



THE INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIPS AMONG WOMEN IN *THE HELP* BY KATHRYN STOCKETT

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ABSTRACT

This journal analyzes the complexities and challenges of interracial relationships among women in Kathryn Stockett's "The Help," offering profound insights into the intricate dynamics of societal norms and racial dynamics in 1960s America. The novel intricately portrays the dynamics of friendships, alliances, and conflicts that arise between black maids and their white employers, illuminating the complex intersections of race, class, and gender. Through these relationships, the narrative highlights the potential for empathy, understanding, and solidarity across racial lines, challenging the barriers imposed by segregation and discrimination. Despite the resilience displayed by the characters, the novel underscores the enduring effects of racial injustice. Through its exploration of themes such as identity, empathy, and resilience in "The Help", this journal offers a nuanced portrayal of the human experience amidst the backdrop of racial tensions and also show support among women with racial differences. The result of this analysis aims to demonstrate that skin color and social class do not impede solidarity among women. Skeeter, a white woman, endeavors to protect and advocate for black maids, asserting that they are all equals and should not face discrimination.

Keywords: interracial relationships, societal norms, racial dynamics, discrimination, 1960s America.

ABSTRAK

Jurnal ini menganalisis kompleksitas dan tantangan dalam hubungan antar-ras antara wanita dalam novel "The Help" karya Kathryn Stockett, yang memberikan wawasan mendalam tentang dinamika rumit norma-norma sosial dan dinamika rasial di Amerika tahun 1960-an. Penelitian dalam novel ini menggambarkan dinamika persahabatan, aliansi, dan konflik yang muncul antara perempuan kulit hitam dan perempuan kulit putih, menggambarkan perpotongan kompleks ras, kelas, dan gender. Melalui hubungan antar ras ini, narasi menyoroti potensi empati, pengertian, dan solidaritas lintas garis ras, menantang hambatan yang didapatkan dari segregasi dan diskriminasi. Meskipun adanya ketahanan di dalam novel tersebut yang menekankan dampak yang berkelanjutan dari ketidakadilan rasial. Melalui eksplorasi terhadap tema-tema seperti identitas, empati, dan ketahanan, dalam novel "The Help", jurnal ini memperlihatkan gambaran yang rumit tentang pengalaman manusia di tengah latar belakang ketegangan rasial dan juga menunjukkan adanya dukungan antar Perempuan dengan perbedaan ras. Hasil dari analisis ini menunjukkan bahwa warna kulit dan kelas sosial tidak menghalangi solidaritas di antara perempuan. Skeeter, seorang wanita kulit putih, berusaha melindungi dan membela para pembantu Perempuan kulit hitam, dengan keyakinan bahwa mereka semua sama dan tidak boleh diperlakukan secara berbeda.

Kata kunci: hubungan antar-ras, norma-norma sosial, dinamika rasial, diskriminasi, Amerika tahun 1960-an.



INTRODUCTION

In the 1960s, discrimination fueled by racial differences became a crucial issue for most American society. Racial discrimination perpetrated by white people significantly impacted the well-being of black individuals. The superiority asserted by white people influenced the lives of black individuals, including in their daily activities. Black individuals were treated as if they were slaves because of the belief held by white people that their race was superior. The perception of racial hierarchy differences sparked widespread and enduring conflicts if not addressed by society.

The change in perception regarding racial differences needs to be cultivated to uphold justice. However, this is difficult to achieve considering that society still holds differing views on equality. Nevertheless, justice in communal living is essential for the well-being of all parties involved. The justice in question involves efforts to support fellow humans regardless of race. In addition to discrimination stemming from racial differences, class differences also need to be addressed to avoid ongoing conflicts. To prevent conflicts, a strong sense of relationship is necessary. One form of support and relationship among women is referred to as 'sisterhood'.

Sisterhood depicts how women support each other regardless of their backgrounds, including race and culture. As stated by hooks, "*Women are divided by sexist attitudes, racism, class privilege, and a host of other prejudices. Women need to come together and respect one another no matter what their culture, color, or religion is to start a movement*" (hooks, 1984). hooks also suggests that the concept of sisterhood wouldn't exist if women continued to differentiate and separate themselves from other women (based on race or skin color). The solidarity and support given to fellow women develop a sense of caring for fellow humans, as exemplified in *The Help*.

The Author

Kathryn Stockett, an American writer born on February 26, 1969, in Jackson, Mississippi, gained fame for her debut novel, *The Help*, published in 2009. Growing up in the South, Stockett attended the University of Alabama, where she studied English and Creative Writing (Biography.com, n.d.; Encyclopedia.com, n.d.).

The Help quickly became a bestseller and was celebrated for its exploration of the social issues related to race, class, and gender in the 1960s Mississippi. The novel focuses on the lives of African American maids working in white households and their interactions with their employers. The story is particularly centered around Skeeter, a young white woman with aspirations of becoming a writer, who helps to tell the maids' stories (SparkNotes, n.d.).

Stockett was inspired by her Southern upbringing and the dynamics she observed between black domestic workers and white families (NPR, 2009). Despite its commercial success and the numerous awards it garnered, *The Help* also faced criticism. Some commentators argued



that Stockett, as a white author, may not have fully captured the complexities of the black experience and that the narrative was overly centered on a white protagonist (The Atlantic, 2011; The Guardian, 2011).

Although Stockett has not published another novel since *The Help*, her debut continues to hold significance in contemporary literature. It has sparked important discussions about race, privilege, and social justice (The New York Times, 2009; NPR, 2014).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The 1960s in America were characterized by heightened racial tensions and widespread discrimination, particularly against black individuals. Scholars have extensively analyzed the social, cultural, and political dynamics of this period, highlighting the enduring legacy of racial inequality and its impact on society. Works such as *The Warmth of Other Suns* by Isabel Wilkerson (Wilkerson, 2010) and *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin (Baldwin, 1963) offer profound insights into the complexities of race relations in 1960s America, shedding light on the systemic injustices faced by black communities.

Racial discrimination, perpetuated by white supremacy, not only influenced societal structures but also permeated interpersonal relationships, shaping interactions between individuals of different racial backgrounds. Studies by scholars like Michelle Alexander, in *The New Jim Crow* (Alexander, 2010), have examined how institutionalized racism has contributed to the mass incarceration of black individuals, perpetuating cycles of poverty and disenfranchisement.

In addition to racial discrimination, scholars have also explored the intersections of race, class, and gender in shaping social hierarchies and power dynamics. Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality has been instrumental in understanding how multiple forms of oppression intersect to create unique experiences of marginalization, particularly for women of color (Crenshaw, 1991). Works such as Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Thought* (Collins, 2000) have further elucidated the ways in which race, gender, and class intersect to shape women's experiences of oppression and resistance.

Within this scholarly discourse, the concept of sisterhood has emerged as a central theme in discussions of women's solidarity and resistance. Scholars like bell hooks have explored the transformative potential of sisterhood in challenging patriarchal and racist systems, emphasizing the importance of mutual support and collective action among women. Through acts of solidarity and empathy, women forge bonds that transcend racial and cultural divides, fostering a sense of shared humanity and collective liberation (hooks, 1981).

Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* occupies a significant place within this literary landscape, offering a compelling portrayal of sisterhood amidst the backdrop of racial segregation and discrimination in 1960s America. By examining the novel's depiction of female relationships,



scholars have explored how Stockett explores themes of empathy, solidarity, and resistance, shedding light on the transformative power of women's collective action in challenging systemic injustices.

This literature review provides a contextual framework for understanding the complexities of race, gender, and class in 1960s America, highlighting the significance of works like *The Help* in advancing discussions of social justice and equality. Through interdisciplinary scholarship, scholars continue to unpack the nuances of racial dynamics and women's experiences, deepening our understanding of the ongoing struggles for justice and liberation.

METHODOLOGY

This journal employs a qualitative approach to analyze the portrayal of sisterhood and its intersection with racial dynamics in Kathryn Stockett's *The Help*. Utilizing a textual analysis method, the researcher will closely examine the novel's narrative, character interactions, and thematic elements to elucidate the complexities of female relationships within the context of 1960s America.

1. Selection of Text: The primary text for analysis is *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett, a novel set in 1960s Mississippi that explores the relationships between black maids and their white employers. The selection of this text is based on its thematic relevance to the study's focus on sisterhood and racial dynamics.
2. Textual Analysis: The researcher will conduct a close reading of the novel, paying particular attention to scenes depicting interactions between female characters of different racial backgrounds. Themes such as empathy, solidarity, and resistance will be identified and analyzed within the context of sisterhood.
3. Thematic Coding: The researcher will employ thematic coding techniques to identify recurring motifs, symbols, and patterns related to sisterhood and racial dynamics in the text. Themes will be categorized and organized to facilitate a comprehensive analysis of the novel's portrayal of female relationships.
4. Intersectional Analysis: Drawing on intersectional feminist theory, the researcher will examine how race, gender, and class intersect to shape the experiences of female characters in the novel. This intersectional analysis will deepen our understanding of the complexities of sisterhood within the context of systemic oppression.
5. Comparison and Contrast: The researcher will compare and contrast the experiences of different female characters in the novel, considering factors such as race, socioeconomic status, and personal agency. This comparative analysis will provide insights into the diverse manifestations of sisterhood and solidarity within the narrative.



6. Ethical Considerations: Throughout the analysis, the researcher will maintain ethical standards by respecting the integrity of the text and the voices of the characters represented. Sensitivity will be exercised in interpreting potentially sensitive themes related to race, gender, and power dynamics.

7. Triangulation: To enhance the rigor and validity of the analysis, triangulation techniques may be employed, such as consulting secondary sources and engaging in peer debriefing. This multipronged approach will contribute to a robust interpretation of the novel's portrayal of sisterhood and racial dynamics.

Overall, this methodology will enable a nuanced exploration of the themes of sisterhood and racial dynamics in *The Help*, providing valuable insights into the complexities of female relationships and solidarity in the context of 1960s America.

DISCUSSION

In *The Help*, we see how Miss Skeeter, the protagonist who is white, supports and protects the rights of black women. Miss Skeeter demonstrates courage in advocating for justice for other women, even though she is isolated by society, including her own race. The bravery shown by Miss Skeeter illustrates that women should be able to support and respect each other, regardless of their backgrounds, race, skin color, or religion.

Miss Skeeter, a white woman who disagrees with the discriminatory and segregative treatment towards black female maids, can be observed from the following quote:

"...it's just plain dangerous. Everybody knows they carry different kinds of disease than we do. I double."

I pick up a stack of napkins. I don't know why, but all of a sudden I want to hear what Miss Leefolt is going to say to this. She's my boss.

"It would be nice," Miss Leefolt says, taking a little puff of her cigarette, "not having her use the one in the house. I bid three spades."

"That's exactly why I've designed the Home Help Sanitation Initiative," Miss Hilly says. "A disease-preventative measure."

I'm surprised by how tight my throat gets. It's a shame I learned to keep it down a long time ago. (Stockett, 2009)

That quote occurs when Aibileen, a black maid, overhears a conversation between Miss Hilly, a white woman who wants to segregate toilets for black maids so they don't use the same toilet



as white people. However, Miss Skeeter notices Aibileen overhearing Miss Hilly's conversation about segregation. Miss Skeeter wants to defend Aibileen and other black maids, stating that segregation is unnecessary. As seen in the following quote:

Miss Skeeter looks real confused. "The Home...the what?"

"A bill that requires every white home to have a separate bathroom for the colored help. I've even notified the surgeon general of Mississippi to see if he'll endorse the idea. I pass."

Miss Skeeter, she's frowning at Miss Hilly. She sets her cards down faceup and says real matter-of-fact, "Maybe we ought to just build you a bathroom outside, Hilly." And Law, that room gets quiet.

Miss Hilly says, "I don't think you ought to be joking around about the colored situation. Not if you want to stay on as editor of the League, Skeeter Phelan."

Miss Skeeter kind of laughs, but I can tell she doesn't think it's funny.

"What, you'd...kick me out? For disagreeing with you?" (Stockett, 2009)

From the excerpt, it is evident that Miss Skeeter refuses to accept Miss Hilly's desire to segregate toilets for black people. Miss Hilly also realizes that Aibileen overhears the deliberately crafted conversation in front of her. Upon hearing the conversation, Miss Skeeter tells Miss Hilly that she should also have a toilet outside the house so that Miss Hilly can experience what black maids feel. Miss Hilly threatens Miss Skeeter because she defends black maids. This indicates that Skeeter, as a white person, does not want segregation for black maids. Skeeter tells Miss Hilly that if Miss Hilly wants segregation for black maids, then Miss Hilly should experience segregation herself. This shows that Skeeter defends Aibileen and other black maids so that they do not feel 'discriminated against' by the segregation. As stated by Lorde (1984):

"As white women ignore their built-in privilege of whiteness and define woman in terms of their own experience alone, then women of Color become 'Other', the outsider whose experience and tradition is too 'alien' to comprehend."

Lorde states that if white women ignore their privilege as white women and define women only in terms of their own experiences, then women of color become 'The Other', the outsider whose experiences and traditions are too "alien" to understand. This is reflected in how black maids are seen as 'The Others' compared to white women. Skeeter does not want this difference because she feels that black women are the same as white women.



When Skeeter was thirteen years old, she was described as an ugly girl. She cried, and Constantine, her black maid, comforted her and gave her support. As in the following quote:

“Ugly lives up on the inside. Ugly be a hurtful, mean person. Is you one a them people?”

“I don’t know. I don’t think so,” I sobbed.

“Every morning, until you dead in the ground, you gon have to make this decision.” Constantine was so close, I could see the blackness of her gums. “You gon have to ask yourself, Am I gon believe what them fools say about me today?”

I nodded that I understood. I was just smart enough to realize she meant white people. And even though I still felt miserable, and knew I was, most likely, ugly, it was the first time she ever talked to me like I was something besides my mother’s white child. All my life I’d been told what to believe about politics, coloreds, being a girl. But with Constantine’s thumb pressed in my hand, I realized I actually had a choice in what I could believe.” (Stockett, 2009)

In the following excerpt, Constantine tells Skeeter that she doesn't need to listen to what people say about her, much like Constantine who disregards and doesn't care about what white people say about her. Skeeter also feels the genuine love given by her black maid.

“I just want to show that Constantine’s love for me began with missing her own child. Perhaps that’s what made it so unique. It didn’t matter that I was white. While she was wanting her own daughter back, I was longing for Mother not to be disappointed in me”

Skeeter felt the love given to Constantine and didn't see skin color; Constantine didn't see Skeeter solely as a white girl. Skeeter felt a greater sense of love from her black maid than from her own mother. This demonstrates a strong bond and relationship between black women and white women.

It is evident that there is a strong bond between Constantine, who sees Skeeter as her own child, regardless of Skeeter being white and not her biological child. This illustrates a motherly nature in women, showing an internal psychological element that preserves the trust deconstructed by society in defining women's roles and activities in households as something very natural and inherent in women themselves (Chodorow, 1983).



Skeeter is a journalist who wants to write about the black maids in her town, Jackson. Her editor questions why she would risk writing about black maids.

“What gave you this idea? About interviewing domestic housekeepers. I’m curious.”

“I was...well, I was raised by a colored woman. I’ve seen how simple it can be and--- and how complex it can be between the families and the help.” I cleared my throat. I sounded stiff, like I was talking to my teacher.

“Continue”

“I’d like to write this showing the point of view of the help. The colored women down here.” I tried to picture Constantine’s face, Aibileen’s. “They raise a white child and then twenty years later the child becomes the employer. It’s that irony, that we love them and they love us yet..We don’t even allow them to use the toilet in the house”

Skeeter wants to change the perspective of white people towards black individuals, especially black maids who care for white children as if they were their own. This is because Skeeter received more love from Constantine than from her own mother. They love each other dearly, but black maids are not allowed to use the toilet inside the house. Skeeter aims to change people's thinking by writing a book about black maids, even though she knows the risks involved, including the possibility of arrest and prosecution for violating integration rules by speaking with black maids. Nevertheless, Skeeter takes the risk to advocate for black maids.

“What makes you think colored people need your help?” Minny stands up, chair scraping. “Why you even care about this? You white.”

“We all working for the same thing here, Minny,” Aibileen says, “We just talking.”

My face is burning red. I speak slowly. “We want to show you your perspective...so people might understand what it’s like to be on your side. We hope it might change some things around here.”

The quote is obtained when Skeeter asks Minny, a black maid who is also Aibileen's friend, to be interviewed about her perspective. Skeeter hopes that her writing will help change the views of white people towards black individuals and also change the views of black people so they don't have to be afraid to speak out, as they have been silenced for so long due to the fact that black people were not allowed to voice their opinions. This demonstrates a sense of solidarity between Skeeter in helping black maids, and the black maids themselves are aware of the risks,



but they don't care because they do it together, facing the risks. hooks (1984) states, "A sisterhood should be women coming together to fight for each other's right no matter what their background or their skin color is." hooks also says that women should support and empower each other, regardless of their skin color, culture, or religion, to create a movement.

After the book was published, Skeeter landed a job in New York and had to leave the black maids in Jackson. However, because Skeeter felt responsible for everything, her book and also responsible for the black maids, she didn't want to leave them. Nevertheless, the strong support from the black maids made Skeeter feel less hesitant about going to New York.

"I can't leave you now, right when things are getting bad. I'm not going to leave you this mess."

"But...them bad things gone happen whether you here or not."

God, to hear her say that, I want to cry. I let out a groan.

"I didn't mean it like that. We don't know what's gone happen. Miss Skeeter, you got to take that job."

"You listen to me, Miss Skeeter. I'm on take care a Aibileen and she gone take care a me.... So don't walk your white butt to New York, run it."

Really? I think, actually considering it for the first time. Can i really do this?

Minnie is right, and Aibileen is too.

I lean against the shelves, close my eyes. I'm going, I'm going to New York.

The support from Aibileen and Minny made Skeeter confident in pursuing her career in New York. Although initially hesitant to leave the black maids because she felt she still had a responsibility to them if anything happened, the support from each other made them confident that whatever happened, they had to protect each other. This is based on the idea that there is a strong bond among women to protect and support each other.

CONCLUSION

The strong sense of solidarity to protect each other among women is demonstrated by Skeeter, Aibileen, and Minny. *The Help* aims to show that skin color and class do not hinder their solidarity as women. Skeeter, a white woman, wants to protect and defend black maids because she believes they are all the same and should not be treated differently. Skeeter, Aibileen, and



Minnie want to assert their rights to express their opinions. This is shown as 'women empowerment,' as they support each other, strengthening themselves, even though they know the risks they face in protecting and supporting each other together.

In *The Help*, the three main characters (Skeeter, Aibileen, and Minnie) exemplify a powerful bond of solidarity that transcends boundaries of race and class. Despite living in a deeply segregated society where racial discrimination is rampant, these women come together to support and protect each other. Skeeter, as a white woman, challenges the societal norms of her time by advocating for the rights and dignity of black maids, recognizing their humanity and intrinsic worth beyond the color of their skin.

This solidarity among women, regardless of their backgrounds, is a central theme in the novel. It emphasizes the importance of unity and mutual support in the face of adversity. Skeeter, Aibileen, and Minnie refuse to be divided by societal expectations or prejudices; instead, they unite to amplify their voices and assert their agency.

The Help portrays women empowerment as more than just individual strength; it's about collective action and sisterhood. By standing together, these women find the courage to speak out against injustice and challenge the status quo. Their solidarity serves as a beacon of hope, inspiring others to join them in the fight for equality and justice.

Despite the risks and obstacles they face, Skeeter, Aibileen, and Minnie are determined to make a difference. Their willingness to support and protect each other underscores the transformative power of solidarity, showing that when women unite, they can effect meaningful change and pave the way for a more equitable society.

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