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Echoes of Resistance: Black Feminist Agency and Intersectional Solidarity in Stockett's *The Help* and Taylor's Adaptation

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Abstract

This article aims to investigate the interconnected narratives of race, gender, and class in Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* (2009) and its film adaptation by Tate Taylor (2011), through the lens of Black Feminism. Utilizing Bell Hooks' framework, the analysis highlights the complexities of intersectionality that shape the experiences of Black women in the Jim Crow South in the 1960s. By exploring Stockett's depiction of domestic workers and their interactions with white families, this study reveals the dynamics of power and resistance present in their stories. Additionally, it assesses Taylor's adaptation, analyzing how cinematic choices either support or challenge the themes of the original text. The research suggests that both Stockett's literary work and Taylor's film serve as cultural artifacts that reflect and critique societal norms related to race and gender. This research contributes to discussions on Black Feminism by emphasizing the importance of narrative agency and collective memory in shaping the identities of marginalized women. The findings underscore the necessity for a nuanced understanding of Black women's experiences in both historical and contemporary contexts, advocating for a more inclusive feminist dialogue that recognizes their voices. In conclusion, this study calls for ongoing engagement with these narratives to foster an appreciation for the complexities of identity and representation.

Keywords: Black Feminism, Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* (2009), Tate Taylor's *The Help* (2011), Empowerment, Agency, Race, Gender

Introduction

The concept of Black feminism arose during the 1960s and 1970s. Collins (2000) asserts that the emergence of Black feminism can be understood as a deliberate reaction to the constraints and marginalization faced by Black women within conventional feminist movements, this



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distinct theoretical framework was developed to specifically address the complex interplay of race, gender, and class that shapes the lived realities of Black women. Hooks (1984) notes that many prominent white feminists in feminist discourse overlook the importance of white supremacy in racial politics, some of these individuals have been hesitant to recognize their complicity in the oppression of women of color.

This study critically analyses and compares two works: Kathryn Stockett's novel *The Help* (2009) and its film adaptation (2011) directed by Tate Taylor, from a feminist standpoint, both the original text and its cinematic portrayal delve into the narratives of African American maid women within the framework of societies predominantly controlled by white and Black males, the focus is specifically on the struggles encountered by Black maid women in the 1960s and the obstacles they confronted while under the control of individuals in positions of authority. This article is made of five basic sections, the first section explores empowerment and agency through Black feminist perspectives in the lives of Aibileen and Minny. The discussion in the second section elaborates on the confluence of race, gender, and power in the journey of Aibileen and Minny, the third section scrutinizes Black liberation examining the resilience and strength of Black women. The fourth section deliberates on building solidarity and community within the power of sisterhood, and the fifth section investigates Black feminist strategies for liberation. In a context marked by persistent oppression and racial inequity, the narratives of Black women often illuminate the complexity of their experiences and the diverse aspects of their resistance.

Tate Taylor directs Stockett's novel *The Help*, which centers on the struggles of African American maids in 1960s Jackson, Mississippi. Utilizing Black feminist theory, both the novel and the film clarify the complex interplay of race, class, and gender, illustrating how these women maneuver through hostile situations while asserting their agency and humanity. This inquiry leads us to perceive freedom as an ongoing process that includes resilience and solidarity rather than a final objective. The primary theme of *The Help* is the connection between the black maids and the white women they serve, presenting as a microcosm of broader societal tensions.

The narrative occurs during the Civil Rights Movement, illustrating the ugly facts of discrimination and segregation. Instead of portraying these women as victims, Stockett's work stresses their strength, intelligence, and capacity for resistance. The characters defy the established order via both subtle and overt acts of revolt, revealing a complex narrative of sisterhood and collective empowerment. This image reflects Black feminist principles, which promote the inclusion of Black women's opinions and experiences in discussions about liberation. Tate Taylor's adaptation renders these issues more accessible to a broader audience while also highlighting significant considerations about portrayal and authenticity.



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The film retains several significant ideas from the novel, but has faced criticism for its presentation of race relations and for possibly eclipsing the tales of Black women in favor of a more mainstream, audience-friendly viewpoint. This issue requires a thorough examination of how adaptations can improve and complicate the narrative they aim to convey. Examining Stockett's text and Taylor's film via a Black feminist perspective exposes the complexities of resistance and empowerment that characterize the liberation fight in *The Help*.

Between the Pages and the Screen: Reimagining Empowerment and Agency Through Black Feminist Perspectives in the Lives of Aibileen and Minny

The 1960s, a period characterized by severe racial segregation and inequality, strongly illustrates the independence and empowerment of Black feminist perspectives. The narrative emphasizes the experiences of African American domestic workers, who frequently feel abused and marginalized by their white employers. A central theme of the novel is the struggle to strengthen African American women in adversity. The two protagonists, Aibileen and Minny, serve as maids in white households, enduring daily discrimination and abuse, however, their voices are ultimately amplified through their friendship with Skeeter, a young white woman who embarks on a project to document the injustices faced by these women (Edwards, 2012, p. 75). This collaboration illustrates the potential for cross-racial solidarity and highlights the importance of storytelling as a means of resistance.

Black feminist discourses on agency and empowerment emphasize self-determination and resistance in the context of oppressive structures. By choosing to share their stories, Aibileen and Minny exercise their agency, thereby challenging the cultural norms of their time. Their actions represent a powerful assertion of identity and autonomy against a backdrop of systemic racism and sexism, moreover, both the novel and its film adaptation explore how intersectionality frames the experiences of African American women (Hooks, 1981, p. 9). Aibileen and Minny not only confront racism from white employers but also face sexism within their communities, where Black men often hold power and privilege over Black women, this intersectional analysis elucidates the complex ways in which race, gender, and class converge to shape the lives of African American women (Alinia, 2015, p. 2335). By examining these intersecting oppressions, *The Help* offers a nuanced portrayal of the multifaceted struggles faced by its characters.

In Stockett's novel *The Help* (2009), protagonist Aibileen Clark exemplifies an effort for agency within a racially stratified society. Aibileen, a Black maid working for a white family, navigates the complexities of her role while nurturing the children she cares for. Her poignant reflections on motherhood and loss illustrate a sense of responsibility and resilience, as she states, "I can't even remember how many babies I've taken care of" (Stockett, 2009, p. 7). This acknowledgment of her effort emphasizes the emotional toll of her situation, but it also acts as a foundation for her eventual empowerment. Aibileen's decision to engage in Skeeter's book project is a watershed moment, as she begins to reclaim her story and speak out against



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systematic oppression (Stockett, 2009, p. 118).

Minny Jackson, another major character, offers a distinct but complementary take on agency and empowerment. Minny, known for her culinary abilities and staunch independence, first struggles with the coercive dynamics imposed by her abusive spouse, as well as the racial inequalities inherent in her workplace. Minny's friendship with Miss Celia Foote becomes a critical site of resistance, as she discovers a place where she can freely express herself and be appreciated for her efforts. Minny declares, "I'm not nobody's maid" (Stockett, 2009, p. 169), indicating her rejection to be defined merely by her job and emphasizing her desire for dignity and respect in both personal and professional settings.

The character of Skeeter Phelan serves as a conduit for the voices of Aibileen and Minny, but her position as a white woman complicates her role in the story. Skeeter's intentions to document the experiences of Black maids reflect a desire for social change; however, they also risk perpetuating a savior complex that undermines the agency of those she seeks to represent. Her journey from naivety to awareness is marked by critical moments of realization about her privilege and the consequences of her actions. For instance, when she states, "I want to write something that matters" (Stockett, 2009, p. 5), it highlights her initial lack of understanding regarding the implications of her project on the lives of Aibileen and Minny. As Skeeter grapples with these complexities, her character arc ultimately raises questions about allyship and accountability within the framework of Black feminist discourse.

Tate Taylor's (2011) adaptation of the book discusses these concepts through the cinematic narrative that underscores the emotional labor of Black maids. The cinematography captures intimate moments between Aibileen and the children she cares for, reinforcing the depth of their relationships. In one poignant scene, Aibileen's gentle guidance of Mae Mobley illustrates not only her nurturing spirit but also her struggle against systemic forces that devalue her existence. Mae Mobley leans back and repeats Aibileen's words. "Mae Mobley, you is smart you is kind you is important. [Aibileen hugs Mae Mobley]" (Taylor, 2011, 01:19:46). The film's portrayal of these dynamics serves to highlight the importance of visibility in narratives surrounding marginalized voices, aligning with Black feminist perspectives that advocate for self-representation and empowerment.

Moreover, Minny's character is further developed in the film through her interactions with Miss Celia Foote. The visual medium allows for a more nuanced exploration of their relationship, showcasing moments of vulnerability that deepen their bond. In scenes where Minny teaches Celia to cook "Minny, you gots plenty more to be grateful for than me, [...] he wondering how the cookin's [sic] so good? Celia Foote, you're right maybe we ought to burn the chicken a little" (Taylor, 2011, 01:07:13).

Minny lowers her piece of chicken and looks or shares personal anecdotes about her life, and



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Celia also shares a personal thing about her life with Minny, Celia “I’m pregnant now, Minny steps back and surveys Celia. Minny gone be eatin’ [sic] for two, double the cookin’” (Taylor, 2011, p. 59). The film illustrates how these exchanges foster a sense of mutual respect and understanding. This portrayal underscores the potential for solidarity across racial lines while simultaneously acknowledging the complexities inherent in such relationships. This section functions as a preface to the ensuing analysis, which will explore the intricate interplay of race, gender, and power in the journeys of Minny and Aibileen.

Intersecting Shadows: The Confluence of Race, Gender, and Power in Minny and Aibileen’s Journey

In Stockett’s *The Help*, characters like Minny and Aibileen navigate through layers of intersectional oppression related to race, gender, and power dynamics. Collins (2000) says that the Black maids, working for white families in Jackson, Mississippi, at the height of the civil rights struggle, experience systemic discrimination and marginalization, the most critical aspect of their oppression is race (p. 19). As African American women living in a segregated South, they encounter systemic racism in their everyday lives, they internalize feelings of inferiority compared to their white employers, who treat them with degrading attitudes rooted in racial prejudice, this societal structure confines them to conservative social norms and limits their access to better opportunities solely based on the color of their skin (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 149).

Gender also serves as a significant instrument of oppression for Minny and Aibileen. As women, they are expected to fulfill traditional gender roles, including caregiving within the household. However, as maids in white homes, they are subject to the whims of their employers, which strips them of autonomy (Davis, 1981, p. 9). They often endure mistreatment and abuse from employers who view them as expendable objects rather than fellow human beings deserving of respect and dignity, these intersecting oppressions are exacerbated by the power dynamics at play; their white employers wield social, economic, and racial power over them, rendering Minny and Aibileen vulnerable and powerless in their roles as maids (Lorde, 1984, p. 110). Despite facing overwhelming odds in their struggles, Minny and Aibileen exhibit remarkable strength, resilience, and resourcefulness in navigating their intersecting oppressions, they develop camaraderie with other maids and marginalized community members who share similar challenges, finding solace in one another (Johnson & Cervero, 2004, p. 17).

Their actions reflect a form of resistance that challenges the status quo; they reclaim aspects of their humanity from dehumanizing oppression in *The Help*, Stockett accomplishes something extraordinary by illuminating the intersecting oppressions that African American women faced in the Jim Crow South. She underscores how issues of race, gender, and power intricately configure lived experiences of oppression (Hooks, 1981, p. 67). Through Minny and Aibileen’s narratives, Stockett invites readers to consider the enduring legacy of systemic discrimination



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and the transformative potential inherent in acts of solidarity and resistance against injustice (Davis, 1983, p. 117).

Minny's assertion, "Ugly live up on the inside. Ugly be a hurtful, mean person" (Stockett, 2009, p. 64), articulates a profound critique of societal beauty standards that disproportionately affect Black women. By distinguishing between external appearance and internal character, Minny reclaims her agency against the oppressive narratives that define her worth based on physical traits. This statement challenges the racist and sexist ideologies that have historically marginalized Black women, suggesting that true ugliness is rooted in malice rather than appearance. Minny's perspective serves as a form of resistance against the dehumanizing stereotypes imposed upon her, highlighting the importance of inner strength and moral integrity as measures of true beauty.

The quote from Mrs. Walters, "I may not remember my name or what country I live in, but you and that pie is something I will never forget" (Stockett, 2009, p. 300), illustrates a moment of unexpected connection between racial groups, this statement underscores the potential for shared humanity to transcend entrenched racial divisions, as it reflects a moment of recognition and appreciation for Minny's culinary skills. The pie becomes a symbol of common ground that fosters empathy, suggesting that even amid systemic oppression, there exists a possibility for relational understanding. This connection serves as a counter-narrative to the prevailing racism of the era, demonstrating how personal interactions can challenge societal barriers (Hooks, 2000, p. 134).

In the film adaptation, Minny's defiant declaration, "No ma'am. But you about to cause you just did. Hilly did what?" (Taylor, 2011, 01:39:01). captures her resistance against Hilly's oppressive authority. This quote emerges during a pivotal confrontation where Minny asserts her dignity in the face of intimidation the line encapsulates the tension between the characters and highlights Minny's refusal to be subjugated. Her defiance reflects broader themes of empowerment among Black women, emphasizing their resilience in navigating oppressive power dynamics.

Aibileen's question, "What if you don't like what I've got to say?" (Taylor, 2011, 00:42:12). reveals her anxieties regarding vulnerability and recognition within the context of her racial and gendered oppression. This quote occurs during her dialogue with Skeeter as they discuss Aibileen's story. Aibileen's fear highlights the difficulties Black women confront while attempting to express their experiences in a society that frequently silences their voices. Her investigation reflects a larger concern about being misunderstood or disregarded, underscoring the significance of honest depiction in narratives about underrepresented communities. (Hooks, 2000, page 19).

Skeeter's realization: "This isn't about me" (Taylor, 2011, 00:44:25). represents a significant



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moment of self-awareness about her involvement in chronicling the lives of Black maids. The observation demonstrates Skeeter's transformation from self-interest to a recognition of her responsibility to elevate the voices of those historically marginalized. Skeeter demonstrates a growing awareness of racism and privilege by recognizing the interconnected nature of her narrative with those of Aibileen and Minny. The incident is a pivotal moment in the narrative, illustrating the challenges of allyship and the value of real involvement with the narratives of marginalized people. This analysis will contain a planned section that will scrutinize themes of emancipation as well as manifestations of perseverance and strength among Black women in both the novel and the movie.

Crafting Liberation: The Ingenious Designs of Black Women's Resilience and Strength in the Novel and Adaptation

Throughout *The Help*, Stockett navigates the complexities of race, gender, and power dynamics, inviting critical engagement with the representation of Black women's experiences. While the narrative has faced critiques regarding its portrayal of race relations and the dynamics of privilege, it nonetheless serves as a crucial reminder of the power inherent in the stories of marginalized voices, by examining Aibileen and Minny's journeys through the lens of resilience and strength, readers are encouraged to reflect on the ongoing struggles for social justice and the multifaceted nature of liberation (Collins, 2000, p. 221). The characters' resilience not only challenges oppressive systems but also paves the way for future generations to continue advocating for their rights and dignity in an ever-evolving socio-political landscape, this theme of intergenerational struggle is vital, as it emphasizes that the fight for justice is not solely an individual endeavor but a collective one that builds upon the efforts of those who came before (Hooks, 1995, p. 85).

In this context, the act of storytelling becomes a powerful mechanism for empowerment. Aibileen and Minny's decision to share their narratives highlights the significance of voice in reclaiming agency and confronting systemic injustices, this aligns with the notion that narratives can serve as tools for resistance, enabling marginalized individuals to assert their identity and challenge dominant discourses (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244). Ultimately, Stockett's work invites readers to critically engage with both the triumphs and shortcomings of its characters' journeys. By foregrounding their stories, *The Help* challenges prevailing narratives that often silence or misrepresent Black women's experiences, encouraging an understanding of their resilience and the complexities of their realities (Davis, 1983, pp. 15-17).

In this quotation, Aibileen's strength is demonstrated by her capacity to accept love and connection despite her sadness. When Mae Mobley says, "Hi, Aibee[sic]. I love you, Aibee[sic] and I feel a tickly feeling, soft like the flap a butterfly wings, watching her play out there. The way I used to feel watching Treelore. And that makes me kind a sad, memoring[sic]" (Stockett, 2009, p. 89), emphasizes the link they have created and Aibileen's nurturing personality. The quote "flap a butterfly" represents the delight and warmth she experiences from this



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relationship, demonstrating her ability to offer and receive love. Despite her sadness, she continues to offer her heart to another kid, demonstrating her courage in going forward while remembering her past. This paradox exemplifies Aibileen's character she represents strength via her ability to love passionately, care for others, and confront her grief, making her a powerful symbol of resilience in the face of adversity.

Minny Jackson's assertion, "We ain't [sic] doing civil rights here. We just telling stories like they really happened" (Stockett, 2009, p. 181), underscores the transformative power of storytelling as a form of resistance, by framing their narratives as authentic accounts of lived experiences, Minny and Aibileen reclaim their voices and redefine their identities beyond the stereotypes imposed upon them. This statement emphasizes the significance of truth-telling as a means to challenge dominant narratives that have historically marginalized Black women. The act of sharing their stories allows them to assert their humanity and agency, fostering understanding and solidarity in the struggle for equality. Minny's declaration reflects a broader cultural movement where Black women actively participate in reshaping their narratives and asserting their rightful place within society.

In Tate Taylor's film adaptation, Minny's declaration, "Minny, you a fool. You done went and did it now" (Taylor, 2011, 01:02:30), encapsulates her act of defiance against Hilly Holbrook's racism through subversive humor, by serving Hilly a pie containing her excrement, Minny employs a shocking yet potent form of resistance that challenges the power dynamics inherent in her employment, this act not only symbolizes her rejection of Hilly's oppressive behavior but also illustrates Minny's cleverness and resourcefulness in navigating a hostile environment, such acts of rebellion reflect the broader theme of resistance found throughout *The Help*, emphasizing how marginalized individuals can assert their agency through unexpected means. Minny's tough love advice to Skeeter "You ain't [sic] got nothing left here but enemies in the Junior League. You done burned every bridge there is" (Taylor, 2011, 01:42:00) demonstrates her pragmatic approach to adversity. Encouraging Skeeter to pursue her dreams despite societal backlash reflects Minny's desire to see not only herself but also others succeed in their endeavors. This quote highlights Minny's resilience and strength as she navigates her struggles while simultaneously uplifting those around her. By recognizing the importance of ambition and self-advocacy, Minny embodies the spirit of empowerment that resonates throughout the narrative.

Aibileen's statement, "I know something about you. Don't you forget that" (Taylor, 2011, 01:46:15), exemplifies her quiet defiance against Hilly Holbrook's racism and manipulation. By asserting her knowledge and willingness to speak out, Aibileen leverages her position to hold Hilly accountable for her actions, this moment not only illustrates Aibileen's strength but also underscores the importance of using one's voice as a means of resistance against systemic oppression, her resolve to confront Hilly signifies a pivotal moment of empowerment that reinforces the theme of agency among Black women in the narrative. This analysis will



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incorporate a forthcoming section that examines the construction of solidarity and community, emphasizing the transformative power of sisterhood in overcoming adversity.

Building Solidarity and Community: The Power of Sisterhood in Overcoming Adversity

The Help novel thrives on important concepts of sisterhood and female bonding, this work revolves around Black maids working in white households and explores how they form bonds of sisterhood while navigating the racial tensions of their society, the narrative highlights the significance of solidarity among women in the face of systemic oppression. One of the most poignant examples of sisterhood in the novel is the developing bond between Aibileen, Minny, and Skeeter, coming from very diverse backgrounds, these three women are united by their shared experiences of bigotry and oppression, they draw strength and support from one another to combat the adversities they face.

As Collins (2007) “The intersections of race and gender create unique challenges that require solidarity among women to address systemic injustices” (p. 45). In a society marred by racism and sexism, the women of *The Help* discover that collectively they are stronger than they are individually, they unite as a supportive community, defending one another and opposing the prejudiced power structures that stand in their way, through acts of resistance such as sharing their collective stories in Skeeter’s book project the women reveal to the audience what a coalition of solidarity looks like.

As Hooks (2000) argues, “Sisterhood is not just a bond; it is a political act that challenges the structures of oppression” (p. 89). Furthermore, sisterhood contributes to the empowerment of female characters in the book, by uniting in their fight for rights and demanding respect and dignity, they find agency and autonomy in their work as maids an autonomy that is often denied to them, sisterhood enables them to challenge the status quo and effect real change in their lives and within their community, according to Crenshaw (1991), “The collective experiences of marginalized women highlight the necessity of intersectional approaches to understanding empowerment” (p. 124).

The Help is thus a magnificent testament to the tenacity and strength of women and how sisterhood can transform societal norms for the better, each woman in the novel faces injustices that threaten to break them apart; however, they ultimately emerge empowered, the narrative challenges readers to build community and stand together in the struggle for justice and equality, as Lorde (1984) states, “It is not our differences that divide us; it is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences” (p. 53). The quotes from the novel and the movie serve as critical reflections on the lived experiences of Black female characters, illustrating their navigation through systemic oppression via agency, truth-telling, and mass resistance.

Minny’s statement, “That’s what I love about Aibileen, she can take the most complicated



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things in life and wrap them up so small and simple, they'll fit right in your pocket" (Stockett, 2009, p. 283). This quote reflects Minny's admiration for Aibileen's ability to simplify complex social issues, Aibileen's storytelling serves as a means of fostering understanding and empathy among women, by distilling intricate problems into relatable wisdom, she creates a space for dialogue and connection, her highlights how storytelling can be a powerful tool for building unity and support among marginalized individuals.

Skeeter came to the realization, "Wasn't that the point of the book? For women to realize, we are just two people. Not that much separates us. Not nearly as much as I'd thought" (Stockett, 2009, p. 378). In Chapter Thirty-Three, Skeeter's remark illustrates her awareness of the shared humanity inherent in all individuals, despite their differences. She accepts that societal obstacles, like race, gender, and position, can foster a sense of division. Skeeter underscores the notion that fundamentally, individuals have analogous emotions, challenges, and desires by stating, "We are just two people" This insight is pertinent considering the book's themes of racism and social injustice. Skeeter's revelation suggests that comprehension and kindness can close divides, encouraging readers to emphasize shared experiences over contrasts. It is an appeal to transcend cultural limitations and establish connections that cross those barriers. The appreciation of common humanity is crucial for deconstructing systemic obstacles and fostering common emancipation (Hooks, 2000, p. 135).

From the movie "We all gonna die, we don't Get to Choose the Color of Our Skin" (Taylor, 2011, 00:46:55). This quote addresses the universal struggle against racism and discrimination, highlighting shared adversity that can unite women across different backgrounds. By emphasizing mortality as a common experience, it serves as a reminder that systemic injustices affect all individuals, encouraging solidarity in the fight for equality "We can't afford to lose Aibileen. If we lose Aibileen, we lose the whole" (Taylor, 2011, 01:05:20). This statement underscores the significance of each individual's contributions to the collective struggle for justice, it illustrates how sisterhood involves recognizing and valuing each person's worth within the larger context of activism, the loss of Aibileen symbolizes a potential setback in their fight for equality, emphasizing the necessity of unity and support.

Skeeter's mother assertion "Courage sometimes skips a generation. Thank you for bringing it back to our family" (Taylor, 2011, 01:28:45). This quote beautifully encapsulates intergenerational solidarity, suggesting that resilience and bravery can be inherited. It highlights how sisterhood extends beyond contemporary struggles to include the legacy of strength passed down through generations. This connection fosters a sense of continuity and empowerment among women. "All my life I've been told what to believe, what to think. And I'm tired of it. Ain't [sic] it time to change things?" (Taylor, 2011, 01:48:30). This declaration marks a pivotal moment in self-advocacy and empowerment. It signifies a collective desire for change among women who challenge societal norms together. The quote captures the transformative potential of sisterhood as a catalyst for personal and social change, emphasizing



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the importance of standing up against oppression.

Standing of sisterhood as a source of strength, resilience, and empowerment. They illustrate how shared experiences and mutual support help women navigate adversity, fostering a sense of community that transcends individual struggles, through their stories and actions, both in the novel and film, the characters demonstrate that solidarity is essential for effecting meaningful change in a divided society. In essence, these quotes encapsulate the intricate dynamics of agency, truth-telling, and mass resistance among Black female characters in *The Help*, each moment serves as a testament to their resilience and the profound impact of solidarity in navigating systemic oppression, through their collective actions and shared narratives, they forge a path toward empowerment and social change, illuminating the transformative potential inherent in community solidarity (Hooks, 2000, p. 45). This explanation will include a forthcoming section that explores identity and autonomy, focusing on Black feminist strategies for liberation.

Reclaiming Identity and Autonomy: Black Feminist Strategies for Liberation

As Aibileen and Minny forge a bond rooted in shared experiences of hardship, their relationship becomes emblematic of the solidarity that is crucial for resistance against oppression. This sisterhood enables them to develop strategies for survival that transcend mere endurance; they actively resist the dehumanization imposed upon them, Aibileen's decision to share her stories with Skeeter not only serves as a means of personal empowerment but also catalyzes a broader dialogue about the realities of Black domestic workers, this act of storytelling becomes a radical form of reclamation, allowing Aibileen to assert her identity in a world that seeks to define her solely by her servitude (Gates, 2011, p. 45).

Minny's character further illustrates the theme of defiance against oppressive structures through her refusal to accept abuse from her employers. Her actions serve as a microcosm of resistance that challenges the dominant narrative surrounding Black womanhood, by employing wit and courage, she not only reclaims her autonomy but also asserts her right to dignity and respect, this defiance is crucial in dismantling the stereotypes that confine Black women to submissive roles, thereby contributing to a collective consciousness that recognizes their inherent worth (Hooks, 2000, p. 64).

The adaptation of *The Help* into film amplifies these themes while simultaneously complicating them, while the film retains the core narrative of solidarity and resistance, it also risks oversimplifying the complexities of race relations by centering the white perspective of Skeeter, this shift raises critical questions about narrative ownership and representation within the context of Black feminist discourse, the portrayal of Aibileen and Minny's struggles is at times overshadowed by Skeeter's journey, which can lead to a dilution of the authentic voices that should be at the forefront of this narrative (Paugh, 2004, p. 98).

These quotes from *The Help* both the novel and the film powerfully illustrate the Black feminist



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strategies employed by the characters to reclaim their identities and assert their autonomy in a racially oppressive society. From the novel “I want to yell so loud that Baby Girl can hear me that dirty ain’t a color, disease ain’t [sic] the Negro side of town. I want to stop that moment from coming and it come in every white child’s life when they start to think that colored folks are not as good as whites” (Stockett, 2009, p. 93). This quote encapsulates the protagonist’s profound desire to challenge societal racism and empower Black children to recognize their worth.

From the movie “You is kind. You is smart. You is important” (Taylor, 2011, 00:10:25). Aibileen’s affirmation serves as a powerful reminder of self-worth, this reputation is for herself to be stronger countering the devaluation of Black women in society. Skeeter acknowledges the strength of Black women, appreciating their resilience in the face of oppression, this recognition fosters solidarity and empowerment. “I’m gonna write me a book about what it’s like to work for white folks, and it is a best-seller” (Taylor, 2011, 00:45:10).

Aibileen’s ambition to reclaim her narrative challenges dominant discourses that silence Black voices, asserting her agency through storytelling “I want to interview you. Write your stories down” (Taylor, 2011, 01:16:55). Skeeter’s initiative to document the experiences of Black women signifies an effort to restore their voices and agency, emphasizing the importance of representation. “You are beautiful, you are important, you are special” (Taylor, 2011, 01:48:20). Skeeter’s acknowledgment reinforces the dignity of Black women, counteracting societal degradation and fostering a sense of worth (Hooks, 1981, p. 9).

Minnie’s encouragement “Can’t nobody hold a candle to your worth” (Taylor, 2011, 02:02:15). highlights the strength of Black women, affirming their resilience and reclaiming their identities from societal devaluation. “I refuse to go along with the lies they tell about us. I’m gonna tell my own story” (Taylor, 2011, 00:02:12). Aibileen’s declaration reflects her determination to confront false narratives about her community, reclaiming her truth and asserting her identity. These quotes from both the novel and film illuminate how the characters navigate the intersections of race, gender, and power. They employ various Black feminist strategies such as storytelling, affirmation, and resistance to reclaim their identities and assert their autonomy. These narratives represent crucial steps toward liberation, highlighting the importance of self-worth and cooperation among Black women in their fight against injustice (Hooks, 1989, p. 15).

Concluding Remarks

Both the novel and the movie adaptation present a captivating story that encapsulates the intricacies of Black feminist resistance and empowerment within a racially charged historical context. The lives of African American maids show not just their battles against systemic oppression but also their extraordinary resilience and capacity for agency. These individuals reflect the essence of Black feminist thought, which highlights intersectionality and the



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necessity of prioritizing the experiences of Black women in conversations about emancipation. The film adaptation enhances the story's intriguing allure but also incites critical scrutiny over over-representation and narrative nuance. This discussion essentializes the conflict between authenticity and accessibility, prompting us to scrutinize who can express these narratives and how diverse audiences interpret them.

Analyzing both the novel and the film reveals that freedom is a never-ending process distinguished by communal action, unity, and the steadfast spirit of those who dare to confront the status quo. Ultimately *The Help* asks us to interact with the past, recognizing its significance to modern battles for justice and equality. By reimagining liberation through a Black feminist lens, reminded that true empowerment arises from acknowledging the voices and experiences of those who have historically been marginalized. Moving forward in pursuits for social justice, let us carry with us the lessons learned from these narratives, fostering an understanding of resistance that honors the complexities of identity, community, and the relentless quest for freedom.

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