

Black Voice Portrayed in The Movie of The Hidden Figures by Theodore Melfi

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ABSTRACT

The film *Hidden Figures* is based on the actual tale of three African-American women who work at NASA on space rocket launches. Katherine G. Johnson, Mary Jackson, and Dorothy Vaughan are the three African-American women. With the backdrop of the 1960s, these three women face discrimination (differences in race or skin color) in their workplace at NASA. This study aims to explore the theory of black feminism from Patricia Hill Collins and integrate it with the Self Defenses Mechanism theory from Sigmund Freud about how they faced problems at that time. This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach. This study finds black feminism in the film *Hidden Figures* in the form of discrimination experienced by these characters in the form of gender, race, and class. However, the resistance carried out by these characters is through Aggression, namely expressing anger, Apathetic, namely by withdrawing not entering into a problem, Isolation, namely respecting something that causes frustration, and finally, Introjection, which is taking the positive side of other people.

Keywords: *Feminism, Self Defences Mechanism, Hidden Figures Movie*

INTRODUCTION

Afro-American, also known as African American, was a term used by Whites to refer to Black Americans in 1961. Africans were brought directly from Africa and sold as slaves. At that time there were two

groups namely North Americans or called Black people and South Americans or called White people. Black people are in the lowest class they are usually employed in agriculture for their livelihood from cotton while White people are industrial. This caused instability in the economy of the North because they are also a minority group and from there the civil war started and was won by the southern group. At that time North was a minority group they got very bad treatment because they were African Americans. This systemic practice of slavery helped manifest skin color in the African-American community. Furthermore, discrimination of skin color has become an effective strategy in colonizing and dividing people into other continents and countries around the world. Racism in America arose during the colonial era when white Americans had the advantage of having a great life, having jobs, living as well as they could, and having a better opportunity at living their lives. Meanwhile, Black Americans are an example of a living victim (Febriani and Arianto, 2020).

Sowell states that some people describe discrimination or racism as differences in "life chances." For example, a Black child who does not have the same opportunities as a White child to become a scientist or executive or a woman who is unlikely to lead a company or country, or a disabled child who is "specialized" and treated differently from other classmates (Valiantien, 2019).

Historically racism is one of two related meanings namely the belief in inherited racial differences that explain differences in racial behavior and support for segregation, discrimination, or unequal treatment of race is often accompanied by strong prejudice and intense hostility and that means where in one condition in a racist society there is a dominant group and a minority group (Horton et.al 1991: 303 as cited in Ghazi 2008). Meanwhile, In the sociology of race and ethnicity, racism has become several social phenomena such as systemic inequality, institutional discrimination, internalized stereotypes, and racial attitudes. Some researchers also argue that the broad and inconsistent use of the word "racism" means "weaken rather than strengthen the argument about race" (Wilson 1987 as cited in Woody, 2020).

Hidden Figures is one of the racist forms of the era. There are numerous types of films each with its plot, story, genre, and fantasy. The researcher on the other hand chose The Hidden Figures Because it is based on a true story where racism was still very strong in the 1960s. Hidden Figures is a biographical drama film directed by Theodore Melfi and written by Allison Schroeder that was released in 2016 the genre

was comedy drama and historical fiction film and runs for 2 hours and 7 minutes. In this film, the researcher focuses on the three main female characters who often experience injustice in their environment.

There are many different types of characters, but the main character is the one who attracts the most attention from the audience and becomes the focus of the viewer's attention. This character has the most scenes as well. The supporting characters are the ones who put the main character in this circumstance and cause friction (Alvinindyta, 2018).

The main character is the most important person in the story, a story is essentially about this character but it cannot stand alone it requires other characters to make the story more convincing. Minor characters are less important than the main characters the protagonist is the main character in a novel or a play the protagonist in traditional fiction is also the "hero" or "heroine" an admirable character who embodies widely accepted strength and virtues and is morally good because the antagonist is vile enough the term "villain" or "villainess" is used (Tussadiyah, 2017).

This film relates the tale of three brilliant black women "a minority group in the United States" who played a key part in the early days of NASA when prejudice was still a big concern. Mary Jackson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Katharine Goble are their names. Mary Jackson was an engineer who was turned down for a job at NASA unless she completed a higher education program that was only open to white people. Then Dorothy who worked as an acting supervisor or supervisor in the Western Region was consistently denied a permanent post due to her skin tone. Meanwhile, Katherine Goble the key character in the film Hidden Figures is frequently overlooked and marginalized due to her skin tone. However, they were the brains behind one of the most important operations in American history when NASA found the untapped potential of three African-American mathematicians as the US raced against Russia to put a man in space. The trio was responsible for calculating astronaut John Glenn's critical launch into space and guaranteeing his return safely. As a result of their intelligence and desire Dorothy, Mary, and Katherine Goble Johnson spanned all genders, races, and professional lines. Despite the constant pressure they rule to show their worth to become an important figure in the launch of astronaut John Glenn into space.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In researching the types of discrimination in *The Hidden Figures* movie, the researcher used Patricia Hill Collins's theory of Black Feminism (2000) and integrated it with the theory of the Self-Defences Mechanism by Sigmund Freud.

According to Collins (2000) in the United States, the oppression of black women is carried out in a systematic and structured manner. Collins explains that oppression in the United States based on race, class, and gender cannot occur without an ideological justification for it. Collins argues that feminism is the concept that women are social creations that may be altered and also state that feminism emphasizes women's autonomy (Rahayu, 2021). Feminism comes from the word "femme" which means woman. The word "Woman" means all women without exception. Black feminism is one such example. The term Black Feminism is a hope for Black Women in achieving major changes in social justice and women's struggles against racial and gender oppression experienced by African Americans (Rafael, 2021).

Meanwhile, Self Defense Mechanisms are the methods by which we act or think to better protect or defend ourselves. This method used to see how people prevent themselves from being completely aware of unpleasant ideas, feelings, and behaviors is through defense mechanisms (Cahyani, 2018). According to Freud, the defense mechanism is divided into several mechanisms. And here are some parts of the mechanism that appear in *The Hidden Figures* Movie. There Aggression is expressed directly to the person or object that is the source of frustration, Apathetic is an attitude of indifference or not caring about something. Apathy is another form of frustration reaction, namely, withdrawal and giving up (Fadillah, 2018). Isolation is a mechanism that works by changing emotions from painful memories. For example, nurses and doctors must learn to separate their revulsion, annoyance, and terror from blood, wounds, and other such things while still treating patients as members of their family Introjection is a defensive mechanism by which a person feels bad about himself or is insecure, so there takes good behavior or positive things from others to make himself feel better and more confident (Mubarok, 2019).

Several analyzes of feminism have been carried out previously (Desmawati, 2018) she explained that there are four types of feminism from the novel *Little Women* namely Liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, Existentialist feminism, and Radical feminism. (Putra, 2021) This study uses a qualitative method with the theory of semiotic analysis from John Fiske. The object of this research is the cases of feminism contained in this film with the theory of *The Codes of Television* and

uses three social codes, namely reality, representation, and ideology. (Nur, 2017) This study aims to characterize the feminist character by examining the primary female character as a feminist character and the contribution of the feminist character to the development of the narrative. This study employs a qualitative descriptive technique. The study's findings show that Edna Pontellier a feminist heroine helped to create the typical plot and that her feminist actions had an impact on it.

They explain the types of feminism and how the female character helped to create the plot. Meanwhile, the researcher focus to analyze the movie and the types of discrimination and how they fight against discrimination in the movie of The Hidden Figures.

The researcher found that there are two problems in this research like what is the racism that appears in the movie of Hidden Figures and how the Black women resist the racism in the movie of Hidden Figures. Meanwhile, the objectives of this research are to reveal the racism that appears in the movie of Hidden Figures and to analyze how women fight against racism in the movie of Hidden Figures.

There are two benefits of this research: Theoretically, this research is expected to broaden the researcher's perspective to improve their comprehension of Patricia Hill Collins Black Feminist theory and Self Defences Mechanism by Sigmund Freud which can be utilized as an input or reference for future research. Practically, this research is expected to produce information that can be utilized as a reference in literary work as well as supplementary knowledge for English Department students interested in Black Feminists by Patricia Hill Collins and Self Defences Mechanism by Sigmund Freud.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In conducting the research the researchers used the descriptive qualitative method because the data is acquired using words or pictures rather than statistics (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982). The data would be collected from the script and clips from the movie (Maskhurin, Handayani, 2014). Qualitative methods are the best way to assist writers in analyzing data (Putri, 2019). The Researcher focus to classified the types of feminism and to described how they face feminism in the workplace. The result of the analysis is combined to obtain good results and conclusions.

The procedure that researchers used in collecting data were watching movies, highlighting racism and resistance in the movie of hidden figures, and classifying data that related to discussions based on the problems of the study. After all the data were collected, the

researchers analyzed it based on the questions asked by the researchers. The analysis that was carried out by the researchers would be useful for making conclusions. The procedures to analyze the data were classifying the discriminations types, analyzing and classifying the discriminations and the resistances in the movie of Hidden Figures, and making the conclusions based on research findings.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The researcher found that there were three types of discrimination and Self Defences Mechanisms that appear in the Hidden Figures movie, they are Gender, Race, and Class three Self Defences Mechanism Aggression and Apathetic, Isolation, and Interjection. The findings of the research in the explanation above can be seen in the analysis below.

1. Gender Discrimination



Picture 1. Vivian Mitchell talking to Mary Jackson.

Mrs.Mitchell: **"NASA does not commission females for the Engineer training program".**

Mary Jackson: "That position is open to any qualified applicant".

In this film, Vivian is a White woman who works as a supervisor. Vivian's sentence above clearly describes gender discrimination. She said that women were not allowed for Engineer training at the Virginia Hampton school because it was only for White people. In the line above, it can be seen that people of color like Mary don't have the opportunity to attend higher education, have high positions, and earn high salaries at work even though they work harder than white people.



Picture 2. Jim Johnson to talk about Katherine's job at NASA

Mr. Johnson: **"Aeronautics. Pretty heady stuff. They let women handle that kind of"**.

Mr. Johnson: "Well, that is not what I mean".

Katherine: "What do you mean"?

Mr. Johnson: "I was just surprised something so".

Katherine: "Mr. Johnson, it may be best if you quit talking right now".

Jim Johnson is a colonel who is also interested in Katherine G. Johnson, heard that Katherine works at NASA Jim Johnson asked if NASA employs women there, and they let women do the calculations for rockets. Jim couldn't believe it because he thought the discrimination there was still very strong. In Jim's statement, it can be concluded that Katherine gets gender discrimination if women are deemed unfit to do all that.



Picture 3. Levi and Mary are arguing about Mary's job at NASA.

Mr. Jackson: **"Now you want to be an engineer? A female engineer. We are Negro baby. Ain't no such thing. Unders tand it"**.

Mary Jackson: "It is not like that there, Levi".

Mr. Jackson: "The only real chance we are gonna has is when we fight back. You can't apply for freedom. Freedom is never granted to the oppressed. It's got to be demanded. Taken".

Levi Jackson is the husband of Mary Jackson he is a civil rights activist who only sees African Americans progress, and sees his wife work as the first female engineer at NASA Levi Jackson instead of not allowing it because they will never get justice there and that there will never be equality between Black people and White People plus she is a woman, from the sentence above explains that Mary Jackson got gender discrimination from her husband if women will never be equal to men.



Picture 4. Paul Stanford forbids Kathrine from entering the room.

Katherine: Sir If I could attend this briefing. I would be able to stay current.

Mr.Stanfford: **"We have been through this Katherine. It is not possible there is no protocol for women attending"**.

Paul Stanford's sentence above explains that Katherine experiences gender discrimination because Katherine is prohibited from entering the room because she is a woman.

2. Race Discrimination



Picture 5. Vivian Mitchell is racist to Katherine because of her skin color.

Mrs. Mitchell: **"They have never had a colored in here before, Katherine does not embarrass me"**.

At that time Mrs. Mitchell was looking for a Geometric Analyst and Dorothy suggested Katherine because she was the right person, they had to recruit Katherine because no one in the White people could do that. But before Katherine worked there Mrs. Mithcell sternly warned if no Black people were working there, in Mitchell's sentence above she showed discrimination against skin color, she thought black people would not be able to compare with white people.



Picture 6. Dorothy Vaughan is looking for a book in the library.

White Librarian: What are you here for?

Dorothy: A book.

White Librarian: **You have a book in the colored section.**

Dorothy: It doesn't have what I'm looking for.

White Librarian: That is just the way it is.

In this scene, Dorothy and her two children are looking for a book, but suddenly a White woman scolds Dorothy and says that they don't want to be in trouble and that a separate book is available for Black people. In the sentence above Dorothy experiences skin color discrimination where Black people cannot be in the same room with White people because Black people are considered dangerous for them.



Picture 7. Mrs. Mitchell talked to Dorothy about the permanent supervisor.

Dorothy: My application for supervisor mam I was wondering if they're still considering me for that position.

Mrs.Mitchell: **Yes, well the official word is no. They're not assigned' a permanent supervisor to the Colored Group.**

At that point, Dorothy asked if there was any consideration of the position for her to be supervisor, but Mrs. Mitchell said no because there would never be a Black person who would work permanently everything was temporary. From Mitchell's sentence above, it can be concluded that Dorothy experiences discrimination against skin color and that Black people will never get a permanent job like White people.



Picture 8. The Judge having a conversation with Mary Jackson.

The Judge: **"What would warrant a Colored woman attending a White school"?**

Mary: "May I approach the bench sir"?

Mary Jackson fought for her right to be able to attend a Virginia Hampton school which is a school for White people only, she has to go to school there because she wants to be a female engineer at NASA, and to be able to go to school there she must get permission from the Judge. Judge's sentence above explains that Mary Jackson is racist towards skin color.

3. Class Discrimination



Picture 9. Mrs. Mitchell looking for someone with a handle on analytic geometry.

Vivian Mitchell: "The space task group needs a computer asap. Someone with a handle on Analytic Geometry. Much to my chagrin we can't fill the position of the East Group".

Dorothy: "Permanent or temp"?

Vivian Mitchell: "Everything is temporary Dorothy. You have someone"?

No one from the East group was good at geometry, so they had to look from the North group but only worked temporarily until the rocket could reach the moon because at that time the North group was a minority and at the same time they were the lower class. Vivian's sentence above explains that White people are in power in everything while the Blacks are just messengers and their salary is also not by what they do.

1. Aggression and Apathetic



Picture 10. Katherine is expressing her frustration.

Mr.Harrison: "There is no bathroom? What do you mean there is no bathroom for you here"?

Katherine: "There is no bathroom here. There are no Colored bathrooms in this building or any building outside the West Campus. Which is half a mile away! did you know that? I have to walk to Timbuktu just to relieve myself! And I can't take one of the handy bikes. The picture with my uniform skirt on the knees and my heels. And don't get me started about the simple pearl necklace I can't afford. Lord knows you don't pay the Coloreds enough for that. And I work like a dog day and night, living on coffee from a coffee pot half of you don't want me to touch! So excuse me if I have to go to the restroom a few times a day"!

Katherine who works at NASA is constantly under pressure from her co-workers, ranging from a separate drinking receptacle for Blacks to a bathroom that is very far from her workplace, and she has to travel quite a distance to get to the bathroom which is quite time-consuming. This caused Katherine to be absent from work frequently and made Al Harrison angry with her. From the sentence above, Katherine explained that all this time she was patient with everything but her work was not appreciated and she vented all her frustrations at that time.



Picture 11. Library security kicks Dorothy and her children out.

Dorothy: "Get your hands off my children. Do not touch them".

When Dorothy was looking for a book in a library suddenly a security guard escorted Dorothy and her son violently out of the library. When the guard shoved her children's shoulders Dorothy got angry. This is when Dorothy vented her anger against the security guard because she didn't want innocent children to become victims of discrimination.



Picture 12. Mary Jackson shows her frustration to Mrs. Mitchell.

Vivian Mitchell: "We now require advanced extension courses through the University of Virginia. It's in the employee handbook. An addendum. She slides a copy on the table".

Vivian Mitchell: "Case you haven't read it".

Mary: "Every time we have a chance to get ahead you all move the finish line".

When Mary Jackson was having lunch with her two friends suddenly Mrs. Mitchell comes and tells Mary that he can't become an engineer without attending a special engineering school. Mary denied that because she already had several titles and she deserved the position but Mrs. Mitchele persisted. And at that time the school was a special school for White people. In the sentence above, Mary Jackson explains that she expresses her frustration towards Mrs. Mitchell because Mary thought it was unfair just because she was a Black woman.

2. Apathetic



Picture 13. Dorothy lifts some boxes into the White people's room.

Mrs. Mitchell: "Our runner can pick up your work Dorothy. You need to be working not walking".

Dorothy: "It is break time ma'am. No trouble at all".

Mrs. Mitchell: "Since you made the trip you can take that batch over there".

Dorothy: "Sure thing Mrs. Mitchell"

When Dorothy entered the workspace of a White people, Vivian didn't seem welcome there Dorothy was immediately expelled gently by telling Dorothy to bring some boxes on the side. Dorothy calmly and resignedly took it. From the sentence above, it can be concluded that Dorothy is a person who does not want to have problems with other people.



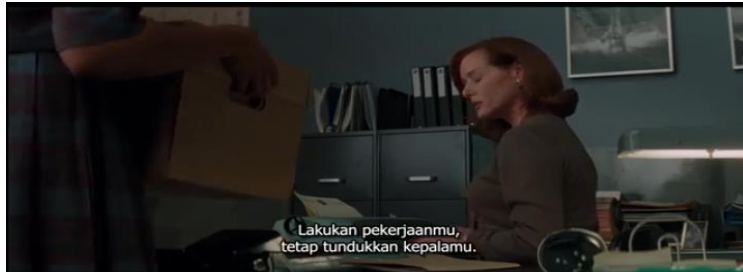
Picture 14. Katherine recalculated the data from Paul Stanford.

Mr. Stanfford: "Mr. Harrison wants you to confirm the launch and landing for the Redstone Rocket test".

Katherine: "I cannot work on what I cannot see Mr. Stafford it is illegible".

Mr. Stanfford: "The numbers have been confirmed by two Engineers in this department and me. It is more or less a dummy check".

Paul Stanford is Katherine's co-worker and he doesn't like Katherine's presence there because she is a woman and has Black skin. Katherine often experiences ostracism and works under pressure in the picture above. Katherine does the count of Paul Stanford who has been crossed out. In Katherine's sentence above she explained that she could not read what was not seen, but she still tried to read it by putting it under the light. Here Katherine's attitude shows that she is resigned to the situation that happened at that time.



Picture 15. Ruth is rude to Katherine.

Ruth: "Mr. Harrison won't warm up to you do not expect it. Do your work keep your head down".

Katherine: "Thank you".

Ruth: "Go on. Get settled".

The first time Katherine entered the new workplace and approached Mrs. Ruth. Ruth is very rude to her. Ruth's sentence above emphasizes that Katherine will not be well received by Mr. Al Harrison and told Katherine to keep her head down. But with all Mrs. Ruth's treatment of her, Katherine still respects her and chooses to surrender to the situation and chooses to withdraw from the frustrating thing.

3. Isolation



Picture 16. Ruth is rude to Katherine.

Al Harrison: "Does she know how to handle Analytic Geometry"?

Ruth: "Absolutely and she speaks".

Katherine: "I do sir".

Al Harrison: "Which one?"

Katherine: "Both, sir geometry and speaking".

Ruth is a white woman and Mr. Harrison's secretary and she is the only woman in the Geometry calculations office when Katherine started working there Ruth didn't seem to like her and didn't even think about it. Katherine knew that she was not welcome in the office but

Katherine did not reciprocate the treatment she preferred to treat them regardless of skin color and like any other human being. From Katherine's answer above, it can be concluded that Katherine respects each other.

4. Introjection

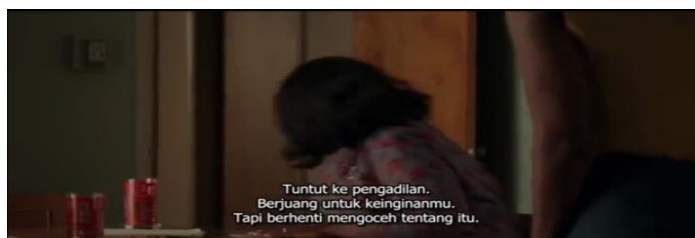


Picture 17. Mr. Zielinski gives some advice to Mary Jackson.

Mary: "Mr. Zielinski I am a Negro woman. I am not going to entertain the impossible".

Zielinski: "And I am a Polish Jew whose parents died in a Nazi prison camp. Now I'm standing beneath a spaceship that is going to carry an astronaut to the stars. I think we can say we are living the impossible. Let me ask if you were a white male would you wish to be an engineer"?"

Here Mary Jackson does not believe in herself she thinks that there will be no results everything will be the same, and Black people will not change and will remain the same as they are now. But on the other hand, Mr. Zielinski changed Mary's view that nothing is impossible as long as we are willing to try. Mr. Zielinski's sentence above shows that Mary takes the good side of others and grows that positive side in herself.



Picture 18. Dorothy advises Mary.

Mary: "Virginia acts like Brown vs. the Board of Ed never happened. They will never just let a Colored woman take classes at an all-white school"!

Dorothy: "Sounds about right".

Mary: "That is all you are gonna say"?

**Dorothy: "I am not going to sit here all day and listen to you
complain about the way things are. Petition the
court. Fight for what you want".**

When Mary complained about the Virginia school which would not allow Black women into the school she continued to complain about it, instead of Dorothy getting tired of listening to her and Dorothy giving advice to Mary in an irritated tone and Mary was silent. From Dorothy's sentence that inadvertently changed Mary's view, Mary also takes the positive side of her friend that is fighting for her rights.

CONCLUSION

Hidden Figures provides an illustration of how strong racism that appear in the 1960s era. Where in the film Black People experience discrimination such as gender, race, and class either from where they work or from the surrounding environment because Black people are considered dangerous. The researcher divides the analysis of The Hidden Figures movie into two points. The first point has discussed the types of discrimination. The second point discussed how Black people fight against discrimination with the theory of Self-Defences Mechanism by Sigmund Freud. Black people fight for their rights with intelligence and expertise in their respective fields. Based on the data obtained, there are four discriminations against gender, four from the race and one from class. As for the Self Defense Mechanism, there are three Aggressions, three Apathetic, one Isolation, and two Interjections. And the total data obtained is eighteen data.

And in the end, the three Negro women made it through all gender, race, and class. In 1960 they were the first women to achieve Gender equality at NASA. As a result, Mary Jackson graduated from Virginia Hampton school and became the first African American female Aeronautics technician staff and was appointed program manager at Langley. Dorothy Vaughan became the first NASA Africa America permanent supervisor. Katherine Goble continued to work on computing and NASA presented the Computing Building to Katherine Goble for her hard work.

SUGGESTIONS

In this literary research in the film *The Hidden Figures*, the researcher uses a feminist approach to understanding and improving the image of women in the film and is supported by the Self Defenses Mechanism about how they fought against discrimination at that time. Therefore, the researcher suggests anyone interested in studying more deeply about the characters and characterizations, especially in the field of literature, conduct studies in other different aspects that have not been analyzed because literature is rich in knowledge. However, if the readers want to analyze the same film, the readers can further develop the analysis of the previous one to avoid plagiarism and the creation of novelty from research.

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