



Gender Roles and Patriarchy in Kathryn Stockett's *The Help*

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Abstract

This paper examines the themes of gender roles and patriarchy in Kathryn Stockett's novel, *The Help*, set in the racially charged atmosphere of 1960s Mississippi. The novel highlights the experiences of black women working as maids in white households, navigating a society where they face both racism and sexism. Through the characters of Aibileen, Minny, and Skeeter, the novel showcases the intersectionality of racism and sexism, female solidarity and resistance, and the challenging of traditional gender roles. This analysis demonstrates how *The Help* highlights the complex and intersecting nature of oppression, emphasizing the importance of female relationships and collective resistance against male-controlled and racist systems.

Keywords: Gender Roles, Patriarchy, Racism, Sexism, Intersectionality, Female Solidarity, Resistance

Introduction

Kathryn Stockett's novel, *The Help* highlights the experiences of black women working as maids in white households, navigating a society where they face both racism and sexism. *The Help* provides a powerful portrayal of the ways in which masculine systems continue oppression, particularly for black women. An examination of gender roles and supremacy in the novel therefore reveals how women at the same time experience oppression and, in certain moments, enact resistance within a socially graded and male-dominated order.

Patriarchal Society and the Subjugation of Women

The novel describes a patriarchal society where women, particularly black women, are marginalized and oppressed. The character of Hilly Holbrook exemplifies the internalized patriarchy, continuing the suppression of black women and reinforcing the racist and sexist norms of the time. Hilly's black character demonstrates how women can internalize and perpetuate patriarchal values, contributing to the oppression of other women. The patriarchal society also spreads the notion that women are inferior to men and are expected to be obedient to them.

The patriarchal society has a profound impact on the black community, where black men are also oppressed and marginalized. The novel highlights how black men, such as Aibileen's son, Treelick, are socialized to conform to patriarchal norms and are expected to assert their masculinity through violence and dominance.

Intersectionality of Racism and Sexism

The novel things to see the intersectionality of racism and sexism, demonstrating how black women face multiple forms of oppression. The character of Aibileen Clark, a black maid, illustrates the struggles of navigating a society where she is marginalized both as a black person and as a woman. Aibileen's experiences demonstrate the ways in which racism and sexism intersect, creating unique forms of oppression for black women.

The intersectionality of racism and sexism is also evident in the way black women are portrayed in the novel. They are often depicted as being more subservient and obedient than white women, highlighting the ways in which racism and sexism intersect to create complex forms of oppression.

Female Solidarity and Resistance

Despite the oppressive society, the novel showcases the solidarity and resistance of women, particularly black women, who form bonds and support each other in the face of adversity. The characters of Aibileen, Minny, and Skeeter demonstrate the power of female relationships and collective resistance against patriarchal and racist systems. Through their relationships, the novel highlights the importance of female solidarity in challenging oppressive systems.

The novel also highlights the ways in which women resist patriarchal norms and expectations. For example, Minny's character is a symbol of resistance against patriarchal norms, as she refuses to conform to societal expectations and instead asserts her independence and self-sufficiency.

Challenging Traditional Gender Roles

The novel challenges traditional gender roles, particularly the expectation that women should be obedient and domestic. The character of Skeeter Phelan, a white woman, defies these expectations by pursuing a career in writing and challenging the racist norms of her community. Skeeter's character demonstrates the ways in which women can challenge traditional gender roles and expectations, creating space for resistance and change. The novel also illustrates the ways in which traditional gender roles are limiting and oppressive for women. For example, the character of Hilly Holbrook is a symbol of the dangers of internalized patriarchy, as she perpetuates and reinforces patriarchal norms and expectations.

Conclusion

The Help is not merely a story about the complex and intersecting nature of oppression, demonstrating how patriarchy and racism are deeply ingrained in society. Through the experiences of its characters, the novel shows the importance of female solidarity, resistance, and challenging traditional gender roles. The novel provides a powerful portrayal of the ways in which women, particularly black women, resist and challenge oppressive systems, creating space for change and transformation.

Works Cited

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