

Racial Discrimination And Its Effects Experienced By Katherine Goble In *Hidden Figure* Movie By Theodore Melfi

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Abstract

This study aimed at analysing how the racial discrimination was depicted toward Katherine in Hidden Figures movie and describe the effects of racial discrimination experienced by her. This study belonged to a descriptive study because the data were in the form of sentences. The data were identified and collected from the movie script. The collected data were analysed using the underlying theory, in this case was the theory about racial discrimination taking place America as the settings. The result from the study indicated that Katherine faced racial discrimination not only from individual but also from her workplace, NASA. In her workplace, Katherine faced with limited resource and opportunities in doing her job. In addition, she also got different amount of salary; she got lower salary compared to white staff. In the movie, it was also shown that the racial discrimination gave her some negative effects. The effect of racial discrimination that Katherine faced was an enormous psychological distress. She almost believed that she was not good enough to continue working in that department. Katherine had faced racial discrimination from her early age but those act still inflict enormous stress toward her mental health. In short, this movie clearly shown that racial discrimination can bring negative effects towards the people as the objects of the unfair treatments.

Keywords: Hidden Figure movie, racism, racial discrimination, effects of racial discrimination

1. INTRODUCTION

Racism has embedded deeply in the American history because America has a long history in enslaving African – American people. The history of slavery contributes towards the racism in America because enslaving African – Americans was a common thing back then and continually happened for a long period. Thus, because of that, until today, there are still many people that still assume that white people are much better than colored people. In other words, there are still some groups or individuals that still think that the white people are the greatest race and see African-American people as the second class citizen

The explanation above is aligned with the definition of racism as an “ideology of racial domination” (Wilson, 14) in which they regard biological or cultural superiority of one or more racial groups to justify or prescribe inferior treatments or social positions of other racial groups. This way of thinking leads to the dominant race acquires certain privileges as the system that was built by the dominant race that does not favor them. In everyday life we can take an example in a workplace, the boss prefers to give promotion toward the white people as he thinks that white people is the best race and ignoring the achievement that has been acquired by the African - American person as he/she is more capable for the promotion. The boss that chooses the white race over the African-American and ignoring the capability of the person just because of his race can be counted as an example of racial discrimination.

These racial discriminations can be seen many aspects including literary works; one of them is the movie entitled *Hidden Figure*. In this movie, the main character struggles towards racial discriminations variously experienced by them. The movie has a good picture of how the American living conditions in 1961 as it is narrated the African-American people are only allowed to sit in the back in the bus, drink from a colored labeled fountain, and use colored labeled bathroom. In the movie, we can see when Katherine has the urge to go to the bathroom, she has trouble finding the colored bathroom and has to run about 1,5 miles to find a colored bathroom. At that time even the privilege of using the bathroom was limited as African-American people cannot use the white bathroom. In the movie, it is also pictured how the African-American people protest and demand racial equality for them. The movie has pictured the living condition in America at that time very well so it can give people an image of how the African-American people were treated at that time.

The issue that *Hidden Figures* brings mostly talking about racial discrimination and how African-American people at that time solve those problems. The issue of racial discrimination is a serious matter in society and can affect many aspects of life. The racial discrimination that we see occurred in the movie itself discrimination in a workplace based on race so the privileges for the African-American people were limited to a certain degree. Therefore, this research is intended to depict how racial discrimination was depicted in the movie and how it affected the main character, Katherine.

2. METHOD

Types of research which was used for this study was qualitative. The data were in the form of dialogues or monologues. The data were collected by watching the movie, reading the movie script, and identified the data. The data were analyzed by applying systematic procedure to reach the purpose of this study, in this case was using the theory about racial discrimination.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Racial Discrimination Depicted towards Kathrine Goble

In this research, as explained before that racism is a fundamental in this movie as Katherine as the main character struggling in facing discrimination treatment from her surrounding, such as the society, workplace, and from the element of government.

First, she experienced racial discrimination when she cannot enter a better school to develop her potential in Math.

MARION SMITHSON

West Virginia Collegiate Institute is the best school for Negroes in the state.

MS. SUMNER

It's the only school, past the eighth grade, anywhere close to here.

JOSHUA COLEMAN

Katherine's in the sixth grade.

MS. SUMNER

They want to take her early.

MARION SMITHSON

They're offering a full scholarship. All you have to do is get there.
Joshua and Joylette are overwhelmed. They grasp each other's hands.

MS. SUMNER

Joshua, Joylette...we took up a collection amongst the teachers and such,
a few parents.

Ms. Sumner hands Joylette an envelope.

MS. SUMNER (CONT'D)

It's not a whole lot, but it'll surely help get you settled in.

Joylette accepts the envelope.

JOYLETTE COLEMAN

That's beyond kind, Ms. Sumner.

MS. SUMNER

In all my years of teaching, I've never seen a mind like the one your
daughter has. You have to go. You have to see what she becomes.
Joylette starts to tear. The kindness of people. Joshua puts his arm around
his wife.

(Melfi, 3)

This conversation took place in the headmaster's room. These two people were the headmaster and Katherine's teacher. The previous screenplay stated that Katherine was a genius student and her teacher recommended her parent enroll her in a better school. Unfortunately, not every school in the region welcomed colored students such as Katherine, no matter how genius she was. So she had only one option for a school that wanted to accept her. The unequal treatment that Katherine had gone through since an early age indicates the exposure of racial discrimination

Second, she also experienced racial discrimination in her work place. In the movie, the white male worker indirectly told Katherine not to use the same coffee machine and despised her earlier action. These white male workers were putting up a

racial barrier as Katherine was different from them. This scene also put a significant barrier between Katherine and the white workers as they decided to set a separate coffee pot for Katherine. Racism involves the subordination of people of color by white people. While individual persons of color may well discriminate against a white person or another person of color because of their race, this does not qualify as racism according to our definition because that person of color cannot depend upon all the intuitions of society to enforce or extend his or her personal dislike. Nor can he or she call upon the force of history to reflect and enforce that prejudice...history provides us with a long record of white people holding and using power and privileges over people of color to subordinate them, not the reverse (Wolf, 2). It can be concluded that racial discrimination is a behavior or pattern that systematically denies access to opportunities or privileges to members of one racial group while perpetuating access to opportunities and other racial group members. This racial discrimination took the agreement of a more dominant group to take the privileges from the African American people, such as different coffee pots and bathrooms. This kind of behavior happens because of the deep belief that the dominant race is better than other races.

Racial discrimination can be said an act of racism. If racism only had the form of thought, then racial discrimination is a form of activity conducted by the racist individual or even a particular group. In simple terms, racial discrimination is described as unequal treatment received by a person or a group of people based on their ethnicity or race (Pager & Shepherd, 182). According to this theory, what the officer did toward Katherine and her friend depicted an example of racial discrimination. The officer, supposed to become the protector of the people, practiced unequal treatment toward Katherine and was suspicious about their existence on that road without even asking whether they need any help or what happened. He started to soften towards Katherine and her friend after learning that they worked for NASA and help the astronaut go to space. As an embodiment of law, the officer practiced racial discrimination instead of protecting the people and giving equal treatment.

Racism can be defined simply as “any policy, belief, attitude, action or inaction, which subordinate individuals or groups based on their race” (Wolf, 2). According to Wolf's statement, Vivian's actions and attitude were considered an act of racial discrimination, and her action came from her belief in racial superiority and dominance. In this scene, Vivian's action was considered a natural racial discrimination action that was supposed to not happen in an institution like NASA. Katherine that felt overwhelmed is also a part of Vivian's attitude toward Katherine.

There is a scene where Stafford, as senior staff, intentionally gave Katherine a hard time doing her job. He used black ink to cover up essential data, so Katherine had difficulty performing her full ability since she lacked enough data to calculate. Ruth was shocked to see the new computer that Mr. Harrison requested for so long was an African American woman, which she showed towards Katherine. A computer was a person that is responsible for calculation. “Racism is often used synonymously with prejudice (biased feelings or affect), stereotyping (biased thoughts and beliefs, flawed generalizations), discrimination (differential treatment or the absence of equal treatment), and bigotry (intolerance or hatred)” (Phia, 2018). From the theory, it can be concluded that Stafford gave differential treatment toward Katherine. He underestimated Katherine's capabilities in doing her job as a calculator by intentionally putting on black ink above some critical data as he gave the paper to Katherine. He even also stated that Katherine was nothing

more than a dummy check. Stafford, as senior staff, was supposed to judge Katherine by her ability, not by his race or ethnicity. Ruth also had a biased feeling toward Katherine. She did not believe that the new computer was an African American woman working in an all-white department, which was not a usual sight. This Expression also can be clearly shown in her face when she looked toward Katherine directly.

In this movie, racial discrimination was not only depicted not only on the human rights side. Even in NASA, Katherine faced discrimination based on her race, and this discrimination manifested in various forms. The things that hurt Katherine emotionally came from simple things such as the coffee maker and bathroom. From this dialogue above, it can be seen that the company where Katherine worked, NASA, supported the ideology of racism by conducting the act of making separate bathrooms for colored employees such as Katherine. In this scene, Katherine had to find another bathroom that she could use in another building only to relieve herself. Although she already worked in that building, NASA did not care about it. From this act alone, NASA can be indicated supporting racism as they make colored employees take separate bathrooms. These kinds of policies make Katherine had a hard time working in space task groups in NASA since she had to run with her high heels for around 800 meters.

Racism involves the subordination of people of color by white people. While individual persons of color may well discriminate against a white person or another person of color because of their race, this does not qualify as racism according to our definition because that person of color cannot depend upon all the intuitions of society to enforce or extend his or her personal dislike. Nor can he or she call upon the force of history to reflect and enforce that prejudice...history provides us with a long record of white people holding and using power and privileges over people of color to subordinate them, not the reverse (wolf, 2). Bowling (38) states, Discrimination consist of unequal, unfavorable and unjustifiable treatment based on a person's sex, gender, 'race', ethnicity, culture, religion, language, class, sexual preference, age, physical disability or any improper ground. It includes refusal to offer employment, pay fair wages, to provide housing or medical treatment or to provide a commercial or social service. It can also take the form of harassment, attack, exclusion, and expulsion.

This theory concludes that Ruth's unfavorable and unjustifiable act toward the African American Worker in the welcoming event of an astronaut candidate by trying to skip to give handshake toward African American staff standing next to the white team was racial discrimination. Discrimination that (Bowling, 2007) stated is based on race and classified as racial discrimination.

From this theory, it can be concluded that racial discrimination is a behavior or pattern that systematically denies access to opportunities or privileges to members of one racial group while perpetuating access to opportunities and other racial group members. This racial discrimination took the agreement of a more dominant group to take the privileges from the African American people, such as different coffee pots and bathrooms. This kind of behavior happens because of the deep belief that the dominant race is better than other races.

Effect of Racial Discrimination Experienced by Katherine Goble

In this research, the effect of racial discrimination can be found in several part of the movie. One of them is when Katherine was overwhelmed from her first day of work and also from the treatment in her workplace that not helped her out so she could perform

her job. Instead, they practiced discrimination because of her race. In this scene, Katherine was given an incomplete document that AL needed from Katherine. So as result, AL felt disappointed and throw her work into the trash bin. This act alone made Katherine felt sad, as her works were considered worthless. Katherine felt depressed as she thought that she was not good enough to work there.

“A recent review documented that discrimination is positively associated with measures of depression and anxiety symptoms and psychological distress, as well as, with defined psychiatric disorders” (Lewis, Cogburn, and William, 2015). It can be concluded that racial discrimination has a certain effect on depression which Katherine had gone through as mention above. The depression that Katherine felt as her works redeem worthlessly is not because of her inability to do her job properly, but because of her colleague's biased treatment based on her race. This discrimination affects her works as she cannot perform her job to the fullest potential she has.

Another example of how racial discrimination affects Katherine is when she got into a problem as she can solve the calculation from redacted data from Stafford. Katherine was able to do the right calculation for the trajectory of the space rocket, and while this meant Katherine could do her job properly. It also raised suspicion toward her, they thought that she was a Russian spy that tried to steal their research data. She was able to get the redacted data by putting the paper under the light and from there she had all the data she needs to calculate the trajectory of the rocket.

Discrimination was also associated with a small increased risk of depressive symptoms and serious psychological distress (Mouzon, 2017). It means this interrogation conducted by Stafford, Sam, Ruth, and AL inflicted serious distress toward Katherine's psychological state. Because if she was branded as a Russian spy, she will be prisoned for it. She did that because of what AL request toward her, to see beyond the numbers, and as the result, she was almost branded as a Russian spy. The suspicion arose not because of her work but because she was different from her colleagues and Stafford felt impossible for her to know the classified data that he redacted from Katherine's datasheet. At that time, they consider Katherine a spy from Russia because she could do the calculation from redacted data, but they fail to understand that AL expects Katherine to do all the calculations.

Discrimination must be understood and assessed within the context of other mechanisms of racism. Social disadvantages and stressors often cluster in people and places. In addition, institutional/structural racism can give rise to what (Pearlin, 2005) called stress proliferation processes, in which an initial stressor can initiate or exacerbate stressors in other domains of life. Thus, living and working conditions created by racial discrimination can initiate and sustain differential exposure to a broad range of stressors that, at face value, may not appear to be related to racism. These can include “traditional stressors” such as violence, criminal victimization, neighborhood conditions, financial stress, and relationship stress. From the statement above, it can be concluded that Katherine pours out her deepest stress about how her discrimination affects her work, about how NASA that not give enough salary for colored staff. The stress that Katherine holds was unbearable anymore. As Pearlin stated above, racial discrimination that sponsored by the institution will create stressor that leads to violence, financial stress, etc. in this scene Katherine showed how she was financially stressed as NASA not pay her enough. How her colleagues discriminate against her by putting colored coffee pot. This action made Katherine stress and affect her work.

Based on in-depth qualitative interviews, Fleming and colleagues conclude that incidents of racial discrimination matter so profoundly for mental health because they are experiences of exclusion that trigger feelings of a ‘defilement of self’ (Fleming, Lamont and Welburn 2012). Defilement of self is the feeling of over-scrutinized, overlook, underappreciated, misunderstood, and disrespected. It can be concluded that, as depicted in the movie Katherine felt disrespected, over-scrutinized, and misunderstood. This feeling created her depression that explained above. From the moment she entered the space task group, she had experienced much racial discrimination that made her work harder and these discriminations also made her underappreciated and overlook, especially in this particular scene. She felt the need for appreciation from NASA for her outstanding work in the space task group. This feeling was created as an accumulative result of her colleague's action toward Katherine.

4. CONCLUSION

This research was to analyze the racial discrimination depicted toward Katherine Goble's life, especially in her workplace which is NASA. In addition, it was also intended to analyze the effect of racial discrimination in the movie experienced by the main character. Katherine had faced racial discrimination from an early age, racial discrimination was not only physical or verbal but also in the form of limitation of opportunities and resources. The racial discrimination that depicted toward Katherine had made her know that African-Americans people like her is a second class citizen with limited opportunities and resources. Another discrimination that she had was the different salary that she received throughout her career as a computer in a space task group. Racism in this era where the movie took place, already had a deep root in society and the government. In this research, the racial discrimination depicted toward Katherine was shown in the form of a limited facility in her workplace. Racial discrimination in this research comes from her colleague's treatment that clearly stated they are not accepting Katherine.

The effect of racial discrimination shown in the movie was psychological distress that can be seen in several scenes. The stress that comes from the feeling underappreciated, over scrutinized, and low self-esteem. These effects were shown in a certain part of the movie. Katherine felt that all of her work was underappreciated as she was not acknowledged by her supervisor that discriminates against her because she is African American. There is also the depression that almost made Katherine felt she was not good enough to work in the space task group.

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