main character in the novel. Lorde finds herself in a very difficult situation since she's not only an Afro-Latinx but also a non-heterosexual growing up in America in the 1940s. In the above-mentioned passage, Lorde narrates her challenges as a non-heterosexual female in New York in the 1950s. At the time, the American culture defined femininity as submissiveness and anyone who would not conform to this standard would be deemed as "butch" or masculine. She mentions going into the Bag, which is intended to be taken literal as it is the name of the club she enters to; however, Lorde is also alluding to society as a whole and the journey she is about to embark as a biracial woman. As a light-skinned Afro-Latinx, she was not necessarily identified as a Black woman but she was not white either; this caused her to be puzzled as she did not fit any side of the spectrum.

In the Bag, her cultural intersectionality made her reflect not only on the dilemma her skin colour brought, but also on the preconceptions and prejudice within the community. At the same time, Lorde briefly acknowledges her own prejudice and preconceived notions of the society around her. The statement "a much-too-open piece of myself" along with her previous statement of her own Blackness being mirrored, gives the reader some insight as to her realization that she might have internalized societal views and she is now projecting that internalized fear, prejudice and preconceptions onto others. This adds to her insecurity as she attempts to navigate a world that does not welcome non-whites and a non-heterosexual world that has its own set of standards. She sees herself as weak and

vulnerable; compared to her, everyone else was “ tough in a way [she] felt [she] could never be.”(224) At the time, were held to high beauty standards and these were defined by whites.

Beauty and whiteness went hand in hand; anything aside from it was not beautiful. Based on the beauty standards of the time, femininity & submissiveness were two desirable qualities in a woman; however, these attributes were not usually attached to non-white women. Since non-whites did not possess these desirable attributes, so the only option left for non-heterosexual women was to be the other side of the spectrum: butch. As a result, non-heterosexual Black women did not even attempt to be feminine and saw themselves forced to comply with the attributes desired of them. In the Bag, women who attempted to fall out of the set standards of femininity had to chance of finding a date. In the sentence, “ there was constant competition among butches to have the most ‘ gorgeous femme’ on their arm,” Lorde expresses the pressure women underwent in order to find someone to date(224). This was only really benefiting the Bag, if they could get butch women to bring new femme women then they would most likely come back to the Bag and bring their other white femme woman. This just reinforces the stigma society has already made for these women. It was just assumed that non-white woman had “ very little chance in the bag” and no one really challenged this(224). And if you were to challenge this the outcome would be you were out of the Bag.

Men have more access to economic and political influence, they do not necessarily need to show how masculine they are to prove a point. Unlike

women who always have to prove a point, whether it is to their family, friends, or even society. Currently, in America, there is over 79 percent of white males in the House and 90 percent in the Senate this number has changed slightly since the 1950's but certainly not enough. Since the majority of the political choice's in America are made up from the white males in our society they are the ones setting the " standards". Controlling what our society should define one another as feminine or masculine, and this is exactly why Lorde shares this with her readers. In many ways, she was being sucked into what these white males were labeling non-heterosexual women.

The significance of this passage is to understand the challenges Lorde still faced being an Afro-Latinx as well as a non-heterosexual woman. Lorde acknowledges that she is her own enemy, as she says a " much-too-open piece of myself" but society has also led her to that path. From the encounter she has with women in the Bag; white and non-white, as well as the male perspectives. Lorde is still unsure what side of the spectrum she would fit into, but is aware of who defines these standards.