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## Empowerment In Alice Walker's The Colour Purple

Alice Walker once said, "the most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any". The main character in *The Colour Purple* is made to believe by men that she has no power, so she feels as if she has none. She gives up her power because she believes she has none, but the women around her help her to reclaim that power. Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* implies that females empower each other when they are made small by others. To be made small is to be made to feel "humiliated or inferior". *The Colour Purple* implies that when women are oppressed, other oppressed women will stand up for them. It also implies that when men degrade women, the women that surround them show them their worth. In addition to this, the novel displays how once fellow women empower women, they believe they have power themselves.

Representation. One word that sums up what feminism is all about. It is about how females are represented in novels. On the other hand, it discusses their misrepresentation and underrepresentation. Are their roles determined by the male characters in the novel? Do they have a voice, or do they only have a voice when it relates to male characters? The main focus of feminism is to give women the voice they are denied in society. Females should be represented equally to males in texts, and not only in relation to them. Females should be properly represented; the people who represent them best are individuals of the same gender. Female authorship helps represent women properly, rather than misrepresenting them. Power relationships are very essential to feminism and are greatly represented in Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple*. Alice demonstrates how relationships can hurt women when the power is not equal and the relationships are male-dominated. In the novel, Celie, an oppressed woman, experiences various power relationships with men. The first is her father, who feels as though he has so much power that he can bring her down and make her feel like she is insignificant. It is instilled by the voices around her that she is nothing and will never be worth anything. This inequality continues into her second relationship with her husband. She is treated just as dreadfully as she was in her former male relationship. This all changes when another woman shows her the worth she has inside, sharing the power with her instead of stealing it from her. Once she regains her power it enables her to stand up for herself and remedy the injustices she has endured in the past.

*The Colour Purple* demonstrates how when women are oppressed, other oppressed women will stand up for them. Celie is the main character, a young woman whose mother has died. Due to the death of her mother, she is left with the responsibility of caring for her younger siblings. Her father takes advantage of her and rapes her during and after her mother's passing. In addition, Celie's only remaining parent figure physically abuses her. He remarries after her mother's death, and her younger sister, Nettie, gets involved with a man that has also lost his wife. There is a lot of controversy surrounding this because the man has children already and Nettie is young, but the man, Albert, who Celie calls Mr.\_\_\_\_\_, was also involved with Shug Avery, a very eccentric woman. Shug is a singer who tours around and does not stay in one place for a long time, she is very much judged by others. When Celie looks further into this she gets hold of a picture of Shug Avery and falls in love with the idea of her. Their father will not let Nettie marry Albert, and offers up Celie instead. Her father says to him "[Celie is] ugly... [and he has] to get rid of her" (Walker 8). Celie is made to feel worthless by her father and is married off, along with

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a cow, without her consent so he can get rid of her. When she goes to her new husband's house, he mistreats and abuses her just like all the other men in her life have. Her sister comes soon after to her new house. She has run away from home because of their new stepmother. Celie's new husband is very fond of Nettie and is always complimenting her because he would rather be with her than Celie. Nettie "tell[s her], Your skin. Your hair, Your [teeth]. He tr[ies] to give her a compliment, she pass[es] it on to [Celie]. After a while [Celie starts] to [feel] pretty cute" (Walker 17). Every time Celie's husband compliments Nettie, she passes on the compliment to Celie. Her sister knows she has been oppressed and made small by her husband and father, but there is an immense "strength of the relationship between women: their friendships, love, their shared oppression" (Smith 69). Nettie has also been oppressed by her and Celie's father, she feels Celie's pain. So, she makes her feel beautiful and loved by passing on the compliments she is getting. She empowers Celie by complimenting her and making her feel more confident after her father and husband belittle and diminish her. Overall, it is shown that women who are maltreated will bring up other women who experience the same conflicts.

Additionally, when men degrade women the women that surround them show them their worth. Celie is abused at Albert's house and her sister is sent away because she won't accept Celie's husband's advances and he does not like that. Shug Avery comes to town to perform and Albert leaves Celie all alone with his children for days on end while he sleeps with Shug. One of Albert's children, Harpo, marries and has children with a strong independent woman, Sofia. Not too long after this, an ailing Shug Avery arrives at Celie's house. At first, Shug doesn't like Celie because she is with Shug's love interest, but when Celie takes care of her she warms up to her. The couple tends to Shug until she is back in good health. Just after Shug is better, she performs at Harpo's juke joint, which he built after his wife left him. She left because Harpo tried to beat her so that she would submit to him. Albert doesn't want Celie to go watch Shug, but Shug makes him let Celie come to her show. After this encounter Albert says under his breath "my wife can't do this. My wife can't do that. No wife of mines" (Walker 72). Albert devalues Celie, saying she can't do what she wants and that she has to listen to what he will let her do, not what she wants to do. He tells her she can't make her own choices and she has to listen to him, degrading and discrediting her. Shug will not have it and makes Albert let Celie come see her because she has something special in store for her. During Shug's performance, Celie perks up because she hears her name, "[Shug] say this song [she is about] to sing is [called] Miss Celie's song... [this is the] first time somebody made something and name[d] it after[Celie]" (Walker 73). She wrote a song for Celie; this song makes Celie feel empowered. Shug "dedicates her new song to her, show[ing] her that she is important" (Averbach 61). After Albert makes Celie feel degraded and worthless, Shug dedicates a song to her which makes her feel important and shows Celie her own worth. She has been made small by her husband, so Shug dedicates her new song to her making her feel important and empowered. Ultimately, it is implied that men can degrade women, and when other women notice it, they may help out and raise these women up.

Furthermore, *The Colour Purple* implies that once women are empowered by other women, they believe they have power themselves. The woman who has shown Celie she is significant already, Shug, discovers a large number of letters from Celie's sister Nettie, who Celie thought was dead since she promised she would write to her but she never received any letters from her. This was because Celie's husband hid all the letters from her. Celie finds out that her sister is living in Africa as a missionary with a priest named Samuel and his wife, Corrine. These are the people who adopted the two children that Celie had from her father forcibly violating her.

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After finding all this out she stops believing in God, but Shug convinces her to believe again. Shug explains to Celie what she believes, that "God is inside you and inside everybody else... [she] believe[s] God is everything... and when you can feel that, and be happy to feel that, you've found it" (Walker 195). Believing in God again makes Celie feel empowered because when Shug tells her God is in everything it seems like Celie believes God is in Shug and Nettie. These are the people who have empowered her and made her feel strong, so she feels even more empowered knowing that it could be God coming to help her through these women. She doesn't believe God is a man anymore; she believes he is everything and nothing. She feels as if "[her]eyes [are now open]... [and Albert's] evil sort of shrink[s]" (Walker 197). She can now see God in things around her, his goodness is shrinking the evil in her surroundings. After coming to this conclusion, she feels strongly about Shug and chooses to go and live with her. When she goes to tell her husband this he gets upset and starts to yell at her about what people will think. She will not have it and tells him off, vocalizing her new confidence and telling him "why any woman give[s] a s\*\*t what people think is a mystery to me" (Walker 200). Now that Shug has empowered her she feels she has the power to finally speak up for herself. When she does this it shows that she believes she has power. She finally has the power to stand up for herself because "[she] is discovering something seen in the groups women formed around her" (Averbach 61). She sees power in the women around her, in Shug, Sophia, Nettie, and Harpo's new wife, Mary Agnes. These women encourage her and let her know that she has power too. Celie no longer cares what others think of her and feels empowered enough because of the women around her, to stand up for herself when others try to put her down.

Overall, *The Colour Purple* demonstrates how when women are oppressed, other women that have been mistreated will stand up for them. The novel also implies that when women are degraded by men, the women surrounding them show them their worth. It is also inferred that once women are empowered by other women, they believe they have power themselves. Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* implies that females empower each other when they are made small by others. The unequal power relationships between men and women in the novel form Celie into a woman who listens to the voices around her and diminishes herself because of other's opinions. After other women enter her life and show Celie her true worth, she becomes empowered by it and finally stands up for herself. Celie grows to have power.