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Analyzing the Movie "Hidden Figures" (2016): A Comprehensive Examination of Race and Gender Inequality

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ABSTRACT

Hidden Figures is a movie based on a true story that told a story about the challenges of being black race women due to racial and gender discrimination in the society at that time. This study aims to examine how Hidden Figures portrays black feminism of the injustice against the black race and the complexities of women in gender inequality, particularly within the historical context that highlights the experiences of women. This research is based on descriptive analysis methods. Descriptive analysis is used to reveal the representation of gender inequality, racial injustice, and black women feminism in Hidden Figures by examining the characters' interactions, dialogue, and narrative choices. The analysis revealed the injustice against the black race in society experienced by the characters in the movie. Furthermore, this study showed gender inequality that happened in the movie Hidden Figures. It can be concluded that Hidden Figures portrays issues such as racial and gender barriers, especially to black women in workspace. In addition, the movie Hidden Figures also added a conclusion to this study, in which complexity of women in gender inequality is a concerning issue in the film.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The history of black women ignites the fire and shapes their resistance and stance in Black Feminism. According to (Taylor, U., 1998), black women work on themselves by creating definitions and assessing themselves that can enable them to build positive and diverse images as a form of rejection and resistance to negative representations and control of black women.

A lot of accidents befall them, and most of them are bad things. The reason behind all of the bad luck that has occurred is because of their skin. The perception that dark skin is seen as ugliness and inferiority contrasts sharply with the perception of white skin. White skin is considered with traits like modesty,

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rationality, beauty, and superiority, creating a distinct contrast with dark skin (Hunter, & Margaret, 2007; Mutiani & Faisal, 2019). It affects their issues related to women's global poverty; such as education opportunities, industrial development, employment policies, etc. Moreover, the activities of basic life that they should be able to do like other white women, become a little complicated and difficult because they have to experience difficulties and gaps in it.

The oppression experienced by black women has led them to challenge these stereotypes using black feminism. According to the (Jumriani et al., 2021; Taylor, K.-Y, 2020) black women, as one of the marginalized groups in western countries, have made it their duty to resist and challenge the stereotypes that whiteness has given them, set against their political struggles directly against the intertwined ferocity of capitalism-racism, sexism, and poverty. The bad images and oppression they experience come from traditional media that often portrays black women in a bad light. However, today's widespread media has turned into a place where feminism and black women can be shown to a wider audience with favorable responses (Abbas et al., 2021; Johnson, T. B., 2017).

One of the media that can be used to support black feminism as well as black women is movies. By way of movies, the situation, condition, and action can be shown clearly and in detail to the public. Through the movie Hidden Figures, people can see the discrimination experienced and faced by black women, which shows the complexity of racial and gender injustice, especially in a historical context that emphasizes women's experiences, which are explored through the lens of a black feminist perspective. Escorted by a true story told through films around 1961, it revealed the inequality they experienced because they were women and colored.

2. METHODS

This study uses descriptive-analytic research, which, according to (Abbas et al., 2022; Geertz, C., 1974), emphasizes the importance of detailed analysis and rich context. In all research, including film studies, the use of descriptive research allows for a deep and complex understanding of the subject. A structured approach and detailed scientific analysis are certainly necessary for the process of gender analysis in Disney's "Hidden Figures", which examines racial and gender inequality in detail.

(Foucault, M., 2002; Mutiani et al., 2021) also explains the importance of the analysis of language and representation in the construction of knowledge and the formation of social norms. This concept describes how individuals of different races interpret and experience gendered roles according to their respective social positions. In other words, on the whole, analysis is an approach that employs specific methods to gain a deeper understanding of meaning, and descriptive analysis allows for a detailed and contextualized use of the film.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The movie called "Hidden Figures," adapted from a true story, has garnered significant attention among the public. In the movie that has the backdrop of the 1960s, portrays and emphasizes the leading roles of Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson in NASA's space missions, addressing a glaring gender disparity gap. The three main female characters encounter disparities in opportunities, concessions, and resources within the STEM fields due to their gender and race. The women in the film confront obstacles in career development, unequal salaries compared to both white men and women, and challenges in gaining professional recognition.

3. 1. The Injustice Against Black People

The movie Hidden Figures shows that there are a lot of injustices experienced by black people especially women because of the rules made illogical by white people and also the views of white people towards black people. Somehow, racism refers to the unequal treatment of one person or group of people because of their race or ethnicity (Jumriani et al., 2022; Setianingsih et al., 2021). Just because of the difference in skin tone color, black people have to face a difficult life. According to the Hidden Figures movie, black people are always differentiated from public places such as bathroom space, work space,

libraries, eating and drinking utensils, even for continuing education. The Black workers do not get good facilities in the workplace like White workers get (Azzizah, S, 2020).

One of the characters in Hidden Figures, Katherine Johnson, was recruited as a Geometry Analyst at NASA because no white person could do it. However, Mrs. Mitchell, who is a white supervisor, had previously told Katherine that black people could not work at NASA because they did not meet white standards (Puspita, M., & Ramdhani, M. I., 2022) (Puspita & Ramdhani, 2022). Additionally, other character names Dorothy also gets inequality treatment from her boss, Mrs. Mitchell. Dorothy submitted an application request to become a permanent supervisor at NASA but was rejected by Mrs. Mitchell because she was a black person. Moreover, Mrs. Mitchell gave a clear reason why a black person should not work as a permanent supervisor. She only said because the black people could not continue to work permanently. Everything is temporary. Based on the words spoken by Mrs. Mitchell, it can be seen that she undervalued black people and does not want to give black people the opportunity to prove that they can and deserve to work in that position.

The workplace for black people is also differentiated. They are placed in another building which is West Computing Group, one inappropriate room where all the black workers are there. When Katherine was promoted and ended up in the same room as the white employees who worked there, the work given to her was complicated, one of which was that her writing was edited by being overwritten with black marker. This is because there is still a sense of distrust to work with black people. White people are incapable of recognizing the existence of people of color and therefore never treat people of color with different characteristics as real entities. She receives unequal treatment among white workers just because she is black. On the way back home, she told her friends that she doubts herself to keep up her job there because the discrimination is too painful for her.

Black people also do not get the same education as white people. The education that white people get is better than black people. This can be proven by Mary wishing to study on white school to develop her knowledge on space but she could not do it because it is limited for black people. It is always assumed that colored people are behind in knowledge and understanding. Another thing is that they cannot use the public library even though there is no rule that black people cannot use the public library. White people can say directly in front of black people that they have their own section in black people. Black people visit the white people's book section because the book they are looking for is not in the black people's book section and the book is available in the white people's section. People in there always minimize things for black people. This is terribly unfair because everyone deserves to get the portion that is appropriate (Ikhsano A., & Jakarudi, J., 2020).

However, there are mostly two public places available that are shown in the movie, one for white people and one for black people. No bathrooms available in white offices for black people. Wherefore, Katherine who works together with white people when she wants to relieve herself has to look for the colored bathroom which is located in the West Computing Group building that is half a mile away and takes 40 minutes. Meanwhile, the job that Katherine has is very crucial to time because even a little late has changed the calculation which is a space task. She was questioned by her boss because she was often not at the workplace. Not only that, places for making drinks such as coffee and tea are separated. Therefore, Katherine explained everything to her boss out loud because she was tortured. She is one of the black people who dared to voice the injustice of using public places directly in front of white people (Azzizah S, 2020)

2. Gender Inequality

Gender inequality is the violation of a fundamental human right, which is deprived by gender-based discrimination. In addition, gender inequality commonly happens to women because people have the perception that women are meant to be weak (Haryanti, R. S., et al., 2019) However, the most common women who often experience it are black women. The reason black women often experience gender inequality is because they have two identities that are often oppressed, namely women and being black. The inequality that occurs in black people is because they are considered unequal to others, namely white people, also black people often get stigma as a lower social class (Maryam, L. H et al., 2022).

It can be proven in the film "Hidden Figures" that has very clearly illustrated the gender inequality that was widely discussed in the 1960s. One of the scenes that shows gender inequality in the movie is when Katherine meets Jim Johnson, her future husband, at a church event and has a light conversation while preparing food for Katherine's daughters. The topic of their conversation is related to the job that Katherine took at NASA, namely the Aeronautics section. At first, Jim Johnson simply asked Katherine about what kind of job it was until he gave his opinion that the job was hard and NASA let women do it. Their conversation falls into gender inequality with discrimination in that. It can be seen that Jim underestimates Katherine's competence because she is a woman, while the work Katherine does is in the scope of aeronautical science, which in that year, the 1960s, was generally done by men (Sri Haryanti et al., 2019).

In another scene from the movie, Katherine was going to enter the meeting room for discussion, but at first she was not allowed to enter the room. The reason turned out to be because Katherine is a woman, whereas the meeting room was for men only. In her workplace, there is a policy of facilities segregation between each racial and gender. This behavior toward Katherine is known as subordination, which is an understanding that makes women be placed as an unimportant role (Maryam et al., 2022). We can see that from this one scene itself already gives a depiction of seemingly prevalent races and gender injustice that existed during that historical period in the 1960s. Therefore, Katherine must face challenges of such discrimination just because she is a woman .

Another character, Mary Jackson, has a desire to advance to a more senior technician position at Langley. However, she faced a barrier as she had to graduate from a whites-only college, Hampton School. To secure a spot at Hampton, she had to distinguish herself on the court. Fortunately, Mary succeeds in persuading the judge to grant her permission to attend Hampton, even though she must enroll in classes that commence at 9 pm.The three black women in this movie, who repeatedly experience and confront discrimination in the workplace, do not make them avoid or choose to run away from the problems they face. Instead, they fight and resist in order to achieve the equality that they deserve (Sumarsono, I., et al., 2023).

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Hidden Figures shows inequality of races, especially toward black women feminism as we analyzed it with descriptive analysis methods by taking data from the characters' interactions, dialogue, and narrative choices. The limitation of this research is the reality of an injustice faced by black race women because of irrational views and discrimination act by white races. Not only shows the challenges of being black in different aspects of life, but the movie also gives us a representation of gender inequality of black people being differentiated in certain places, from public spaces, workspaces, even educational surroundings. It is shown in the movie that people tend to distrust and disrespect others who are black individuals even though they actually possess extraordinary skills in the certain workfield or the other fields. Instead of showing the advanced technology of someone who is working at NASA, this movie rather gives us a wide view that opens our mind that every “color” must have equal rights for everything.

The researchers currently know that the Hidden Figures movie has such an inspirational story that would make people think deeply about race and gender rights issues, and that discrimination of any gender or race must not be tolerated at all. This movie is a true realization that struggles of black women in gender inequality is a real concerning issue because the movie itself was based on a true story. Thus, as depicted in the movie, there is a need for more efforts to remove such racial prejudices and there should be an equality for all. In the other words, it would be so much better if people raise more awareness of race and gender equality rights, so that there is no more disparity between any races or gender, and therefore peace would be made.

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