Stories from the Margin:

A study on the representation of black female experience and identity in black female literature

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Introduction

This paper concerns the notion of black feminism and black feminist theory. During and posterior to an engagement concerning hegemonic feminism and white feminist literature on previous semesters, we have come to develop a large personal inspiration and motivation for this paper, as we came to discover the limitations and exclusiveness of hegemonic feminism. We have developed a natural interest to obtain a broader and more extensive understanding of and perspective to the notion of feminism in order to attain a more holistic perception of the different issues, approaches and terms within feminism. By working with black feminist literature, we discovered the complexity of being African American women in America due to their overlapping subjugation in terms of race and gender, and their exclusion from social movements for the same reason. Additionally, the time perspective is intriguing to us as well, when considering how young feminism as a phenomenon and established theory is. Many forerunners of black feminism are still alive, continuing their fight for refining the social conditions for black women. However, we are highly aware of our personal ethical questions of legitimacy when employing experiences and struggles of African American women. Our intention is not to determine any scope or magnitude of experience, rather, we attempt to examine these experiences as a way for us to gain an understanding that will enable us to legitimately discuss the effects and repercussions of the development of a black feminist theory and black feminist thought.

The purpose of our project, then, is to examine the notion of black feminism within fiction and theory. When referring to black feminism, we are primarily concerned with three key elements, namely black feminist thinking, black female experience and black female identity. These terms will work as focal points in our project as we intend to analyze how they can be understood as well as how they are represented in our chosen theory and fiction. By equating theory with fiction, we aim to stress their individual strengths and advantages as well as to discuss their unifying significance.

We have chosen black feminist theory by bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins as tools for analyzing four novels by respectively Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Delores Phillips and Kathryn Stockett; novels that belong within the genre of black feminist literature. Due to this, we expect each of them to take a black feminist approach by articulating and thematizing similar topics and issues related to black feminism. However, our purpose is to demonstrate how the novels use different perspectives in the handling of black feminism by demonstrating their individual representations of primarily black feminist thinking, black female experience and black female

identity. An enhancement of differences is exactly what makes the analyses interesting as it provides us with a broader foundation to our understanding and discussion of the notion of black feminism.

Scope of Analysis

With this chapter, our aim is to chart the total frame for the paper in order to clarify the choices that have been made throughout the sections of theory, analysis and discussion. Moreover, we will comment on the paper's structure and how to read it. Starting with the first two chapters; firstly, we are going to give a historical overview in order to frame the paper properly within a historical context. This will also be done in order to explain specific terminology and references within the analysis. Besides the general historical overview, we are going to elaborate on the emergence of black feminist theory as this period of time forms the basis of the complete thematic and literary genre that this paper touches upon, which will clarify the details regarding when and why the need for black feminist theory arose as well.

As for our theory, we have chosen to use bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins to provide a theoretical basis for the understanding of black feminist thinking and theory. Both women are considered highly dominating and influential to the general construction of black feminist theory. Despite sharing fundamental notions of the understanding of black feminist theory, each author contributes with an individual motivation and perspective in their writings. Likewise, our selection of theory by respectively Stuart Hall, Sarah Ahmed and Mary Jane Collier serves as foundation for our thesis regarding the perception of identity. By including sociocultural theories, we attain knowledge of the representation of different contemporaries, and we are hereby able to analyze our novels from a modern and critical perspective.

The composition of the novels by Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Delores Phillips and Kathryn Stockett has been selected in order to ensure a sufficiently broad representation of authors to base further conclusions on, and likewise, to ensure a sufficient number of different perspectives for the same purpose. Furthermore, the novels are published and take place in different decades, which provides nuanced perspectives and purposes to consider. Moreover, we have different expectations of analysis and authorship to each novel, as the combination of their personal backgrounds provides a fundamental authenticity to the paper. Generally speaking, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison are both theorists and novelist who are highly acknowledged for *The Color*

Purple and *The Bluest Eye*, but also for many other publications as well. Delores Phillips is the youngest author out of the four, which makes her perspective particularly interesting, as her view becomes influenced by other and more contemporary aspects. Having published *The Darkest Child* in 2004, one might expect Phillips to be aware of the black feminist work that has been done prior to her debut novel – something that might come forward in her novel. Lastly, Kathryn Stockett's perspective as a white female writer adds yet another and rather controversial perspective to the issue of intersectionality. Her approach distinguishes itself due to frequent discussions about whether women of other races have the right to express themselves on issues of black women in America.

Ultimately, our approach to and employment of our theory is important to clarify prior to reading the paper. As we have allowed a large number of pages to our theory section, we are going to use it two-dimensionally; we have made a clear choice to not only use our theory as an analytical tool applicable to our selected novels, but to use it as an independent element within a comparative assessment by the meaning of theory and fiction in terms of black feminist thought. This discussion is located in the ultimate and secondary part of our discussion.

Historical Context

We have chosen to include a chapter addressing the historical context of the emergence of black feminism as it serves as foundation for the understanding of the incentives of black feminism and contributes to an extensive understanding of the prolonged struggle for equality among blacks and whites – regardless of whether it is the issue concerning gender, race, legal rights etc. The chapter concerns some of the events in the aftermath of the Civil War (1861-1865), including the racial challenges due to the abolishment of slavery, the fight for equality in the Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968), and the movement's initiation of and inspiration to the beginning of black feminist consciousness. We do not intend to go into depth with all events during this period, instead our intention is to stress the aspects that are substantial to the analysis and discussion in this paper.

The abolishment of slavery after the Union victory in the Civil War in 1865 entailed the freedom of millions of slaves. However, this abolishment did not eliminate the racial segregation and discrimination in America and thus African Americans continued to endure racist treatment. This was especially current in the South, which directly opposed any process of rebuilding and transformation in favor of black people's conditions. During the Reconstruction era (1865-1877)

after the Civil War, a period which worked to secure equal civil rights under the constitution, southern states passed "black codes" to suppress the freed African Americans politically, socially and economically (Wilson 1). Both the "black codes" and supremacist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan, which targeted anyone who challenged white authority, reversed the progress and changes of the Reconstruction and thus succeeded in restoring white supremacy in the South. Most significant was the Jim Crow Laws, a legislation that provided the South with means to circumvent the progress during Reconstruction and continue the system of racial marginalization and oppression (Pula 529). Wilson illustrates these conditions with examples of the employment opportunities. Although black men and women worked a variety of jobs, they were constrained and excluded by the segregation policies and discriminatory hiring practices, which left them with limited opportunities. Therefore, most blacks worked in low-level positions and thousands of blacks worked in the homes of white families. For black women, the employment as domestics also meant daily sexual harassment from white men and constant surveillance and commands from white women (Wilson 13-14). Furthermore, Jim Crow enforced the discourse between whites and blacks in which whites referred to blacks as "boy" and "girl", whereas blacks had to refer to whites with formal titles. Also, spatial segregation in public areas were policed. This meant separate movie theaters, public restrooms, hospitals etc. Wilson emphasizes how signs saying "We Serve Whites Only" enforced segregation by telling black where they could, and more importantly, could not eat (ibid. 13-14). Such initiatives were included in the Jim Crow laws and served as constant reminders of black people's subordinate position in society. Thus, Jim Crow appears as a distinctive example of the continued racial segregation and discrimination in the aftermath of the Civil War and the enclosed abolishment of slavery. Jim Crow is also an indicator of the economically, politically and socially suppressive conditions of black people within this period and illustrates the incentives for mobilizing a social movement fighting the inequality rather well.

The purpose of the Civil Rights Movement was exactly an engagement in the struggle for legal rights and it played a major role in articulating the plight of African Americans. The movement encompassed various social movements and activism that utilized nonviolence and passive resistance in order to change the suppressive laws and practices in America, including the Montgomery Bus Boycott commenced by Rosa Parks, the "I Have a Dream" speech by Martin Luther King presented as a part of the March on Washington (1963), and the Civil Rights Acts in respectively 1964 and 1968. The great success of the movement worked as a momentum for the Women's Liberation Movement in the late 1960s (Finley and Mannise 868), as the civil rights

activism also initiated the articulation of women's liberation. However, both movements failed to address the particular concerns of black women. Subsequently, black female voices criticized the male-dominant leadership in the Civil Rights Movement, stating that black women were treated as second-class citizens within black culture in the same way as black people were treated as second-class citizens within American society (Guy-Sheftall 14). Furthermore, the lack of racial perspective within Women's Liberation Movement was the subject of much criticism of black women. This omission of the black female experience commenced a heightened consciousness about the impact of racist and sexist forces in black women's living conditions, which roused a driving force among black females to speak for themselves. And thus, black feminist consciousness initiated a black feminist movement resulting in the evolvement of a black feminist theory, which the following chapters are concerned with.

The purpose of the account of the challenges concerning the aftermath of Civil War, the backlash of the Reconstruction era, and the failure of Civil Rights Movement's and Women's Liberation Movement to address the concerns of black women is to provide our project with a substantiating foundation regarding the racial segregation and discrimination within American society. Additionally, it serves as a fundamental understanding of the driving forces in the emergence of black feminism and black feminist theory. Furthermore, the chapter frames our chosen novels' geographical position in the southern states of America, providing us with an analytical foundation regarding the main characters' social, political and economic situation within American society during the 1930s to the 1960s.

The Emergence of Black Feminist Thinking

This chapter is meant as a brief overview of the contextual frame of the paper. We will be using Becky Thompson's article "Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism" (2002) to examine an alternative perspective on second wave feminism as a movement opposed to traditional hegemonic feminism. When exploring second wave feminism, it is clear how the majority of texts and literature employs white middle class feminists' development since first wave. This account, however, will touch upon how black feminists spent the given period to claim their proper manifestation in feminist history. Additionally, Beverly Guy-Sheftall's anthology *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought* (1995) and Barbara Smith's *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, first published in 1983, will be included to provide

insight into the literary chronology and history of black feminism, but also to increase our own extent of knowledge regarding secondary and additional literature to the paper. Both Smith and Guy-Sheftall's anthologies are collections and chronological overviews of black feminist writers, but they will be used with different purposes in this paper. Guy-Sheftall will help us to contextually categorize our primary literature and to underline their relevance in a broader perspective and context, whereas it is the introduction in Smith's anthology that has most relevance to this paper.

Starting with second wave feminism, Thompson begins her article by expressing concerns of the consideration of feminism as something "hegemonic" (Chela Sandoval in Thompson 337), and hereby something that primarily regards white women and excludes groups of females of other ethnic backgrounds worldwide. Her argument is that this kind of feminism is "white led, marginalizes the activism and world views of women of color, focuses mainly on the United states, and treats sexism as the ultimate oppression" (Thompson 337). She argues that this form of feminism generates negligence of the women who faced the most radical form of oppression and romanticizes what kind of problems existed. Focusing on equality with (white) men as the primary goal for feminism, other important intersecting parameters such as class and race were effectively ignored. Also, the vision for social change was based on individual rights and not justice (ibid. 337). Ultimately, hegemonic feminism became another movement or system for black females to handle in their resistance of oppression and fight for liberation. Feminism should instead be considered multiracial and not merely focusing on the lives of black and white women in America, but on females all over the world, Thompson argues. Moreover, she explains how multiracial feminism is the core of an inclusive women's liberation, which does not mean that the previous work by so-called 'white feminists' was ineffective or improper, as much as it means that it was limited in ambition, effectiveness and inclusiveness. This examination, however, will solely concern Thompson's focus on black women in America.

In the 1970s, the beginning of a multiracial feminist movement, Thompson explains, was largely characterized by an including perspective and driven by a history best told from African American women's point of view (ibid. 337). In 1968, some black organizations and movements emerged and worked with third world females' struggles with imperialism, racism and sexism. The National Black Feminist Organizations (NFBO) was one of the autonomous feminist organizations from the 1970s and was, according to professor of History and Professor of Women's and Gender Studies at Rutgers University, Deborah Gray White, "more than any organization in the century . . . launched a frontal assault on sexism and racism" (ibid. 339-340) and served as an advocate for

colored women and across class. While NFBO was only active for a limited amount of time, its work and members kept flourishing in the feminist environment years after. The major concern of the organizations was "decidedly Black women's issues-stereotypes of Black women in the media, discrimination in the workplace, myths about Black women as matriarchs, Black women's beauty, and self-esteem" (ibid. 340), picking up on the elements that the hegemonic feminist movement failed to include. NFBO and other 1970s organizations and movements created many new possibilities for black women and women of color in the US, who, at this point more than ever, had the ability to unite and work together. Even some white feminists became involved in this part of feminism as well (ibid. 340).

Moving on to *Words of Fire* by Guy-Sheftall, which takes its starting point back in 1831 and is divided into seven chronologically ordered chapters - each chapter built on different significant texts by black feminist authors and personas belonging into the given period of time. With a descriptive preface and introduction to each author and period, this piece provides additional knowledge on what for example black feminists like Audre Lorde, bell hooks and Alice Walker have each contributed with to the notion of black feminism and why they were important. Agreeing with Thompson, Guy-Sheftall explains how the history of American feminism has been "primarily a narrative about the heroic deeds of white women" (xiii), and how descriptions of first wave feminism are insufficient end exclusive of many groups in their stand-taking on black feminism, with only Sojourner Truth to help the conditions that made modern feminism a reality. Guy-Sheftall's aim with this book, albeit insufficient, is to document the presence of all the non-fictional contributors to black feminism and black feminist thought through time, as opposed to somewhat well represented black feminist fiction during what is known to some people as the 'black literary renaissance' (ibid. xiv). *Words of Fire* holds literature from different women who do not necessarily agree in their view feminism, family configurations, class or politics. They are identities with separate and individual voices:

> They have multiple identities, several voices, and different battles to engage. They are academics, activists, artists, community organizers, mothers. They are race women, socialists, communists, Christians, atheists, lesbian and straight, traditional and radical. (ibid. xv)

They do have a shared history of oppression in common, however, and hereby a mutual goal to improve their given conditions and the lives for black women, but also a goal to improve general

living conditions worldwide. Through these individuals and their contributions, Guy-Sheftall negotiates and writes the African American women's history and the evolution of black feminist thinking in the US, and hereby provides transparency about the social and historical impact of sexism, heterosexism, racism and classicism of these women and their lives.

Barbara Smith's *Home Girls* is, like *Words of Fire*, made to enlighten ethnic women and to stress the importance of the work of black female activists, authors and poets. Smith introduces the book by accounting for her own childhood as a way of emphasizing her own motif and to exemplify the many times in life that black women encounter oppression and discrimination as well as to stress the realness of how women can strengthen each other by uniting as one. Smith was also politically active and member of the Combahee River Collective since 1974. Like Guy-Sheftall, Smith explains how *Home Girls* is an attempt to "get the word out about Black feminism to the people who need it the most. Black people in the U.S., the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa - everywhere" (Smith xxxiii). She learned about black feminism by the women of her family and their daily encounter with different struggles, but she soon learned the hardships of fighting. Black feminists at that time were seen as women who were abandoning their race and were therefore not considered part of the black community on the same terms as others. Not only did white men and women and black men work against feminists from developing, but other black women did the same. Men of all ethnicities, however, pointed out how women's liberation was irrelevant to women of color, and this to undermine the movement's efforts as a whole (ibid. xxvii). This reluctance originated from the fact that black feminists were now a threat that could change things as they were, and due to this threat, opponents, both black and white, developed myths that would undermine the work of black feminists. These myths sounded as following: 1. The black woman is already liberated. 2. Racism is the primary (or only) oppression black women have to confront. 3. Feminism is nothing but man-hating (and men have never done anything that would legitimately inspire hatred). 4. Women's issues are narrow, apolitical concerns. People of color need to deal with the "larger struggle". And 5. Those feminists are nothing but lesbians. Besides these myths, existing media ignored black feminist announcements and achievements, and due to lack of consistent communication, like a feminist newspaper or a newspaper that included and mediated the issues amongst black feminists, linking across geographic boundaries was almost impossible. Despite these elements of adversity, however, Smith spends many pages on stressing the importance in knowing how real, relevant and crucial it is for black women to keep pushing these boundaries that everyone else tries to place for them. Furthermore, she argues how, in 1982, black feminist

movement was real and had been a thing since before 1974 when she joined in (ibid. xxxiii). She speaks of 'home truth' as black female reality and of day to day organizing and theory as the areas where black feminism operates, both in action and analysis (ibid. xxxvii).

As mentioned earlier, some of our chosen theoretical literature belongs under a period of Guy-Sheftall's anthology with post-Civil Rights Movements and Women's Liberation as a manifestation from black women refusing to remain quiet on their issues, insisting on moving from the margins to the center of society. A small collection of texts from a grand body of explicitly feminist discourse appeared in the 1980s despite marginalization (ibid. xvi). In the introduction, Guy-Sheftall addresses how black women through time have tried to improve their conditions through many different movements. For example, like Thompson, she mentions the NFBO as one of the essential organizations alongside other nationalist movements, civil rights movements etc., which all made enormous impacts on modern black feminism and contemporary black women's history (ibid. 229). The 1980s thereby became a decade of changing feminist discourse; from black women's silence to their empowerment, and black feminist theory would become groundbreaking corrective to the privileged white, female, middle-class gaze.

Part 1: Theory

bell hooks

When concerned with the emergence of black feminism to second wave feminism, acknowledged author, professor, feminist and social activist bell hooks is inevitable. Having published more than 30 books and multiple academic essays, hooks is considered a major contributor to the evolvement of black feminism and black feminist theory. The publication of her earliest works *Ain't I a Woman?: Black Women and Feminism* from 1981 and *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* from 1984 were of vital importance to changing the direction and understanding of feminism in the 1980s, as they break with hegemonic second wave feminism. The works are considered groundbreaking in the struggle for black women's liberation as they map the black female experience, adjusting the social position of black women in the US and initiating a black feminist movement. Within these works, hooks addresses her contentions of the origins of racist, sexist and classist issues regarding black women in America. Her writing style is rather distinctive and of particular significance. Being an academic, her academic way of thinking reflects her writing but

her argumentation and descriptions, however, are obviously based on a level of personal experiences. Furthermore, her omission of references throughout her works has caused her much criticism. In her essay "Theory as Liberatory Practice" (1991), hooks disclaims the omission of references and conventional academic format, stating that is it a deliberate decision motivated by the desire to "reach as many readers as possible in as many different locations as possible" (9). She is well aware of the negative response, including academic settings deeming the works "not theoretical" and "not scholarly" (ibid. 9). However, this deliberate decision reflects her works' purpose as a diverse and inclusive feminist theory, which will be further examined throughout this chapter. Our examination of hooks' works is divided into four sections, each concerned with a significant aspect of her theoretical perspectives. Thus, the following sections are concerned with her examination of slavery and its impact on the oppression of black women, her aim at including black women "from the margins" to feminist theory, her critique of early hegemonic feminism and finally, her vision for a new feminist movement based on accountability and a united sisterhood between white and black women.

The Impact of Slavery

In her introduction to *Ain't I a Woman*, hooks states that her primary intent with the book is to "document the impact of sexism on the social status of black women" (13). However, this intention expanded to a broader perspective including "the impact of sexism on black women during slavery, the devaluation of black womanhood, black male sexism, racism within the recent feminist movement, and black women's involvement with feminism" (ibid. 13). In the first chapter "Sexism and the Black Slave Experience", hooks examines the sexist and racist oppression of black women into a historical context rooted in slavery. She finds this chapter particularly necessary, as she criticizes the lack of previous scholarly work presenting the experience of black enslaved women since most scholarly material is concerned with the male perspective (ibid. 20-22). According to hooks, slavery is a crucial element in black feminist theory as being the core cause of sexist oppression against black women. Although her statements can be considered rather rigid or antiquated, slavery remains a crucial historical component to the understanding of racist, sexist and classist tendencies in American society, and a crucial element to hook's submission of black female oppression. She states that the racist and sexist treatment of black women during slavery has created a comparable treatment of black women in contemporary American society. Brutal methods such as whipping, raping and branding done by white men are examples of this treatment (ibid. 18-19), and

especially rape, hooks argues, is considered an "institutionalized method to demoralize and dehumanize black women" (ibid. 27). This treatment of black women was done in order for white men to "obtain absolute allegiance and obedience to white imperialistic order" (ibid. 27), and if black women refused the sexual exploitation, they directly challenged this system. Thus, hooks illustrates the impact of female treatment during slavery and thereby establishes the origins of sexism against black women. However, although white men institutionalized slavery in order to obtain white imperialistic order, white women, hooks contends, were the most beneficiaries:

> Prior to slavery, patriarchal law decreed white women were lowly inferior beings, the subordinate group in society. The subjugation of black people allowed them to vacate their despised position and assume the role of a superior. (ibid. 153)

Slavery created a new superior status for women as opposed to the status of black men and women. She grounds her argumentation on intersecting dimensions, claiming that in an imperialistic, hierarchical society, white women can act as superior due to their race even though they are considered inferior due to their sex (ibid. 141). This new status of white women, hooks claims, initiated "the conflict of sisterhood" between white and black women.

Margin vs. Center

In her second book *Feminist Theory*, being an elaboration and enhancement of the former book, hooks is deliberated to develop a black feminist theory. She paves the way for a significant core element in black feminist thought, namely the importance of including a variety of perspectives and experiences when constructing a social theory. She criticizes early feminism and feminist movement of underestimating and neglecting this aspect:

> It was the dearth of material by and about black women that led me to begin the research and writing of *Ain't I A Woman: black women and feminism*. It is the absence of feminist theory that addresses margin and center that has led me to write this book. In the pages ahead, I explore the limitations of various aspects of feminist theory and practice, proposing new directions. (hooks in *Feminist Theory* preface)

hooks' initiative is highly influenced by the lack of material regarding black women. Her intention to include knowledge "from the margins" indicates that the perspective of the margin must be taken

into consideration within feminist theory as an attempt to provide a broader perspective to feminist theory. When using the term "from margin to center" both as the book's title and the premise for writing it, hooks not only scopes the thematic foundation of her book and theory, she furthermore contends the idea of a social construction consisting of a center and a margin. When referring to the margin, hooks refers to black women's placement outside the societal center, namely non-white, non-upper-class, non-educated women, who are "part of the whole but outside the main body" (ibid. preface). These women, hooks states, have been eliminated from feminist theory and movement due to early hegemonic feminism:

> Much feminist theory emerges from privileged women who live at the center, whose perspectives on reality rarely include knowledge and awareness of the lives of women and men who live in the margin. As a consequence, feminist theory lacks wholeness, lacks the broad analysis that could encompass a variety of human experiences. (ibid preface).

hooks states that black feminist theory is capable of meeting these conditions. Thus, she argues that this experience of black women (and men) belonging in the margin and working in the center provides them with a significant societal position of looking both "from the outside in and from the inside out" (ibid. preface). This "particular way of seeing reality" is a result of the daily structure of their lives, namely working for white people and living among and as black people, which makes them capable of understanding different perspectives and societal positions. This, hooks states, provides them with an oppositional worldview: "This mode of seeing reminded us of the existence of a whole universe, a main body made up of both margin and center" (ibid. preface). With this, hooks grounds her statement that black women are capable of what white women and early feminism are not; to include the margin, to encompass a variety of perspectives and experiences and to consider and include these varieties within feminist theory. Furthermore, she grounds this statement on her own personal experience of living in the margin of society. She demonstrates her personal societal position by a symbolic and illustrative description of the railroads in Kentucky:

> As black Americans living in a small Kentucky town, the railroads tracks were a daily reminder of our marginality . . . Across those tracks was a world we could work in as maids, as janitors, as prostitutes, as long as it was in a service capacity. We would

> enter that world but we could not live there. We had always to return to the margin. (ibid.)

The railroads serve as a divider between the margin and the center, the blacks and the whites. Her personal experiences enable her to speak as a black woman "from the margins". Thus, hooks uses personal experiences to establish and substantiate her statements and thereby strengthens her own and her theory's reliability and authority.

Critique of Early White Feminism

Throughout both *Ain't I a Woman* and *Feminist Theory*, hooks presents a distinctive critique of early white feminism. In *Ain't I a Woman*, she especially addresses the issue of accountability and how early white feminists are guilty of retaining and advocating racial oppression of black men and women (124). By presenting a comprehensive analysis of racist traits in feminist movements, hooks substantiates her contentions that black women's interests are ignored and excluded from early feminist theory. Her critique is based on several early feminist writers' works stating that: "most white female writers who considered themselves feminists revealed in their writing that they had been socialized to accept and perpetuate racial ideology" (ibid. 137). According to hooks, the racism in these works was rather subtle; by simply ignoring the perspectives and conditions of black women, or using racist and sexist stereotypes, white feminist writers did not take part in decomposing racist and sexist oppression against black women (ibid. 137-142). In *Feminist Theory,* hooks expands her criticism with a particular focus on the lack of perspective from the margins in early feminist theory. This narrowness of perspective, hooks argues, is a consequence of the discourse among the white, upper-middle-class women who initiated a feminist movement only to advocate personal interests. She substantiates this statement with a critique of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), one of the first and most influential writings to early feminist theory. She exemplifies the narrowness of perspective with Friedan's statement: "We can no longer ignore that voice within women that says: 'I want something more than my husband and my children and my house.'" (hooks in *Feminist Theory* 1). What Friedan alludes to, namely a career and work as the key to liberation, is an evident example of her not moving beyond personal interests and life experiences (ibid. 3). Thus, according to hooks, Friedan's work is an outright illustration of the issues of narrow perspective and exclusion of the margins embodied in early feminist movement:

> She made her plight and the plight of white women like herself synonymous with a condition affecting all American women. In doing so, she deflected attention away from her classism, her racism, her sexist attitudes towards the masses of American women. (ibid. 2)

hooks criticizes Friedan for not taking into account the impact of intersectionality; she does not comprehend the effect of white superiority and white upper-middle-class women's political and social status within a sexist, racist and capitalist society (ibid. 3-4). Furthermore, hooks enhances the conflicting elements in Friedan's struggle for liberation. The women that she refers to, the white, upper-middle-class women who want "something more", strive to become more like the men who oppress them. In that sense, hooks argues, women like Friedan ended up reinforcing this oppressive system (ibid. 7). Thus, these women's idea of liberation is based on having the power of white men, and as a consequence, black and white women will always be in conflict with one another (hooks in *Ain't I a Woman* 156).

Accountability, Sisterhood and the Proposing of a New Feminist Movement

In both *Ain't I a Woman* and *Feminist Theory,* hooks' theoretical argumentation is based on how social, political and cultural systems in American society work to affect and oppress different groups of people. She contends that this foundation, based on capitalist and patriarchal principles, is the piercing reason that racism, sexism and classism occur. As mentioned, hooks criticizes early white feminists of reinforcing this system. Furthermore, she states that the reason for the conflict between white and black women is caused by this implicit acceptance of these principles. She proposes a resolution for this conflict, one that originates in the issue of accountability and the necessity for a new feminist movement:

> If women want a feminist revolution – ours is a world that is crying out for feminist revolution – then we must assume responsibility for drawing women together in political solidarity. That means we must assume responsibility for eliminating all the forces that divide women. Racism is one such force. Women, all women, are accountable for racism continuing to divide us. (ibid. 157-158)

She encourages women to not only refuse the racist, sexist and classist standards, but to act upon them together in solidarity. This, she contends, is the only way to change the system (ibid. 157). A united sisterhood among women regardless of intersecting differences is of crucial importance for a successful change. Thus, she enhances the importance of acknowledging and accepting these intersecting differences. This notion of a united sisterhood delineates hooks' distinctive way of constructing a new feminist theory. Her aim is to include and integrate women from the margins into the center, but without excluding the white women placed at the center. Instead, she aims at reintegrating these women in a new, inclusive and united feminist movement. Furthermore, in her essays in *Feminist Theory*, hooks proposes terms and perspectives that have the potential to transform these deeply entrenched political, social, racial, and sexist structures in contemporary American society. A feminist movement, hooks contends, is the core of cultural transformation. Furthermore, she expresses that men too have a responsibility to fight the structures and principles in society, and that male involvement is crucial in order for a feminist movement to succeed. The inclusion of men will shatter the hegemonic notions of men as "the enemy" and women as "victims". Additionally, both men and women will benefit from the movement, hooks states, as breaking down the oppressive gender system will result in liberation of intersecting systems for both genders.

To sum up, hooks is of significant importance to the emergence of black feminist theory and black feminist thought in the way she articulates black women's history and social conditions in American society. Her works *Ain't I a Woman* and *Feminist Theory* deliberately break with early hegemonic feminism and are considered groundbreaking as she is one of the first black women to commence the discourse of black feminist thinking. Furthermore, she is one of the first to produce work that acts as catalyst for social change for black women by offering a new inclusive feminist theory. With a comprehensive examination of the enslavement, hooks elucidates black female oppression with a thorough documentation of slavery to the social status of black women. Furthermore, by enhancing the narrowness of perspective due to an exclusion of the margins of society, she criticizes early white feminists' course in the struggle for women's liberation and the development of feminist theory. Throughout her works, hooks challenges these feminists to incorporate the perspective of intersectionality to their activism and theoretical work. This, she contends, will generate a multidimensional feminist theory and a reconstructed movement unrestrained by the sexist, classist and racist principles of a patriarchal, capitalist society. She bases her argumentation on the notion that, in order to reconstruct feminist theory with a diverse and

intersecting perspective, all women must challenge the deeply underlying societal structures. It is exactly the awareness of the societal dynamics between the cultural, social, and political relations as well as the relations between genders that will eventually destroy the same oppressive forces and cause a transformative and revolutionary impact on society.

Patricia Hill Collins

Patricia Hill Collins is arguably most famous for her works *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, And the Politics of Empowerment* (2000) and *Intersectionality* (2016) and is a vastly respected and influential professor of African American studies and sociology at the University of Cincinnati. Initially, Collins wrote a monograph named *Black Feminist Thought,* a stepping-stone to her more developed and famous book of the same name. To many, her work is considered to be revolutionary and belonging in the category of mostly used material within women's studies curricula (Guy-Sheftall 337). This part of the theory section touches upon the most important concepts within the above-mentioned two pieces in relation to our literary analysis and overall paper. It will be divided into two main chapters, including underlying sections. The aim with this account is to both map and address Patricia Hill Collins' influence on and role within black feminist thinking and theory, as well as to account for important terms that will become analytical tools to our chosen novels.

Black Feminist Thought

Black Feminist Thought is a compilation of black feminist thinking through second wave feminism. Collins incorporates the conventional academic formats' influence on her work's acknowledgment and consumption, and by this, she takes larger part in the admitted academic discourse and format concurrently with employing non-academic knowledge, including individual life experiences, music and fiction. Alongside her personal and subjective life experiences as a black woman as motivation, an objective perspective accompanies her thinking and writing style, making her work multi layered and -dimensional. Moreover, Collins' contextual position of a later generation than for example bell hooks, Barbara Smith and Alice Walker enables her to dissociate herself from the extremely, at the time, controversial and agitated occurrences in the 1980s, which permits her an objective and reflective perspective.

Several contributions containing groundbreaking thinking have been made prior to *Black Feminist Thought*, nevertheless, Collins' work is revolutionary to the discussion. In the first part of

her book, "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought", Collins' personal style and structure become visible alongside her premise and foundation for her further methodological work. Focusing on significant posterior written material within her field, she accepts and acknowledges these contributions' different perspectives, motifs and experiences, and thenceforth, she starts untangling the utmost important factors and consistencies. *Black Feminist Thought*, then, becomes a systematic, academic and categorical compilation of already present knowledge on the area of black feminist thinking.

Using different terminology, including intersectionality, Collins organizes the different lines of oppression, the different areas in which they are evident and the different levels on which they each operate into boxes and categories that create an understanding and overview of the issue. This categorization works as a system consisting of overlapping dimensions of race, gender and class on one parameter, political, economic and social aspects on another parameter, and finally, the individual, cultural and institutional level on a third parameter. With this type of categorization, Collins facilitates the ability to understand the complicated intertwining system of oppression and how the parameters work together and crosswise. It can, for example, be used to understand how these dimensions and levels create a system in which it is visible how it takes understanding and distinctive consideration when distinguishing between groups of people and their individual circumstances. For instance, it is complicated to compare a black, middle-class male raised by a single mother, with a low-class, mixed race, lesbian female raised in another kind of family structure. Many different parameters have to be considered with these two people, and how this can be measured and classified is what Collins successfully does with this chapter, so they at some point can be compared.

Additionally, in this part of her book, Collins also accounts for the different features that, to her, distinguish general US black feminist thought. First, she explains how black feminist thought should be considered as a critical social theory:

> Black feminist thought aims to empower African-American women within the context of social injustice sustained by intersecting oppressions. Since black women cannot be fully empowered unless intersecting oppressions themselves are eliminated, black feminist thought supports broad principles of social justice that transcend U.S Black women's particular needs. (ibid. 26)

She refers to the persisting social and governmental differential group treatment based on individuals' race, gender, sexuality etc. Furthermore, other distinguishing features in black feminist thought, Collins explains, are the links between experiences and ideas, the connections between U.S Black women's experiences as a heterogeneous collectivity and any ensuing group knowledge or standpoint, the essential contributions of African American women intellectuals, and finally, the significance of change depending on black feminist thought and black feminism as dynamic (ibid. 25-43). These features constitute black feminist thought, and the premise for Collins' theory. Taking both matters of experiences of individuals, collective groups and common people into account, including academics and considering their dynamics, Collins proposes a well-rounded theory.

Collins uses the term 'outsider-within' to articulate black female oppression in American society, which was first presented in her essay *Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought* from 1986. It is an oxymoron describing the contradictory social position of black women in America, and alongside the title on Audre Lorde's major piece *Sister Outsider*, it has become a crucial signpost and figure of speech within black feminist theory. With it, and in continuation of the account for bell hooks' notion of "margin vs. center", Collins states that black women are considered outsiders, or aliens, within the spaces of oppression, and she exemplifies, with their position in proportion to feminist thought and black social thought, that they cannot become fully members of either constitution due to their sex and their race. Nevertheless, based on this position as an outsider-within, Collins argues how this position provides a unique standpoint and perspective to black women when looking at cultural, social and political realities, as it enables them to look differently at oppression, and gives them a broader perspective to feminist thinking (ibid. 14-15).

Core Themes in Black Feminist Thought

Moving on to the second chapter "Core Themes in Black Feminist Thought", which is by far the longest and is the one in which Collins accounts for what, to her, have the highest and most central relevance for black women's living conditions. In this chapter, we will provide an account of what Collins refers to as 'controlling images' and examples hereof, and secondly, we will explain Collins' view on black women's love relationships and relation to motherhood. This will be done in order to generate a vocabulary for further analysis, in which these following terms will be used as central terminology.

Controlling Images

One core theme within this chapter is, as mentioned before, Collins' description of the concept 'controlling images'. This term covers the way by which black women have been categorized in society and how they have been written into a homogeneous history, as well as it demonstrates the consequences of the dysfunctional societal American structure. Controlling images illustrate the fundamental power relations between white and black people and serve as a way for the dominant group to maintain the oppressed group in a numbing position while serving an ideological justification for this oppression. Collins explains how:

> [t]he dominant ideology of the slave era fostered the creation of several interrelated, socially constructed controlling images of Black womanhood, each reflecting the dominant group's interest in maintaining the Black woman's subordination. (ibid. 79)

This way, she introduces the first and most pronounced of the controlled images, namely, the mammy. This image was based on a fundamental cult of "true womanhood" in extension of the mythical idea of family ideals, where piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity were characteristics ascribed to the propertied white woman, who were also expected to deny her female sexuality (ibid. 79, 81). Mammies, on the other hand, were considered asexual all in all and encountered with expectations as being an obedient servant of her 'white family', caring more for them and their children than for her own. The mammy also represents the public face that whites expect from black women. This image emerged to cover the exploitation of social class and for reasons of economic survival, but it was also a normative measure used to evaluate all black women's behavior (ibid. 80-81). The second controlling image is what Collins and others call the matriarch: "Though a more recent phenomenon, the image of the Black matriarch fulfills similar functions in explaining Black women's placement in intersecting oppressions" (ibid. 82). Where the mammy represents the 'good' black mother figure in white homes, the matriarch represents the 'bad' black mother in black homes. Marked as unfeminine due to employment outside the household and due to being overly aggressive, the matriarch is stigmatized as one who emasculates their husbands and lovers, which led to divorce and abandonment. The matriarch then, also known as an overly strong woman, is punished for her automatic social placement as abandoned by her man, impoverished and stigmatized as being unfeminine and hereby less desirable as assertiveness come out negatively as well. Both the images of the mammy and the matriarch, Collins argues, are

central to intersecting oppressions of class, gender and race, leaving the women in an untenable position (ibid. 83-85).

Apart from the mammy and the matriarch, Collins presents three other controlling images as well, albeit not as pronounced. Moreover, these controlling images have emerged in a later time period, typically after the 1960s. Firstly, the welfare-mother is a figure constructed on a class-specific controlling image, developed for impoverished black women to make use of social welfare benefits. This image arose from the idea of the 'breeder woman' and the idea that African American women are hypersexual females and that they, for that reason, should breed more children. This idea belongs to the slavery era, as several children were commodities and an advantage at that point, but in a later context, these children are considered a burden, leaving the welfare-mother as of moral aberration. She is tied to the working class ideal, and, like the matriarch, she is considered a 'bad' mother due to lack of aggressiveness as to determining her life, acting lazy, and content to be unemployed. Secondly, the black lady is another controlling image that refers to the middle class educated women. This image does not emerge until the 1980s and is the image of the professional black woman. Like the mammy, the black lady is seen as asexual and unfeminine and she has deselected family due to her assertiveness and her aim at success (ibid. 86-89). The final controlling image is called the jezebel. The jezebel represents a deviant and overly sexual black woman and is central in the linking of all controlling images of black womanhood: "Because efforts to control black women's sexuality lie at the heart of Black women's oppression, historical jezebels and contemporary "hoochies" represent a deviant Black female sexuality" (ibid. 89). According to Collins, all these controlling images must be suppressed via black female liberation, as they are some of the major reasons for black female oppression.

Black Women's Love Relationships

We have chosen to examine and include Collins' account for black women's love relationships and their relation to motherhood in order to create a framework that supports and categorizes the different characters' actions and conditions in the selected novels. This enables us to analyze whether these fictional characters are representatives for an academic discourse on love, relationships and motherhood. Furthermore, like Collins argues, the tensions and relationships between African American men and women have been an explored and long-standing theme in US black feminist thought (ibid. 164).

Black men and black women have a distinct relation to one another and to white men and women as well. Focusing on black women's relation to black men, Collins explains how this tradition includes both "love and trouble" as equally strong notions. She elaborates by stating: "Both the tensions between African-American women and men and the strong attachment that we feel for one another represent a rejection of binary thinking and an acceptance of the both/and conceptual stance in Black feminist thought" (ibid. 165). An understanding of this relation demands further understanding of heterosexist, Eurocentric gender ideology and how men and women are advanced by ideas about traditional family ideals, which influences African American men and women directly or indirectly. Moreover, definitions and ideas of proper gender behavior for men and women affect both social institutions and daily interactions for black men and women. The main issue arises in black women's anticipations towards black men:

> The list of qualities is clear. A good man is one who makes a woman laugh, does not run around with other women, has a good body, is a good lover, can hold a decent conversation, and "spends time with his kids when he can." He always has his woman's "back" when she needs him, and he's "never disrespectful 'cause his momma taught him that. (ibid. 167)

Black female authors, musicians and other vocalists have long traditions for declaring their love and identifying their relationship with black men as a source of strength and support (Harrison 1978, 1988; Russell 1982 in Collins 164). Simultaneously, black women have been mistreated, oppressed and abused by those same men, leaving the women with a love/hate relationship towards the opposite gender, supported by an argument of a strong attachment and level of tension representing rejection of binary thinking and an acceptance of the both/and stance in black feminist thought (Collins 165). Thus, a reaction to this tendency becomes for many black women to liberate themselves from this abuse and mistreatment and to live alone with their children instead. Being alone is not as frowned upon in black civil society due to the awareness of the notion that good black men are hard to find (ibid. 174).

Black Women and Motherhood

With focus on the analysis of black motherhood post the growth of modern black feminism, we gain insight to the historical significance and reality of African American motherhood. Furthermore, with this approach, a more revitalized black feminist analysis of motherhood will be made,

debunking the mythical image of the "happy slave", the white male-created matriarch or the black male-perpetuated super strong black mother (ibid. 190). This account of African American women's position of black motherhood is characterized by five themes; the first being situated around the significance of bloodmothers, othermothers and women-centered networks. With this category, Collins explains how in many African American communities, women can have several roles. Bloodmothers are biological mothers to their own children and expected to care for them. However, due to recognition of the hardship and challenges motherhood brings, othermothers have come to play a significant role as well by supporting children and bloodmothers who may lack preparation or desire for motherhood. These othermothers assist the bloodmothers by sharing the mothering responsibilities and have traditionally been part of the institution of black motherhood (Troester 1984 in Collins 192). Sisters, friends, grandmothers and cousins among others take on these responsibilities and, historically, temporary assistance often turns into long-term care or informal adoption (Collins 193). The second theme touches upon mothers, their daughters and socialization for survival, and how mothers struggle and ability to lead their daughters into the right direction in life. Mammy work may not be the optimum solution albeit obvious, because mothers know how their daughters become active parts in their own subordination with this kind of work. Albeit ideal and due to the fear of not surviving, strong self-defined and self-valuated daughters who challenge oppression is not necessarily a realistic solution either:

> Black daughters must learn how to survive the sexual politics of intersecting oppressions while rejecting and transcending the same power relations. In order to develop these skills in their daughters, mothers demonstrate varying combinations of behaviors devoted to ensuring their daughters' survival – such as providing them with basic necessities and protecting them in dangerous environments. (Joseph 1981, 1984 in Collins 199)

Many black mothers who undergo intersecting oppressions find that they have neither time nor patience for affection and demonstration in correct life choices. Yet, the majorities of black daughters both admire their mothers and are convinced that their mothers love them (ibid. 202). The third and less relevant theme for this paper, covers the situation of community othermothers and political activism, and will not be elaborated on.

Motherhood as a symbol of power is the fourth theme and addresses how African American women can evoke motherhood as a symbol of power. A large part of black women's status within

women-centered kin networks stems from their important contributions as bloodmothers and othermothers. This aspect is important because black women's involvement in community work forms an important foundation for power within black civil society (Collins 207-208). When describing the strong black woman, this kind of power is often part of what and who is referred to.

Lastly, the view from the inside and the personal meaning of mothering to African American women is based on the recognition that black motherhood is a highly and fundamentally contradictory institution. Contradictory, due to the fact that African American women's innovative and practical approach to motherhood under oppressive conditions often foster their empowerment, but simultaneously, motherhood demands high personal costs (ibid. 211). For example, unwanted pregnancy can have fatal and tragic consequences for individuals. Still, there is a historical and anthropological tradition of pregnancy to be a significant step from girlhood towards womanhood. This, however, becomes a problem for those girls who encounter this event prematurely. Despite high costs, many unmarried black adolescent mothers choose to keep their children, which might reflect strong pronatalist values (ibid. 212). Yet, the willingness to self-sacrifice might originate from a lack of committed love relationships with black men. Women, who, due to harsh environments and sexual politics are left alone, might bear the need for solace and love from their children instead.

Black Feminist Epistemology

What characterizes Collins' work is her deliberate and prioritized articulation, inclusion and distinction of black feminist epistemology. In her chapter "Black Feminist Epistemology", she thoroughly accounts for the underlying fundamental epistemological issues concerning the rearticulating of black feminist thought. She hereby emphasizes the issues and adversity that black women face when trying to establish and reformulate standpoints and opinions within black feminist thought, and how these issues are results of power relations and structures. Collins argues that white male dominant societal groups have an interest in suppressing black females and black feminist standpoints in order to maintain their own superior position. In her article "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought" (1981), Collins states that: "One key reason that standpoints of oppressed groups are suppressed by superior groups is that self-defined standpoints can stimulate oppressed groups to resist their domination" (749).

In order to break with their position as subordinates, black women confront the perspectives of dominant groups and start developing "self-defined standpoints based on their own experience

and resistance" (ibid. 749), as mentioned previously. Yet, challenging these perspectives and standpoints and also rearticulating black feminist thinking is a very difficult and comprehensive process caused by the so-called knowledge-validation made and controlled by a group of white males. Collins argues that all social thought reflects the interests and standpoints of its makers, and thus, these given standpoints of black feminist thought for example, can be subjugated and rejected as valid knowledge on epistemological grounds (Collins in *Black Feminist Thought* 271). With this, black female scholars become unable to legitimate their knowledge claims as long as the criteria for validation is based on the same Eurocentric masculinist criteria: "New knowledge claims must be consistent with an existing body of knowledge that the group controlling the interpretive context accepts as true" (ibid. 273). This argument demonstrates the significance of enhancing an alternative black feminist epistemology; an epistemology where the standpoints of black women are accepted and acknowledged, and one that supports the construction of black feminist thought by legitimating these women's knowledge claims. In order to do this, Collins gives a detailed account of the criteria of black feminist epistemology. She addresses four key components or concepts on which these criteria are based; the use of dialog in assessing knowledge claims, the lived experiences as criterion of meaning, the ethics of caring, and finally, the ethics of personal accountability (ibid. 275-285). This consideration of epistemological issues that Collins finds so important is an articulation of the challenges and resistances that the early black scholars like hooks, Lorde and Walker faced through time, when attempting to validate their knowledge claims based on black feminist epistemology ever since second wave feminism emerged. Hereby, this chapter should both be considered an elucidation of this protracted struggle, but also a participating attempt to rearticulate black feminist knowledge claims on epistemological grounds. Thus, Collins' work itself is a contribution to the fundamental creation of an establishment of black feminist thought as critical social theory. Furthermore, this certain chapter can be argued to be a validation of her work in the sense that she complies with the prospective criticism and reluctance that her theoretical arguments may receive. Thus, what is distinctive about Collins and *Black Feminist Thought* is her intention to commit her work to these epistemological challenges and take into account in her writing and theoretical framework the criteria for black feminist epistemology (ibid. 22).

Black Feminist Thought

'Black feminist thought' does not only work as the title of her book, it is also a term used throughout the book, referring to black feminism or black feminist thinking. It is a term composed of black women and feminists' standpoints and contains their observations, interpretations and experiences. Collins also categorizes black feminist thought as a critical social theory that covers the process that happens prior to establishing a black feminist theory, which has now become an established constituent in academia and a branch within sociocultural theory. Likewise, black feminist thought is the result of black women challenging the early hegemonic feminism towards a multidimensional, multiethnic and multiracial movement. Black feminist thought has hereby modified and challenged the understanding of feminism and is now to be considered an integrated part of feminism as a notion and not only a branch of it. Black feminist thought is not only based on black feminism, but also contextualized by second wave hegemonic feminism and the historical consequences for black women, which includes the impact of slavery and feminist movements.

The book does take a starting-point in Collins' own life experiences, yet she is very aware of the interplay between these experiences and the ones of other women before her. Therefore, what makes this theoretical writing so distinctive is her constant dialogue with preceding information, her dialogue with other black women, and a constant comparison of life experiences to uphold her theory as a legitimate examination general black feminist thought. This interplay is rather characteristic in social movements and is considered an acknowledged way of constructing theory, allowing Collins to take part in academics, nevertheless, the characteristics of black feminist thought is the perpetual practical orientation on both an individual as well as on an institutional level.

Intersectionality

In 2016, Patricia Hill Collins wrote the book *Intersectionality* together with Sirma Bilge. It is built up around conversation between the two and written to institutionalize intersectionality in the academy and to help readers understand the complexity of intersectionality further (Bilge and Collins vii+viii):

> Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood and shaped by one factor. They are

> generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytical tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves. (ibid. 2)

This definition and the term itself have both received critique and created debates, but intersectionality has come to represent how people understand the dynamics and systems of oppression and identity and is now a term used by stakeholders and a variety of other uses (ibid. 2). This definition is also the one we refer to when using the term in this paper. Like Collins and Bilge suggest, we will be using intersectionality to address a range of social problems within our selected novels and discover the major axes of social division in a given society at a given time, as well as use it to explain how race, gender, sexuality and class build on each other and work together (ibid. 4). Despite Collins and Bilge's work being sociologically oriented, we attempt to convert this theory and method to fit into a context of fiction and narrative.

Intersectionality as Analytical Tool

When using intersectionality as an analytical tool, we aim to measure and examine how power relations are entangled and mutually dependent. Within this, there are categories of analysis and terms that refer to social division, the categories being for example race, class, gender and sexuality. These terms, then, gain meaning from power relations of sexism, racism, heterosexism and class exploitation. Four interconnected domains of power are used to describe the organization of power: the interpersonal, the disciplinary, the cultural and the structural domain, which are all used to provide opportunity for using and understanding intersectionality and the way it should be analyzed (ibid. 7). These domains of power will hereby be elaborated on to fully understand their function and area of coverage.

Starting with the interpersonal domain of power, a domain of power that covers the power relations in people's lives, their relation to one another and how one part will always be either advantaged or disadvantaged within social interactions. This is where the varying combinations of for example class, gender and race categorize all individuals, depending on the combination thereof (ibid. 7-8). The second domain of power is the disciplinary. Within this domain lies part of the

organization of power and how individual people encounter individual treatment depending on how rules apply to them and how they are going to be implemented. Furthermore, power operates with an aspect of disciplining people in ways that become deciding for their options, possibilities and limitations and in life (ibid. 9). Thirdly, the cultural domain of power touches upon another aspect of the organization of power. Within this domain, an explanation for social inequality is signified as a game that, as a rule, is based on fair play. In the game of society, there are winners and losers, but what determines who is what? Winners and losers are divided based on their ability and achievements; losers suffer from lack of talent, inferior self-discipline and/or bad luck, whereas winners are talented, disciplined and lucky. This means that fair competition must produce just results. Having this either/or worldview enables one to use this frame to explain social inequality, as people are unable to see through the fact that the playing field on which they are playing is not level, that all competition is not fair, and that any loss or win is not always fairly accomplished (ibid. 11). Lastly, the structural domain of power refers to structure and organization. Intersectionality is per definition of complex character and is therefore inclusive of questioning how power relations like class, gender and race shape institutionalization and organization (ibid. 12). These domains of power, then, can be used as tools to shed light on the complexity of people's lives within an equally complex social context. Additionally, they can be used to illustrate how events and conditions of social and political life at play are not only shaped by one factor, but by several dynamics that reflect many factors that work together in diverse and mutually influencing ways (ibid. 25).

There are some core ideas of frameworks that work together with these different domains of power, namely social inequality, power, relationality, social context, complexity and social justice. These core ideas function as guideposts for thinking through intersectionality and an account for how these certain ideas should be considered within this area of scholarship (ibid. 194). Social inequality concerns how we are ought to move beyond seeing social inequality through race-only or class-only lenses. Rather, intersectionality enables us to understand how social inequality is often caused by different dynamic factors and interactions among various categories by adding these different layers to the perception (ibid. 26).

Power covers the dimensions of organizations of power. One distinctive point within this idea as well, is the approach to analyzing power. Collins and Bilge emphasize how power relations are ought to be analyzed *via* their intersections as well as *across* the given domains of power and hereby understood through mutual construction. This is to understand how people's lives and

identities are generally molded by several factors in diverse and influencing ways. For example, class, race and gender constitute interlocking, mutually constructing or intersecting systems of power, and power relations of racism and sexism gain meaning in relation to each other (ibid. 26). Relationality has an important impact on both intersectional scholarship and practice. Relational thinking rejects either/or binary thinking and embraces the both/and-frame. It also figures power as something conceptualized as a relationship like for example power relations, more than as a static unit. Moreover, relational thinking shifts between analyzing what distinguishes units, like the differences between gender and race, to examining their interconnections (ibid. 27-28). Collins and Bilge use social context as a prism to study or observe social inequality, relationality and power relations. It is an idea that contextualizes one's argument by being aware of the fact that particular historical, intellectual and political contexts shape what we think and do. The idea that different perspectives can arise in different social contexts is important for understanding differences within intersectionality itself (ibid. 28). The fifth idea is complexity, which is an interesting and important term to address when working with intersectionality as analytical tool. Complexity explains how the above-mentioned core ideas are all intertwined, which provides an element of complexity into intersectional analysis. As the world to a large extent is complex, trying to analyze it will be complex as well, and despite intersectionality being an explanative tool of analysis, it is nonetheless inadequate to capture all facets of intersectionality (ibid. 29). Lastly, Collins and Bilge talk about social justice as part of how people automatically and inherently accept the premise of the concept of winners and losers. Simultaneously, fairness becomes elusive in unequal societies where the rules may seem fair but are still differentially imposed through practices of discriminatory character. The rules may seem equally applied to everyone, however, they still produce unequal and unfair outcomes exemplified by how people in democratic societies all have the right to vote but not everyone has equal opportunity or access to do so (ibid. 29).

Identity

This chapter aims to examine the understanding and construction of black female identity and is divided into three sections. The first section will focus on cultural identity theory (CIT) based on early theories by Mary Jane Collier. The second part will examine Stuart Hall's contribution to cultural identity theory with the purpose of identifying how the notions of difference and othering contribute to the understanding of social categorizations and interdependent systems of

intersectionality. Hereafter, we will implicate Patricia Hill Collins to restrict the identity perspective to black women by applying her notions of self-liberation and empowerment to demonstrate the constitution and challenges when constructing black female identity. Finally, we implicate Collins and Bilge's theoretical account of the relationship between identity and intersectionality to enhance this relationship's impact on black female identity within American society.

Cultural Identity Theory

Cultural identity theory was developed in the late 1980s and is particularly concerned with the use of communicative processes when constructing and negotiating cultural identity. The earliest theoretical versions of CIT place great emphasis on the ethnography of communication and social construction. Mary Jane Collier and Milt Thomas proposed, through a variety of studies, their approach to the understanding of cultural identity. They posit that a given individual consists of multiple types of cultural identities such as national, racial, ethnic, class, sex and gender (Collier 260). Thus, individuals' cultural identities vary depending on the situational interactions and contexts. These multiple identities imply that members of a particular cultural group are not recognized in the same way, as they do not communicate identically due to their differences. This diversity within and between groups is considered a key principle within CIT (ibid. 260).

Collier proposes two processes related to the negotiation of cultural identity, stating that one's cultural identity is influenced of both outside and inside perspectives. Cultural identity, she states, is both avowed and ascribed (ibid. 260). On one hand, avowed identity treats the articulation and addressing of one's own perception of self. On the other hand, ascribed identity refers to how others perceive and refer to an individual, often in connection with the function of one's physical appearance and stereotypical associations. The construction of identity is a result of the negotiation between ascribed and avowed identities and therefore, both concepts are crucial (ibid. 261). The challenge, however, lies within the potential mismatch between one's avowed and ascribed identity. Collier's studies in early 1990s based on interviews with South Africans found that "there was often a difference in described qualities of avowed cultural identity by insiders and the qualities ascribed to that group by outsiders" (ibid. 261). This mismatch, Collier argues, might contribute to reinforcing systems of oppression if the ascribed cultural identity takes the form of racial stereotyping by subjugating certain groups of people (ibid. 261). Before going into depth with this argument, however, we need to determine some of these systems of oppression. This will be done in the following section with Stuart Hall's examination of cultural identity.

Stuart Hall: Cultural Identity, Difference, Stereotyping and Othering

Stuart Hall, cultural theorist, political activist and sociologist, has with several acknowledged works contributed to the notion of cultural identity. Throughout his work, Hall is particularly concerned with the complexity of cultural identity. He provides a thorough account of the notions of difference, othering and stereotyping, which will help to uncover some of the systems of oppression related to cultural identity.

Hall defines cultural identity as "those aspects of our identities which arose from our "belonging" to distinctive ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, and, above all, national cultures" (Hall, 'Question of Cultural Identity', 596). Hall states that this group consists of its own distinctive culture and can be founded on for instance nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, and social class. It is made up by a shared culture that reflects common historical experiences and shared cultural codes, which provides the group with a feeling of belonging, of being "one people" (Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', 222). Furthermore, like Collier and Thomas, Hall enhances how cultural identity is formed in the interaction between both self, people within the specific group and society: "[The subject] is formed and modified in a continuous dialogue with the cultural worlds "outside" and the identities which they offer" (Hall, 'Question of Cultural Identity', 597). Cultural identity is a distinctive part of a person's self-perception and is thus a way for individuals to construct their identity. However, Hall states that cultural identities are historical and fluid, ever-changing and transformative (ibid. 223).

Hall considers theoretical accounts of the meaning and significance of 'difference'. He draws his examination on several theorists by representing their approaches to the term. However, we will not go into depth with all of them but instead provide an overall account of difference in relation to binary systems and the notion of othering. Difference, Hall states, is essential to meaning. Without difference, meaning cannot exist. Meaning is dependent on "difference between opposites", as difference can only be marked in relation to what it is not, to its 'others' (Hall, 'Spectacle of the 'Other', 235). These binary oppositions are crucial for classification. The marking of difference enables a symbolic cultural system of order. Hall contends that "[c]ulture depends on giving things meaning by assigning them to different positions within a classificatory system" (ibid. 236). Thus, difference becomes essential to cultural meaning. However, these binary oppositions create a relation of power and establishes a hierarchy, as one pole of the binary will appear as the

dominant one. To clarify this power dimension, the binary oppositions of gender, sex, race and class are represented as man/*woman*, masculinity/*femininity*, white/*black* and upper class/*lower class* (ibid. 235). Thus, the term of the right side of the slash is reduced to a secondary, devalued other. Consequently, the representation of difference and the system of binary oppositions compose what Hall describes as "the racialized regime of representation", as racialized discourse is structured by these binary oppositions (ibid. 243). Furthermore, Hall links the representation of racial difference to stereotyping. When stereotyping, every characteristic about a person is reduced to a few, recognizable traits, which are exaggerated and simplified. In this sense, stereotyping both reduces, naturalizes, essentializes and fixes 'difference' (ibid. 258). Furthermore, stereotyping divides the normal and acceptable from the abnormal and unacceptable and thereby excludes everything 'different':

> It sets up a symbolic frontier between the 'normal' and the 'deviant', the 'normal' and the 'pathological', the 'acceptable' and the 'unacceptable', what 'belongs' and what does not or is the 'Other', between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Us and Them. (ibid. 258)

In this sense, stereotyping is part of the construction of binary oppositions and a social order, placing everything 'different' lowest in the hierarchy. However, although stereotyping constitutes hierarchy and oppressive social structures, stereotyping is necessary in order for people to orientate themselves in society.

When relating Hall's notions of difference and othering to Collier's account of ascribed and avowed cultural identities, the conflict between ascribed and avowed identity becomes evident. For instance, when considering the construction of identity of a black woman, if the ascribed identity of outsiders is based on a racist perspective, this positions the black woman as the other, placing her lowest in the hierarchy due to her cultural identity related to her race and sex. This is a way of stereotyping as this particular woman's identity is perceived only on the basis of racist, stereotypical trades. In this sense, her avowed self-perception is oppressed by these notions of difference, othering and stereotyping.

Patricia Hill Collins: Self-Definition and Empowerment

Hall's examination of identity is founded on the theory of intersectionality and focuses on how the constitution of identity is based on the exclusion of and in relation to the 'other'. This notion of othering is considered a result of the power relations within binary oppositions and the significance

of stereotyping deeply embedded within American society. The following section aims at examining how intersectionality, including the illuminated terms and notions above, affects the identity of black females based on the theoretical examination of intersectionality and identity in our chosen works of Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge. First, they distinguish between the notion of self-identity and collective identities, referring to one's individual self-perception and one's cultural identity. She examines black women's self-identity in relation to their social environment. Stating that black women constitute an oppressed group in American society, Collins and Bilge apply intersectionality as an analytical tool to provide an expansive understanding of the construction of respectively individual and collective cultural identities (114-115). Black women's position as an oppressed group in society, they contend, places black women's lives in a different world from that of people who are not black and female. Thus, their binary positions as 'other' in terms of race and gender impact the construction of black women's self-identity as an individual's social environment and contributes as a determining factor when shaping one's self-identity. These women are considered 'different' and are hence subjected to stereotyping and exclusion.

In order for black women to endure their oppressed position as a secondary and devalued other within the social hierarchy, Collins provides the notions of self-liberation and empowerment as essential terms to their survival in *Black Feminist Thought*. The notion of self-liberation provides an insight into the ideology and construction of black women's identity. Based on the argumentation in her chapter regarding black female epistemology, Collins uses examples of how self-definition can work as a way for women to liberate themselves from oppression. Self-definition, she claims, is a way for black women to define themselves through their own perceptions as opposed to the perceptions of society. Previous works of black female influencers and intellectuals such as bell hooks, Alice Walker and Audre Lorde are examples of this liberation, as these works depict these women's struggle and attempt to identify themselves as something else than fitting into society's controlling images like mammies and matriarchs. They claim a place in the center of analysis as opposed to the margins and succeed in addressing the perspective of black female identities. Using women like hooks, Walker and Lorde, it is evident that Collins values their achievements as some to be imitated or to act as inspiration in order for other women to liberate themselves. Additionally, Collins argues that accepting and recognizing black women's self-definitions will help to create cultural environments, ideologies and social institutions, something that Collins also refers to as "safe spaces", where black women can "speak freely" (Collins 98-101). Based on Collin's account, black female identity, then, is contingent on black women's ability to

liberate themselves from their placement within stereotypical, oppressive and binary categorizations in American society. They must challenge these ascriptions with retaliated self-definitions and thereby empower each other into constructing a black female identity from an individual perspective.

The Relationship Between Identity and Intersectionality

In this paper, intersectionality and identity play a grand part of the analysis. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate another significant approach to these theories, as it aims at examining how intersectionality works in correlation with identity. In order to do this, we have chosen to include Collins and Bilge's explanation of the relationship between intersectionality and identity in comparison to hip hop, as it provides a foundation to the further examination. By way of introduction within intersectionality and identity, Collins and Bilge explains that "to understand intersectionality primarily as a theory of individual identity, often with the goal of criticizing it, overemphasizes some dimensions of intersectionality while underemphasizing others" (115). With this disclaimer, they move to make a comparison between identity and hip-hop using youths as the primary group of focus. Both notions contain a strong personal expression where primarily youth claims a voice that demands focus on individual identity, as this group of people's personal position enables them to create an identity politic that criticizes the social issues they face on a daily basis. Furthermore, this group is among the first to encounter the interconnections between systems of power that place them at risk through their daily encounter with the contours of growing social inequality. Also, they have a special vantage point on intersecting social inequalities of both ethnicity religion, gender, sexuality and race due to their age, which makes them experience this social inequality that is associated with age as a system of power. Young people's experiences of social problems and injustice are intensified because age can include both race, class and gender disadvantages as well. Hip-hop, then, is to many youths a tool of expression of their specific social problems and a way of addressing political issues, as they cannot yet take part in proper political activism. Hip-hop should not be seen as neither noise nor identity politics in the abstract, rather, it constitutes an important space for developing collective identity politics that informs contemporary intersectional praxis (ibid. 118). Another thing hip-hip and intersectionality share is their rapid growth, which might be important to the construction of collective identity itself, as their ideas were dispersed in places where collective identity politics of disenfranchised groups moved into public spaces. They both offer alternative analyses and interpretations of social problems, but they also

reframe identities as an important component of politics. Lastly, both intersectionality and hip-hop face the challenge of how to reflect on their own identity politics (ibid. 119). In terms of black feminism, the connection between intersectionality and identity is important to understand as these two theoretical terms influence and depend on each other to such a degree that they cannot be separated. This will be examined further in our discussion and serve as a central perspective to our general examination of black feminist thought and black female identity.

Representation

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical foundation to our analysis and discussion of the representation of black female identity in our chosen theoretical and fictional works. First, we will provide a definition of representation in order to establish our approach to the term. This definition will be based on the theoretical account of the notion of representation by Stuart Hall. Hereafter, we are going to examine the significance and challenges of representation in relation to subordinate groups within American society. This examination will be based on the theoretical accounts of Ella Shohat and Gayatri C. Spivat, who are considered substantial contributors to postcolonial and cultural studies. Although their works take the perspectives of different ethnic minority groups, the theories are still in evidence to the perspective of black women. Lastly, the significance and challenges of representation will be applied and compared to the theory by hooks and Collins, tying them together to a comprehensive, collective perspective to black female identity.

Self-Representation of the Subordinate

This following part focuses the significance of representation in relation to subordinate groups. In the first chapter "The Work of Representation" in his book *Representation* (1997), Stuart Hall provides a thorough account of the concept of representation.Hall defines representation as:

> [U]sing language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully to other people . . . This is how you 'make sense of' the world of people, objects and events, and how you are able to express a complex thought about those things to other people, or to communicate about them through language in ways which other people are able to understand. (16-17)

Additionally, representation as a term can be defined in different ways. Often, representations are considered to be images, performances and simulations as an implied visual component that is re-

presenting a particular "real" thing (Baldonado). Representations are expressed within various forms of popular culture like photographs, film, paintings and television etc. Also written materials such as academic texts and novels are considered important forms of representation (ibid.). However, the relationship between the "real" thing and the representation of the thing implies the question of objectivity and authenticity. Representations can never work as a true reality but are reflections of it; they are constructed images that can be differently perceived and interpreted depending on the given receiver. The problematics, then, lie within the judgement of accuracy of a given representation as its "truth-content" is reliant on the interpretations of the individual (ibid.). In her essay "The Struggle over Representation" (1995), Shohat contends that this element of interpretation involved in representation denotes that we must constantly question representations:

> Each filmic or academic utterance must be analyzed not only in terms of who represents but also in terms of who is being represented for what purpose, at which historical moment, for which location, using which strategies, and in what tone of address. (173).

Thus, the questioning of representations is crucial as the representations encompass possible implied intentions. Although representations being only representations, the interpretations of them are of significant meaning in real life and can impact the conditions of the given represented "thing". Shohat stresses how this questioning is particularly important when it regards representations of subordinate individuals or groups within society as they are not in control of their own representation. Instead, the representations of these subordinate groups are merely flawed, stereotypical generalizations that work to include all subordinate groups, assuming that each group is able to represent the other groups (ibid.). With this, she stresses some of the key issues within the theoretical works of both hooks and Collins, namely their attempt to substantiate a black feminist thought and black feminist theory by including the perspectives from "the margins" and establishing a black female identity independent on the representative controlling images. Thus, it is important that the representations of subordinate groups are consistent with the self-perceptions and realities that exist within these groups. Therefore, as both hooks and Collins emphasize and encourage, people of subordinate groups must act as representative voices of their group in order to distance themselves from the stereotypical, generalizing representations. The increasement and inclusion of the representative voices of subordinate groups will work to challenge oppression and hegemonic ideologies. Shohat claims that representations within one representative sphere can work

to impact another representative sphere (ibid. 173). For example, the representation of black people as a subordinate group within popular culture affects the political sphere of representation regarding black people and vice versa. Thus, by representing black people as subordinate and secondary within films and television as opposed to white people, this representation reinforces hegemonic ideologies and a racist hierarchy.

Comparably, Gayatri C. Spivak emphasizes this relationship between representative spheres. In her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak" (1988), she claims how representations are ideological tools that serve to reinforce systems of inequality and subordination and sustain colonialist or neocolonialist project. According to Spivak, representation is constituted by a speaker and a listener where the recognition of the listener is essential. This complicates the self-representations of the subordinate, if his/her representation is not recognized by the listener because it differs from the flawed, stereotypical expectations of representation, and thereby does not fit within the "lines laid down by the official institutional structures of representation" (Spivak 306). Due to this complication between the speaker and the listener, representations of the subordinate are struggling. However, she contends, continued attempts of self-representations from people of subordinate groups are essential in order to displace the dominant modes of representation within society (Baldonado). In this sense, the works of hooks and Collins are of great importance as they are closely tied to the challenges of representation of black women as these works are exactly striving to challenge status quo representations. hooks and Collins, then, act as representatives of the subordinate group of black females. Altogether, this examination of representation illustrates the importance of self-representation. Furthermore, it serves as a foundation to our following analysis of our chosen novels, enabling us to examine how the authors choose to represent black women and how the fictional characters work as representations of the experiences of black women.

Cultural Politics of Emotions

We have chosen to include Sara Ahmed's book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* from 2014 as additional theory to advance our analysis. We aim to read Ahmed's sociological approach to emotions into our novels to examine how these fictional narratives are representative to academic discourse on emotion. Secondly, we want to examine how emotions are relevant for the social actions and structures in the fictional societies in our novels. Our point of focus will be centered around Ahmed's way of contextualizing and negotiating the notion of emotions into a political and cultural perspective. Ahmed's eye for emotions as cultural practice can help us examine how the

characters in our chosen novels handle their feelings, and whether this affects their molding of black female identity.

Among other things, Ahmed's aim and focus with the theory is to reflect on the processes where 'being emotional' is seen as characteristic of some bodies and not others, and due to this, it is necessary to consider the way which emotions operate to make and shape bodies as forms of action. According to Ahmed, emotions work to define who we are as well as shape what we do, and this is no more powerfully at play than in the world of politics. She uses a multidisciplinary approach to comprehend how emotions are tied to notions such as culture and power and explores how emotions, despite their abstractness, are physically bound to the body and create a split between the inside and outside world. Furthermore, she considers how emotions keep us involved in relationships of power and shows how this use of emotion can be crucial to other areas, like for example feminism. Ahmed uses an approach that she calls 'the sociology of emotion', which is a model claiming that emotions do not only create boundaries between inside and outside, but that they create a distinction between the individual and the social as well. She argues how emotions tend to be categorized as something internal and connected to individualistic processes, but interestingly, Ahmed focuses on the physical properties of emotions, including how these are tied to the body and to the ties that exist between languages and emotions. To Ahmed, emotions circulate between bodies, which is also how emotions 'stick' and 'move'. This sociality of emotions is opposite to how emotions are normally assumed to exist, where the subject has to look inwards to discover these feelings as they come from within a psychological state. These psychological emotions, then, move from the inside out and affect others. This is what Ahmed calls the inside-out model (ibid. 14). Oppositely, the sociological and anthropological approach, which Ahmed bases her theory on, suggests that emotions are not psychological states as much as they are social and cultural practices, as mentioned previously. She offers a model of sociality of emotions that suggests that we do not develop our tendencies and ways ourselves, rather, they come to us from the outside and contribute to shaping individual identities. With this, emotions become a social form more than something individual. Stating that feelings come from without and then penetrate the subject to become part of our body and being, Ahmed offers an outside-in model. This model stems from 'crowd psychology', a theory that argues crowds have feelings and that individuals then get drawn into the crowd of emotions by feeling their feelings. With this, Ahmed states that emotions are not something that the 'I' or the 'WE' have, rather, it is through emotions and how this subject

respond to objects and others that boundaries and surfaces of emotions are made. They are shaped in contact with others (ibid. 14).

In her introduction, Ahmed explains how emotions work as cultural and social practices. To some feminist philosophers, the subordination of emotions works to subordinate the feminine as well, scaling emotions as something negative. She states that: "to be emotional is to have one's judgment affected: it is to be reactive rather than active, to be dependent rather than autonomous" (Ahmed 9). With this, her theory becomes rather interesting to this paper, as it gives us yet another parameter on which we can measure the condition of the characters in our chosen novels. She continues by explaining how emotions are associated with females, and that these females are considered closer to nature, ruled by their own appetite towards it and less able to overstep the body through thought, judgment and will:

> It is significant that the word 'passion' and the word 'passive' share the same root in the Latin word for 'suffering' (passio). To be passive is to be enacted upon, as a negation that is already relt as suffering. The fear of passicity is tied to the fear of emotionality in which weakness is defined in terms of a tendency to be shaped by others. Softness is narrated as a proneness to injury. The association between passion and passivity is instructive. It works as a reminder of how 'emotion' has been viewed as 'beneath' the faculties of thought and reason. (ibid. 9)

She continues by explaining how the hierarchies between emotions and thought exist, however, this might be displaced by the hierarchy between emotions, where some emotions are considered signs of cultivation and other emotions are considered a sign of weakness (ibid. 10). This division highly belongs to contemporary culture. Within this, emotions are considered a strength or intelligence provided that these emotions are an asset to the subject in the project of life and career enhancement. Ergo, emotions make weak. Hardness, however, "is not the absence of emotion, but a different emotional orientation towards others" (ibid. 10). This idea, then, generates a scheme in where women and men respectively can be placed on a scale of emotionality and power; a contribution to the idea why men are the powerful sex.

In terms of emotions as cultural practice, and in continuation of Stuart Hall's articulation of 'otherness', Ahmed stresses how the cultural bodies of emotions create "others" by aligning a group of bodies with each other inside a certain community and then marginalizing or completely excluding other bodies. Likewise, in relation to the thematics of this paper, emotions can lead to

collective politics and social alliances, which is a social power shown through politics and social movements and even to create national identities (ibid. 11). Ahmed uses these national identities to explain the foundation for, for example, racism as a politics of hatred. She underlines how love and hate are two interdependent and connected feelings and how love is often used as justification and persuasion of hate (ibid. 41). Narratives where fascist discourse functions by generating a subject that is endangered by imagined others, whose proximity threatens not only to take something away from the subject (jobs, security, power), but also to take the place of the subject, exist as a general justification and explanation for racism or sexism. The presence of this "other", then, is to the subject envisioned as a threat to the object of love (ibid. 41), the subject being the ordinary white people, in this case. The white subject claims not only the place, but also the role as the victim. The whites' love for the nation then becomes hate for the threat, which brings this group of whites together. The subject, Ahmed argues, is reproduced as the injured party, based on their history with the black invasion, and this body of "others" then, is transformed into representing hatred through a discourse of pain (ibid. 43).

When examining for example fear as racial politics of emotion, Ahmed starts by explaining how the origin of fear comes from opening up past histories of association. This allows the white and the black bodies to be constructed as two different and separate figures in the present as well (57). What fear does, then, is re-establishing distance between bodies, blacks and whites for example. It works by establishing 'others' as fearsome, and such fantasies then come to work as justification for violence against these others, whose existence comes to be felt as a threat to the life of one's own body. It also involves relationships of proximity, which is obviously crucial to establishing the 'apartness' of whiteness. This proximity involves the repetition of stereotypes as well (ibid. 58). Like with hate, Ahmed establishes how fear is an affective economy that does not live in certain objects or signs. Rather, it is the lack of residence that allows fear to flow between bodies. The anticipations of how other bodies are or will act allow fear to exist. For example, the 'other' is only felt to be fearsome through a misreading, which is returned by the 'other' through its response of fear – so a fear of fear.

Fear is an embodied experience and a reasonable response to vulnerability, and different bodies feel it differently due to time, space and mobility. Ahmed explains how fear involves an anticipation of hurt or injury (ibid. 59), that what we fear is not necessarily right before us or in front of us, rather, it impresses upon us in the present as an anticipated pain in the future. Using racial politics as an example; insofar the 'black man' is the object of fear, then he may pass by, and

this physicality of passing by can be associated with a proximity that is then imagined as the possibility of future injury. Fear hereby responds to what is approaching rather than what is already here (ibid. 60). It is also the structural possibility that the object of fear may pass us by which makes everything possibly fearsome. Within fear, Ahmed uses a feminist approach as well. Here, she articulates the question of fear, which, in this case, is both structural and mediated rather than a bodily response to an objective danger. She does not see fear as an inevitable consequence of women's vulnerability as much as a response to the threat of violence. Women's access to public space, she argues, is restricted by the circulation of narratives of feminine vulnerability, which generates an idea of the 'outside' as dangerous and 'home' as the only safe space (ibid. 63). This calls for women to stay home, something Ahmed calls femininity as domestication, or for women to be extra careful when moving outside their house, femininity as constrained mobility, generates a male-dependent mentality for women.

In terms of love, and based on Sigmund Freud's theory on love, Ahmed describes love as crucial to the pursuit for happiness, as something that makes the subject vulnerable, exposed to, and dependent upon another actor who then possess the power and ability to take away the love. Love, then, becomes a form of dependence (ibid. 107). Like with hate, women are in a particular position, as love becomes a sign of respected femininity, a capacity to touch and be touched by others. The reproduction of femininity is tied up with the reproduction of the national ideal of love, as love relationships are about reproducing the race. Likewise, heterosexuality becomes love as an obligation to the nation, and mixed-race relationships become a sign of hate or a willingness to contaminate the blood of the race (ibid. 106). In terms of the national ideal, Ahmed states that love is a way of bonding with others in relation to an ideal, which then takes shape as an effect of such bonding. In relation to the focus of this paper, she uses only a few lines on describing familial love in continuation of identification. Familial love, to Ahmed, is rooted in the fact that we are alike on grounds of character, genetics or belief systems – likeness and love then becomes an inheritance and uncompromising figure within families (ibid. 110).

Part 2: Analysis

Introduction

Prior to the actual section of analysis, we would like to establish our approach and focus of analysis in the selected novels. The work and terminology within our theory section will serve as the main

components and analytical tools to the analyses. First, we are going to analyze the novels one by one and in chronological order. The general focus will be aimed at intersectionality, power relations, black female empowerment, narrative and construction of identity, where theoretical key terms will be implemented and employed in relation to the different themes in the novels. However, as the novels have rather different approaches to these thematics, we will be adjusting the analysis depending on the focus of the particular novel. Hereby, the four analyses come to appear different despite the overall common points of focus. In terms of intersectionality and in continuation of Collins and Bilge's description hereof, we have chosen to accentuate and classify the different forms of oppression into their own sections, despite its undeniably codependent and complex function. This is done to emphasize the importance of the ability to see through these elements in order to distinguish how these forms of oppression work individually and crosswise, and what this means to the given characters within the novels.

The Color Purple by Alice Walker

The first analysis is of Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple,* first published in 1982. The chapter will open with a summary and a brief introduction to Alice Walker before the actual analysis begins. Hereafter, the analysis will be divided into two main parts. The first part aims to enhance how intersecting parameters impact the lives of the black female characters in the novel with a particular focus on the protagonist Celie. This examination will focus primarily on racist and sexist trades and on controlling images. The second part includes a characterization of Celie and aims to describe her identity process of self-definition and empowerment by enhancing different contributing aspects in the novel. Lastly, we will be commenting on the novel's structure and narrative.

Alice Walker, born in Georgia in 1944, is a civil rights activist and teacher. In 1983, she coined the term 'womanism', which served as alternative terminology to black feminism as a way for women of color to organize a "world of their own" (Guy-Sheftall 538). Additionally, Walker has contributed to black feminist theory with several works including her novel *The Color Purple,* for which she won the 1983 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. The novel portrays the life of black African American women in rural Georgia in the 1930s America. It primarily focuses on the main character, Celie, and her everyday life in her forced marriage with Mr. ____ and her relations to the novel's other black male and female characters, which she describes and expresses in her consistent letters to God. Later in the novel, she starts addressing her letters to Nettie and the sisters' correspondence

persist until their reunion at the end of the story. It is through this exchange and writing of letters that the reader witnesses the events and developments in both sisters' lives.

Intersectionality

Gender

> [Mr.____] laugh. Who do you think you is? he say. … Look at you, pore you, you ugly, you a woman. Goddam, he say, you nothing at all. (ibid. 213)

With this statement, Mr. ____ establishes the general view of black women in the novel. *The Color Purple* is a portrayal of the general male dominated hierarchy that was evident in American society in the 1930s. In the novel, traditional gender roles take place and constitute the norm in the relationship between men and women. Whenever the women step out of line, they are abused as punishment. This is particularly evident between husbands and wives, where the husbands tend to exert their dominance over their wives by beating and raping them. Celie is the most distinctive victim of sexism. From an early age, she loses the privacy over her own body when she is repeatedly raped and beaten by her stepfather. She is then deprived of her babies and forced into marriage with Mr. ____, who treats her like a servant and beats and rapes her whenever he pleases. She is nothing but a mule in their relationship, her opinions are not valued, and she is only noticed whenever she does not succeed at meeting Mr. ____'s demands. When his son Harpo questions his behavior, Mr. ____ bases his justification of his treatment by saying: "Cause she my wife. Plus, she stubborn" (Walker 23). In his mind, these are proper and reasonable excuses for his treatment of her.

The women's response to their the sexist treatment are distinctively different. Through most of the story, Celie meets the expectations of her social positions. She responds to the sexist treatment by being passive and submissive. When Mr. ____ rapes her, she develops ways to protect herself: "I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you are tree" (ibid. 23). When she is mistreated and unappreciated, she reminds herself that "[t]his life soon be over … Heaven last all ways" (ibid. 40). Conversely, Sofia, who is married to Mr. ____'s son Harpo, appears as the opposite to Celie. Sofia aggressively refuses to submit to her husband. Sofia and Harpo's marriage consists of intensive fights for power, and Harpo repeatedly loses the battle:

> They fighting like two mens . . . He try to slap her . . . She search down and grab a piece of stove wood and whack him cross the eyes. He punch her in the stomach, she

> double over groaning but come up with both hands lock right under his privates. He roll on the floor. He grab her dress tail and pull. She stand there in her slip. She never blink an eye. He jump up to put a hammer lock under her chin, she throw him over her back. He fall *bam* up gainst the stove. (ibid. 37)

In this incident, Sofia's psychical strength is expressed as masculine, which is, according to Sofia herself, a necessity to survive as a black woman. She is aware of power relations between men and women, but she refuses to accept them:

> All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and my uncles. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men. But I never thought I had to fight in my own house . . . I love Harpo, she say. God knows I do. But I'll kill him dead before I let him beat me. (ibid. 39)

Reversely, her husband Harpo appears as weak and powerless. Whenever he attempts to subdue Sofia, she counters. This leads Harpo into an existential crisis, as he does not live up to the stereotypical gender roles. He feels emasculated due to his lack of dominance over his wife. Generally, Harpo and Sofia's actions overturn the stereotypical gender roles. Besides being physically inferior, Harpo expresses emotions of love for his wife and children, he cries in front of Celie several times and enjoys domestic work such as cooking and cleaning, whereas Sofia enjoys working in the fields, chopping woods, and tending the animals (ibid. 57). However, Harpo is challenged by his father to meet the expectations of male dominance. Mr. ____ frequently expresses his dissatisfaction with Sofia's behavior and convinces his son that he must beat her: "Wives is like children. You have to let 'em know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating" (ibid. 35). Mr. ____ is clearly an advocate of reinforcing stereotypical gender roles and appears, on the surface, stereotypical himself. However, when concerned with Mr. ____'s upbringing, one discovers that he himself is victim of intersecting oppression. His violent treatment and sexist perspective of black women are manners that he learned from his own father as a young boy. When his father Old Mr. ____ comes to visit, Celie discovers this similarity. When Mr. ____ was young, he was not allowed by his father to marry Shug, who, like Sofia, does not fit into stereotypical expectations of a wife. Back then, Mr. ____ let himself be subdued enough of his father to marry Annie Julia instead, which then became an unhappy marriage (ibid. 245). However, when Old Mr. ____ once again expresses his dissatisfaction of Shug's presence, Mr. ____ now

exhibits the strength to stand up against his father and dismiss him from the house. In this sense, Mr. ____ has double standards. He tries to govern Harpo's life in the same way that his father governed his due to his extreme opposing of Harpo marrying Sofia. Although Harpo manages to break with his father's stance, Mr. ____ still succeeds at influencing him, making Harpo strive for control and domination. These relationships between fathers and sons serve as great examples of how one's actions are influenced by the ascriptions of one's placement within a cultural group. Old. Mr. ____, Mr. ____ and Harpo are considered to belong within the group of black African American males and are hence expected to represent and meet the shared cultural codes of this particular group. Due to binary oppositions and historical stereotypical gender roles, they are then expected to impart the subjugation of black females.

Race

Although *The Color Purple* is placed in a historical setting, it never refers to actual contextual events. However, as the story is set in the rural Georgia in the South, one gets an implicit idea of the persistent racism within society; the novel presents several examples of the retained racist mentality among white people such as how black women are still referred to as "girls" (ibid. 16), and how they are still victims of rape from white men. Mary Agnes is for example raped by the white warden (ibid. 89), as the dark color of her skin alone permits him to rape her. Thus, racist views of black women as inferior and merely sexual objects are sustaining, which works as a reminder that struggle of achieving civil rights is not successful at changing people's mentality.

The most prominent example of the consequences of racism regards Sofia. She not only refuses to submit to black men but anyone who attempts to dominate and subjugate her. Her resistance however, results in misfortune when she defies the town's mayor and his wife when they ask her to be their maid. Sofia regards this request as condescending, which ignites a hostility in her. Hereafter, when she is slapped by the mayor for her attitude, Sofia attacks him. Her actions result in her being beaten nearly to death: "They crack her skull, they crack her ribs. They tear her nose loose on one side. They blind her in one eye" (ibid. 82), and then sentenced twelve years with the charge of attacking a white man. As a black woman, the mayor and his wife automatically assume that she takes the pride in working in the homes of white people. Sofia's opposition to the oppressing placement of her causes the mayor and the police to beat her in order to reassert their racial superiority. During her sentence, Sofia describes herself as a slave due to the way she is treated (ibid. 96). The difference from the traditional idea of an enslaved woman is that Sofia's

position is categorized as the work of a maid. Her sentence serves as an illustration of the struggle of resistance when fighting both cultural and institutional racism of white supremacists.

Being and feeling inferior towards white people is not only asserted to black females. However, through the novel, one gets the impression that the feeling of being inferior to white men is still a dominant thought in black men's identity as well. White supremacy prevents black men from prospering. The most significant example in the novel is the one regarding Celie and Nettie's father. In a letter, Nettie explains her discovery of the fate of their biological father due to his successful business:

> Then the white merchants began to get together and complain that this store was taking all the black business away from them, and the man's blacksmith shop that he set up behind the store, was taking some of the white. This would not do. And so, one night, the man's store was burned down, his smithy destroyed, and the man and his two brothers dragged out of their homes in the middle of the night and hanged. (ibid. 157)

This is a significant example of the black man's oppression and subordination in relation to white men, partly due to the Jim Crow laws that provided white supremacists the authority to exterminate the slightest glimpse of black prosperity and murder innocent black people. Thus, black men's only chance at appearing superior was in reference to black women, which they, as the previous section regarding sexism demonstrates, took the advantage of.

Controlling Images

According to Collins, black women encounter a different set of controlling images as means of justifying black female inferiority and enforcing social hierarchies. When relating Collin's notions of controlling images to *The Color Purple*, several images are evident within the novel, by which the images of the mammy, the matriarch and the jezebel appear as most prominent. In terms of the mammy, Celie appears as an eminent example. She has accepted her inherently subordinate position within sexist, classist and racist power relations and serve as a stereotypical example of a house slave; she obeys the demands of Mr. ____, takes care of his children and most importantly, deprioritizes personal needs. Thus, she impeccably meets the expectations of her ascribed identity related to the mammy by being a "[g]ood housekeeper, good with children, good cook" (ibid. 21). Sofia, on the other hand, comes to represent the matriarch. Her resistance towards intersecting

systems of oppression entails a need of strength and will. Additionally, emasculation of her husband Harpo and her aggressive manners place her within the category of the matriarch. Her resistance causes her to spend a majority of her life in jail, leaving her children at home alone with their father, while she works at the mayor's house, taking care of his children. In that sense, her actions as matriarch are caused by lack of presence at home and caretaking of her own children. Lastly, Shug appears as representative of the controlling image of the jezebel. By others, she is described as a black woman with a lack of morals and uncontrolled sexuality. She is a promiscuous performer who enjoys bodily attention and admiration of both male and female audience. Thus, when a 19-year-old boy expresses his admiration and desire for her, she cannot resist and leaves Celie. Though Shug comes to represent the images of the jezebel, one learns that she is a dynamic character that shows consideration and compassion to others, which makes her break with stereotypical expectations and labeling of the jezebel.

Walker's portrayal of Celie, Sofia and Shug as representatives of three types of controlling images can be considered a way to demonstrate the oppressing impact and affection of controlling images to the perceptions and expectations of the black female characters, as they serve to prevent any form of resistance towards social hierarchies and white patriarchal dominance. However, Walker allows her characters, and Celie in particular, to break with these stereotypical anticipations through empowerment and self-liberation, which will be elaborated on in the analysis.

Celie

So far, the analysis has, with a variety of examples, demonstrated how intersecting forms of oppression impact the protagonist Celie's life. Her submission to sexist and racist beliefs has prompt her to a passive and insecure human being who constantly devalues her own worth. This insecurity and devaluation of herself are the repercussions of her both her stepfather and Mr. ____'s devalued treatment of her. Besides abusing her, these men have deliberately worked to sustain Celie in her passive position by eliminating any potential chance of Celie accumulating alternative knowledge outside the space of home and the world they present. Her stepfather prohibits her from going to school and getting educated (ibid. 11), and Mr. ____ hides Nettie's letters from her. Alternatively, they exhaust her with hard work to make her "too tired to think" (ibid. 18). If Celie becomes too tired to think, she is not allowed her own consciousness, and she will become too tired to even consider liberating herself from Mr._____'s chains. As Audre Lorde expresses in her essay "Poetry is not a Luxury" from 1977, she found her own identity through personal experiences. She

educates other black women about how to discover an inner strength that will allow one to listen to the authoritative from inside oneself rather than modifying one's behavior to fit rigid standards. This kind of thinking is also closely connected to how white feminists introduced female consciousness during the first wave feminism and earlier. For example, in Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own" (1929) and "The Mark on the Wall" (1919) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892). In her essay, Lorde writes that: "The white fathers told us: I think, therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us - the poet - whispers in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free" (ibid. 38). The 'i feel, therefore i can be free' is a completely aligned to Woolf's thinking of women who can only be free within their minds and stream of consciousness. If Celie is robbed of her own space to think, her liberation out of oppression becomes difficult. Especially Mr. _____'s choice to hide the letters enforces his role in sustaining Celie in ignorance as these letters prove to play a major role in Celie's eventual process of empowerment, identity construction and self-liberation. However, in the first part of the novel, Celie has no intentions of an alternative way of living. Due to her ignorance, she is convinced by the sexist, racist and classist perspectives that her position as a black woman in America is incurable. Thus, she sees no point in fighting her submissive position, which is distinctly manifested in her response to Nettie's attempt of resistance: "I think about Nettie, dead. She fight, she run away. What good it do? I don't fight, I stay where I'm told. But I'm alive" (ibid. 22). Celie's ignorance thus sustains her in her acceptance of submission and passivity.

However, the novel also portrays the development of Celie's character by a process of coming of age, hereby the construction of identity, and empowerment. Her development is caused by different elements, which we will elaborate in this section. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, Celie's liberation and identity process initiates concurrently with the blooming of her friendship with Shug Avery. Shug's impact on Mr. ____ enables her to make him stop the abusive treatment of Celie (ibid. 72). Furthermore, Shug teaches Celie about life outside the house of Mr. ____, which diminishes her ignorance. The women share their life stories and Shug is thus the first person whom Celie confides in. As the following sections will demonstrate, Shug is of great importance in relation to Celie's development. Her importance is referred to in the epigram in the opening of the novel with the quotation of Stevie Wonder: "Show me how to do like you // Show me how to do it" (ibid.). Walker includes the lyrics to suggest that, in order for victims of oppression to fight their position, they need someone to lead the way. In many ways, Shug serves as a guide for Celie. When considering Collin's account of motherhood, it can be argued that Shug

takes on the role as othermother for Celie. We learn at the beginning of the novel that Celie's mother dies (ibid. 4), leaving Celie and Nettie motherless. Shug undertakes the mothering responsibilities of Celie by supporting, empowering and caring for her.

One important alteration that Shug helps to engender is Celie's perception of herself and her body. As previously mentioned, Celie thinks of her body as wood as a coping mechanism when being beaten and raped by men. With this, Celie separates her body and soul to protect and distance herself. Thus, it is only her body that is handed to men to be abused and to perform the hard work, not her soul. However, Shug sways Celie's perception of body and soul when she makes her look at herself in the mirror (ibid. 75). In this sequence, Celie is reacquainted with her body to discover that it belongs to her and does not serve as sexual gratification for men. Additionally, Celie commences her first self-imposed sexual relationship with Shug, who helps her retrieve her sexuality. This presentation to a different perception of her body is of great importance in terms of Celie's identity construction and sexuality as it changes her body from being an object of men's possession to become an entirety of body and soul. Thus, her inner identity starts becoming consistent with her outer identity as well.

Another important aspect in Celie's development is her perception of God. In the beginning of the novel, Celie's letters are addressed to God. She regards God as her only listener and the only one to turn to, especially out of fear due to Mr. ___'s warning that she "better not never tell nobody but God" (ibid. *X*). However, Celie feels disregarded and neglected by God and expresses her dissatisfaction to Shug: "the God I been praying to and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowndown" (ibid. 173). She continues by articulating her oppressive social position as a black woman in American society: "If [God] ever listened to poor colored women the world would be a different place, I can tell you" (ibid. 173). Her condition as a black woman is terrible and leaves her no way out of her oppressive status within a racist, sexist and classist society. However, Shug helps Celie to reconsider her understanding of God. When she asks Celie to describe God, her description reveals that her perceptions is based on a white patriarchal perspective (ibid. 175). In response to her description, Shug laughs and argues that God is neither male nor female, white or black, but an "it" (ibid. 176). Shug rejects the false religious ideas of God that the church tries to afflict on people. To her, it is the awareness of nature and its beauty and an appreciation of life: "I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it" (ibid. 177). Shug opens Celie's eyes to the beauty of the world, something that Celie has not been able to see and appreciate before. Thus, Shug comes to represent one of the

principal themes within the novel: spirituality. In the preface, Walker identifies her own religious development as inspiration to the novel' intention, namely:

> To explore the difficult path of someone who starts out in life already a spiritual captive, but who, through her own courage and the help of others, breaks free into the realization that she, like Nature itself, is a radiant expression of the heretofore perceived as quite distant Divine. (ix)

Walker refers to the fact that Celie exemplifies the development from a conventional patriarchal religious belief, which sustains her in the position as inferior, to a more spiritual perception of God that eventually enables her to disengage herself from this position, which is possible due to the help from Shug. This development is expressed in Celie's last letter in which she addresses God as: "Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God" (ibid. 259). Her changed attitude to God is of great importance to her process of empowerment and self-liberation as it symbolizes her transformation from a passive object into an independent woman. She has evolved a spiritual version of religion and God that represents and considers her identity as a black female.

Empowerment and Independence

Celie's development of an individual voice provides her with a sufficient amount of self-confidence to face Mr. ____ with her anger towards him: "Until you do right by me, I say, everything you even dream about will fail. I give it to him straight, just like it comes to me. And it seem to come to me from the trees" (ibid. 187). With these words, Celie liberates herself from her oppressive marriage and leaves Mr. _____ to move in with Shug. Firstly, Celie's liberation is expressed through her financial independence. She makes a business of sewing, an act that is traditionally included within the chores of domestic work. However, Celie turns it into the possibility of applying her creativity to a successful business. After years as submissive and passive, Celie is finally in a satisfactory state of mind: "I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time" (ibid. 194).

However, although Celie appears confident and independent, she is still and undeniably dependent on her relationship with Shug and her letters from Nettie. Thus, her newfound self-confidence is challenged when she does not receive any letters from Nettie, thus assuming she is dead, and Shug pronounces her love for a younger man. Celie expresses that the news of Shug's lover silences her: "I don't say nothing. Stillness, coolness. Nothingness. Coming fast . . . I don't

say nothing. I pray to die, just so I don't ever have to speak" (ibid. 225). Celie's loss of voice symbolizes Celie's still vulnerable identity construction. She is dependent on the love and support form Shug as she has no individual love for herself. Hereafter, Celie falls back in her former despondent approach to life. She tells herself that: "… happiness was just a trick in your case … Even thought you had the trees with you. The whole earth. The stars. But look at you. When Shug left, happiness desert" (ibid. 235). With this, Celie resigns herself the opportunity of any further happiness and disregards her spiritual beliefs. Another distinctive example of her change of attitude is also demonstrated by the way she perceives herself in the mirror (ibid. 235). Unlike previously, this time Celie ascribes her body as belonging to herself, but she is disgusted by her reflection. She is however blinded by appearance; her focus is concerned with her ageing and ordinariness and she does not pay any attention to her inner worth.

Celie's struggle of loneliness and her temporary loss of Shug and Nettie serve as essential elements in her process towards independence. In the end, she starts to become independent: "If [Shug] come, I be happy. If she don't, I be content. And then I figure this is the lesson I was suppose to learn" (ibid. 257). Celie reflects on her own development, referring to the fact that she has now found her place in life by which she is satisfied. Her process of liberation and independence is initiated by external voices, however, in order for Celie to develop a sense of self, part of the process must be done within herself. Her identity construction is thus an interdependent process of both external and internal influences.

Emotions

In her letters, Celie expresses emotions of fear, hate and love. This section aims to examine how these emotions are expressed and how she acts upon them. Ahmed explains how black women are culturally impacted to approach emotions in a certain way due to their position as being a cultural practice. Furthermore, and in terms of fear, Ahmed states that fear involves an anticipation of hurt or injury. Celie expresses emotions of fear related to her relationship to men: "He [Mr. ____] beat me today cause he say I winked at a boy in church … I don't even look at mens . . . I look at women, tho, cause I'm not scared of them (ibid. 7). She is afraid of men due to the anticipated abuse they represent; she fears them because of their superior position that permits them to mistreat her. In that sense, Celie's emotions of fear are her response to the threat of violence and abuse she has experienced in her life. When experiencing the anticipations related to her emotions of fear, Celie responds by being passive and submissive – as mentioned in the section regarding sexism, she

"makes herself wood" as a means to protect herself. Furthermore, Celie develops emotions of hate towards men due to their oppressing treatment of her. In fact, she does not have any positive relations to men until the end of the novel. As the example demonstrates, she is not attracted to men either, not physically nor emotionally. To Celie, men are frogs (ibid. 230).

Although Celie expresses emotions of hate, she also implies emotions of love. Celie is in desperate need to be loved and to love somebody. Throughout the novel, Celie develops a strong sense of love for Shug, which we have already examined as being of great importance to Celie's liberation process. Additionally, the novel places great value to the love related to the sisterhood among black women. This sense of sisterhood takes many forms in the novel; some motherly or sisterly, some biological, some sexual and some in the form of pure friendships. However, the common denominator is the mutual love that these women express for each other. This union of sisterhood is symbolized in the quilting that the women work on together. The quilt is composed of diverse patterns that they sew together, symbolizing diverse people coming together in unity. In that sense, Walker portrays emotions of love in female relationships as a way for black women to empower and support each other by creating a loving refuge that allows them to resist their oppressive position in a sexist and racist society.

Colors as Symbols of Liberation

Colors are used as significant symbolism throughout the novel to enhance the liberation and development of the novel's characters. For example, Mr. ____'s transformation is illustrated by the fact that he paints his house "fresh and white" as a symbol of his development and new perspective on life (ibid. 229). Furthermore, Walker's choice of title for the book enhances the importance of colors and the color purple in particular. Purple is a color that signifies the union of body and soul and one's spiritual energy, which fits with the novel's spiritual perception of God. Purple thus represents the beauty of nature and everything that God has created for the enjoyment of humans. In the beginning, Celie's position as an oppressed, passive woman makes her unable of sensing the color purple and appreciating God's creations. Her only purpose in life is the struggle for survival. When Kate takes her shopping for a new dress, Celie desires a dress in purple and red. However, as a black woman her only color options are brown, maroon and navy blue (ibid. 21), which symbolize her social status in American society. It can be argued that society impedes her discovery of the color purple to sustain her in this position by only offering her the choice of darker shades of color.

When Shug introduces her to an alternative perception of God, Celie starts appreciating life and its beauty, which makes her start noticing the color purple. Her appreciation and awareness are symbolized when she decorates her home in the colors of purple and red (ibid. 257). The notion of the color purple is a general inspiration to Walker's theoretical account of her term 'womanism', a term expressed in her book *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (1983), which she uses as a redefinition of the regarding of African American women (Walker xi-xii). The darker shade provides the inclusion of the experiences of black women to feminist theory.

Change in Other Characters

Although Celie's transformation appears as most prominent, several characters in the novel undergo personal developments. Harpo's second wife, Mary Agnes, succeeds in constructing a self-confident identity as well, which empowers her to resist her submissive position as a black female. Her transformation is enhanced in the letter in which she is raped and objectified by the white warden. The incident affects her in a way that makes her stand up to anyone who does not regard and treat her as an individual person. Eventually, she fights back against Harpo and leaves him to pursue her dream of becoming a singer. Her development towards independence is symbolized when she demands to be called by her real name, Mary Agnes, instead of the dismissive and negatively connotated nickname, Squeak: "She stand up. My name is Mary Agnes, she say" (ibid. 90).

Mr. ____ too undergoes a significant transformation after the climax in the relationship between Mr. ____ and Celie (ibid. 187). When Celie meets him afterwards, she describes this transition: "I look in his eyes and I see he feeling scared of me. Well good, I think. Let him feel what I felt" (ibid. 201). It seems that the power relations between Mr. ____ and Celie has been reversed and Mr. ____ appears as inferior. When Celie returns from living with Shug, she is surprised by the fact that his actions and attempts to improve himself as a person makes her not hate him anymore. She explains:

> After the evil he done I know you wonder why I don't hate him … look like he trying to make something out himself. I don't mean just that he work and he clean up after himself and he appreciate some of the things God was playful enough to make. I mean when you talk to him now he really listen, and one time, out of nowhere in the

> conversation us was having, he said Celie, I'm satisfied this the first time I ever lived on Earth as a natural man (ibid. 236).

This change results in a mutually respected friendship between Celie and Mr. ____ with deep conversations about life and a mutual enjoyment of sewing. Mr. ____ even proposes that they remarry, yet Celie declines. However, interestingly about Mr. ____'s transformation is the fact that his development involves takes on "feminine" characteristics. He finds joy in traditionally feminine activities such as cooking, cleaning and sewing (ibid. 201), things that he previously loathed and refused to do. In that sense, Walker makes Mr. ____ breaks with traditional stereotypical gender roles.

Narrative and Structure

The Color Purple is an epistolary novel composed by a collection of letters written by the sister Celie and Nettie. Its epistolary structure composed by mixed first-person narratives makes the novel take form as a diary. In the beginning, Celie's letters are addressed to God, but later, when she eventually receives Nettie's letters, she starts addressing the letters to her in correspondence. However, although the sisters address the letters to each other, they are not dependent on an audience. Through a significant amount of time, Celie is not even familiar with Nettie's letters, however, Nettie continues her writing. In that sense, the letters can be considered what Collins calls a 'safe space' for both sisters to express and communicate their observations and experiences into a personal life story without a particular audience. Walker's choice of structure and narrative, then, becomes a powerful way to emphasize her message regarding the importance of voice; the ability to use one's voice to narrate one's thoughts and personal experiences is crucial when constructing a sense of self resulting in an avowed identity. The interplay between their letters are thus of great significance as it contributes to the personal development of the characters. Besides confiding in Shug, Celie gains power when she receives Nettie's letters. Not only does she discover that Nettie is alive and that resistance is beneficial, but the letters also initiate her personal process of finding and shaping her personal narrative. Celie's development is demonstrated by her narrative. When using the first-person narrative, the experiences expressed in the letters are thus influenced by the narrator's perception of the world. In the beginning, Celie's language appears poor compared to Nettie's, which is emphasized by her grammar, spelling and dialect. Concurrently with her empowerment and coming of age, Celie's narrative develops both in terms of linguistic skills and in

terms of complexity and structure. She is able to express herself more clearly and appears more reflective. Thus, Walker's choice of narrative is two-functional in the sense that it initiates and contributes to Celie's construction of identity as well as it acts as a demonstration of her character's development by the language.

Sub-conclusion

The Color Purple portrays Celie's process of empowerment and self-definition towards self-liberation. At the beginning of the novel, Celie is represented as a contemporary black female slave. We have examined how intersecting power relations of racism, sexism and controlling images work to sustain her in a passive, submissive position. The black women within the novel are conflicted due to the norms of their cultural identity. They are subjects to stereotypical ascribed identities that prevents them from developing a balance between their ascribed and avowed identity. However, Walker's novel is a demonstration of how resistance towards oppression is expressed in the transformation of the novel's characters. Walker attaches female relationships as essential for self-definition and empowerment but at the same time, she stresses that one must develop a sense of independence in order to liberate oneself. The protagonist Celie is the most significant example of a successful liberation as she succeeds in constructing a self-identity and liberates herself from sexist oppression. Additionally, Walker suggests that breaking with traditional stereotyping perspectives of power relations provides an alternative to black women and men's strict and oppressing societal placement in society, which she demonstrates by reversing gender roles.

The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison

This part of the analysis starts with a summary of the novel *The Bluest Eye* including a presentation of the author Toni Morrison. Hereafter, we aim to address the different intersecting axes of social division that can be located within the novel in order to analyze how these work together to oppress certain societal groups. Thirdly there will be made a characterization of the two main characters in the novel, Pecola Breedlove and Claudia MacTeer to illustrate both sides of the narrative in the novel, and to demonstrate the development in the two central figures. Finally, we will be commenting on the structure and the form of Toni Morrison's piece for further discussion.

Toni Morrison was born in 1931 in Lorain, Ohio, and is educated from Howard University and Cornell University. She was professor at Princeton University and aside from being a novelist and teacher, she has written several plays and essays as well. Morrison's work is both highly

acknowledged and praised with awards like the Nobel Prize in 1993 and the Pulitzer Prize in 1988. *The Bluest Eye* is one of Morrison's most popular novels and was published in 1970. The novel takes place in Lorain, Ohio during the end of the Great Depression and centers around Pecola Breedlove, a foster child in the MacTeer family. Nine-year-old Claudia MacTeer and ten-year-old Frieda MacTeer live with their parents and a tenant named Mr. Henry. Prior to this, Pecola's family's house burned down by her emotionally unstable, alcoholic, and sexually abusive father. They had little money, and both physical and verbal violence was part of their everyday life. Pecola has a wish for blue eyes due to the fact that both herself and her social community continually remind her of how ugly and how dark she is. The need for blue eyes stems from a standard that was perpetuated through the gifting of white, blue-eyed dolls throughout her childhood, and films containing white female figures. Through several flashbacks, the novel explores the younger years of Pecola's parents and their struggles as African American in a White Anglo Saxon Protestant community. However, another central event is the rape of Pecola, done by her own father, and how she becomes impregnated with an unwanted child. Claudia and Frieda are the only ones hoping for Pecola's child to survive and turns to superstitious remedies to ensure this, however, the child, being born prematurely, dies at birth. Hereafter, two sides of Pecola's own confusing and deluded imagination are presented into dialogue about the rape by her father.

Intersectionality

Race

To measure and examine how the power relations within *The Bluest Eye* are constructed, we will address the different categories of analysis that refer to social division. Within this novel, four interconnected categories are central to understand. The first one being race. In the town of Lorain wherein the narrative takes place, people simply live in a segregated community. Whites live among whites, and blacks among blacks. What is more important in terms of race and racism in *The Bluest Eye,* is how these are complex issues as it is a slightly unusual portrayal of racism, due to the fact that racism is typically depicted through white hatred against blacks, and the other way around. One example of this is visible in when Pecola mentions dandelions: "Nobody loves the head of a dandelion. Maybe because they are so many, strong and soon" (Ibid. 45). With this quote, Morrison marks dandelions as a symbol of the black race. Describing them as "so many, strong and soon" then becomes a description of how the white community sees African Americans; as a threat. White people, to Morrison, are unable to appreciate the African American beauty just like how many

people fail to appreciate dandelions. Arguably, this is an example of what Sara Ahmed means when she explains about crowd psychology, how crowds have feelings that can draw individuals into a crowd of emotions, feeling what the crowd is feeling. Likewise, it exemplifies what Ahmed says regarding hate coming from a place of love for something. In this case, white people's hate towards black people come from a love to America, and black people, then, come to represent a threat to their country, and to the ideal family structure in America. This novel, however, primarily explores the racist structure internally among people of color. Only a few white, secondary characters are included, nevertheless, racism remains as the primary focus of the novel. Due to the fact that the novel involves mostly black characters, "whiteness" come to exist on a different spectrum where it is not only appearance and actual skin-color that defines one's race, it is also the educational background, the socioeconomic class and one's place of origin. Whiteness is strongly associated with virtue, cleanliness and value, while blackness is associated with immorality, dirtiness and worthlessness. This idea of race thus becomes internalized to varying degrees by different characters in the novel, and ultimately it leads to racial self-hatred among these characters and generate various forms of dysfunctionality in their lives. As an example, it is visible no further than on the second page how illness is perceived within Claudia MacTeer's family, one out of several times: "Our illness is treated with contempt, foul Black Drought, and castor oil that blunts our minds" (Morrison 8). Sickness signifies uncleanliness, which is related to being black, hence the contempt. Likewise, the character Soaphead Church cannot stand the dirtiness associated with black women, for which reason he directs his sexual desires towards children. Many of the black characters' sense of self-worth and avowed identity are based on other individuals as point of reference. Distinctions are initially drawn based on skin tone, the hue of one's eyes and the texture of one's hair, but when these markers fall short the socioeconomic, hereditary and religious orientation define their sense of 'whiteness'. The characters lacking any marker of whiteness, then, suffer the most. One of the central events of the novel is the rape of Pecola Breedlove, which, in terms of race adds the climax to the discussion of race. This moment offers the literal and metaphorical pinnacle of racial self-hatred. Ensuing, Pecola must bear the metaphorical internalization of her father's racial self-hatred through the trauma she carries forward, but also literally, as she carries her father's baby.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison explores the relation between race and beauty and ugliness. She illustrates how the dominant racial group's perspective on beauty and appearance serves to degrade

and humiliate other races. White beauty standards are imposed and forced upon the black race, and when they fail to live up to this, they come to suffer from strong self-loathing:

> You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said, "You are ugly people." They had looked about themselves and saw nothing contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. "Yes," they had said. "You are right." And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it. (ibid. 37)

Throughout the novel, physical beauty affects the self-esteem of almost every character, because several media outlets define beauty based on white culture of the time period. Black women come to identify themselves on a false premise of whiteness rather than blackness. The association between whiteness and beauty removes the beauty ideal beyond bodily exterior, making it a signifier of one's value and worth. Several characters live by the belief that their beauty defines their value in their community and society in general. Morrison suggests that the Breedloves, for example, are fixed in poverty due to their self-perceived ugliness. With this, beauty endows some characters with the power that belongs under the category that Collins and Bilge's refer to as the interpersonal domain of power. The Breedlove's 'ugliness', or the darkness of their skin, comes to be a natural disadvantage within their social interactions.

Another element within racism in *The Bluest Eye* is the zoomorphistic connection to black people, and more so on black women. Like Alice Walker implicates with her infamous articulation of how black women were at some point trapped in a myth and the controlling image as being 'the mules of the world', Morrison makes that same comparison. Pauline Breedlove's birth of Pecola is a good example hereof. She explains in her flashback how the white doctor had a clear view on her as a person: *"When he got to me he said now these here women you don't have any trouble with. They deliver right away and with no pain. Just like horses"* (ibid 122-123). Viewing black human behavior in terms of the behavior of animals degrades Pauline to a place where she is considered a being without any sense of bodily or mental consciousness, rather than a normal, intelligent and sensing human being. Similarly, Geraldine, a middle-class black woman, runs a very special family

structure in her home where the family cat causes much commotion in the house. Geraldine is very clear in her opinion about black people, and due to the fact that the cat is the only individual in the house with blue eyes, Geraldine shows the most affection towards the pet. This leads to both trauma and disturb with her son Junior, who seeks abreaction towards little girls and children more black than him – an example of how interpersonal power functions as hierarchical transmission of oppression.

Gender

Moving forward to the second category of social division, namely sexism/gender or female oppression. At its core, *The Bluest Eye* is a story about oppression of women who do not only suffer from racial oppression, but also from the tyranny and violation brought upon them by the male figures. What is central to this part of the analysis, however, is how the novel depicts several phases of a girl's development into womanhood. Both Pecola and Claudia, the youngest female characters within the novel, possesses a limited and idealistic view of the significance and meaning of womanhood and all it contains. Marriage as constellation is, through Mrs. Breedlove and Geraldine's narratives, represented as a phase where innocence becomes ruined through the hardship of marriage and the oppression that follows. Although the women in *The Bluest Eye* experience the primary oppression from their husbands, they are neither innocent nor powerless. Through physical force and verbal assault, the women exercise authority over their children, and likewise, through gossip, lynching and slander, over other women. Like men oppress women, the light skinned, middle-class women turn towards the weakest and most vulnerable women in the community, transmitting their own oppression outwards. The three prostitutes come to represent the only exception to the rule of men oppressing women, as they gain power over men through exploiting their femininity and sexuality. This form of action comes at a price of their respect of themselves and the women around them. Many of their traits like drinking and aggression come to resemble male behavior, which will be elaborated in our discussion.

One of the most significant parts of *The Bluest Eye*, and another reason why Morrison's novel attains so much relevance and importance, is where the audience is allowed into the consciousness of Pecola's father, Cholly Breedlove. We are introduced to Cholly's first sexual experience, one that shows to become crucial for his entire life. Two white men catch Cholly and his girlfriend Darlene mid-action, and stay with them to witness the whole session: ""get on wid it. An' make it good, nigger, make it good" . . . Cholly moving faster, looked at Darlene. He hated her.

He almost wished he could do it – hard, long and painfully, he hated her so much" (ibid. 146). Hereby, Cholly's loss of virginity, and one of the most vulnerable and intense experiences in a person's life, becomes an element of entertainment for these white men to judge and mock, imposing their power in society over him. What is interesting, however, is his direction of anger subsequently. Growing up in a racist community, Cholly is aware of the interpersonal and cultural power white people have over him as a black man, wherefore Cholly's anger is directed towards Darlene instead of the white men. Anger towards the white community, he knows, will destroy him. Arguably, a mirror could be placed between Cholly's first sexual experience and the rape of his own daughter. Both episodes are pivotal to the characters' lives; both destructive, traumatizing and both mentally disabling.

Class

The third category of analysis referring to social division is that of classism. Due to the strong overlapping with racism, these two categories are difficult to completely separate. However, the class issue might be the major source of oppression of black people in America. It is an issue closely connected to capitalism, the primary system dividing society into two class categories; the rich and the poor, and before the civil rights movement, masters and slaves. The whites have been the major, central and upper class whereas the blacks have had no other place than at the margin. This status, then, has caused major suffering for black Americans. *The Bluest Eye* perfectly exemplifies how women were considered menials, only allowed jobs as mammies in the kitchens of white households. This position illustrates how race, class and gender have been interrelated notions during the history of black American women. Pauline Breedlove is a perfect illustration of this notion in the novel. Saddled with an alcoholic husband and an allegedly 'ugly' daughter, Pauline seeks to work for an ideal white family, the Fishers, to attain the happiness and fulfillment she cannot reach with her own family. The class barrier, however, maintains the hierarchical structure as servant vs. master.

The class issue is also what pushes Pecola towards the far margin, even in her own black community. Most of the characters in the novel are poor, but the Breedlove's are even poorer. By placing Pecola as both poor, ugly, insane and a victim of incest, Morrison excludes her from sharing the normal social and economic advantages she might be offered. Concurrently, the Breedloves are not completely capable of comprehending the depth of their social exclusion, and they are powerless to change their own situation. Morrison's creation of class-consciousness internally

among the black community is a perfect demonstration of how consciousness of the role that economics play within exploitation of black people. This, too, is a powerful way of showing how perpetuating racial ideology and discourse gives power to the dominant culture to oppress those who classify under what Hall calls 'others'. For example, Morrison have made a clear choice to emphasize the impact of classism in *The Bluest Eye* by inserting a passage from an elementary children's school book Dick and Jane, written in simple, understandable language. The passage contains a description of the house of two white children, namely Dick and Jane, and how their parents and house pets come to play with them. This depiction of the ideal, white, family-structure elucidates how life was presented to black people at the time. This story of Dick and Jane, which is built on heterosexist, Eurocentric gender ideology regarding men and women's advancement by ideas about traditional family ideals influences many African American men and women's everyday life, and very much so the characters in *The Bluest Eye*. Alongside constant references to it throughout the novel then functions as a constant reminder of the unrealistic expectations black Americans are measured by, condemned to constant failure.

Another tangible example of the natural classist and racist attitude towards and among black people in the novel is again with Geraldine, who is obsessed with distinguishing her family and herself away from the remaining black community. Something worth noticing is her son Junior's relation to other people: "Junior used to long to play with the black boys. … Bay Boy and P. L. had at one time been his idols. Gradually he came to agree with his mother that neither Bay Boy nor P. L. was good enough for him. He played only with Ralph Nisensky …" (ibid. 85). This quote exemplifies wherein the structural classist problem is situated; initially, Junior approaches the world through an innocent gaze where he can reflect himself on every individual peer. Coming of age, his mother's deeply rooted biased values come to affect him in a way so profound, that his open-minded behavior at some point must be compromised. Not allowed to play with blacks, and not accepted by whites, he has learned to vent his frustration by bullying young girls and abusing the family pet, imparting and reproducing racism, classism and female oppression. This point of analysis will be elaborated on in our discussion.

Pecola Breedlove

It is governed through the adults' attitude towards the above-mentioned intersecting categories of class, gender and race that Pecola Breedlove's experiences great trauma and the loss of her adolescent innocence. Despite Pecola position as the protagonist in *The Bluest Eye*, her character

remains rather mysterious to the reader. Pecola undergoes a major decline throughout the novel; already in the beginning of the novel, which unfolds during Pecola's pre-adolescent years, she is a fragile and susceptible child, and is therefore, due to the hardships and violence she must go through, completely destroyed and deluded. In this part of the analysis we will focus on Pecola Breedlove's development of self-identity and collective identity throughout the novel to further examine the status of female empowerment in comparison and held together with Claudia MacTeer.

The mind of Pecola Breedlove works fairly simply; she desires to be loved by her parents and by her remaining community, who repeatedly assigns her with an ascribed identity of being 'black', 'ugly', 'dirty' and a 'bitch'. Secondly, when undergoing different mental and physical abuse, she desires to disappear from the world she is placed in. Since these desires are at no point granted, Pecola is forced into a parallel state of mind in order to ease the pain of her existence. Through the socially constructed idea of whiteness as the ideal way of life, Pecola becomes obsessed with the idea that if she attains blue eyes, she will become loved. She is convinced that physical beauty is linked to love, and thus, that blue eyes and beauty will improve her life. Becoming more and more convinced with this idea, ultimately, her life and sanity are completely consumed by it. This obsession with white beauty standards illustrates the way which binary oppositions and cultural concepts of beauty can be devastating to everyone belonging in the 'wrong category'. As Hall states, binary oppositions create a relation of power in society and establishes a hierarchy with only one dominant pole. Using his model of binary oppositions with the categorizing of male/female, white/black and upper/lower class as the possible parameters to measure humans by, Pecola belongs to the group of devalued 'others' as a black, vastly poor female. While Pecola is an African American female, American beauty standards were at this time in the beginning of the 1940's completely comprised by white females. Throughout the novel, these kinds of beauty standards are presented continually for the black community to relate to. In this case, Pecola's idolizes the child-star Shirley Temple. Victimized by the ultimate intersecting system of oppression, Pecola not only has to contend with the communal attitude towards a preferential racial identity that completely ignores the beauty of her skin, she must also endure the adult community's attitude towards gender.

The ultimate victimization is Cholly's rape of Pecola. Prior to the rape, and initially in the novel, Morrison makes a clear statement regarding exactly where the transition from childhood into adolescence and womanhood is defined. Pecola's first menstruation happens in the company of Claudia and Frieda. They talk about how she can now get pregnant, which leads to a statement

about how someone has to love you to become pregnant. This is where Pecola's ever-present question of life becomes verbalized: "How do you do that? I mean, how do you get somebody to love you?" (Ibid. 30). She never gets an answer, because a young, black girl growing up in a cold, disdainful adult world leaves no chance of love. Starting her menstrual cycle, Pecola goes from one identity to another, where her individual self-perception becomes that of a woman. Her infantile mindset does not cope with neither the action of rape nor the consequence of pregnancy. Her body and mind are disconnected. Generally, the adolescent girls in the story lack a true understanding of the perilous nature of sex, as they hold idealistic views of what sex means and is, associating it with love. This bodily enforcement into adulthood compromises her mental willingness, which leaves her even more vulnerable. The rape, then, becomes another turning point, another enforcement into yet another stage in life for which she is not ready. Not only is sex throughout the novel associated with violence, humiliation and immorality, it is a strong action of oppression. The rape becomes a tangible way for society to ascribe a certain identity to Pecola, and a concrete object to point their hatred at. Through this experience, Pecola comes to embody the tragic effect of sexual violence and the oppressive force of sex in these women's lives.

To a high degree, Morrison does originate Pecola's racial self-loathing in her parents and their treatment of her, however, she creates an antithesis to Pecola's self-denying of racial identity in the form of Maureen Peal as well. Described as "[a] high-yellow dream child with long brown hair braided into two lynch ropes that hung down her back. She was rich, […] swaddled in comfort and care" (Ibid. 60), Maureen captivates adults and humbles her peers. Due to Pecola's weak mold, she is not able to find any flaws with Maureen, and therefore, Maureen becomes the embodiment of 'whiteness', which illustrates how a critically inquiring nature is essential to the positive molding of avowed identity of a black adolescent female. Hereby, Maureen automatically attains cultural and interpersonal power over Pecola and the other black girls in the community. Several of the people in the black community act out their own self-hatred by expressing it towards the easiest target, namely Pecola. Ultimately, she becomes a scapegoat for the entire community, representing their self-hatred and belief in their own ugliness:

> All of us – all who knew her – felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood aside her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. … We honored our egos on her. (ibid 203).

Claudia MacTeer

Next to- and in collaboration with Pecola Breedlove, the character of Claudia MacTeer becomes the most central in *The Bluest Eye*. As the novel's primary narrator, Claudia's point of view is crucial for the reader's understanding of the different events. Claudia's narration is particularly interesting due to the fact that she regards the community's situation from both a reflexive adult stance and an innocent, childish one. Her narrative and structure of the novel will be elaborated on in the last section of the analysis of *The Bluest Eye*. To this paper, Claudia is interesting to include and emphasize in the analysis as an extension and counterpart to Pecola, as Claudia's presence is a constant reminder to the reader that black family structure can be many different things; some black families pull together in the face of hardship instead of falling apart:

> But was it really like that? As painful as I remember? Only mildly. Or rather, it was a productive and fructifying pain. Love, thick and dark as Alaga syrup, eased up into that cracked window. I could smell it – taste it – sweet, musty, with an edge of wintergreen in its base – everywhere in that house. . . . So when I think of autumn, I think of somebody with hands who does not want me to die. (ibid. 10)

Claudia doesn't doubt that her mother, her father, and her sister love her, which is a major difference between her and Pecola. Furthermore, it is absolutely pivotal to her destiny, and an example of the power of affection. Sarah Ahmed explains how emotions can lead to collective politics and social alliances; in a mild version, Claudia's strong familial fundament is a social alliance against the dominant, light-skinned power group. Through emotional stability from her parents, she becomes penetrated with positive emotional values and affected hereof – allowing her a surplus of mental resources. Yet, like Pecola, Claudia suffers from the effect of racist beauty standards and material insecurity, but her social background provides rationality and a self-identification that Pecola does not possess:

> We were lesser. Nicer, brighter, but still lesser… What was the secret? What did we lack? Why was it important? And so what? Guileless and without vanity, we were still in love with ourselves then. We felt comfortable in our skins, enjoyed the news that our senses released to us, admired our dirt, cultivated our scars, and could not comprehend this unworthiness (ibid. 72).

Claudia's outlook on the racially biased ideal of beauty represents a counter reaction where she tries to resist the pressure of worshipping such ideals. The quote shows characterization, point of view, and plot development. It witnesses the fact that Claudia enjoys her color and will not let others dictate her qualities. The character of Claudia will be elaborated on in the following section.

Black Female Empowerment

This part of the analysis is an examination of Pecola and Claudia's development of empowerment throughout the novel. It will focus on motherhood, sisterhood and emotions, and Claudia and Pecola's molding of black female identity. One significant and damaging relationship in terms of empowerment in the novel is the one between Pecola and her mother. Not only is it one of the strongest, if not the strongest contribution to Pecola's racial self-hatred, it also generates a strongly negative image concerning her gender. Like Collins points out in Black Feminist Thought, motherhood in black communities leads to mammy work in order to earn a wage, which compromises their wish for self-liberation and self-identification. Mammy work enforces women to take part in their own subordination, something Pauline almost does with pride. All Pauline's love is placed within the white family's house: "All meaningfulness of her life was in her work. For her virtues were intact" (Ibid. 126) Likewise, it seems to be the case of a mother who, due to her own oppression, finds it too hard and to time-consuming to show affection and demonstration of correct life choices, when it comes to Pauline and Pecola's relationship. Despite the costs of Pauline's life, however, she kept her children, which demonstrates, albeit hidden, existing pronatalist values. Due to the fact that a mother-daughter relationship is of such high potential of empowerment, the relationship between Pecola and Pauline seems that more tragic. They are both placed in a patriarchal and racist environment in where they stand no chance of developing a positive and strong, female identity. Their collective identity is so strong that it does not allow any space for their self-identity to come forward. To Pecola, Pauline is not her 'mother', she is merely just another adult, Mrs. Breedlove. This way, Pecola becomes what Collins calls the 'outsider-within'. Not only as a black woman, but as a mentally disabled and prematurely impregnated, she is excluded from what should have been her social community.

When examining black female empowerment among the characters in *The Bluest Eye*, the three prostitutes are central figures. These three women resemble a 'safe space' wherein Pecola can ask questions about her personal development. They function as a sisterly bond to Pecola, together

with Claudia and Frieda, and they are focused on being honest with the girls. However, due to their own position as prostitutes and the lack of emotional investment in the male gender, they become unable to teach about what Pecola longs an answer for, namely love. On the contrary, they teach about the possibilities with a life without men and with personal self-liberation and –empowerment. One of the prostitutes mentions how she only respect "Good, Christian, colored women" (ibid. 56), encouraging to a sisterly bond between women with healthy beliefs. With this, and with Pecola and Claudia's continual engagement with these women, they accept and recognize these black women's self-definition, allowing them a balanced negotiation between their avowed and ascribed identity. The emotional condition for the prostitutes arises from a life full of male oppression and mistreat, and due to their emotional detachment from men, they gain power. Their handling of emotions becomes rationally acknowledged as a form of strength that they can use to create their own destiny. As emotions are culturally ascribed to women, the prostitutes become manlier, and are thereby a threat to their oppressors.

Emotions

Sarah Ahmed describes emotions as cultural practice that shapes and defines who we are, and furthermore, they create a distinction between the individual and the social. The way Pecola develops herself with outside contribution, is pivotal to her destiny. She is placed in the lowest end of the emotional hierarchy, where her emotions are not only considered a weakness but become an actual hindrance for living her life properly. She is culturally raised to live under horrible conditions, which, as a fundamental trait, makes her the weaker person. This provides her with a weaker foundation when being penetrated with outside emotions from other individuals. Pecola handles her strong and terrifying emotions in a very obvious way; she creates a complete distance from the real world. Her insanity, then, becomes her active way of coping with her lifelong oppression and alienation caused by her gender, class and race. Oppositely, Claudia is endowed with a critical approach to any oncoming obstacle. Her emotions are used as a tool to rationalize her outlook on the world – placing her at on top of the hierarchy of emotions. Her rationality means cultivation, which allows her another destiny than Pecola. Claudia is empowered by her emotions. Female oppression and an every-day encounter with social disadvantages based on her race forces Claudia to decide how this should be handled:

> We tried to see her without looking at her, and never, never went near. Not because she was absurd, or repulsive, or because we were frightened, but because we had failed her. Our flowers never grow. I was convinced that Frieda was right, that I had planted them too deeply. How could I have been so sloven? So we avoided Pecola Breedlove – forever (ibid. 203).

From this statement, one can draw the conclusion that Claudia has felt a sisterly bond to Pecola and therefore, she has been aware of the existence of a simple, humane responsibility. Both Audre Lorde and bell hooks argue how black female empowerment is a mental state, and a state of avowed identity. With this empowerment come a responsibility of enlightening others, but not a responsibility of salvation. Claudia and her sister have sensed this responsibility, and therefore, they feel guilty of Pecola's downfall. What empowerment does to a black woman is provide an ability to create an individual black female identity. The source of Claudia's empowerment lies in what Collins calls a 'safe space' from where she can speak freely. This safe space consists of her relationship with her sister Frieda, and somewhat her relationship with Pecola, which facilitates the sisters' endurance of their racist, classist and gender oppression.

Structure

The first distinctive structural element appears already in the prologue of *The Bluest Eye,* and concerns the immediacy of engagement of the reader. By introducing the novel with "*Quiet as it's kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941*" (ibid. prologue), Morrison intrigues the reader to believe that they are being included in some kind of secrecy that must not be talked about. She continues with "*We thought, at the time, that it was because Pecola was having her father's baby that the marigolds did not grow*" (ibid. prologue), a way of throwing a horrible truth in the face of the author, making us accompliced in her knowledge. She confides in us. Already after to sentences, we know everything, without knowing anything. During the prologue, then, we become aware of the whole plot of the book, but we do not know why those things happen. We are provided an anticipation of the story, which not only generate suspense, but a sense of circularity as well, taking the first part of the prologue, the Dick and Jane section, into account - an implication that this story is not a singular instance. Furthermore, the power of this particular story, like many of the same instances in the 1940's America, will not come from the surprise of a climax or point of no return. Rather, Claudia's/Morrison's opening structures the novel in a way that allows the reader to know

basic plot elements beforehand, and we can hereby concentrate on the questions that Claudia herself wants answered. Since 'why' is too difficult to answer, the novel attempts to ask 'how', by examining Pecola's life and the impact of social constructions and the role that these forces played in her tragedy.

The second central structural element in *The Bluest Eye*, the form, is characterized by Morrison's mission of providing highly nuanced and diverse perspective on the issues regarding black female oppression, the complexities of black female adolescence, and intersectionality in general in America in the 1940's. The narrative of *The Bluest Eye* is built on several different stories within one story, alternating between different narrators as well. Claudia MacTeer is the primary first person narrator, shifting between an adult and an adolescent viewpoint and an omniscient third-person narrator, employed to cover those portions of the novel not narrated by Claudia herself. The third-person narrator explores the back-stories of primary characters, for example those of Cholly and Pauline, and narrates sections like the disquisition on black womanhood in chapter five. Pecola herself narrates only a brief section of the final chapter through an interior dialogue.

Despite Claudia's adult knowledge and voice, it never intrudes the novel and leaves the adolescent years in focus. Observing episodes of violence, obvious female and racial oppression, bullying, insanity and mistreat in general, Claudia's childish viewpoint makes her uniquely qualified to register what her peer, Pecola, experiences. Her adult voice, then, can correct the incompleteness and directly misunderstood happenings, providing a thorough and nuanced point of view. She is a messenger of both hope and suffering, revealing the true story of Pecola Breedlove. Additionally, in the afterword Morrison explains how she purposely tells Pecola's story from another individual point of view to maintain her dignity and, to some extend, her mystery. Morrison aims at preventing the reader from labeling Pecola or prematurely believing that we understand her fully (ibid. 207). By not providing Pecola with a loud and clear voice in the novel, Morrison clarifies the position of Pecola, and thereby some black women in general, as someone with nothing to say in society. Through the rape of Cholly's rape of Pecola, *The Bluest Eye* reaches its climax within the theme of male oppression over women. This scene, which details only through Cholly's perspective leaving no place for Pecola's perception, demonstrates the silencing effect of male oppression over women.

What makes Claudia a qualified guide to the remarkable events that unfold in the town of Lorain, Ohio is her life stability that permits her to see clearly. The pain that eventually drives

Pecola into madness does not blur the vision of Claudia. Still, Morrison gives room for other characters to speak with their own voices through their own gaze, which provides a more inclusive narrative, giving rural, less-educated characters the opportunity to describe their own experience in their own language. It is obvious how Morrison is determined to provide nuanced perspectives when she gives both Pauline and Cholly, the utmost cruel and seemingly ignorant characters, a voice. By telling their story as well and hereby providing sympathy for them, Morrison states the complexity of intersectionality and it's origin, clarifying how it is not a simple, one-sided system of oppression.

Sub-conclusion

In recapitulation, *The Bluest Eye* is a multi-layered novel that, with it's constant focus on the complexity of a black girl's journey from adolescence into motherhood, depicts the hardship and consequences of female oppression in African American women's lives. Using black adolescent girls to illustrate the issue of intersectionality and gender oppression, Morrison automatically engages with the question HOW and WHY African American women suffer so significantly from the consequences of the organization within interpersonal, disciplinary and cultural domains of power. The two main characters depict the few possibilities within constructing black female identity, and how black females are limited in liberation and predispositioned for oppression. When analyzing the intersecting forms of oppression and what it means for the characters' self-liberation and self-definition, it is clear that Morrison has focused on providing a versatile, far-reaching and blunt perspective, in order to facilitate the explanations for so many tragic destinies in America. Although published in 1970, the novel is still highly relevant to current perspectives on race, gender and class.

The Darkest Child by Delores Phillips

This part of the analysis is divided into three parts; the first part consists of a summary of *The Darkest Child* and a presentation of the author, Delores Phillips, the second part contains an analysis based on Patricia Hill Collins' theory of intersectionality and intersectionality as an analytical tool, whereas the third part will contain as characterization of the protagonist and an examination of her personal development.

The Darkest Child is Delores Phillips' debut-novel from 2005. She died in June 2014 at the age of 63. Even though Phillips had been writing since childhood and graduated from Cleveland

State University, she worked as a psychiatric nurse for most of her adult life. The novel revolves around 13-year-old Tangy Mae Quinn who lives in extreme poverty in Pakersfield, Georgia during the late 1950s. Tangy Mae is the middle child of ten siblings, all with different fathers, which makes each of their skin-color different, ranging from dark to light. Tangy Mae is the darkest of the siblings, but also the brightest, and finds inner peace and life purpose in school, whereas her mother and older sisters are occupied with the old profession of prostitution. Her mother, Rozelle (Rosie), is a beautiful, light-skinned woman, whose temper, mood swings and emotional distress affect her children in the worst way possible. With psychical violence and hardship, Rosie turns to tyrannical cruelty towards almost all of her children. With a fear of abandonment, Rosie takes her children out of school at the age of twelve and sends them to earn money for the whole household in domestic services, the fields, the mill or through prostitution. Tangy Mae, however, being the cleverest one, has been selected to be part of the first integrated class at a nearby white high school – a chance for her to turn her social heritage and change her fate. Throughout the story, the novel centers around the many horrible experiences like for example deaths, riots, relationships and jealousy, which Tangy Mae has to experience in order to be motivated to break free and leave town and liberate herself and her youngest sister.

Intersectionality

Race

In *The Darkest Child*, race is one of the most pronounced issues. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, *The Darkest Child* takes place in 1950s Pakersfield, Georgia, and Phillips describes the town as an, at this point, highly segregated area:

> The Negroes in our town seldom went to Barley, and we called Rockside "the white man's row" because we had very little use for the street. We were denied entrance to the library, we could not drink from the fountain or sit in the gazebo at the courthouse, and very few of us could afford to deposit funds at the bank, nor were we welcome to do so. (ibid. 15)

As readers, we are immediately placed at a point in history where black communities in the South of America are starting to become more aware of their interpersonal situation. Simultaneously, white people in the South work to resist a situation where black people start to demand a completely other position in society, demanding part of the power and an acknowledgement that only white

people possess, and claiming a new collective identity. In continuation of this, the white communities find themselves in a situation where they risk losing their cultural, interpersonal and disciplinary domain of power. Whereas Toni Morrison depicts the internal racism among black people, *The Darkest Child* and *The Help* is to a higher degree portrayal of the racism in the relationship between black and white people. Phillips manages to include the way black communities were starting to conceive ways to break with their oppression and mistreatment, creating examples on how this was articulated:

> We do need change, but he's going about it all wrong. We need to organize like they're doing in other cities, bring in the NAACP. We need to be in agreement on what we're going to do and how we are going to do it. You can't beat a man down with your fists and not expect retaliation but that's just what Hambone thinks he can do. I, for one, think we should solicit help from the outside. We need laws to enforce the laws - if you know what I mean. (ibid. 17)

A young black man named Junior utters this intelligent and well-considered quote. His smart and rational mindset exemplifies how the Civil Rights Movement at some point became a reality for the black communities. He intends on organizing people from the black community, include the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and enforce themselves with laws that can help their situation. Furthermore, he directly dissociates himself from physical violence and other uncontrolled rebellious actions due to an awareness of the fact that this will only lead to retaliation and hereby deteriorate their situation. With this, he comes to function as an actual threat to the white civil and political society, which generates a natural collective emotion of fear. Hereby, they see no other possibility than to remove the object of fear by lynching him, which leaves the black community without an ambitious and sufficiently intelligent leader. Moreover, the lynching has no consequence for the white civil society due to their structural and interpersonal power. Another example of the magnitude of racist abuse of power towards blacks is when Rosie points out the fact that the white sheriff is the father to one of her sons. Simultaneously, her son Sam is held imprisoned for the killing of his friend Junior. When Rosie threatens to reveal their biological relation to one another, the sheriff threatens the following: ""I've told you once, don't threaten me," he said, his voice heavy with contempt. "if you so much as whisper my name, you'll never see that boy again. Try to remember that, Rozelle."" (ibid. 212). In this case, like many others, the white

sheriff has a power that means that he, as a white man, can kill young black men without sanctions, if they function as a threat to their supremacist system.

In the novel, Phillips not only describes the societal racial conflict between black and white people, but also the domestic racial conflict apparent in many black families, which adds another dimension the notion of race. She underlines the racial duality by incorporating a racialization internally in the Quinn family. Within Tangy's family, the condition of internal racism and self-hatred is extreme: "She took pleasure in categorizing her children by race. Mushy, Harvey, Sam and Martha Jean were her white children. Tarabelle, Wallace and Laura were Indians – Cherokee, no less. Edna and I were Negroes" (ibid. 16). Rosie's categorizing of her children appears to be a consequence of and indicator for the general societal condition. By dividing the children into whites, the people who dominates in North America, Cherokees, the indigenous people of America, and then negroes, the people who were forced to America as slaves and later considered a burden to North America, Rosie is clear about how she agrees negroes do not belong nor deserve a place in America, as those are the ones she treats the worst. This comes to function as a strong reproduction of the racial oppression that Rosie has always been a subject to.

Gender

Gender discrimination, or more specifically discrimination of black females, is the second major issue flourishing in *The Darkest Child*. On the first page Phillips opens up with the following quote: "Tangy Mae, this will be your life. Grab an apron and enjoy it" (Ibid. 1), stating how black women, whether they like it or not, have no other options than to become mammies. The quote is uttered by Rosie, which reveals again how she takes large part in reinforcing her and her daughters' oppression. Allowing the existence of cultural and ascribed identity, Rosie blindly accepts her limits in life and sustains her daughters within those same limits. "My girls ain't nothing. If it wadn't for my boys bringing us money, we'd be in bad shape. Not one of my girls ever bring one dime to this house" (ibid. 330). Her children's worth is calculated in their ability to earn money, and as the boys can do physically hard labor, they can earn more money. Rosie, then, is a good example of how black women to a high degree create a self-perception and avowed identity that fits into their stereotypical role, negotiated by their cultural heritage and societal discursive construction of black people.

Additionally, *The Darkest Child* clearly portrays the power relation and gender oppression between men and black women. "My daddy say a colored woman ain't shit. He say they ain't good

for nothing. Can't do nothing but stand around putting a whole lot of weight on a man" (Ibid. 114). Uttered by Mattie, Tangy's best friend, Phillips accurately describes the view on black women. Additionally, women, both white and black, are described as something that is in possession of men (ibid. 4), juxtaposed to cars, houses and clothes. Women, especially black women, can be left, tossed and violently abused with no given consequence. Nevertheless, having settled how the general view upon black women is evident in the novel, it is interestingly enough not the male characters who are close to the protagonist, who express the most devaluation of black women. It can be argued that Rosie and the white male characters are the primary exercisers of oppressive behavior towards black women. Due to her personal issues and a history that we as readers do not know of, Rosie is emotionally blunted to such a degree where she has no surplus energy to neither empower nor care genuinely for her children. This focus of analysis will be elaborated in the following.

Class

Several examples on classicism can also be found in *The Darkest Child*. The Quinn family is an example of the worst cases of poverty within the black community: "Our house stood alone on a hill off Menyon Road, about half a mile outside the city limits. It was old, crippled, and diseased – an emblem of poverty and neglect" (ibid. 7). With this, we understand their physical living conditions; how the house is old, crippled and a symbol of poverty and neglect. However, a house that is diseased is more than a poor house. This disease comes not only from moist wood and leaking pipes, it comes from the dysfunction, terror and illness from the family living in the house. Tangy's description of her house is just as much a description of her family. Furthermore, being placed "half a mile outside the city limits" the house symbolizes the family's position within, or figuratively outside the community. Due to their dysfunctional family structure and low position as domestic workers, the prostitution of even her young daughters, taking her children out of school to earn money, the encouragement to shoplifting, by trading her own daughter for a car and some money, and general bad behavior and hot temper, Rosie draws her family into exclusion from society.

Secondly, in *The Darkest Child*, class is delineated primarily with focus on the disparity between white and black people. The following quote describes the situation accurately:

> "I expect you to stop staring at the ground every time you speak to a white man that ain't a drop better than you. I expect you to be the men you were born to be, and to

> demand your God-given right to be human." "We've got wives and children to feed," one man yelled. "Who gon' pay our wages when we go making all these demands?" "What wages?" Hambone yelled back. "There's not a dozen of you here who can feed your children without your wives going to work. And what is she doing? She's … scrubbing the white man's house, tending his children, washing his clothes, and cooking his meals. … then you wanna knock them around when they're too tired to have your supper on the table on time". (ibid. 228)

With this, the class issue becomes an issue of dependence, as well as a matter of cultural and structural power. On one hand, the black community is governed by an already existing system, however, the system is so fragile and the disparity is so large that the system generates too poor living conditions for the black community. Alternatively, anarchist initiatives can be made to make the greatest impact on this system, but anarchy is even more unstable and unfamiliar. Hereby, the class conflicts become a question of either gaining human rights or earn wages. The structural system of power in America were made up by for example Jim Crow Laws and others that allowed this view on and judgment of humanity to occur, which left the black community with a demand for rebellions and or civil rights movements to settle the situation. Secondly, the strength within the cultural domain of power becomes evident. As mentioned in connection with intersectionality as an analytical tool, the cultural domain of power touches upon some aspects of the general and civil organization of power. Within this domain, an explanation for social inequality between the black and whites within this community is signified as a game that, as a rule, is based on fair play; that the black people in Georgia at the time might as well have success, as they were practically free to do what they wanted. The racism and the interpersonal power, however, sustain them in the societal structure. Having this either/or worldview can be used to explain social inequality, as people are unable to see through the fact that the playing field on which we are playing is not level, and the black community had no real option.

Heterosexism and Ableism

Aside from racism, sexism and classism, which are evident in the full range of our novels, Phillips includes two other categories as well, heterosexism and ableism, to illustrate the conditions for these two minorities at the time. In Rosie's large group of children, one turns out to be a lesbian and another is deaf and mute. Instead of recognizing and acknowledging her daughters' sexuality,

Rosie turns lesbianism into something abnormal and ugly: “”What’s a bull dyke, Mama?” [Tangy Mae asked] “It’s a full-grown woman running ‘round trying to grow a cock like a full-grown man. Trying to like other women.” (ibid. 289). In her collection of essays *Sister Outsider* from 1984, black, lesbian feminist Audre Lorde, comments on the condition of heterosexism and lesbianism within black communities. She provides a definition of heterosexism: “Heterosexism: *The belief in the inherent superiority of one pattern of loving and thereby it’s right to dominance*” and explains how it is a form of human blindness (Lorde 45). Furthermore, she explains how black women are naturally encouraged by black men to identify themselves only in terms of their allegiance to their black male partners, using threats of emotional and personal rejection as persuasion. Black lesbians, then, are considered to be threats since they do not fit into this model. The divisions within minority groups, Lorde says, are based on the false assumption that there is a limited amount of freedom to go around. This misconception leads to the fear that another group's success at securing some of that freedom will eliminate it from another group.

Tangy’s sister, Martha Jean, is born deaf. Her handicap is continually being referred to as Tangy and Martha Jean have a close relationship, thus, Tangy responds very compassionately to her handicap. Rosie, on the other hand, uses Martha Jean’s handicap against her: “Dumb bitch. You no-good, dumb bitch. I’ll break yo’ goddamn neck.” … “With artistic precision, she opened gashes, loosened teeth and viciously rearranged my sister’s face.” (Phillips 118). With this quote, it is clear how Rosie does not feel to show extra consideration for Martha Jean, as well as there exists a conviction that Martha Jean is stupid and worthless due to her handicap. In terms of ableism, however, it is highly arguable how Rosie’s mental condition belongs under this category as well. Offhand, Rosie is stuck within the stereotype of a matriarch throughout the novel, which will be elaborated later; nevertheless, going through her characteristics and tendencies, one would not be completely exaggerating if claiming that she suffers from mental illness. The older siblings in the family are constantly taking on the roles as caretakers to mask this mental illness of their mother. Additionally, Rosie’s own mother, who appears in the story somewhat late, labels Rosie as an evil. This could be an example of a spiritual or religious conflict in terms of accepting and understanding mental illness. Tangy articulates a fear that there is “something terribly wrong with [their] mother” (ibid. 115) at different points in the novel, and her siblings agree by conversing how to ‘handle’ their mother and who is going to take care of her if they all leave. Tangy elaborates:

> I was baffled by the ambiguities of my mother’s emotions and behavior. She denied and feared God in the same breath. She allowed our actions to shame her, and yet she

> was void of shame. I truly believed there was something unnatural about her – a madness that only her children could see. My yearning was not to understand it, but to escape it. (ibid. 122)

The fact that Tangy thinks that Rosie's madness is only visible to her children indicates that this problem is only existing within the house, and that the children cannot reach out for help due to mental illness being taboo in this area at this time, as racist issues tend to have families keep mental illness internal. The family is more or less aware of the mother's instability, however, does not reach out for help until the problem can no longer stay within the family. This is an example of the distrust of impoverished families for institutionalized help.

Tangy Mae

This part of the analysis will provide a characterization of the protagonist and narrator of the novel, Tangy Mae Quinn. Tangy is thirteen years old, she is the darkest of her mother's ten children, and she is truly wise beyond her years. Her knowledge and ambitions are not only kept in school, she appears constantly aware of what is going on around her. Throughout the novel, Tangy goes through a large transformation. Phillips initiates the novel by admitting Tangy's character: "My obedience, as always, was swift" (ibid. 2). Referring to the many orders and commands given by her mother, Tangy knows her place in the family. She obeys her mother in the same way as a black slave would obey a white man. "I thought she was beautiful, despite my acquaintance with the demon that hibernated beneath her elegant surface" (ibid. 2). Tangy's transformation begins with this quote, which illustrates how she feels largely torn towards her mother. She sees the good sides of her, and she sees the bad side as one that is only visible sometimes. Reading the book, one would argue that the tyrannical side of Rosie is the most dominant and visible. What Tangy then needs and comes to discover, is that she does have other possibilities in life.

Within the section about intersectionality in this analysis we explained how Rosie divides her children into groups by color. This detail is, to us, rather important in terms of Tangy's self-image and identity. This division being an example of othering in the most pronounced way, Tangy is not only born into a large community undergoing severe oppression, she is also, within that group, being even further degraded. When relating Hall's notions of difference and othering to Collier's account of ascribed and avowed cultural identities, the conflict between ascribed and avowed identity becomes evident. For instance, taking the construction of identity of a black

woman into account, and considering the fact that Tangy's ascribed identity is based on a racist perspective, this positions her as an 'other' – not only as a black woman, but as the darkest of her kind and in relation to her gender as well. A significant example of Tangy's self-image is when tangy volunteers to prostitute herself to spare her sister from doing it: "I glanced up, and she slapped my face so hard that I bit my tongue, and the blood coated my palate and rolled down my throat. "Who the hell do you think wants you?" she asked. "Nobody, Mama," I answered truthfully." (ibid. 120). With this quote, Tangy's expresses a clear feeling of self-hatred and low self-esteem, as her mother's constant patronizing convinces Tangy that she is unwanted and replaceable in the world. Having heard this all her life, Tangy's avowed identity becomes dominated by her ascribed, cultural identity, which reinforces the system of oppression. This stereotyping of a particular woman's identity, perceived only on the basis of racist, stereotypical trades, makes it difficult for Tangy to even see through that gaze. In this sense, her avowed self-perception is so affected by oppression and of these notions of difference, othering and stereotyping, that she becomes largely dependent on her gifted mind in order to liberate herself, which will be elaborated in a following section.

Tangy fits, to some extend, under the categorization of the black lady as a stereotype and controlling image. Her character bears strong marks of intellectuality, and from the beginning, her aim in life is to become something more than what her heritage and culture initially dictates:

> Mama loosened her grip on my arm . . . then smiled and winked at me. Painfully, I parted my frost-chapped lips and returned a smile. I loved her with all my heart, but if she did not die by Monday morning, I was determined to discover from the mages of my schoolbooks, how to break the chains that bound me to my mother. (ibid. 6)

The black lady is per definition someone who actively deselects family due to her assertiveness at success. In Tangy's case, this may be true, however, it may stem from a different motivation. Despite her assertiveness at wanting success in life, whether educational, personal or social, she knows that she cannot achieve this if she stays with her family. It is unknown whether Tangy actively selects a family in her adult life, yet, her expressiveness regarding education and liberation from her mother's chains is rather distinct. However, the black lady is seen as asexual and unfeminine, which does not directly fit to Tangy's character. Her physicality and sexuality are depicted as rather complex; her mother tries to asexualize her with her dark skin-color: "He thinks I'm pretty, Mama." "Nah. That boy ain't say nothing like that. Is he blind?" … "That boy up to

something" … "I don't know what it is, but he up to something" (ibid. 161). However, she is sexualized by the male figures, including her boyfriend and the abusive men at the Farmhouse, which leaves Tangy in a complex and confusing reality where she does not know the rules of sexual politics and the power that follows.

Motherhood

In *The Darkest Child*, motherhood is one of the most significant themes and plays a great role when examining the protagonist's development and representation and construction of identity. The mother-daughter relationship between Tangy and Rosie is not the only interesting relation to examine however, it is also interesting to examine how motherhood gains meaning in the relation internally among the brothers and sisters in the Quinn family and the family's relation to their neighbor, Miss Pearl. Rosie is the 'official' mother in the novel and treats her children the worst way possible. Not only is she violent, abusive and manipulative, she even makes the children think it is their own fault: ""*I done branded you a Quinn, girl. Don't you ever run from nobody else as long as you live."* … "*It wouldna burned you so bad if you'da been still", she says"* (ibid. 52). This is only one out of many examples of how she blames the children for her own actions to lighten her own guilty conscience. In many ways, Rosie belongs to the controlling image of the matriarch. She is the 'bad' black mother in a black home, and her necessity to work outside the household marks her as unfeminine to other men. Furthermore, her overly aggressive actions towards men makes them feel emasculated and unnecessary, which might be one reason why she does not have a husband and ten different fathers to her children. She is impoverished, stigmatized due to her behavior and mental illness, and abandoned by several men. Rosie takes a lot of pride in her family name and is very assertive about her family providing for themselves, which makes her less desirable as spouse, as these features come out negatively to black men. Furthermore, Rosie used to work as a mammy at the Munfords' house and passes this job on to her daughters, keeping them within this undesirable position and transferring an oppressed identity as oppressed women. Like we explained in out theory section, Collins argues how both the image of the matriarch and the mammy is central to intersecting oppressions of class, race and gender. Due to her multidimensional tendencies, Rosie becomes a highly complex character. She is both a mammy and a matriarch who seems to both reject and be rejected by the many men in town. Yet, Rosie's physicality and sexuality qualify her to belong under the ancient stereotype of a jezebel as well. Collins describes a jezebel as an overly sexual woman, which fits well on Rosie, who uses her

sexuality as an object of power to obtain the things she wants. Additionally, Rosie has spent many years working as a prostitute at the Farmhouse, which has led large parts of the community to associate her with only that.

As argued previously, Rosie is the official mother in the novel. Yet, taking her behavior and maternal pattern, or the lack thereof, into consideration, it is relevant to include Collins' explanation of the positions as bloodmothers and othermothers. Rosie is her children's bloodmother; she gave birth to them and she kept them under her roof, nonetheless, Rosie's best friend, Miss Pearl, is the solid support and caretaker of Rosie's children and what Collins describes as the othermother. Rosie obviously lacks preparation, engagement and desire for motherhood, thus, Miss Pearl serves as an assistant for Rosie by sharing her mothering responsibilities and guiding Rosie. She feels a responsibility to protect the children, and lets Rosie know when she crosses the line. An example hereof is when Rosie accuses her daughter Mushy for wanting to turn the rest of the children against her:

> Mushy can't turn 'em against you. You gon' do that all by yo'self. It ain't much on the Bible, but I'm almost sho' it's a sin the way you beat yo' chilluns. Just look at Martha Jean's face. … You done that, Rosie, just as sho' as I'm sitting here." "I didn't, Pearl," Mama lied. (ibid. 128)

In *The Darkest Child*, other othermothers are present as well. Immediately after Rosie gives birth to Judy, the tenth child, Martha Jean comes to take on the role as mother for the baby due to Rosie's complete ignorance of the baby's existence. In consequence of this, she establishes the strongest bond to the baby and becomes most devastated when Judy is killed by Rosie. Motherhood in *The Darkest Child*, then, becomes a complex and unnatural matter. Rosie is the object of fear to her children, she is unpredictable, devious and manipulative, and at the same time, she expresses pride and dependence on her family, which leads the children unsure of everything they know. Collins argues how many black mothers through time, who is constantly dominated by intersecting oppressions, come to have neither time nor patience for showing their children real affection and demonstration of how to act through life. To an extend and due to her behavior, it would make more sense for Rosie to abandon her children, but as Collins states, women who are left alone because of hard environments and sexual politics may bear a need for love from their children instead of from men. However, black daughters, like Tangy, still admire their mothers and have no doubt about their love for them.

In continuation of this and of the characterization of Tangy, it is interesting to examine the expressed feelings that move between the characters in the novel and how these feelings are handled. According to Sarah Ahmed and to emotions as cultural practices, fear is founded in anticipation of hurt or injury, which is also based on a premise of experience. Tangy and her siblings experiences the violence and abuse from their mother, and their fear is therefore based on an anticipation that she is going to do what she always does, when they do her wrong: "In less than five minutes our mother had taught us to never touch her metal box, and the true meaning of fear. I wondered that day if I was the only one in the room who knew that there was something terribly wrong with our mother" (ibid. 15). In this case, their fear is not in front of them, it is merely anticipation, but the object of fear, namely Rosie, is present. Not only with this example, but in general, her physicality is associated with a proximity that is then imagined as the possibility of future injury. The fear is hereby ever present with her children. The structural possibility that Rosie may abuse the children makes everything possibly fearsome to the children: "Sometimes I believed she did not mean to hurt us but could not help herself. She was, after all, the same gentle woman who had once, long ago, taught us to love, and I had learned to love with every part of my being" (ibid. 122). Through this, we gain insight into Tangy's complex relationship of love, fear and hate towards her mother. Ahmed mentions how such a relation can be explained by the certain notion of familial love. She explains how love in itself is a form of independence, which complicates Tangy's process of liberating herself from her mother, and the love she once gave her and still sees little glimpses of. Familial love is an uncompromising figure, and what Tangy expresses in the latter quote is what Ahmed describes as a feeling based on grounds of character, genetics and belief system where love then becomes an inheritance within her family. The way Tangy handles her emotions towards her mother is arguably intertwined with her intellectual grounds. Ahmed's idea of hierarchy between emotions suggests that Tangy's emotions bear the character of being connected strongly to rationality, and they hereby become an advantage and a cultivation that she can use to liberate herself and redefine her black female identity. This can be an explanation to where she finds inner strength and empowerment to finally create better destiny for herself.

Empowerment

Despite all the violence and hardship throughout her early teenage years, Tangy manages to not only survive but to leave everything behind and save her little sister. Thus, she manages to create a new and brighter future for herself. Many different factors come to serve as Tangy's empowerment.

First of all, her engagement with education becomes pivotal for her destiny. She constantly insists on staying in school despite her mother's resistance. For her diligence and talent, she is rewarded a rare scholarship which opens up new possibilities for Tangy, not only in terms of education, but in terms of making her believe in herself and her take herself and her talent seriously.
Additionally, and in continuation hereof, the many books, magazines and newspapers that Tangy is presented provides her with knowledge into an area of the world that she has yet to discover. The two male characters, Junior and Hambone, who present her with both reading material and verbal transmission of knowledge, serve the same effect. For example, Hambone holds her obliged to answer for the societal situation of oppression, as he asks her how she feels about white people:

> "[T]hey treat me all right." "How's that?" "Well, they give us a school. They supply our library with books, and they give us vaccinations in their library." "Yeah, they do," Hambone agreed. "In the basement of their library. I remember that. You ever wonder why they give Negroes shots in the basement of a library?" (ibid. 83)

With this quote, we become aware of the way Tangy understands the relationship between black and white people. She believes that they are care takers for her kind, and that she therefore is ought to feel grateful for their services. Likewise, Junior acts as a source of enlightenment and empowerment for Tangy:

> Junior was a lanky young man with dark complexion like mine, and one day he had told our class that life was hard for Negroes, but harder for those his color. He held us riveted with his tales of the Ki Klux Klan, Jim Crow laws, and injustices taking place right in our own town. (ibid. 18)

These are two out of several significant examples of how Tangy meets enlightenment and becomes challenged in her worldview, which is an important step in her character's development. Furthermore, it comes to serve as empowerment of Tangy as she gains a more diverse and intelligent foundation to base the understanding of her own oppression on.

A third source of empowerment is provided from her siblings. Despite the controversial and unhealthy family structure caused by Rosie, Tangy's brothers and sisters take care of each other. An example hereof, is when Tangy is chased and harassed by bullies: "[M]y warriors charge the battlefield without armor, attacking my predators, pulling clothes, and hair, and skin, drawing blood

and screams of terror, as I fall into the dirt, panting and crying" (ibid. 51). The 'warriors' she refers to are two of her siblings. This episode forms a picture of the way that the family constantly tries to hold everything together and save each other from the ugliness in life. The fact that all the children are dominated by Rosie enables them to help each other in a manner that no other people are able to. Together, they have a safe space wherein they can speak freely about their experiences and hopes. Especially Tangy's close relationship with Martha Jean provides a safe space and generates a feeling of sisterhood where encouragement of demanding improvement for oneself is exercised to some degree.

Lastly, Tangy's relationship with God is an important factor in terms of empowerment as well. She turns to the church on Sundays, and she silently prays for help from God: "I thought, *Satan is not going to leave. The only way to get him out is to invite God in, and God is not welcome in my mother's house"* (ibid. 71). Religion was both a private and serious matter to many American people at the time and served as a place for many to seek both meaning and redemption. Rosie's statement that God is not welcome in her house is a clever, mental use of force on her children, as she knows how a good relationship with God can change people's lives. It is a way for Rosie to control her children's minds and ensure they will not be enlightened or inspired, and having dismissed God a long time ago, Rosie can hereby keep her children from finding greater purpose, meaning and positivity in their lives so they will not leave her alone for something better. Therefore, Tangy is forced to keep her religion private. Her engagement with God, however, is a factor that helps her to create mental progress for herself.

Structure

Phillips presents a classical first-person narrative in her novel. We are only familiarized with the perspective of Tangy, which is possibly done to scrutinize the importance of her inner development of character. However, as Phillips provides Tangy with such an intellectual and rational mind, her point of view becomes both highly observant and generous with details from every aspect of her social and intellectual reality. Tangy is both observant with her personal one-to-one relations, with the secondary relations internally between other characters, and with third-part relations that she is not familiarized with personally but solely through secondary parts. As readers, we are also limited to only Tangy's personal perception of every experiences in the novel, which comes to serve as a black, female, adolescent perspective. However, Phillips manages to create a diverse and inclusive approach and amount of information about other perspectives through conversation. Besides Tangy

Mae's narrative, which gives us insight to the story itself, we are also, marked with italicized writing, familiarized with her inner prayers to God and a few flashbacks from her childhood, which adds another level of knowledge to Tangy's character. Despite the fact that *The Darkest Child* is obviously told from Tangy's perspective and caused by her position as first-person narrator, Rosie is given a great amount of attention as well. Rosie, then, can be considered to be another main character in the novel, but her space only consists of the view Tangy has on her and hereby, Rosie is unavoidable to both her kids and thereby also to the reader.

In terms of voices within the novel, it is clear how Phillips uses speech and conversation as a strong literary tool. Both the voice and the thoughts of Tangy Mae are made up by an extensive and ambitious vocabulary that, at times, seem slightly far-fetched and even exaggerated at times, taking Tangy's age into consideration. Likewise, there can be made a rather clear line between the characters wanting to liberate themselves, who are given well-articulated and intelligent voices, and then those who act more ignorant and indifferent about the situation of the black community and whose voices are made to fit in under a black, southern and strongly cultural stereotype.

Sub-conclusion

The Darkest Child is a novel that bears a clear mark of an ambition to delineate the condition for poor, black families at the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. The racial issues are outspoken to a degree where they serve as a frame for the narrative and the characters' personal development. The novel gives several examples of the worldly different struggles of respectively young black men and young black women at the time, which is an important and interesting approach to enhance. In her complex experiences of adolescence, Tangy Mae functions as a coming-of-age character who is both faced with the utmost cruelty of life but at the same time becomes her own moral compass. We are familiarized with the constantly insecure self-perception of hers, which actually leaves the audience with a constant feeling of doubt about whether she will survive at all. Obviously, Phillips takes a certain interest in the notion of motherhood and sexual politics of black women. Her illustration of the complexity of motherhood for black women and the daughters thereof speaks a clear message about how motherhood should not be considered the only purpose and meaning for women, but rather a choice that should either be taken or deselected with care. *The Darkest Child* hereby is an example of the consequences when this choice is not given from the beginning but forced upon an individual. When analyzing the impact of intersecting forms of oppression and the significance for the characters' self-liberation and self-definition, it is clear how

respectively Rosie and Tangy represent different destinies for black females. Rosie's history of hardship and misery caused by gender, class and race oppression takes over her present and her future, and leaves her with a life with loneliness, insanity and very little purpose. Oppositely, Tangy Mae, blessed with a strong mind and wisdom, takes charge of her own life at a young age and hereby gets the chance to redefine her reality and identity and make something of herself and her little sister. Lastly, Delores Phillips' manages to place a mirror between the development that Tangy Mae undergoes throughout the novel and the similitude of development with the southern states in America; like Tangy, America is coming of age, going through a phase from immaturity and ignorance to a state of knowledge and diversity.

The Help by Kathryn Stockett

The last part of the analysis is an examination of Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* (2009). It starts with a presentation of Stockett and a brief summary of the novel's plot. Hereafter, we once more aim to address how intersectionality is presented within this particular novel. Additionally, we will be focusing on examining the relationship between the novel's black and white female characters to illustrate the importance of relations across race. In continuation of this examination, we aim to demonstrate the main characters' individual developments by enhancing the significance of narrative and storytelling as empowering elements to their identity construction and self-liberation. Finally, an examination of narrative and structure will be made.

Kathryn Stockett is an American novelist, born and raised in Jackson, Mississippi. After graduating from University of Alabama, she moved to New York to pursue a career in writing. In 2009, her debut novel *The Help* was published. It has sold more than 10 million copies and became a bestseller a few months after its release. *The Help* is a novel that portrays the danger and struggle of challenging cultural norms of race and gender in Jackson, Mississippi during the early 1960s. Through the narratives of Minny Jackson, Aibileen Clark and Eugenia "Skeeter" Phelan, the novel depicts the conditions for and treatment of female African American mammies working in the households of white families, enhancing the complex relationship between white female employers and their black female employees. Through the main characters' experiences and stories, the reader is introduced to a variety of characters who represent diverse attitudes of the racial segregation policies that dominated the American society contemporarily.

Intersectionality

Race

The issue of race is greatly emphasized in the novel. In Jackson, Mississippi, race is the number one determinant of people's position in the societal hierarchy. The town is strongly influenced by the rules and laws of Jim Crow that restrict black people's lives. The novel explores the impact of stereotyping as a consequence of racial difference. Besides being addressed as "others", black people are generally exposed to stereotyping treatment that portrays them as lazy, ignorant, less valuable, disease-infectious people. The novel reveals how this stereotyping is incorporated into the everyday practices of Jackson's citizens and how it is meant to reinforce racial segregation. The most prominent illustration of racial segregation are the bathroom policies, which appear as a recurring motif in the novel. The issue is initiated with Hilly's Home Help Sanitation Initiative, which requires all white families to provide a separate bathroom for their black employees. Her initiative is symbolic for the prejudiced stereotypical beliefs that black people carry diseases that might infect white people if sharing bathrooms. This claim is used to justify segregated bathroom policies in order for white people to maintain the racist status quo. Hilly's initiative is even endorsed by the surgeon general of Mississippi, making her initiative an exemplification of the institutionalized racism that legalizes discriminatory practices. For instance, when black male Robert Brown accidently uses a bathroom for whites, he is beaten and blinded by white people for breaking the law. Stockett's large emphasis on the issue of bathroom policies in the novel is also made to emphasize the paradoxical and contradictory nature of race in the 1960s; black people are able to do the cooking and cleaning in white people's homes and take care of their children, but they are not allowed to use their bathrooms. Skeeter expresses this contradiction by saying that : "[t]he colored women down here … 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" (ibid. 105-106). Her statement enhances the bitty irony related to the bathroom segregation. Likewise, Aibileen copes with her new bathroom at the Leefolts in a sarcastic and humorous manner: "I use my colored bathroom from now on. And then I go on and Clorox the white bathroom again real good" (ibid. 29).

Another significant aspect of racism in the novel is the impact of cultural identities. White people in Jackson share a common cultural identity due to their skin color that categorizes them within a specific cultural group. Hereby, they are exposed to historical cultural codes and norms that reinforce patriarchal relations of power, and thus influence their perspectives and attitudes

when constructing an identity. Aibileen expresses this influence regarding the upbringing of Mae Mobley:

> I want to yell so loud that Baby girl can hear me that dirty ain't a color, disease ain't the Negro side of town. I want to stop that moment from coming – and it come in ever white child's life – when they start to think that colored folks are not as good as whites. (ibid. 96)

Aibileen states that white children like Mae Mobley are not born with racial prejudices, but these prejudices are being taught to them due to the impact of their cultural group identity. For instance, in school Mae Mobley is taught that being black means being dirty (ibid. 40). Although trying to teach Mae Mobley otherwise, Aibileen knows from experience that she is not capable of preventing white children from developing racist beliefs.

The novel stresses that racial prejudices are reciprocal. When Skeeter is on her way to visit Aibileen in the black district of town, she is met with "narrow eyes" that watches her pass by (ibid. 104). Additionally, Minny expresses strong racial prejudices towards white people, and white women in particular. These prejudices are due to the racist and inhumane treatment that she has experienced working for white families her entire life. When Skeeter presents her idea of writing a book from the perspective of the help, Minny immediately becomes suspicious: "Why you even care about this? You *white*" (ibid. 164). However, Minny's prejudices are challenged when she starts working for Celia Rae Foote who does not comply with racist policies. Minny expresses her worries:

> See, I think if God had intended for white people and colored people to be this close together for so much of the day, he would've made us color-blind. And while Miss Celia's grinning and "good morning" and "glad to see"-ing me, I'm wondering, how did she get this far in life without knowing where the lines are drawn? . . . she has sat down and eaten lunch with me every single day since I started working here. I don't mean in the same room, I mean at the same *table* . . . Every white woman I've ever worked for ate in the dining room as far away from the colored help as they could. And that was fine with me . . . There are so many things that Celia is just pain *ignorant* about. (ibid. 215-216)

This statement indicates that Minny is genuinely satisfied with the segregation of blacks and whites, and therefore Celia's behavior makes her uncomfortable and suspicious. Minny regards Celia's kindness as fake or plain stupid and considers her actions as ignorant and naive. Eventually, after spending a significant amount of time together, Minny learns that Celia's kindness and appreciation is sincere, and she then develops a respectful and honest friendship with her and her husband, Johnny. Minny's generalizing and racial prejudices against white people are thus reversed, which will eventually be further examined in the analysis. Thus, the novel examines the racial prejudices within American society and how breaking with cultural norms facilitates a reversal of one's cultural understanding of race if there is a contradiction between one's prejudices and one's experiences.

Class

Classism and racism strongly overlap each other, which makes them difficult to completely separate. In our theory, we have examined how black people are restricted to low-positioned jobs due to the racial segregation and supremacist policies. Thus, black people's racial inferiority makes them inferior within a classist perspective as well. *The Help* is another significant example of the effects classism. Like with the other novels, *The Help* portrays how black characters are placed lowest within the classificatory system. Their low position is primarily expressed by their work as domestics and mammies. They are not valued for their work, instead, they must put up with poor work conditions and a salary that is not even minimum wage (ibid. 37). The poor salary results in poverty that detains them from improving the conditions for their children. For instance, Yule May is not capable of sending both her twin sons to college. The lack of money, then, obviously symbolizes the black characters' classist inferiority.

Classism is rather significant to the white female characters in *The Help*. From the perspective of intersectionality, it can be argued that classism enables these women to climb the hierarchal latter. Being oppressed and inferior due to their sex, they strive to belong within the higher societal layers to diminish their inferiority. Regardless, the prestige related to the higher class is extremely desired among white women in the novel. Elizabeth Leefolt is a great example of the struggle of "belonging". Although coming from a wealthy family, her husband's low income makes her not fully capable of integrating into higher class, and thus, Elizabeth compensates her family's lack of wealth by hiring Aibileen, as having a mammy symbolizes class status. Aibileen gets insight into the home of the Leefolts and describes the regular procedures for Elizabeth to uphold appearances:

> I arrange the-this and the-that for her lady friends. Set out the good crystal, put the silver service out. Miss Leefolt don't put up no dinky card table like the other ladies do. We set at the dining room table. Put a cloth on top to cover the big L-shaped crack, move that red flower centerpiece to the sideboard to hide where the wood all scratched. Miss Leefolt, she like it fancy when she do luncheon. Maybe she trying to make up for her house being small. They ain't rich folks. Rich folks don't try so hard. (ibid. 3)

Aibileen's observations reveal Elizabeth's desperate attempts to meet the expectations of higher class. Additionally, Celia's societal position is rather significant as well. Unlike the other white women in the novel, Celia is not born into high society but in Sugar Ditch and raised poor (ibid. 32). She is, as Minny puts it, "white trash" (ibid. 316). She has married into higher society. Her personal background places her in a position by which she appears ignorant to the racist conventions in Jackson, which we enhanced in the section regarding race. Although racist oppression is not limited to higher societal classes or correlated to wealth, Celia's previous position as low class within white society means that she is not concerned with race. Thus, she is ignorant about power relations, societal hierarchy and the accompanied cultural norms and conventions.

Gender

The Help portrays the cultural rules and norms governing gender in the 1960s Southern States of America. The novel is a perfect example of how black women are restricted to domestic work due to sexual discriminatory hiring practices and racial segregation policies. They are expected to be passive menials who sacrifice their personal lives and family to work as mammies and matriarchs in the homes of white people (ibid. 106). This stereotypical reduction and the restricted jobs options sustain these black women in the inferior societal position and thus maintain a patriarchal status quo. The novel is furthermore a demonstration of sexist attitudes towards black women as it portrays how violence and rape are common actions performed on them by males of either race. Minny's marriage is a significant example; she lives in constant fear of her husband Leroy who harnesses any opportunity to exploit his sexual masculine superiority by beating her. Aibileen, on the other hand, deliberately distances herself from men due to her previous experiences and awareness of sexist and racist attitudes, including being witness to Minny's oppressive and abusive marriage. Furthermore, through the stories told by black maids as contribution to Skeeter's book,

the novel reveals how their employment as domestic workers meant daily sexual harassment by their white male employers. This harassment portrays how the power relations between black female employees and white male employers authorize white men to sexually objectify black women. Additionally, these stories demonstrate how the power relations between black women and white men are due to a persistent impact of slavery; they exemplify hooks' claim that white males still degrade and dehumanize black women by sexual exploitation.

Stockett's account for gender in *The Help* is not only concerned with sexist oppression of black females but also with the impact of stereotypical gender roles within white society upon the novel's white female characters. It is a portrayal of contemporary valuation of white women by their ability to find a husband, get married and produce children. Stockett explores the characters' different attitudes towards these traditional gender roles. Most of the white women within the novel are eager to meet this culturally ascribed identity related to their gender, however, they struggle to reconcile the expectations with the realities of their lives. For example, Celia, who has experienced several miscarriages, is still persistent on getting pregnant, stating that "kids is the only thing worth living for" (ibid. 33). To her, being unable to have children means being unable to meet her expectations as wife, which makes her fear that her husband Johnny will leave her. Reversely, Elizabeth Leefolt struggles to meet the anticipations of motherhood; through Aibileen's point of view, one gains insight into Elizabeth's neglection her daughter Mae Mobley and how she physically and verbally abuses her. These women's struggles, then, serve as demonstrations of the powerful impact of cultural ascribed identity that they are subjected to. However, whereas these women's actions reinforce the power relations of gender roles, Skeeter contrarily represents significantly different attitudes towards the stereotyping of white women. Through her narrative, one is presented to the prejudices and resistance she encounters as an educated, unmarried woman in the 1960s. Her mother expresses her perpetual concerns that Skeeter has not yet married or shown any interest in men, which makes her automatically assume that something is wrong with Skeeter, making her mother want to "cure her" from her "unnatural thoughts" (ibid. 75). Furthermore, Skeeter's job search portrays how employers in the 1960s were allowed to discriminate on the basis of gender and race both in terms of wage and job opportunities (ibid. 59). *The Help*, then, is a portrayal of the discriminatory and sexist attitudes towards women regardless of race.

Stockett's deliberate choice to include the perspectives of both white and black female characters and to enhance the distinctive struggles of women of either race supports the notion of the complexity of intersectionality. Due to strong intersecting overlaps, the novel examines the

complexity of interpersonal domains of power; the black female characters are victims of racist and sexist oppression, whereas the white female characters are oppressed in terms of gender. Within social interactions, white women are then advantaged in relation to black women due to their racist and classist hierarchical position. Thus, *The Help* sheds a light on the complexity of intersectionality by examining the entanglement of power relations and how people's lives are influenced by several dynamics factors.

The Relationship Between White and Black Female Characters

Among other things, we have now analyzed mutual racial prejudices between white and black women in the novel. This relationship between the white and black female characters are closely tied to the politics of emotions. According to Ahmed, emotions are social and cultural practices that are developed under the influence of outside perspective. Thus, the relationship between the novel's female characters are dependent on societal dynamics. Furthermore, based on Ahmed's theory, it can be argued that the reason for white women's spiteful treatment and devaluation of black women is the result of crowd psychology by which black people as race become a threat to their supremacist society. Thereby, the black race is established as fearsome, which works as reasoning of the violence and oppression performed by white characters in the story. For instance, we experience how Aibileen's son was murdered and how Robert Brown was beaten and blinded by white men, and we are witness to white women's racist attitudes and devaluation of their black maids. Furthermore, the impact of crowd psychology on the novel's white female characters supports bell hooks' statement that white women oppress black women to obtain imperialistic hierarchy and their superior racial status.

Additionally, when taking the perspective of the novel's black women, it can be argued that their emotions of hate towards white women are related to fear; it is the anticipated pain that white people come to represent that establishes hatred and white racial prejudices. As previously mentioned, Minny is the most prominent example of racist attitudes towards white women. Based on her personal experiences, she has developed a fear of being mistreated and devalued by her white employers that has generated a general hate towards the white race. Thus, the novel works as a great representation of hook's notion of "the conflict of sisterhood" as racist and classist conventions divide the female characters and establish emotions of hate towards one another.

However, the lines between emotions of hate and love are blurry in the novel. Although cultural norms in Jackson govern racist attitudes, the characters still enter relations across race. The novel

enhances the close relations between black mammies and white children, which, although being complicated by the structures of racist society, show that emotions and actions of love exist across race and can work to counteract conventions of racial hate. The relationship between Skeeter and Constantine and the one between Aibileen and Mae Mobley are of great significance to this. We learn that Constantine and Aibileen compose the roles of othermothers to Skeeter and Mae Mobley during their upbringing by their lessons of self-worth and self-love. Constantine teaches Skeeter to love herself and not buy into societal ideals of beauty and traditional gender roles (ibid. 57, 62-63). When Mae Mobley describes herself as "bad", Aibileen teaches her to speak her own self-worth by making her repeat the following: "You a *smart* girl. You a *kind* girl" (ibid. 96). These words are meant to provide Mae Mobley with a fundamental feeling of love and kindness to help her manage her mother's neglection of her. Additionally, Aibileen presents Mae Mobley to the notion of racial equality and civil rights with the aim to prevent her from developing racist beliefs by introducing her to alternative perceptions.

Generally, *The Help* is a novel that emphasizes the correlation between relations and the governing of attitudes. It portrays how the construction of relations between white and black female characters is of great importance to the characters' approach to cultural norms and racial prejudices. For instance, the growing friendship between Skeeter, Aibileen and Minny exemplifies how new relations can work to diminish emotions of hate between races. For Minny, the turning point in terms of her racial prejudices towards white women is prompt by Celia rescuing her from the naked man. Her actions take Minny by surprise: "*Is this really happening?* Is a white woman really beating up a white man to save me?" (ibid. 308). Hereafter, Minny develops grateful and respectful attitudes towards Celia.

Skeeter's change of attitudes is the most prominent example of the impact of new relations. Through her friendship with Aibileen and Minny, she develops an awareness of the societal dynamics of cultural, social and political forces, which challenges her life-long friendship with Hilly and Elizabeth. Through a series of events, including Skeeter's reading of the Jim Crow Laws, Hilly's bathroom segregation initiative, Constantine's fate, and the stories from the black maids, Skeeter distances herself from her white female relations. The more conscious she becomes of Hilly's racist statements, the more she starts developing a sense of hate towards her and the racist and classist society she represents:

> But then I realize, like a shell cracking open in my head, there's no difference between those government laws and Hilly building Aibileen a bathroom in the garage, except ten minutes' worth of signatures in the state capitol. (ibid. 173-174)

Skeeter's dissociation is expressed in her actions of resistance such as urging people to drop off their toilets in Hilly's front yard and her eagerness to write a book articulating the injustice within Jackson, Mississippi. In many ways, Skeeter is a representation of the agenda of hegemonic feminism, namely to challenge traditional gender roles and the power relations between men and women. This is expressed through her college education, her pursue of a carrier and her distancing to marriage and the role as a housewife. Additionally, Skeeter comes to take part in demonstrating one of the core themes within black feminist theory as well: namely to include the perspective of the margin. She states how no one has ever written from the perspective of the black maid (ibid. 106), exemplifying the lack of perspective from black women, hence the margin. Thus, besides being the focal point within the story, the book also proves to be the focal point in terms of uniting the novel's female characters across race.

Empowerment and Consciousness

In addition to the book's success at uniting several of the novel's black and white women, the book serves as a crucial element in the process of empowering the novel's female characters through narrative and storytelling. The book enables the black female characters to articulate their individual stories and define themselves through their own perceptions by expressing their personal lived experiences. Additionally, the new-found relations between the novel's black and white women is a crucial element to their empowerment, as the constructing of one's avowed identity is highly influenced by one's interactions. Thus, these women empower each other to challenge their ascribed identities based on stereotypical controlling images and their placement within binary intersecting categorizations in society.

Aibileen has always expressed herself through writing. She writes down her prayers every night, which has become her safe space to speak freely. However, by expressing her perceptions and experiences to others, Aibileen's character develops into being more satisfied and positive. For instance, in the beginning of the story, Aibileen often refers to a "bitter seed" that began growing inside of her when her son died (ibid. 3). Treelore's death, then, represents Aibileen's attitudes towards white people's degrading treatment of her and black people in general. Consequently, every

time she experiences some kind of racial injustice, she feels the seed growing inside her (ibid. 29). The seed serves as a symbol of Aibileen's incipient awareness and resistance towards racism, and telling her personal stories becomes her vehicle to fight her bitterness. At the end, Aibileen no longer mentions the seed, meaning that she has succeeded at fighting it through narrative and storytelling. Furthermore, Aibileen's gain of voice has succeeded at liberating her from oppressive systems of domination by self-definition, which she expresses to Minny towards the end of the story:

> I used to believe in em [the lines between black and white people]. I don't anymore. They in our heads. People like miss Hilly is always trying to make us believe they there. But they ain't . . . Some folks just made those up, long time ago. (ibid. 312)

Minny, on the other hand, struggles to prevent herself from expressing her opinions outwardly in the beginning of the story: "*Tuck it in, Minny*. Tuck in whatever might fly out my mouth and tuck in my behind to. Look like a maid who does what she's told" (ibid. 31). Unlike Aibileen, who often suppress her opinions in the company of others (ibid. 29), Minny struggles to accept being treated in a devaluing, objectifying manner. However, the depiction of Minny's marriage demonstrates how Minny loses her voice in the company of Leroy. In the process of contributing to Skeeter's book with her personal experiences, Minny's storytelling provides her with the strength and self-esteem to liberate herself from her abusive, sexist and oppressive marriage (ibid. 438-439). Furthermore, the book represents Minny's safe space by which she can express herself and her opinions without getting fired or accused of stealing silver. Besides giving her the independence to resist Leroy's abuse, and although appearing rather skeptical about Skeeter writing the book in the first place, Minny finds satisfaction in her storytelling:

> I don't want anybody to know how much I need those Skeeter stories . . . But here's the thing: I like telling my stories. It feels like I'm doing something about it. When I leave, the concrete in my chest has loosened, melted down so I can breathe for a few days. (ibid. 218)

Minny's statement enhances the empowering elements of narrative and voice, contending that storytelling serves as a way of taking action. Lastly, Skeeter's development, albeit already examined, also empowers her to leave Jackson and move to New York. Thus, *The Help* is a

demonstration of the importance of empowerment to the initiation of the process of self-definition and self-liberation. The novel is a depiction of the processes of Skeeter, Aibileen and Minny's individual construction of an avowed identity and their resistance towards power relations, gender roles and other intersecting forces.

Furthermore, it can be argued that, by writing a book from the perspective of black females within America, the black female characters serve as a demonstration of black women claiming a place in the center instead of at the margins within feminist theory. The book within the novel illustrates a resistance towards the conditions in society by articulating the relationship between blacks and whites. Throughout the novel, it is perceived that cultural norms and racist conventions are not something to be discussed and responded to, which Skeeter expresses when she reads the laws of Jim Crow: "We all know about these laws, we live here, but we don't talk about them. This is the first time I've ever seen them written down" (ibid. 173). In that sense, the book is an articulation of the oppressive and racist relationship between black and white females, which serves to generate an awareness in its readers: "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" (ibid. 418). Some of the white female characters, like Elizabeth Leefolt, remain ignorant as they do not even recognize themselves in the stories (ibid. 444). For others, the book succeeds at initiating this awareness, which is expressed by the white female character Miss Chotard, who commences a conversation with her black maid Willie Mae by asking her "if she treats her bad as that awful lady in the book" (ibid. 429). This results in a mutual communication between the two:

> Then Willie May tell her what all the other white ladies done to her, the good and the bad, and that white lady listen to her. Willie Mae say she been there thirty-seven years and it's the first time they ever sat at the same table together (ibid. 429).

Thus, *The Help* enhances the power of narrative and storytelling as a means for one's voice and perspective to be considered. By defining and valuing their consciousness of their personal experiences as black females within Jackson, Minny, Aibileen and the other black maids create a way of resisting the intersecting systems of oppression and stereotypical controlling images as well as contributing to the formation of a collective consciousness of black women.

Narrative and Structure

The Help consists of 34 chapters divided between its three first-person narrators, Minny, Aibileen and Skeeter, who take turn in telling stories from their point of view. This use of rotating narration enables Stockett to include different perspectives on the same circumstances. Furthermore, Stockett's choice of narration stands out from the other novels. Unlike the others which are exclusively told from the perspective of black females, Stockett has chosen to include a white female narrator as well. Besides contributing to enhancing the complexity of intersectionality, which we have already examined, Skeeter's narration enables the audience to gain insight into the mind of a white female in the 1960s Southern States of America, providing one with an understanding of her upbringing greatly influenced by the strict cultural norms and values in society. Skeeter's narrative takes up roughly the same amount of space as the other narrators' - Minny is assigned 9 chapters, Aibileen 13 chapters and Skeeter 11 chapters - making her perspective on par with the individual narratives of the black females. Thus, the audience is invited to sympathize with each of the main characters equally. However, as Skeeter represents the only point of view from a white female perspective, an insight into the experiences and reasons of the actions of the novel's other white female characters remain absent, making Skeeter the only white woman for the reader to sympathize with. The other white women, then, appear stereotypical in the roles of racist female characters who desire to reinforce contemporary power relations and a racist societal hierarchy. For instance, the reader never learns the incentives of Hilly's racist attitudes.

Chapter 25, "The Benefit" is the only chapter that differs in terms of narrative. This chapter is mostly concerned with Celia Foote and her meeting with the novel's other white female characters. It is told in the third person as Celia's ignorance and diffuse state of mind would prevent her narrative from capturing the other characters' censorious reactions and the social interactions between those present at the benefit. Furthermore, at the book's ending, Stockett has chosen to include a chapter named "Too Little, Too Late" in which she in her own words expresses her reasons and motivation for writing the book, including her intention of adding a white female narrative. This account is highly relevant to our project in terms of authorship and will be examined in the following discussion.

When looking from a meta perspective, *The Help* can be considered two-dimensional in terms of narrative and structure. It is a story about three women's efforts to write a book on the basis of individual experiences as women in 1960s America, but Stockett's novel itself comes to represent their stories. In that sense, her book itself is a contribution to the representation of black female

identity and can then be placed among literary pieces contributing to establishing a black feminist thought.

Sub-conclusion

The Help portrays empowerment at its best; how female relations within and across race pave the way for resistance towards oppression and how narrative through storytelling reinforces the narrator's process of self-liberation and sense of an avowed identity. It also depicts the struggles of breaking with cultural norms and stereotypical controlling images, emphasizing the importance of an inner voice to empower oneself to break with stereotypical ascribed cultural identities. The inclusion of narratives of both white and black female characters ensures a multilateral perspective to the story's plot, enabling the reader to sympathize and grasp the complexity of intersectionality from various standpoints.

Part 3: Discussion

The discussion is divided in two parts. The first part contains a capitulation of the four novel's main themes and employment thereof. First, we are going to discuss the significance and role of relationality to discuss the position of the black man within black feminist fiction. Subsequently, we will address the novels' thematics and discuss the different perspectives the novels take on these. Furthermore, there will be made a short discussion of the importance and effect of authorship within black female literature by focusing on the impact of our chosen authors' personal experiences and history to their writing. In the second part of the discussion, we are going to discuss the significance of and difference between black female fiction and black feminist theory in order to enhance their respective impacts on the black feminist movement and black feminist theory. Lastly, we will discuss how our chosen theory and fiction individually and together are considered to be representations of black female identity.

The Significance of Relationality

Posterior to the analysis of respectively *The Color Purple*, *The Bluest Eye*, *The Darkest Child* and *The Help*, we have found that one common denominator is the impact and importance of relational structures to the main characters' individual developments of identity. We found that one common and constant dynamic in the novels is the change and replacement of relations between the

characters. This change appears when new relations are shaped and old relations are replaced, as well as when already existing relations sustain and change over time. In *The Help*, for example, the relation between the white and black females is the source of change in the attitude towards the opposite race. Skeeter's genuine interest and sympathy with Minny, Aibileen and the other black women come to affect their view upon each other positively and generate a space for conversation and openness. Furthermore, the many relations across race, age and class in *The Help* illustrate the complexity within an entangled system of relations and how love is independent of these. Throughout *The Color Purple*, Walker constantly scrutinizes the relation internally between the black female characters and the sense of reciprocity in their influence. She exemplifies how black females, through strong bonds and sense of sisterhood, can move each other's consciousness and self-image positively and generate both liberation and empowerment among one another. A concrete example is how the relation between Mr._____ and Celie turns out to be highly influenced and dependent on Celie's relationship with Shug, by which Celie over time becomes empowered. In *The Bluest Eye*, it is the lack of relations that becomes vital to the destiny of Pecola. Due to the fact that the people around her become reluctant to deal with Pecola's tragic experiences and mistreatment, it becomes clear how her world-view is negatively affected by lack of relations, and she hereby becomes sustained in a state of ignorance and insanity, unable of seeking resistance and empowerment. Oppositely, Morrison manages to exemplify how Claudia's positive relations to her sister and her mother are likewise crucial for her ability to navigate and take a critical stance to her ascribed and avowed identity. *The Darkest Child* delineates how Tangy's relation to her mother constantly affects her mindset. The notion of motherhood and the relation between mother and daughter itself, not only within this novel but throughout all of them, is often the most important relation for a young black female. In this case, Tangy is part of a big family, which is an automatic source of relations. With these relations, she is automatically exposed to a high degree of relational diversity, which enlightens and develops her positively and prepares her for new encounters. All of the novels, then, albeit differently, demonstrate different consequences of both positive and negative relations, including the lack of relations. Generally, they agree that notions of sisterhood and general female relations between black women lead to higher chances of empowerment, which then enhance positive personal development of black female identity.

An alternative and important aspect of relationality within all the novels is the significance of relations between black men and women, and how these also affect the women's self-dependence and development of their avowed identity. What is interesting with this kind of relation is the

existence of unbalanced power relations between the male and female characters. Consistently, the female characters are degraded to a position as the 'other' and the male characters are superior in terms of gender due to the distinct existence of binary hierarchy. Additionally, another dependent subordinate relation exists; the relation between black and white men come to be dominant, and is of vital importance to the relation between black women and men. In almost all encounters between black and white characters in the novels, a power relation becomes evident. White males have the cultural, racial and economic power over the black males, which automatically reproduce a dominant attitude from black males towards black women and children, as this becomes their only space and possibility of dominance. This power hierarchy is consistent with the general understanding of male oppression within the black communities. The authors hereby build great attention to the existence of traditional gender roles within African American masculinity, which is obviously impacted by the treatment of slaves. American masculinity and power are connected to whiteness, good economy and physical power, which automatically make African American men deviate and instead be identified as 'others'. The black male characters in the novels thus experience pronounced emasculation in their encounters with whites, which explains their aggressive sense of masculinity towards black women and children. The same counts for the relationship between white and black women in *The Help*; Stockett demonstrates how the white female characters oppress the black female characters due to intersecting power relations.

Within this particular area of relationality, it is interesting to discuss the general representation of the black man and his significance for the black female characters. The authors have made clear choices when it comes to placing black men socially and relationally; interestingly, there is a general consensus that the black man is not always the 'bad guy' or the 'monster' that he is easily portrayed as, or at least, he does not bear the responsibility of his bad actions. Generally, black men are kept secondary in the novels. They are addressed only in relation to the female main characters, and their absolute function is to frame the female main characters' development. In *The Bluest Eye*, for example, Cholly is of great significance of both Pecola's and Claudia's self-perceptions. Cholly is undeniably the source to the most tragical event of the novel; yet, Morrison manages to provide a deeper understanding for his actions, so that we, as readers, do not regard him as a monster that rapes his own daughter out of spite. Conversely, we are, via flashbacks into Cholly's memories, familiarized with a pivotal experience of his, which has partly shaped his manhood. As we get insight into a direct example of emasculation of his character, we obtain sympathy for him. Hereby, he becomes a poor soul and an innocent victim to racial oppression, who does not know better than

to reinforce this behavior towards other victims weaker than him. Likewise, in *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker represents the novel's black male characters with the stereotype of female oppressors on the surface, however, with an intersectional perspective, they come to appear as poor souls, who are governed by cultural norms in the form of traditional gender roles. *The Darkest Child* takes a slightly different approach to the black male figure. Through identities as fighters for liberation and engagement with the initiation of The Civil Rights Movement, the majority of the black male characters appear as everyday heroes, who want the best for their community, including women. Furthermore, we sympathize with Tangy Mae's father, not because he is not capable of fatherhood, but because he is forced to leave her family because of Rosie's hostile attitude towards him. Hereby, as readers, we have sympathy for the black men due to their consciousness of human rights. Instead, it is more important for Phillips to portray white men as the enemy. Lastly, *The Help* presents both the power relations between black and white men, but also between black men and women. However, the most interesting representation in this novel is the white male character of Johnny. Johnny stands out from the general representation of both white and black men; he reads *To Kill A Mockingbird*, and he treats both white and black women with respect. By this, he becomes an exception and an alternative to a white male character.

Authorship and Authenticity

When working with four novels of different authors, who write themselves into a political discussion, it is highly relevant to consider the notion of authorship to base our conclusions on the broadest area of knowledge as possible. What makes these particular writers' backgrounds and motivations interesting to examine is their personal engagement with the themes of their novels. Albeit fictional, the novels represent social issues and personal lived experiences of the authors. Their personal backgrounds and childhoods have all been affected by the themes that frame the novels, which make them particularly authentic and reliable in terms of representing black female experience. In this context, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker are worth mentioning in extension and comparison with each other. It is known that Morrison and Walker are both acknowledged and respected worldwide for their contributions to literature that emphasizes black heroines whose living conditions and daily struggles are determined by gender, race and the patriarchal post-slave society. Likewise, both authors have been working tirelessly with social activism, and they were both part of the early struggles of being young black women in 1950s America, which makes their

terms of predicament comparable. However, they do have individual life experiences that make these terms of predicament differ, in terms of their voices within fictional literature.

Starting with Toni Morrison, who grew up in the same town as her main character in 1931. She lived in a working-class African American family, and therefore, she had a clear vision and intention with *The Bluest Eye*. She wanted to examine the point of low self-esteem among young black women and to speak on behalf of those who were not able to see and believe in their beauty because they were black, as a counter-reaction to the existing self-hatred in African American communities. With her literature, her aim was to demonstrate the negative impact racism had on black women's avowed identity and self-worth. Morrison's narrative form, then, comes to rely highly on her personal perception of the world and sense of reality of being a young black female in the South. With this, and with the inclusion of both the childish and adult perspectives of Claudia, her fictional voice automatically comes to indicate a natural authenticity and sense of reality. In her work as an activist, Morrison has been largely concerned with depicting re-representations of African American history to create a gaze through which this could be looked back on properly. Furthermore, she states how feminism to her is a limitation when writing about reality, and such direct dissociation with feminism makes her both differ from Walker, but it also adds a level of sensibility and inclusion to her writing as well, as a larger group of readers might feel included. Alice Walker's self-identification spans somewhat broader, as her activism concerned work within The Civil Rights Movement, black feminism, womanism and the LGBTQ movement, and took a high part in working theoretically as well. She was absorbed with domestic African American issues, but also highly with worldwide strategies that should investigate personal growth for women. Her feminist approach and openness towards the lesbian community places her in a certain category of writers; something that adds another possible level of interpretation and purpose to *The Color Purple.* To Walker, the intention with her writing, by and large, becomes a matter of changing opinions and attitudes towards not only race, but also gender and sexuality.

Oppositely, Delores Phillips differs from the group due to her age and the year in which her book, and debut-novel, was released. Like her main character, Phillips was born in Georgia and experienced the racial dynamics of the 1950s rural South. She worked as a nurse at an institution for abused children and women in Cleveland, which has provided her with a certain amount of insight into the harsh reality of many black women at the time - something that undoubtedly affected her writing and her fictional characters. However, she did not release *The Darkest Child* until 2004, which has given her time for reflection and interpretation of history based on the ongoing

development of black feminist theory, and for example, the theoretical and fictional work of Alice Walker.

Kathryn Stockett stands even further out from the remaining authors. Her particular view on the issue is exceptionally interesting due to her deviating background as a white middle class woman. Epistemologically, this approach has often been questioned by both scholars and by black feminists:

> There is no trickier subject for a writer from the South than that of affection between a black person and a white one in the unequal world of segregation. For the dishonesty upon which a society is founded makes every emotion suspect, makes it impossible to know whether what flowed between two people was honest feeling or pity or pragmatism. (Howel Raines in Stockett 450)

Stockett, however, takes a clear stand and sympathetically defends her choice of narrative. In her afterword of *The Help*, "Too Little, Too Late", she addresses her own lived, female, southern experience. Stockett grew up in Mississippi in a middle-class family, who, through generations, had had a black family maid, Demetrie, who came to function as a mammy, educator and caretaker for Kathryn and her siblings. Stockett states how she has a lot of genuine love and respect for Demetrie, and that she never pitied her, which come to function as a dissociation with racism and classism. In the afterword too, however, she acknowledges her own controversial position as a white author of a black female narrative:

> I don't presume to think that I know what it really felt like to be a black woman in Mississippi, especially in the 1960s. I don't think it is something any white woman on the other end of a black woman's paycheck could ever truly understand. But trying to understand is vital to our humanity. (ibid. 451)

Stockett's vision of merely enabling herself and others to understand the realities of our humanity generates a high level of sympathetic and respectful ambitions to formulate her own stand with. Arguably, Stockett too has strong preconditions to speak about these political issues. Despite her own race, the novel is a way of writing herself into a political debate that still reflect personal lived life, which is what black feminist theory is partly based on.

What the authors have in common in terms of authorship, then, is the way they all take their own history, experiences and contemporary context into consideration to mediate the history of African American women. Therefore, it is also obvious for two generations of women that feminism and race become two sides of the same coin; intersectionality is constantly present and employs all four authors, but the way it is presented, interpreted, and contextualized, then, is individual. The novels write history in completely different aesthetical ways, but thematically very much alike. What should be considered overall, is each novel's contribution to a general and social discussion and what each author is trying to tell her proper generation. Walker and Morrison wrote themselves into second wave feminism, or the beginning of the black feminist movement, which had the purpose of pushing limits and as to what was appropriate and possible for black females in America at the time, and to educate about how common human rights were to be considered in the light of a feminist approach in order to be significantly inclusive. In prolongation of Walker and Morrison's work, Delores Phillips, like Patricia Hill Collins with her theory come to educate a modern generation about those same issues, but with additional considerations about already existing literature and theory on the area. When publishing a novel about black female identity in the era of civil rights movement and post and during the Great Depression, it is necessary to consider the fact that the audience and general group of receivers is, at the year of publishing, approaching and receiving this thematic in a certain way. In 2004 when Phillips published *The Darkest Child*, the African American people who lived through the time of the book were now older, and new generations had come. These new generations then, were used to the societal discussion and different discursive notions of black feminist thinking, which provides her with more freedom in terms of sharing details about the conditions of the contemporary African American societies. Therefore, Phillips' novel places itself as a re-reconstruction of the issues and reminds the new generations of how it was for their grandparents to love as an African American woman in Southern America. Kathryn Stockett's is of the new generation as well. Not only is her message based on the same terms as Delores Phillips', but by taking such great part in the debate regarding black female oppression as a white female author, her novel speaks to on other conditions and to yet another audience as well. She becomes a mediator between races and a symbol of the inclusion and obliteration of race in respectively the feminist and black feminist movement, mixing them into one matter that regards everyone who reads. Furthermore, Stockett has an advantage of publishing her book in a modern era, in which people have gained a stronger foundation of insight, sympathy and understanding of the thematic of *The Help*.

Themes

Our selected novels demonstrate a distinct correlation in terms of thematics. Generally, they address similar topics including black female oppression, poverty, coming of age, molding of self-identity, and empowerment through narrative. Instead of stressing these similarities, we aim to enhance how different perspectives and approaches to the particular thematics are expressed in the individual novels to point out their diversity. First and foremost, the novels do seem similar as each of them is written into the same political and social context. The plots concern primarily the Southern States of America during the 1930s to 1960s, except *The Bluest Eye,* which takes place in Ohio. However, as the constructions and examinations of the individual analyses demonstrate, the novels are concerned with different main themes and the employment thereof. *The Color Purple* and *The Bluest Eye* deal with sexism in the form of sexual abuse within the relationship between black men and women. *The Darkest Child*, on the other hand, places great emphasis on the notion of motherhood, and *The Help* primarily focuses on the relationship between white and black women.

Furthermore, by applying intersectionality as analytical tool to our examination of the novels, our analyses reveal that each novel differs in terms of focus points and ideologies due to the individualization of narratives. As the previous section demonstrates, the diversity particularly stems from different approaches in terms of relationality. The notion of relationality within the novel is of great significance as it commences different perspectives to the themes, which contributes to demonstrating the complexity of intersectionality. For instance, the novels present different perspectives on racism. In *The Bluest Eye* and *The Color Purple,* the novels' main focus on the relationship between black people indicates a particular concern with how racism exists within black community. On the other hand, *The Help*'s considerations of the relationship between white female employers and black female employees and white women and the relationship between mammies and their white children exhibit the repercussions of segregation laws and racial cultural norms, which then portray reciprocal racism among whites and blacks. Relationalities in *The Darkest Child* reveal racism in two layers; it is concerned with both racism between black activists and white supremacists during Civil Rights Movement, but also the racist hierarchy that exists within the Quinn family initiated by Rosie. Thus, the novels present how racism is composed and exist in many contexts and codependent between various people.

In the same way, the novels' relational approaches generate different perspectives to the portrayal of gender. However, what is distinctive about the way gender exist as a common

denominator is how sexual abuse serves as a common to experience in the life of a black woman at the time. Physical abuse and especially sexual abuse is a recurring theme for not only the four novels, but for black feminism in general. In the novels' handling of the relation between black men and women, sexual abuse is of crucial importance when discussing power relations, as sex becomes a natural part of these power relations. Firstly, it is a given how the biological differences between men and women create a natural imbalance in power relations, however, the era of slavery too makes an impact as to how respectively the male and female gender is understood and perceived. The American legacy of slavery and the unabated commodification of the African bodies that followed have perpetually influenced the experience of sexual violence perpetrated against African American women. During the slave era, sexual assault and sexual exploitation were utilized as a means to dominate and oppress enslaved African women and girls; the sexual victimization of African women was legal and justified by their status as property belonging to the plantation owner. This has led to a perception of the black woman as a sex object and a breeder, and sex with black women has thereby become a question of physicality, and not as an action of love. In the novels, however, there are both examples of sex as physical abuse among the protagonists and strangers, but also as part of a narrative within a husband and wife relationship, like in the case of Minnie and her husband in *The Help*. The novels treat this issue differently, however, in *The Color Purple* for example, sex becomes a power tool for Mr.____ to show physical supremacy and ownership towards Celie, and oppositely in *The Bluest Eye*, Pauline expresses how sex with her husband is the only time she feels empowered in their relationship. *The Bluest Eye* is very expressive about sexual abuse; however, expressive in the sense that Morrison stresses how traumatizing yet how covered up it is on societal basis, which will be elaborated shortly. Morrison establishes that Cholly has never had an example of good parenting or how to love. When he is confronted with feelings of love for his daughter, Cholly reacts in a way that feels most natural to him; that reaction for Cholly is sexual. Like in his relationship with Pauline, the violence that occurs between them is "paralleled only by their lovemaking" (Morrison 43). Simultaneously, the rape becomes a repetition of the sexual humiliation that Cholly experienced under the gaze of two white racists. *The Darkest Child* illustrates sexual abuse in connection to the history of racism and the desire to protect black men from white supremacy and imprisonment, where black women have therefore acted as human shields for black men. The daughters, then, are left vulnerable and available and women allowed themselves and their daughters to be perpetual victims by doing so. Rosie, for instance, prostitutes her daughters in order to protect her son from prison and herself from poverty. Exemplified in all

the novels though, is a certain code of silence that accompanies the actions of sexual abuse. Reflecting a social tendency of not daring to flaunt the black community's dirty laundry, the fear of involvement and taboo that follows for example rape or enforced prostitution is an active part of condoning and enabling such behavior.

In prolongation of sexual abuse as an overall theme in the novels, the general synergies of power relations come to play an active part. When considering the four novels in extension of and in correlation with each other, they enhance and form a nuanced picture of the complexity of intersectionality and power relations. The different thematic perspectives exemplify diverse forms of power, both in terms of the exercise and handling of power and the different ways of subjugating one to power. As we explained in our theory, analysis of the domains of power can be used to illustrate how events and conditions of social and political life at play are not only shaped by one factor but by several dynamics that work together in diverse and mutually influencing ways. Likewise, the novels exemplify the different areas or domains of power. *The Darkest Child* and *The Help* are two novels that depict the severe consequences of the unbalanced the structural power operating before and during the Civil Rights Movement. In these cases, the black communities are simply held down by laws that make them incapable of reacting to the lynching, mistreatment and sexual abuse towards black people by white supremacists. However, all novels emphasize the interpersonal and cultural domain of power the most, as these are the domains in which the common black woman met the largest amount of physical and mental violence. The interpersonal domain of power covers all the personal relations in Tangy, Aibileen, Minny, Celie and Pecola's lives and how their relations to other people are always disadvantaged within social interactions. Firstly, everyone but Aibileen and Minny are adolescent girls, which naturally places them with great physical disadvantage, however, the primary reason for their suppression is the category they are placed within due to their gender, race and class. What the female protagonists have in common is how they are the focal point of power in proportion to everyone else; other black women, white people and black men, both rich and poor. Via these depictions of power relations, the novels constantly express black women's placement in the societal and social hierarchy. Additionally, however, in the four novels, we are constantly introduced to coexisting relations of power around the protagonists; relations that at some point come to affect the oppression of the protagonists in either a positive or negative direction.

The Significance of Fiction vs. Theory

In this project, we have chosen to include both fiction and theory as points of analysis in order to make a comparative assessment of the significance of both elements to the notion of black feminist thought and in contribution to representing black female experience. Thus, in this second part of the discussion, we are going to stress their separate strengths and advantages.

As for fiction, the strength lies within the efficient ability to process human experiences due to its emancipation from documentation, but in the sense that fiction must encompass elements of reality and provide an opportunity of identification composed by a fictional narrative. Narratives work as ways to add meaning and importance to one's life story. Our project's theoretical account of identity will be used as foundation to our argumentation of the importance of this narrative. In our theory, we examine the notion of the construction of identity as a modification by the interaction between outside and inside perspectives and the identities which they offer, hence, a negotiation between ascribed and avowed perspectives. One is able to develop a sense of self, but always as a part of the outside world, which we can never be fully emancipated from. In continuation hereof, our construction of identity can be considered to be composed by ascribed and avowed narratives, the former being enforced narratives by our surroundings and the latter being our own individual addressment of narrative expressing our avowed perception of self. In the novels, narrative is of great significance to the construction of identity and as means of empowerment to self-liberation. The main characters demonstrate the consequences of enforced narratives. For instance, in the beginning of *The Color Purple*, Celie is subject to an enforced narrative as a result of her forced marriage with Mr. ____ and premature sexual experiences. Through the story, Celie works to break with this enforcement in order for her to find her own avowed narrative, which is expressed by her writing of letters. In these letters, Celie constructs her own narrative by expressing her individual perception of personal lived experiences. In that sense, Celie serves as an example of the importance of avowed narrative in order to develop a sense of self., although always being in competition with enforced narratives from outside perspectives. In her storytelling, Celie's ascribed identity becomes part of her narrative as a crucial aspect in her life story. Generally, the novels demonstrate how the possibility to change narratives by the modification process of interaction between avowed and ascribed identities is of vital importance to a successful narrative as each novel has the touch of happy ending; In *The Color Purple*, we witness the reunion of Celia and Nettie. In *The Darkest Child,* the reader witnesses Tangy Mae's escape from the town and the oppressive world she grew up in, and she even manages to save her little

sister as well. Additionally, in *The Help,* Skeeter, Aibileen and Minnie escape the racist and sexist conventions in Jackson and welcome alternative ways of living. *The Bluest Eye,* on the other hand, has a more ambiguous ending. Pecola's insanity and tragedy becomes Claudia's consciousness about the unfair conditions for black women, and hereby a motivation of empowerment for Claudia.

In this sense, fiction can be considered two-functional; first, fiction is allowed to utilize esthetics in a way that generates a more intense and varied impact on the reader due to its emancipation from documentation. For instance, the liberty of fiction enables the author to play with different narratives, dialects and emotions to enhance his or her messages or intentions with the particular novel. Secondly, fictional narratives are used as mirrors to the reader's own narrative. The novels present the reader to narratives that he or she optionally to some extent can identify with or use to vary his or her perception of an alternative narrative. Specifically, in our novels this means that the reader can identify with elements within the story or directly with the novels' characters. This identification depends on the particular reader. Generally, fiction appears as leisure reading by a common audience as it is not necessarily written with the purpose of making academic analyses. However, black feminist literature, which our novels can be categorized within, is written into a political debate. With these novels, the authors are deliberately engaging in a black feminist movement, although not all authors took active share, and thus, their novels are directly addressed to African American women in America, who have the greatest premise of identifying with the narratives of the novels' main characters. Furthermore, identification through narratives work as a means of empowerment of the reader. In that sense, just as narrative within the stories empowers the main characters to self-liberation, fiction serves as a way for the reader to become empowered and enlightened by identifying with the novels' narratives.

Contrary to fiction, theory is dependent on a documented foundation and epistemological consideration to be regarded as valid theory. The messenger-receiver relationship also appears rather different as theory is primarily addressed to an academic setting, including academic analyses and scholars. Thus, theory is receptive to a great amount of criticism if it does not meet the conventional academic formats - for instance, we have already discussed how hooks' omission of references has caused her much criticism in academic settings. Furthermore, theory must encompass an awareness and consideration of a broader contextual perspective. In our case, black feminist theory must take into account the theoretical perspective of cultural identity, feminism, and the history of African Americans, among others.

The theories of hooks and Collins are considered great contributions to the articulation of black female experience and thinking. Their theories appear rather different in terms of format. However, both women's argumentations are based on societal dynamics of political, social, cultural, sexist and economic structures in American society. The strength of their argumentations lies within their inclusion of both academic, theoretical and documented foundations combined with their inclusion of personal lived experiences of black women and as being black women themselves. hooks is one of the first women in history to articulate the notion of a black feminist thought and the issue of hegemonic feminism by drawing her argumentation on both the lack of material regarding black women in America and personal lived experiences. She enhances the importance of articulating black women's personal experiences as a crucial element in the construction of a black feminist theory as well as to the empowerment of black women's liberation. Thus, she is one of the first to commence the discourse of black feminist thinking and to produce theory that act as a catalyst for social change of black women. In addition, Collins' work is a compilation of second wave black feminist thinking. As mentioned, she is of a later generation, which enables her to take the position of a more reflective and objective perspective. Her work is both built on the theory of black feminists like hooks, Walker and Lorde as well as on the existence of creative and cultural materials by black women through this time. This enables her to address black female experience from a new generation's point of view. Thus, her position of a later generation permits her to select between the different previous contributions to black feminist thinking in order to create a collective understanding and terminology of black female experience and -identity.

By examining the works of hooks and Collins, it is evident that authorship plays a great significance to the construction black feminist theory. Authorship is partly what makes black feminist literature revolutionary. The authors' life experiences are important to their authority and as documentation to their argumentation, but they are also what separate the authors from each other and what come to be their individual forces in their works. Their individual experiences generate different nuances and diversity to black feminist thinking but serve also as a collective understanding of black women's experience. hooks and Collins individually theorize black female experience by molding their personal perceptions of concepts and terminology and by enhances individual focus points, but their works are interdependent as they contribute to a collective, nuanced and inclusive ideology of black feminist thought.

When comparing our project's utilization of theory and fiction, it is evident that the genres take different approaches in articulating the experience and identity of black women in America.

However, although different approaches, both our theory and fiction can be considered to serve the same purpose of expressing black feminist thinking through black female experiences. Thus, the practice of narrative within both black female literature and black feminist theory is a powerful way for the particular authors to speak from the position of black women as narrative enables marginalized groups to reclaim their voices through personal storytelling (Amoah 85). The narratives that take place in the novels substantiate terminology and argumentations by hooks and Lorde by expressing and addressing the problematics and focus points of black feminist theory. Furthermore, the fictional narratives enable a broader audience than the one of theory, which is primarily addressed to academic settings by strengthen the opportunity of identification. However, fiction appears as insufficient to the articulation of black female experience, hence the need for a theoretical perspective that secures credibility and authenticity.

The Representation of Black Female Identity

This part of the discussion touches upon how our chosen fiction and theory work individually and together to represent black female identity. We have already discussed how the works of hooks and Collins attempt to break with the ascribed stereotyping representations of black women as a subordinate group within American society. They strive to substantiate a black feminist theory and establish a notion of black female identity consistent with black female experiences. In the same way, the voices of the novels' main characters are to be considered representations of alternative perceptions of black female identity and an attempt to illustrate the living conditions of African American women in American society during the 1930s to 1960s. Through the novels, the reader witnesses racist and sexist treatment of the black female characters, which underlines the imbalanced power relations and intersecting forces that exist and dominate in society at this time.

In our theory section on representation, Hall argues representation to be a production of meaning through language. In that sense, the novels' fictional narratives work as ways for the author to express a particular representation of the world to the reader. Thus, narratives enable the authors to express complex thoughts about the topic concerning black female experience in this particular historical context, and to represent their notions of the construction and constitution of black female identity. This is done by permitting the main characters' first-person narratives act as representative voices of individual black females and their experiences, by communicating their unique meaning and perception of the world through writing and storytelling. Additionally, Shohat argues that representation encompasses implied intentions by the author. We have examined how

both our novels and theory are highly influenced by their authors' personal experiences, and therefore, authorship is important to consider when discussing the representation of black female identity. The authors' implied intentions are to substantiate a black feminist theory and to represent an alternative black female identity that breaks with representative stereotyping controlling images. This is expressed within their enhancement of developing a sense of self expressed by an avowed voice, which will work as an empowerment to self-liberation. Also, as the narratives are primarily addressed for African American female readers to identify with, the narratives work as encouragement for the readers to find their individual voice based on their personal experiences as African American women. Once again, self-representation becomes key to liberation for oppressed groups and thus comparable to our chosen theory. The novels, then, function as representations of black female experiences and thinking.

Conclusion

To conclude on our findings, we would like to repeat our initial purpose and expectations for this paper. As mentioned in our introduction, we aimed to attain a deeper fundamental understanding of the notion of black feminism. In order to do this, our focus was to examine and demonstrate how black feminism is expressed and represented in *The Color Purple, The Darkest Child, The Bluest Eye, The Help* and within theoretical black feminist theory by primarily bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins, with a particular focus on black feminist thinking, black female experience and the development of black female identity. By employing theories of intersectionality, identity and representation as analytical tools to our fictional novels, we have gained a larger understanding of the complexity of black feminism as a cultural movement and experience. The classic narrative and myth of oppressed black females in America was obvious in the selected novels, however, the different perspectives and focus points in the novels made them interesting to analyze crosswise and in extension of each other as these differences come to represent their complexity.

Intersectionality has come to serve as the most effective tool to enable an understanding of the complex structures connected to the lives of black women in America. The experience of being a black woman cannot be understood by considering being black and being a woman independently, rather, it must include the interactions that frequently reinforce each other. Furthermore, through an examination of authorship, key terms, narrative and historical context, we discovered and demonstrated that, within black feminism, the understanding of thinking, identity and experience is

vital in order see through and to separate narratives and experiences from each other. These three aspects are then considered in terms of theory and fiction in order to discuss their separate contributions to the black feminist movement as a whole.

Black feminist thinking serves as the frame for novels' narratives; we are constantly placed inside the minds of the main characters, which generously provide us with their inner thoughts and concerns. Hereby, the question of authorship becomes relevant as well, as it is the authors' consciousness that gives life to the fictional characters. Within a theoretical frame, black feminist thinking is composed of black feminist standpoints and becomes a term that covers black feminism in general. It contains the observations, interpretations and experiences of black women, and come to serve as a critical social theory that covers the processes that happened even before an actual black feminist theory was established.

Black female identity was our second aspect of focus and has appeared to play a central role within black feminism. In our theory section, we have clarified the importance of creating an avowed identity to resist potential subjugating ascribed identities as this enables marginalized groups to create an identity for themselves. Thus, our theorists employ black female identity on a meta-oriented level; they articulate the significance of identity in order for black women in America to become liberated from oppression. Additionally, in the four novels, the development of identity is the goal for the novels' female main characters. It serves as the fundamental premise for liberation and empowerment and is center for an ongoing search throughout their adolescent years. Each novel deals with main characters who are able to construct an avowed identity based on self-perceptions by the means of storytelling and empowering relations. In our analysis, we have emphasized how the development of black female identity is strongly dependent on the development of relationality between characters.

Ultimately, black female experience has revealed to constitute the basis of both black feminist literature and black feminist theory. From a theoretical point of view, black female experience constitutes the essence of black feminism. Both hooks and Collins enhance the importance of articulating personal experiences when constructing a black feminist theory. Their inclusion of individual experiences serves as a contribution to a collective understanding of black women's experiences as well. Their different experiences generate variety and inclusion, which are some of the significances that black feminist theory provides to the notion of feminism. Additionally, the novels' main characters serve as representations of the experiences of black women in America by expressing their personal experiences through narrative. Thus, the

experiences within the novels and the notion of black feminism within the theoretical accounts of hooks and Collins are consistent in the sense that they enhance the importance of claiming one's voice and constructing an avowed identity as ways of resistance in order to remove themselves from the marginalized and disempowered position in American society. In this sense, our chosen theory and fiction serve as representations of an articulation of personal experiences of black women in order to substantiate a notion of black feminism that is consistent with black female experiences.

In closing, the novels and the black feminist theory by bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins have shown to address and utilize similar thematics and issues with the mutual purpose of articulating black women's perspective and advocating the necessity of improving social and political issues concerning African American women in America. However, they handle these thematics and issues within different contexts, with different tools, with different, personal motivations and on different epistemological grounds. This paper is hereby an attempt to demonstrate how respectively theory and fiction operate independently and codependent with the representation and transverse overlapping within black feminist thinking, black female identity and black female experience.

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Summary

This paper is an examination of the representation of black female identity, experience and thinking. The following black feminist novels will be examined; The Darkest Child (2004) by Delores Phillips, The Bluest Eye (1970) by Toni Morrison, The Help (2009) by Kathryn Stockett and lastly, The Color Purple (1982) by Alice Walker. This examination will be done through black feminist theory by Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks, alongside theory on representation, identity and politics of emotions. Our scope of analysis is to examine the notion of black feminism within fiction and theory. When referring to black feminism, it primarily concerns three key elements, namely black feminist thinking, black female experience and black female identity. These terms will work as focal points in our project as we intend to analyze how they can be understood as well as how they are represented in our chosen theory and fiction. By equating theory with fiction, we aim to stress their individual strengths and advantages as well as to discuss their unifying significance.

Within each analysis, intersectionality will function as the primary tool to address the different intersecting points of oppression towards the main characters, and we have herby emphasized how the novels individually express race, class and gender, and in some analyses included heterosexuality and ableism as well. Furthermore, and based on the theoretical accounts, the main characters' construction of black female identity and management of empowerment will be analyzed. There will be made thorough analyses on characteristics of each of the main characters in order to enhance their different representations of black female consciousness. Hereafter, we use the section on discussion to compare and underline the differences between the. To do this, we focus on authorship as means of authenticity, we discuss relationality as crucial to the characters' molding of black female identity, and we discuss representation in prolongation of the creation of identity to establish differences between fiction and theory and what they each provide to the notion of black feminism. With this, the theoretical foundation will serve as both the skeleton to analyzing the novels, but also figure as an independent element across from the novels, in order to discuss each their significance within and approach to the black feminist movement. Conclusively, our examinations become a demonstration of how black feminist theory and fiction both serve to address and utilize similar thematics in order to articulate black women's perspectives and to advocate their political and social situation in America. These thematics then, are employed and addressed within different contexts and on respective epistemological grounds.