

Introduction :

During a pivotal moment of heightened racial injustice in the United States, Netflix introduced a new genre under the banner of the Black Lives Matter Collection which sparked an interest because how did this become number one in the United States when it's not a good representation of a good race movie. At the forefront of this collection, amidst a sea of films aimed at amplifying black voices and experiences, stood *The Help*. This adaptation of Kathryn Stockett's novel swiftly ascended to the number one spot within the United States, prompting widespread discussion about its portrayal of race and representation. The actors in the film came out and stated how the film did take away from the voices of the maids.

The Help provides a rich and compelling subject for analysis within the discipline of communication studies due to its intricate portrayal of race, power dynamics, and storytelling. By examining the way the story is narrated, the film offers a lens through which to explore how media representations perpetuate and reinforce stereotypes, particularly the mammy archetype while touching on white savior complex. Additionally, the film highlights complex power dynamics between black maids and their white employers, providing insight into issues of agency, resistance, and subjugation.

In this paper, I will be discussing *The Help*, focusing on examining key scenes such as Aibileen's caretaking role, the dynamics of her relationship with Mae Mobley, and the power dynamics between Aibileen and Elizabeth Leefolt and its correlation to the mammy archetype portrayed and white savior complex. Firstly, I will analyze the film in comparison to the book, exploring

their similarities and differences and examining the representation within the film while delving into the historical context behind the mammy role and how it manifests within the characters such as Aibileen. Furthermore, I will explore the film's visual and aesthetic choices, which, while visually captivating, may serve to reinforce stereotypes rather than challenge them. Through the portrayal of everyday life in Mississippi during the Civil Rights Movement, *The Help* fails to interrogate the systemic injustices at play, instead centering the narrative on individual relationships and personal struggles. Additionally, I will explore the problematic implications of the film's elevation during a period of heightened racial injustice, highlighting the complexities of representation and the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes in popular media.

Description and Context:

The Help has gathered significant attention since its release in 2011, with its availability on platforms such as Hulu contributing to its widespread viewership. The film's producers, who are white men like Brunson Green, Chris Columbus, and Michael Barnathan, have played a pivotal role in bringing the story to the screen. Additionally, Hulu's ownership by Walt Disney Channel, which also owns the ABC News network, further amplifies the film's reach and influence. This interconnected network of platforms ensures that *The Help* remains accessible to audiences, allowing its portrayal of race, power dynamics, and storytelling to continue sparking discussions and debates long after its initial release. However, despite its popularity, *The Help* is often criticized for its portrayal of race and its failure to engage deeply with the complexities of the civil rights era. It is known as being a feel-good movie that some consider tone-deaf due to its approach to the subject matter. This discrepancy between its widespread popularity and its

shortcomings in addressing the historical context it portrays highlights the importance of critically examining the differences between the book and the film adaptation. In exploring these differences, it becomes evident that the narrative structure plays a significant role in shaping the portrayal of the characters. In academia, the film is often critiqued for its one-sided portrayal of racial injustices and the perpetuation of the mammy stereotype. This critique becomes notably evident in scenes where Aibileen cares for the baby girl, reinforcing traditional racial dynamics and erasing the complexities of Aibileen's character. Additionally, the portrayal of the friendship between Celia Foote and Minny blurs the lines of traditional employer-employee dynamics, underscoring the film's complexity and prompting further analysis into the nuances of power and dependency within these relationships.

Similarities and Differences with Book and Film:

The book and film adaptation of *The Help* differ in certain aspects, they share many similarities that contribute to their enduring impact and resonance with audiences. Both the book and the film are both placed in Jackson, Mississippi and told from the time period of the 1960s, which was a period during racial segregation and civil rights movement. The main theme of both the book and film are to race, power dynamics, gender and storytelling, offering a nuanced portrayal of the complexities of life in the Deep South during this tumultuous period. While both the book and the film adaptation of *The Help* share many similarities in terms of setting, themes, and historical context, they also diverge in certain aspects that shape the portrayal of characters and narrative structure. Let's explore some of the key differences between the two texts. In delving into these distinctions, it becomes evident how the narrative choices in each medium offer unique

perspectives and storytelling experiences, enriching the overall discourse surrounding the themes presented in *The Help* such as character development, narrative structure and inclusion and exclusion of certain plots. While, In the book, the narration is evenly distributed among Aibileen, Minny, and Skeeter, providing each character with agency in telling their own stories and experiences which helps the audience get a better understanding of the lived experience of each character. However, the film predominantly adopts Skeeter's perspective, thus limiting the depth of character development and agency of Aibileen and Minny. The book gives us more of a larger scale of who characters are by going into the detail on the struggles they are facing by going into detail on their lives but also their back stories as well, however in the film it is not as deep as in the book.

Moreover, while the book delves into various subplots, including the civil rights movement, the film primarily focuses on the relationships between the maids and the white families they serve. This narrow focus contributes to the film's portrayal of the mammy archetype, as it lacks the contextualization of broader societal issues and perpetuates the narrative of black women existing solely in relation to their white employers.

In conclusion, the interplay between the book and the film adaptation of *The Help* offers a multifaceted exploration of race, power dynamics, and storytelling in the Deep South. While both mediums share commonalities in their setting and thematic focus, their differences in narrative structure and character portrayal provide unique perspectives that enrich our understanding of the complexities of life during this tumultuous period. By examining these

differences, we gain deeper insights into the lived experiences of the characters and the broader societal issues they navigate.

History:

Before delving deeper into the portrayal of the mammy role within the film and the relationships between Mae Mobley and Aibileen, Elizabeth and Aibileen relationship, and the white savior complex, it's essential to understand the historical context and significance of the mammy stereotype in American culture.

The Mammy archetype originated during the slavery era and has since become a pervasive and harmful stereotype attached to black women. This archetype depicts black women as loyal, caretakers, and nurturers to the white families they serve, often at the expense of their own agency and autonomy. Typically characterized as an overweight, dark-skinned woman resembling Aunt Jemima, the mammy figure is ingrained in American cultural narratives.

Black women were presented in these roles to the families they served, which served to ease white guilt, reinforce racial stereotypes, and uphold the racial hierarchy by positioning black women as inherently maternal and nurturing but inferior to white women. This portrayal persisted beyond the abolition of slavery and continued to be perpetuated through various forms of media, including film and advertising.

For example, in the movie "Gone with the Wind," we see a close mother-daughter relationship between a maid and a white child, perpetuating the mammy archetype. The maid lacks

femininity but is portrayed as content in her duties, reinforcing the notion that black women were not a threat to their white mistresses and were satisfied with their roles as caretakers.

Moreover, the mammy archetype often erased the individuality and personal lives of black women, focusing solely on their roles within white households. This lack of representation of their own lives perpetuate harmful stereotypes and limited the opportunities for black women to be seen as fully realized individuals. Even in contemporary times, remnants of the mammy archetype persist, with immigrant women and characters who are black-coded but not explicitly identified as black often being relegated to similar caregiving roles devoid of agency and autonomy. This ongoing portrayal reflects the enduring legacy of the mammy stereotype and its impact on perceptions of black women in society.

In conclusion, the mammy archetype, rooted in the historical exploitation of black women during slavery, continues to permeate American culture, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and limiting opportunities for black women to be seen as individuals with agency and autonomy. This stereotype, characterized by the loyal and nurturing caretaker figure, served to ease white guilt, reinforce racial hierarchies, and erase the personal lives of black women. Through films like "Gone with the Wind" and other media representations, the mammy archetype endures, presenting black women as content in their subordinate roles within white households.

Jim Crow is a system of racial discrimination and segregation that was mainly in the South. It then became laws that mandated racial discrimination in more public places such as schools, which were mainly created to have separate spaces for black and white people. We can see how

these laws didn't just disappear; they still manifest through systems of oppression such as the school-to-prison pipeline. These are policies in place that target and punish children of color more severely than their white counterparts, and these types of punishments can be traced back to Jim Crow laws and how they perpetuate systemic and racial oppression. We can see this in laws that had to come into place, such as the Crow Act, which was a law in place to protect black people to wear their natural hair without manipulation to conform to a certain look. While Jim Crow no longer exists, it does show up in other ways in society known as systematic forms of oppression to people of color.

Aibileen's care for Mae Mobley

In *The Help*, one of the primary relationships depicted is between Aibileen, a maid for the Leefolt family, and Mae Mobley, affectionately referred to as "babygirl". This relationship serves as a lens through which to examine the dynamics of caretaking roles in the South, reflecting upon historical contexts where black women were responsible for caring for white children.

As we explore their relationship, we uncover themes of race, identity, and the genuine connection between a black maid and a white child, who may not fully comprehend the segregation happening around them. Scenes such as the diaper changing and potty training highlight plan to highlight more scenes where Aibilleen is doing this maternal role. Aibileen's assumption of the primary caretaker role and her nurturing instincts.

Moreover, in discussing the mammy archetype, the analysis will utilize Aibileen's care for Mae Mobley as a central example to illustrate how this stereotype manifests within the film. By

analyzing Aibileen's role as a nurturing caregiver, we can delve into the nuances of the mammy stereotype and its portrayal within their relationship by seeing the positions she automatically takes on though her position is the maid when we clearer can see how she caters to more than maid duties. Through this analysis, we aim to explore how Aibileen's caregiving dynamics with Mae Mobley reflect broader themes of race, power dynamics, and agency, shedding light on the complexities of representation within *The Help*. In summary, the relationship between Aibileen and Mae Mobley in *The Help* serves as a focal point for examining themes of race, identity, and caregiving dynamics in the South. Aibileen's role as a nurturing caregiver to Mae Mobley is pivotal in understanding the manifestation of the mammy archetype within the film. Through our analysis, we aim to explore how this relationship reflects broader themes of race, power dynamics, and agency, shedding light on the complexities of representation within the narrative. Furthermore, the analysis will explore Mae Mobley's declaration of Aibileen as her "real mom," which underscores a deeper bond between the child and her maid, thereby reinforcing the mammy role. This portrayal positions the black maid as a maternal figure, aligning with the historical context of black women as caregivers and nurturers, often at the expense of their own identities. Despite not being Mae Mobley's biological mother, Aibileen undertakes various actions to nurture their bond, such as instilling confidence in the child, reading bedtime stories, potty training, and providing comfort. These actions perpetuate the narrative of black women as naturally selfless caregivers, contributing to racial hierarchies.

Moreover, Mae Mobley's declaration creates complexities of identity within the mammy stereotype. Aibileen's willingness to assume the role of Mae Mobley's primary caregiver

demonstrates a disconnection from her own identity as a black woman, diminishing her agency and autonomy. This aligns her with the characteristics associated with the mammy role, perpetuating stereotypes and limiting the portrayal of black women as multifaceted individuals.

Additionally, this declaration serves as a poignant example of how the mammy stereotype manifests within the narrative of *The Help*, reinforcing racial stereotypes and restricting the portrayal of black women as individuals with agency and autonomy. The relationship between Elizabeth and Aibileen emphasizes the power dynamics within racial hierarchy. Elizabeth is a white woman who is privileged who Aibileen works for. In *The Help*, we can observe the power dynamic between Elizabeth and Aibileen, with Elizabeth being her employer and Aibileen primarily serving as her daughter's caregiver. In the analysis, there will be an expansion on the complexities of white superiority, black femininity, and the perception of black women as inferior to white women. These themes manifest in the relationships between Elizabeth and her friends when interacting with Aibileen. Despite Aibileen rarely speaking and remaining in the shadows, they consistently assert their dominance over her and remind her of her place in society. They uphold professionalism and refrain from challenging their white employers' viewpoints, reinforcing the societal hierarchy.

Black femininity is depicted in the film through intersections of race, gender, and class. Differences in the homes they inhabit and the clothing they wear highlight these intersections. Black femininity is associated with caregiving and nurturing rather than being seen as a form of individual identity. These dynamics underscore the broader themes of race, power, and gender within the narrative.

White Savior Complex (Skeeter):

In the film *The Help*, the white protagonist, Skeeter, embodies the white savior complex. This complex manifests when a white individual believes they must intervene to save marginalized individuals, often portrayed as inferior due to their race, gender, or class. This dynamic occurs when white individuals assume positions of power and superiority, overshadowing the agency of people of color.

The reinforcement of power dynamics is evident in the film through Skeeter's perspective dominating the narrative. We engage with her friends, family, and societal position, which detracts from the focus on the maids who are supposed to be the central characters. This portrayal diminishes the agency of the maids and emphasizes Skeeter's role as the savior figure. Through Skeeter's embodiment of the white savior complex, the film interrogates the role of white individuals in perpetuating systems of oppression and the erasure of black voices. Skeeter's perspective dominating the narrative reinforces power dynamics that overshadow the agency of people of color, emphasizing the need for critical examination of representation and storytelling in media.

The Help prompts us to reflect on the complexities of race, power, and storytelling in American society, challenging us to confront harmful stereotypes and advocate for more inclusive and equitable narratives. As we continue to engage with this film and its themes, may we strive towards creating a more just and compassionate world where every voice is heard and valued.

Introduction:

As a young woman of color, my journey into the world of media representation has been deeply personal. From childhood, I found myself often cast in the role of caregiver, responsible for looking after others, a responsibility that was thrust upon me based on preconceived notions of who I was supposed to be. This experience became particularly salient when I observed similar patterns of expectation in popular films such as *Gone with the Wind* and *Big Momma's House*, where black women were consistently portrayed as nurturing caregivers, reinforcing the enduring stereotype of the mammy.

This personal reflection led me to critically examine the portrayal of black women in media, particularly in the film *The Help*. In this capstone project, I aim to conduct a film analysis to explore how *The Help* reinforces stereotypes such as the mammy archetype while examining the dynamics of relationships between characters like Mae Mobley and Aibileen, as well as Elizabeth and Aibileen. Furthermore, I will delve into the concept of the white savior complex embodied by Skeeter, who seeks to elevate the stories of black maids at great personal risk to the maids.

To situate this analysis within the broader scholarly discourse, it is essential to consider existing literature on media representation and its impact on societal perceptions. Scholars such as Bell Hooks and Kimberlé Crenshaw have explored how media perpetuates stereotypes and reinforces power dynamics along lines of race, gender, and class. Additionally, theories of representation, stereotype threat, and intersectionality provide valuable frameworks for understanding how images of black women in media contribute to broader narratives of identity and agency.

By examining how these themes manifest in *The Help*, I aim to shed light on the ways in which media representations shape societal perceptions and reinforce harmful stereotypes. Through this analysis, I hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities of race, gender, and power dynamics in media portrayals and their implications for broader social attitudes and inequalities. The analysis is important because it provides a deeper understanding of how media representations create these images surrounding women of color which often are harmful towards their own identities and ways they are seen and viewed in society . The methodology employed in this media analysis focuses on examining specific relationships and the representations of black women within the film *The Help*. This film serves as a crucial site of analysis due to historical precedents set by earlier works like *Gone with the Wind*, which similarly depicted black women in negative, stereotypical roles. The importance of exploring this discourse lies in raising awareness of how these damaging portrayals persist in the media and continue to shape societal perceptions, particularly regarding women of color.

This project aims to engage with literature that challenges these stereotypes, shedding light on their prevalence in media and their reinforcement of societal biases. By deconstructing these false images, we seek to highlight the lack of agency afforded to women of color and the problematic narrative that positions them as in need of rescue by white individuals. Through this analysis, we hope to contribute to a greater understanding of the complexities surrounding race, gender, and representation in media.

Lit Review:

Black Women in Hollywood

Black women in Hollywood have faced persistent stereotyping, often relegated to roles such as maids, mammies, or hypersexualized characters like Jezebels, reinforcing harmful gender and racial stereotypes in society. Aldridge and Bridges (2016) delve into the evolution of these roles, highlighting a transition towards more empowering portrayals for Black women in film.

The journal explores the challenges encountered by Black actresses in navigating Hollywood's industry biases and the gradual shift towards more influential roles. While Black women may no longer be confined to overt mammy roles, subtle elements such as clothing choices or physical appearance continue to influence their representation. The exploration of historical settings, particularly during the civil rights movement, reveals intersections of gender and race that mirror contemporary societal issues.

Aldridge and Bridges (2016) emphasize the progress made in diversifying roles for Black women in film, yet acknowledge the ongoing need for further representation and inclusivity. They underscore the importance of diversity beyond casting, extending to production teams and behind-the-scenes roles. Many Black actresses share common experiences of lacking representation on set and advocating for broader inclusion beyond themselves.

Overall, Aldridge and Bridges (2016) shed light on the shifting landscape of Black women's representation in Hollywood, highlighting both advancements and persistent challenges. Their analysis underscores the importance of continued efforts towards greater diversity and inclusion in the film industry.

In exploring the historical portrayal of Black women in Hollywood cinema, Jacqueline Bobo's article, "Resisting the Mammy: Black Women's Representations in the Hollywood Cinema of the 1930s," offers valuable insights into the ways in which racial and gender stereotypes were perpetuated and challenged during this pivotal era. As a seminal work in the field, Bobo's analysis sheds light on the complex dynamics at play in shaping the on-screen representations of Black women, particularly within the context of the Mammy archetype.

Brown Givens & Monahan, (2005) focuses on a study where they watched videos that were about a stereotypical mammy, jezebel and non-stereotypical on video, in this examination they utilized black women, and a white women were then the students were a series of questions which they used negative and positive terms and they noticed that the negative terms were always associated with black women while the positive terms were associated with white women. This was a recent study where these stereotypes are still presented and these perceptions of black woman. Brown Givens & Monahan, (2005) the way that these images are able to give a certain perception of people without knowing anything about them but mainly just by them seeing images and not actually having a back story of the person to associate them with these negative notions. The way that Aldridge and Bridges (2016) hints more on the way that Black Hollywood has been evolving while Brown Givens & Monahan, (2005) discuss more on the effects that

these stereotypes are still presented in based on the study the perform. Brown Givens & Monahan, (2005) states how there was a trend when it came to those negative stereotypes and terms where it came naturally to automatically associated black with terms such as being aggressive, lazy and explaining how black women are viewed in social situations. We see how these images of black women transcends further when the study looks more into the type of careers that they work and associate black women with when looking at the Mammy, Jezebel when they discuss the way that they see the Mammy as being a maid, nanny and housekeepers which in the film industry these have been roles in the industry that black women have been hired to play these roles, and the way jezebel is being seen as a black woman and the way that these certain career path could always being associate with black women.

They explain the woman who is black woman and a cocktail waitress is seen as being a Jezebel like and closely associated with being a exotic dancer and how these stereotypes can create statements such as all black women are exotic dancers or black overweight women are known to be nannies to white families. Chen, Gina Masullo, et al. (2012) was an interview style where they interviewed black women who were ages of 18-59 that described male mammies affected their own identities as black women in society such as characters like Big Momma, Rasputia and Madea the interview explains how these women feel when see men portrayed the mammy but this study does not come of like normal studies we see where it is more of a comparison of responses between white women and how people view black women in comparison in this study they only focus on the viewpoint of black women and how these image affect them unlike in Brown Givens & Monahan, (2005) where they are doing a comparative analysis of two groups

and asking other how they feel. Chen, Gina Masullo, et al. (2012) states “ Black women know that being portrayed as overweight in the media violates White standards” by them stating that it the overweight image of black women in media makes them not seen as the idea of femininity since there not closely associated with white beauty standards so this mammy role can come more active due to them lacking femininity they aren't able to be seen as women in society , the idea that fat is associated with ugly and thin associate with beauty in people like Hattie Mcdonald she is an overweight black woman so this image can create the idea that black women who are overweight are ugly which can portrayed to women who are watching this that beauty can only be associated with white beauty standards and based on the study how these media portrayals actual have an affect on the women.

In Chen, Gina Masullo, et al. (2012) the discuss how the men who are playing roles of Rasputia, Madea and Big Momma are black men but they genuinely don't see a problem with portraying black women in this way because they feel like they're sharing their experiences of the women in their family or see drag as a form of art but this is not drag these characters are rooted in stereotypes surrounding black women's bodies, appearances and places in society that just reinforce what's already been done before but hence towards how the mammy is someone who lack agency and autonomy so it makes sense why these black men feel that they can do this when we look at Crenshaw explanation of intersectionality “is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects” we see how this is present in the by the mammy being a woman who is black and not educated and lacks femininity there should be no problem to portray her due to her being someone who genuinely doesn't exist in

when it comes to someone who is an individual with agency. Crenshaw discusses the way that these interlocking exclusions when thinking about race, gender and class are ways to reinforce power dynamics such as hierarchies in society those who are white men and wealthy can be seen as being in a higher level of power compared to a black woman who is gay. Collins (2002) explains how these images have become way to justified the mistreated of black women and she states how this is a way to essential blame them for being oppressed and the way how these images have always been known but she mainly focus on how the images were present in civil rights era to blame black women for them not being able to obtain the american dream in this she gives an example of "Audre Lorde's account of a shopping trip offers a powerful Example of its tenacity: "I wheel my two-year-old daughter in a shopping cart through a supermarket in ... 1967, and a little white girl riding past in her mother's cart calls out excitedly, 'Oh look, Mommy, a baby maid!'" (1984, 126). A child describing another child who is likely close in age as a baby maid hence towards how these controlling images go further than just media but happen in real life were just by the child being black and a girl she is seen as being a maid ones idea and perspective of an individual can become everyone image when they see black women and by black women in these roles it keeps the image alive that that is supposed to be their place in society.

By Collins amplifying this examples that Chen, Gina Masullo, et al. (2012) studying surrounding the effects that black men dressing as black women and the way that these characters are not just characters but contribute to the way that black women are view in society and actually shaped some societal norms which hence toward things like black women are loud, aggressive, and lazy

which are some of the same terms that we see in Brown Givens & Monahan, (2005) that people just by watching a video or seeing images of black woman can have a perception serves as a reinforcement of stereotypes of black women. Collins (2002) gives examples of real life experiences of black women and how it shows up in everyday life she states that “Mammy is the public face that Whites expect Black women to assume for them” this is only an image that they can see black women do for them when only seeing them as a maternal figure but its the characteristics as well such as the way they dress and present themselves as black women by black women being seen by white people and the explanation of the mammy role they don't see them as a threat or anyone which showcase these power dynamics. Coleman's (2014) examination of the Mammy archetype in Hollywood provides a nuanced understanding of how black actresses have been portrayed over time. By delving into the historical context and evolution of this character, Coleman offers valuable insights into the intersection of film and societal norms. Her analysis sheds light on the systemic issues of racial stereotyping and marginalization within the film industry, a theme that resonates with the findings of Brown Givens & Monahan (2005).

In Coleman's work, she intricately explores the experiences and negotiations of black actresses who inhabit these Mammy roles, providing a rich tapestry of insights into the challenges they face. This deep dive into the portrayal of black actresses in American cinema not only reveals the constraints imposed upon them by industry norms but also highlights their resilience and agency in navigating these complex dynamics.

By integrating Coleman's analysis with the broader discourse on racial stereotypes and marginalization presented in Brown Givens & Monahan (2005), a more comprehensive

understanding of the impact of Mammy representations in Hollywood emerges. This interdisciplinary approach allows for a nuanced examination of the multifaceted ways in which black actresses are depicted and marginalized in film, enriching our understanding of the broader socio-cultural implications of these portrayals. Harris (2004) delves into the influence of media on the portrayal of black women, emphasizing how these representations shape perceptions of black women in society. She highlights the persistence of longstanding caricatures and stereotypes of black women in media, illustrating the challenge of challenging or changing these perceptions. Even in films that address political issues, Harris notes, there remains a tendency to uphold and perpetuate existing stereotypes rather than challenge Western viewpoints. This echoes Collins' (2002) observations regarding the enduring nature of societal perceptions of black women. Both authors discuss the entrenched nature of these stereotypes and the difficulty in shifting societal perceptions, even in the face of efforts to address social and political issues.

Self Perception of Black Women:

When thinking about the self perception of black women are shaped by social, cultural and historical context social context has to do with their position in society which explains how they are viewed in society and cultural the power dynamics and injustice they face when look t racial hierarchies in societies and the historical context has to do how the past is still presented when thinking about the ways in which black women are being perceived in society due to these harmful stereotypes. While highlighting the ways that they can be perceived in media when stereotype like the mammy and the characteristics and scenes that are shown when it comes to the media portrayals of black women we see that with Chen, Gina Masullo, et al. (2012). While looking into McFarlane, Megan D (2015) she talks about how she analyzing the film *The Help*

where she brings up great ideas so while looking into the anti racist white hero characters and the ideas that she brings up revolving the film has to do with how the film brings up the race issue but from a perspective that racism is seen as a women's problem and very catty and how the perspective of the film is based on Skeeter while the maids are in the background and we see how Skeeter gets a great publishing jobs while Aibileen and Minny go back to their former lives while we see how Skeeter is flourishing from their stories. In McWhorter, Christine (2021) the discussion surrounding black hair in media and the representation of hair in film as to with how their hair doesn't fit western standards and cause black women to be associated with be unkept such as the example given of “are often considered messy, disheveled, and inappropriate for professional settings” which highlights the way that the women in the help have to present themselves by having the same outfit as one another and their hair is normal slick back and in a bun.

Methodology:

The methodology , i will be utilizing will in this research will be a textual analysis, I will be performing a close examination on narrative perspectives looking into the similarities in the film and the difference between the film and the book and how the narratives have shift, looking at the character development of Aibileen and how it changed form the beginning of the film towards the end of the film and how in a way she reclaims her power back in the ending. Through an analysis of looking at key scenes and deconstructing them throughout this analysis, I aim to uncover underlying messages, themes, and representations embedded within the film.

Hattie McDaniel *Gone with the Wind* v.s *The Help*:



The portrayal of the Mammy role in films such as *Gone with the Wind* and *The Help* maintain the consistent portrayal of harmful narratives suggesting that Black women are inherently destined to be caretakers and nurturers within Hollywood. Both movies depict Mammy figures as devoted and nurturing servants to white families, perpetuating stereotypes that have long been associated with Black women. Despite the discourse around *The Help* being empowering, these stereotypical notions persist in both films, highlighting the enduring relevance of harmful stereotypes in cinema.

The historical context surrounding the Mammy role in film is crucial in understanding its significance. These characters have been instrumental in shaping perceptions of race, gender, and power dynamics in America, both on-screen and off. Rooted in racial hierarchies, early Hollywood perpetuated the notion that certain races were superior, allowing even white actresses to portray Mammy figures while lacking the physical attributes typically associated with such roles. The debut of the Mammy role in *Gone with the Wind*, portrayed by Hattie McDaniel, epitomized the loyal, selfless servant dedicated to caring for white families. McDaniel's character, clad in dull, unassuming attire, epitomized stereotypes of Black women devoid of

agency and sexuality. This portrayal laid the groundwork for subsequent depictions of Mammy figures in Hollywood.

In *The Help*, Aibileen's portrayal echoes McDaniel's Mammy archetype, despite the film's release over seven decades later. Both characters, dressed in similarly unassuming attire, are depicted as dark-skinned, overweight, and lacking agency or sexual appeal. This consistency in portrayal across time underscores the persistence of harmful stereotypes in cinema.

This essay aims to examine the evolution of the Mammy role from "Gone with the Wind" to *The Help*, highlighting the enduring impact of these portrayals on narratives and perceptions of Black women. By analyzing the similarities between these films and the stereotypes they perpetuate, this essay seeks to shed light on the broader implications of Mammy figures in shaping societal attitudes and power dynamics beyond the film industry. Despite being adaptations of novels, both "Gone with the Wind" and "The Help" reinforce stereotypes, particularly evident in the latter due to its more recent release. While the book version of *The Help* ensures an equitable distribution of storytelling, providing each character with agency to express their feelings and personal experiences amidst the civil rights movement, the film adaptation predominantly focuses on the white protagonist's perspective. This skewed portrayal led to the marginalization of the voices of the maids, relegating them to the background. In fact, Viola Davis, who portrayed a maid in the film, expressed her desire for the maids' voices to be amplified more prominently. The film's emphasis on the white protagonist's narrative diminishes the significance of the maids' experiences, overshadowing their stories and struggles.

The impact of such representations extends beyond the confines of the film industry, shaping societal attitudes towards Black women. These images perpetuate the notion that Black women are solely meant to be *The Help*, reinforcing stereotypes that manifest in everyday interactions. Black women often find themselves stereotyped as servants or subordinate figures, facing expectations to fulfill menial tasks or conform to prescribed roles. This demonstrates the persistence of ignorance and biased perceptions that continue to plague society.

The evolution of the Mammy role transcends the confines of the screen, influencing societal attitudes towards Black women and perpetuating harmful stereotypes. Therefore, when creating adaptations of films, it is imperative to ensure that agency and storytelling are evenly distributed among characters. The portrayal of maids should not be limited to dark-skinned, slightly overweight Black women, but should encompass a diverse range of experiences and perspectives. By challenging traditional narratives and amplifying marginalized voices, filmmakers can contribute to a more inclusive and accurate representation of Black women in media and society. In conclusion, the analysis of Mammy figures in film adaptations such as *Gone with the Wind* and *The Help* underscores the enduring influence of harmful stereotypes on societal perceptions of Black women. Despite efforts to provide more equitable storytelling in adaptations like *The Help*, the persistent marginalization of Black voices reinforces the notion that Black women are destined to be subservient caretakers. These representations not only perpetuate stereotypes within the film industry but also have tangible effects on societal attitudes and interactions. Moving forward, it is imperative for filmmakers to prioritize diverse and authentic portrayals that challenge traditional narratives and amplify the voices of marginalized communities. By doing so, we can work towards dismantling harmful stereotypes and fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

Aibileen Character Development



In analyzing Aibileen's character development in *The Help*, it's essential to delve into her personal identity, the portrayal of the mammy role, and her lack of agency throughout the film. Aibileen, a Black maid working for the Leefolt family in segregated Jackson, Mississippi, embodies power dynamics, race, gender, and the mammy archetype portrayed in the film.

At the outset, understanding Aibileen's character involves examining her demeanor and behavior. When Skeeter visits her home, she notices how Aibileen seems to “stand taller in her own home”. This observation highlights Aibileen's ability to assert her identity within the confines of her safe space, where she can reclaim a sense of agency. However, in her role as a maid, Aibileen often adopts a submissive posture, avoiding direct eye contact and minimizing her presence—a behavior reminiscent of bell hooks' concept of "Black looks," where black individuals may feel compelled to appear less threatening in the presence of white people due to societal perceptions.

Aibileen's embodiment of the mammy role is evident in her caretaking duties, particularly in her nurturing relationship with Mae Mobley. Her loyalty and subservience align with the mammy archetype, reinforced by her plump appearance and the assertion that "babies love fat." This association suggests that to fulfill the role of a child's caregiver, one must possess certain physical attributes commonly associated with black women. This portrayal echoes historical

depictions of black women in film, where overweight black women often portrayed mammy figures.

Despite her central role in caring for Mae Mobley, Aibileen rarely discusses herself as an individual with agency. Instead, she defines herself solely in terms of her occupation, referring to herself as a cook and emphasizing her role in caring for the child. This lack of personal narrative underscores the limitations imposed on Aibileen's identity by societal expectations and reinforces her position as a marginalized figure.

A particularly poignant moment occurs when Aibileen compares her complexion to that of a roach, stating, "He black. Blacker than me." This comparison reflects society's association of blackness with filth and reinforces harmful stereotypes about black people's cleanliness.

Aibileen's internalization of these norms highlights the pervasive impact of racial stereotypes on individual self-perception. In the figure above she states that "nobody has ever ask me how it feels to be me" by her stating this as leaving the job and how she felt free when leaving this type of work which showcase throughout the film her her character can be seen as a mammy by this statement by her being in the shadows and how nobody has truly thought of her as being a human being and never consider that she may have feelings towards things and how she lack agency in here on autonomy but by her saying free as if she been enslaved through a different way which was her being a maid. By walking away and reclaiming freedom she is able to reclaim her identity by doing this and we can see this in this part of the film.

In conclusion, Aibileen's character development in *The Help* is shaped by her embodiment of the mammy role, her lack of agency, and her struggle to assert her identity within a racially stratified society. Through her portrayal, the film highlights the enduring impact of racial stereotypes on

black women's self-image and underscores the importance of challenging societal expectations to reclaim agency and individuality.

Mae Mobley declaration of “Real Mom” Mae Mobely and Aibileen Relationship:



The relationship between Mae Mobley and Aibileen is portrayed as genuine and heartwarming, illustrating how a child can develop a deep affection for her maid, irrespective of the racial segregation prevailing at the time. Mae Mobley's obliviousness to the racial dynamics underscores the purity of her attachment to Aibileen. In one poignant scene, Aibileen is depicted offering words of affirmation to Mae Mobley, recognizing that she may not conform to conventional beauty standards. Aibileen's acknowledgment that Mae Mobley may not fit the societal image of a "beauty queen" due to her weight demonstrates a shared understanding between the two characters. Both Aibileen and Mae Mobley navigate societal expectations and judgments based on their appearance, particularly regarding weight and its association with being ugly and unseen. The close bond between them is strengthened by their mutual experiences of not conforming to traditional beauty standards. Despite the challenges they face, their relationship remains resilient, fostering a sense of understanding and support that transcends

societal norms. However, it is notable that Aibileen refrains from explicitly labeling Mae Mobley as "beautiful" or "pretty," perhaps reflecting her awareness of the harsh judgments society imposes based on appearance. This portrayal highlights the complexities of beauty standards and their impact on relationships, particularly those between individuals marginalized by society's narrow definitions of beauty. In another scene we see how Mae Mobley declares as her "you're my real momma" which we can see this heartfelt statement towards the right there are multiple reason why Mae Mobley labeled Aibileen as her real momma by looking at the role Aibileen takes on such as scene (00:12:30 to 00:14:45) which when Aibileen is potty training mae mobley and changing her diaper, a maid is someone who takes care of the home while a nanny is someone who takes care of the children we can see how the constantly remind Aibileen that she is the maid and that is her role in the household, but the societal norms they faced where it can come off that Aibileen care and the correlation between fat=ugly they both understand it. Furthermore, looking at the bedtime routine that they do nightly where she is tucking the child in and singing to her to bed which amplifies the maternal figure role she is setting up from sun up to sun down Aibileen is front and center in doing the role of this child's mother by providing her with confidence and establishing this security to the child that her mother isn't proving because she genuinely doesn't share and interested in the child because she doesn't meet the beauty standards that her mother imagine of her.

We can see how Mae Mobley and Aibileen are maintain their close relationship in scenes where Aibileen is comforting and showing Ma Mobely affection when shes upset (00:25:10 to 00:27:45) and we see how she is looking towards Aibileen to be her place of comfort and to keep

her which brings their bond closer by her doing this it reinforce Aibileen as being a maternal figure in the show and not just being seen as a maid the type of care that Aibileen does care an mammy role because she is showing to be loyal to the child and family even at the end of the movie when she is being fired because she's been discovered of being apart of the book that was published before she goes states to Mae Mobley that “you'll be my last baby girl” and “remember what I told you are kind you are smart and important” which establishes her loyalty to the family, the intention of her care for the family goes beyond just begin a maid of the family and how the child had became and extension of herself but her identity as well . Their relationship also strengthens due to how they both need each other. Aibillen 's son was hurt on a job which resulted in him losing his life and Mae Mobley mother was going through postpartum depression and really didn't have the time which hence why she leaned on Aibileen to be her mother.

Elizabeth Leefolts Treatment of Aibileen:



Elizabeth's treatment of Aibileen is emblematic of the racial hierarchy prevalent during that time, where Aibileen is perceived as inferior due to her race, gender, and class. This dynamic reinforces power imbalances, with Elizabeth exerting control over Aibileen and dictating her

actions and speech simply because Aibileen works for her. This is evident during a bridge club meeting, where the topic of providing separate bathrooms for maids is discussed. While Elizabeth agrees with the initiative, Aibileen is left serving the guests behind them, visibly affected by Elizabeth's apparent acceptance of the notion that maids are as dirty as animals. Elizabeth's behavior perpetuates racial hierarchies, as it reflects the prevailing belief that whiteness equates to purity and cleanliness, while blackness is associated with dirtiness and inferiority.

Aibileen's inability to speak out against this treatment highlights her marginalized position in society, compounded by her race and lower class status. She is constrained by societal norms and expectations, unable to challenge Elizabeth's authority or express her discontent. Elizabeth's treatment of Aibileen not only reinforces stereotypes about black people but also underscores the class divisions within society, as Aibileen is relegated to a subservient role despite her employer's lower social standing among her peers. Furthermore, Elizabeth's lack of gratitude for Aibileen's services extends beyond household chores, further marginalizing Aibileen and perpetuating her subordinate position. Also, can see how sometimes Aibileen is given a strict schedule which correlates with a slavery time period schedule we thinking about how she has to take the bus to get there from across town which mean she has to be up much earlier to go to work. Aibileen works from 8:00am-4:00pm and she works six days a week and only having Sundays are off but there are invites and engagements they have to attend these events without extra compensate which showcase how these women see their maids as being an extension of themselves but loyal servants as well to the point where they are constantly serving them even

beyond their working which reinforces the mammy role of how they are loyal, spend more time with their employers rather than their own families.

The influence of characters like Hilly, who occupies a higher societal status, exacerbates the power dynamics between Elizabeth and Aibileen. Hilly's influence highlights the intersections of money, race, gender, and social status, which dictate one's position in society. This scene also marks a turning point where Skeeter, the white protagonist, intervenes to offer Aibileen a job opportunity, further complicating the power dynamics by placing Aibileen in a position of needing Skeeter's assistance, thus perpetuating the white savior complex.

Skeeter White Protagonist

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