

Race and Prejudice: Constructing Identity in “The Help” Movie

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

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This study aimed to describe and analyze the representation of racism in the film "The Help." The research method used were descriptive qualitative and content analysis to identify how the concepts of racism, stereotypes, and power displayed in the film's narrative. The theory used in this study was the "Theory of Prejudice" proposed by Gordon Allport, which helps in understanding how negative perceptions of certain groups can develop into discriminatory attitudes and actions. The results of this study provide deep insight into how racism was presented in entertainment media and its impact on social consciousness. It was found 12 acts of discrimination that has been divided into 4 four types such as verbal antagonism, avoidance, segregation, and physical attack.



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Introduction

Racism is differences in behavior and inequality based on skin color, ethnicity, race, and a person's origin that result in restrictions or violations of a person's rights and freedoms. It is usually based on the physical characteristics of a person of a race with their innate behavior, including personality, intelligence, morality, and other cultural characteristics. It has an impact on "one particular party" who feels that their people are the best and deserve to do anything or are superior; an example of racism is racism in the United States against black people. Any set of rules, regulations, beliefs, or obstacles that keep people from achieving justice, equity, and dignity based on their race are collectively referred to as racist. It can manifest as violent acts, intimidating behaviors, abuse, or humiliation. Nevertheless, racism also exists in organizations and systems that run in ways that promote injustice and inequality (Australia Human Rights, 2021).

Racism towards black community in America started with slavery. About 12.5 million people from Africa were kidnapped and sent to America through the transatlantic slave trade that happened between 1525 and 1866. This harrowing journey from Africa to America sadly taking lives and left 10.7 million survivors. In August of 1916, the first enslaved Africans arrived to the English colonies in the America. They were kidnapped by Portuguese slave traders; more than 20 Angolans were sold to English colonies in Jamestown. This marks the beginning of 246 years of continuous enslavement in what will become the United States. In 1856, the new law were made which called Black Codes (also known as Black Laws). The purpose of this law is to control the behavior of newly freed Black in the former of confederacy during the post-civil war reconstruction era. The laws were designed to replace the social controls of slavery that had been removed by the emancipation proclamation and the thirteenth amendment to the constitution. The example of black laws was any eligible working people was not allowed to wander or stroll about leisurely, none of color could

be an artisan, mechanic or shop-keeper, or pursue any other trade or business besides farming, manual labor or domestic service (South Carolina). The former slave owner got first preference when their former slave children were bound out as apprentices (Georgia and North Carolina). None of color could testify against a white person in court, unless the white person agreed to it (North Carolina). It was a felony crime for any person of color to marry a white person, only white men could serve on juries, hold office, and vote in any state, county, or municipal election (Texas). No colored person had the right to vote, held office or sit on juries in this state (Tennessee) (Various, 2024). The reasons behind the enslavement of the Black community were multifaceted. Firstly, Blacks came from a distant continent and could not easily escape or be rescued; secondly, skin color made blacks distinguishable from whites and thus easily set apart as slaves; and lastly, Europeans used Biblical texts to support the enslavement of blacks (University Fitchburg State, 2023). Due to history of slavery, American especially white American started to thinking that black people are not the same level as them. Because of that, discrimination towards black community can happen.

Racism often occurs against a certain race that often causes problems, commotion, and oppression of a race. In America, many cases of discrimination against colored people (people who have skin colors other than white) happened. This case is getting bigger and bigger until there are several riots, for example the death of George Floyd. The George Floyd case was caused by unfounded accusations from the police who thought that George Floyd used fake money, George Floyd who was handcuffed was held with a knee to the neck that resulted in not being able to breathe until he died. The case went so viral that the BlackLives

Matter movement resurfaced. Discrimination and prejudice often refer to people who have black skin that becomes a stereotype that people who have black skin color are described as an inferior race. Therefore, we take this research from the theory of prejudice. Prejudice theory is a theory that discusses the dislike shown to a person or a group that is so large. According to experts Baron and Byrne, prejudice is an attitude that is more negative towards individuals in a group based solely on their membership in that group. Prejudice can be grouped into several types according to Hogg and Vaughan there are prejudices that can be seen from the target, namely prejudice sexism, racism, ageism, prejudice against homosexuals, and prejudice against people with physical disabilities of the types of prejudice that the author highlights the most is racism. According to psychologist Gordon Allport, prejudice-as-antipathy, or other definitions, namely, members of society as sexist consider prejudice-as-dislike, hostility, or aversion, racist, homophobic, and so on.

The Help is a drama film directed by Tate Taylor and released in 2011. The movie is set against the backdrop of the civil rights movement in America in the 1960s and tells the story of an ambitious young writer named Skeeter (played by Emma Stone) who decides to write a book detailing African-American maids' views of the white families they work for, and the hardships they experience daily. Two maids named Aibileen Clark (played by Viola Davis) and Minny Jackson (played by Octavia Spencer) agreed to share their stories with Skeeter, even though their actions risk serious consequences for them. Through the process of writing this book, they opened many people's eyes to the reality of life as black domestic servants in the American South during that era. The movie depicted their struggle against racial discrimination and the way they sought to change. "The Help" is a movie story about friendship, struggle, and hope. The movie has an 8.1/10 rating on IMDb (Gander, 2020).

According to Allport from his book entitled "The Nature of Prejudice", the definitions of prejudice is thinking ill of others without sufficient warrant (Spratt & Allport, 1955). He also mentioned that prejudice is a feeling favorable or unfavorable toward a person or thing, prior to or not based on, actual experience. Based on his theory we can conclude that African-American people are the victim of prejudice by white Americans in the United State, because of the actual experience from African-American people who has been ill thinking or even worse are discriminated by white Americans. The movie "The Help" shows us how cruel white Americans be to African-American back in the day when racism was still massive. That is why the researchers using this movie to proving Allport's theory of how Aibileen, Minny and other black characters being the victim of prejudice by Celia Foote (played by Jessica Chastain), white American woman who were very racist towards African-American people.

The previous study by Adam (Adam, 2019)in "Racism in "The Help" Movie by Tate Taylor (a Sociological Approach)" using the theory from Paradies and Williams (Paradies, 2016) mentioned that African-American people believed they had lower status than white people. Therefore, they convinced that they had no rights to decide the future and a boundary between white and black people. This belief was based on the social status given by group of white. White people maintained the idea that they were belong to a dominant group and they believed that they could explicitly discriminate non-dominant black group.

Other study from Pakaya (Pakaya et al., 2021)with the title "Analysis of Racism in "12 Years a Slave" Movie. Directed by Steve McQueen found that in the movie "12 Years a Slave", white people's power was higher than blacks have. The proof is when black commits a crime towards white they can be sentenced to death easily. This movie also give clear pictures about how the white is always act superior and using their

superiority to treat black inhumanly. For an instance, this movie shows Epps, Solomon's third and most inhumane master, whom Solomon serves for ten years. Epps is cruel and spiteful to all of his slaves, reserves particularly brutal treatment to an elderly male slave named Abram and a young female slave named Patsey. Epps frequently rapes Patsey, making her the object of his jealousy and hatred. This can be identified as verbal representation of forced slavery. This is well suited with Blummer statement that the superiority feeling often can be seen in the way the dominant racial insult the traits quality of the subordinate racial group (Blumer, 1958).

Another research from the movie "Hidden Figures" by Febriani and Arianto shows that racism appear in society and mostly in work place. The racism effect is varies from time to time. This movie specifically shows many black women is lose their job because of racism. They also found that the possibility of black woman to be a engineer because of their ability is high, however they have to works harder to achieve this because of lack facility to have a degree. They tend to stuck in same job called "human computer." We also can see how black women have to work day and night yet still paid by the very minimum amount of money. The conclusion is that this movie contains racism issue in workplace (Febriani & Arianto, 2020).

Another study about racism in movie, titled "Racism and Resistance Strategies in Amma Assante's Movie Where Hands Touch (2018)" by Fazryah (Fazriyah, 2021) discovered six form of racism got from the main character named Leyna including everyday racism, material determinism, social construction, differential racialization, intersectionality, and voice color. The racism she experienced bring her into resisth action such as Leyna uses valuing oneself, leaning on shoulders, role flexing, avoiding, standing up, and fighting back. However, Leyna didn't use one type of resisth action from theory of Shorter-Gooden called resting on faith (Shorter-Gooden, 2004).

"The Help," is an inspiring film based on the backdrop of racial segregation in the American South in the 1960s, offers an interesting perspective to examine racism using Gordon Allport's theory of prejudice. The film challenges the ingrained prejudices that shape the lives of the protagonists and emphasizes the importance of breaking down the walls that support racism through genuine human interaction. Therefore, the researchers encourage readers to study the acts of discrimination and racism that occur in the movie using Gordon Allport's theory and the movie "The Help" as a research object.

Method

In this research, the method that the researchers chose were descriptive qualitative and content analysis. Descriptive research is used to establish the existence of phenomena by explicitly describing them (Selinger & Shohamy, 1989). Content analysis is a specialized type of text analysis that measures and analyses the presence, frequency, and relationship of specific words, themes, or concepts in a text. Content analysis can be used to identify the intent, focus, or trends of individual, group, or institutional communication, as well as to describe attitudinal and behavioural responses to communication, determine the psychological or emotional state of a person or group, reveal international differences in communication content, and reveal patterns in communication content.

Result and Discussion

1. Result

The result of this research was described using the discriminatory behavior such as verbal antagonism, avoidance, segregation, physical attack, and extermination. Here is the explanation of the result:

Table 1 <The Result of the Research>

No	Discriminatory Behavior	Definition	Indication
1.	Verbal Antagonism (Anti-locution)	Disparaging racial comments in or out of the target's presence.	Verbal and non-verbal hostility, verbal abuse and non-verbal rejection, denial, and unlawful discriminatory behaviors.

2.	Avoidance	Alienation to the target of the racial group in such to isolate them.	Avoidance of casual contact, long-term exclusion, and segregation. Problematic in social networking matters, for example employment hiring and promotion, educational opportunities and access to health care
3.	Segregation	Exclude members of a disadvantaged racial group from the allocation of resources and from access to institutions.	Denial of equal education, housing, employment, and health care.
4.	Physical Attacks	Racial groups that have been perpetrated by proponents of segregation.	Harm treatment, the expression of explicit prejudice.
5.	Extermination	Encompass histories of institutionalized prejudice and discrimination	Mass killing based on racial or ethnic animus do occur, difficult life conditions, and hostile acts.

After the researchers watched the movie and made an observation list that consist of types of discrimination that contained in the “The Help” movie, the researchers found 19 acts of discrimination based on the movie. The following table is to present the frequency of the types of discrimination that have been listed by the researchers:

Table 2 <The Frequency Types of Discrimination>

Types of Discrimination	Frequency
Verbal Antagonism (Antilocution)	3
Avoidance	3
Segregation	4
Physical Attacks	2
Extermination	-

2. Discussion

a. Verbal Antagonism



Data 1 <The Help_15:42_black people carry dangerous diseases>

The aforementioned data unequivocally validates the pervasive nature of discrimination against black people as depicted in the movie "The Help." An illustrative instance of such discrimination is articulated through the conceptualization of black individuals being unfairly associated with perilous diseases, exemplifying a form of verbal hostility and accusation prevalent in the narrative. "Before it becomes an excuse, skin color turns into a curse. It is not a natural inequality; rather, it is one made by humans. Even

though we may now be aware that there is no scientific foundation for race, we still act and think differently depending on the color of someone's skin. The fact that a person's skin tone does not determine their value is something we must keep researching and comprehending (Handa, 2021).



Data 2 <The Help_01:30:13_one of the maids was threatened by her white boss>

Data 2 further elucidated an additional manifestation of verbal antagonism, exemplified through the recounting of a harrowing narrative by one of the maids. In this distressing account, the maid revealed that she had been subjected to explicit threats by her white boss, who callously asserted that she would be fatally shot should she ever dare to trespass onto her white boss's property. This part had the deep-seated racial tensions and blatant acts of intimidation experienced by black individuals within the complex social dynamics portrayed in the narrative.



Data 3 <The Help_02:26:14_Minny was threatened by Hilly>

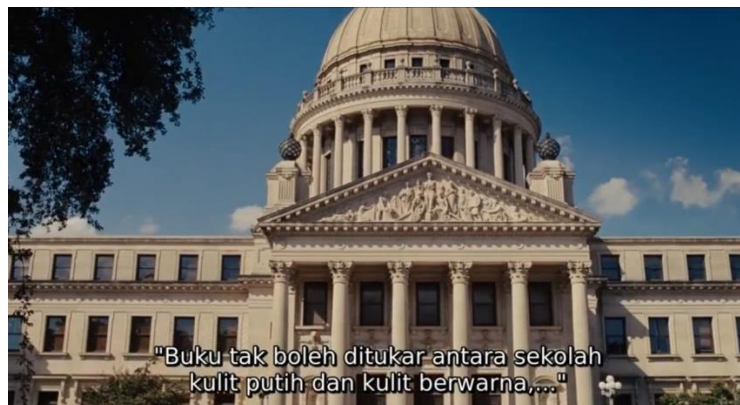
At the end of the sequence of events that show verbal hostility in the movie story, as shown by the third dataset (Data 3), a significant event occurs when Hilly visits Eugenia's home. Her main goal is to discuss the book that Eugenia wrote, which is a collection of testimonies from black maids who describe their experiences working for white families in Jackson, Mississippi. This confrontation adds another level of complexity to the interpersonal dynamics within the plot by focusing not only on Hilly's disapproval of Eugenia's book but also on the menacing act of threatening Minny, Hilly's former black maid who is no longer alive.

b. Avoidance



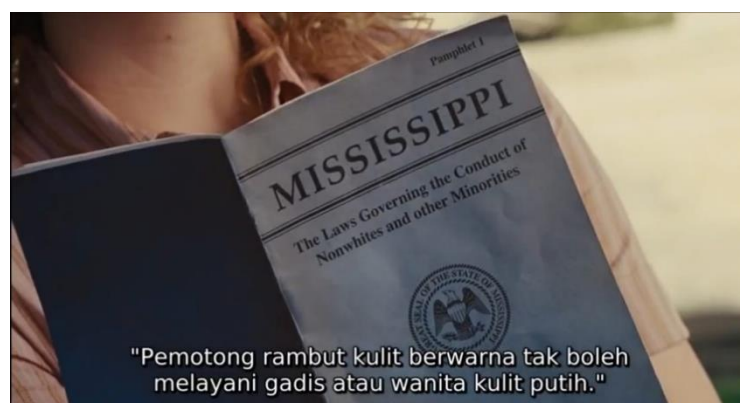
Data 1 <The Help_37:20_ white nurses forbidden to work at colored halls>

The first set of data that was previously mentioned clarifies how far to which white people intentionally avoid forming relationships with black people. As a result, segregation appears in a number of contexts, including the medical field, where white nurses are unable to interact with black patients. This situation is made worse by laws that require white nurses to be barred from entering or working in "colored halls," which emphasizes the institutionalized barriers and racial segregation that are present in the society that is being portrayed.



Data 2 <The Help_37:31_ white students have different books with black students>

Moreover, the latter data set explains the ways in which white people define their access to education differently than that of black people. This revelation implies that white students are given a different set of educational resources, such as different sets of books, and that this creates an environment in which the educational materials assigned to white students and those designated for their black counterparts are noticeably non-interchangeable.



Data 3 <The Help_37:43_ colored beauty parlor cannot handle white people>

The most recent avoidance dataset offers another striking illustration of the degree to which white people purposefully avoid engaging with their black counterparts. In this particular dataset, an interesting example occurs when Skeeter (Eugenia) reads a book that is filled with laws that discriminate against people of color. This literary investigation exposes a harsh reality in which black salons are prohibited from attending to the hairdressing needs of white people, and the opposite circumstance is likewise restricted. Within the context of the story, the deeply embedded and systemic patterns of racial segregation and exclusion that permeate the social fabric are deftly revealed.

c. Segregation



Data1 <The Help_4:44_colored bathroom>

In the first set of data, an obvious example shows how white people are frequently denied fair access to a variety of amenities, including public spaces. The creation of a separate "colored" restroom that is only used by people of African American descent highlights this shocking inequality and provides concrete proof of the discriminatory actions taken by white people to prevent equal access.



Data2 <The Help_1:09:15_colored hospital>

The existence of distinct hospitals earmarked exclusively for Black individuals—often referred to as "colored" hospitals—provides strong evidence of the systemic segregation within the healthcare industry, as revealed by the second set of data. This discovery reinforces the evidence that white people, as the majority social group, deliberately maintained and enforced unequal access to healthcare resources, compounding the severe differences in medical care that are based on racial differences.



Data3 <The Help_1:40:55_'white only' cab>

A notable observation is the presence of a "white only" taxi, indicating that access to this specific taxi service is restricted to individuals of white ethnicity, thereby categorically excluding black people. This case provides a powerful illustration of the overt denial of equality that occurs in the context of public transportation, where discriminatory practices conflict with the values of inclusivity and equitable access.



Data 4 <The Help_15:55_colored bathroom>

Another strong illustration of segregation in the film is revealed in the most recent data set. This case explores the establishment of an additional segregated area that is reserved for Black people. The story begins with a scene that states unequivocally that white people should use a different bathroom, which is commonly referred to as the "colored" bathroom. This reinforces the deeply ingrained racial divide, especially when considering the experience of the black maid. This highlights how systemic and institutionalized discrimination is portrayed in the movie, underscoring the stark reality of racial inequality as it is portrayed in the storyline.

d. Physical Attacks



Data 1<The Help_1:28:27_cops attacked Gretchen the black maid>

The scene that is portrayed in it tells a disturbing story about Gretchen, the black maid, being physically abused. It is a clear example of social injustice. The fundamental cause of this heinous event is Gretchen's desperate theft of Hilly's jewel, which was motivated by a lack of other options and a sense of necessity. After Hilly learns of the theft, the series of events intensifies. She uses her power to send law enforcement agents to arrest Gretchen. Fearing that she would be apprehended, Gretchen makes a desperate attempt to break free from the authorities, only to be brutally thrashed in the process, highlighting the terrible costs that those caught in the complex web of systematic injustice must pay.



Data 2 <The Help_1:21:19_a black person got shot>

The data that follows reveals another upsetting instance of a physical attack that targets Black people. In particular, what happened was that Aibileen got on a bus and the driver told her to get off and walk the rest of the way. This cold-blooded order was given on the grounds that a tragic incident had involved the shooting of a Black individual nearby, which exposed the deeply embedded racial prejudice that was demonstrated by discriminatory practices and the denial of equal treatment. "The entire white world cheers if any white man in the world declares, "Give me liberty or give me death." When a black man says the exact same thing, word for word, he is labeled as a criminal and treated as such. Every effort is made to expose this bad apple so that future generations won't be like him" – James Baldwin (Kaufman, 2020).

The data that has been collected shows the oppression contained in the film *The Help*, especially the behavior of white employers who do not give freedom to black maids. This includes both speech and action oppression. Examples of oppression in terms of speech can be seen from the actions of employers offending them in front or behind, giving nicknames to maids, and swearing. Verbal aggressiveness is a form of violence in communication. The purpose of verbal aggression is to attack someone's impression or self-concept. Verbal aggression attacks another's character, background, abilities, physical appearance, and the like (Hocker & Wilmot, 2017).

According to (Kusumawati, 2016), "Nonverbal Communication" is a message packaged in a form without words. Nonverbal communication such as bulging eyes can be interpreted as anger. Bullying in the form of this form can be represented through eye movements, gestures, tone of voice, glaring eyes, ignoring speech, and forced dismissal because the maid used the employer's toilet, which is happened during the movie.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the issues of racism and discrimination depicted and embedded in the movie "The Help" sustain societal divisions and structural injustices. The Social Identity Theory developed by Gordon Allport provides important insights into the types of prejudice by highlighting the conflicts of discrimination and racism that also contained in this movie. Based on his theory, the researchers have found 12 acts of discrimination that has been divided into 4 four types such as verbal antagonism, avoidance, segregation, and physical attack. The researchers found none of acts or scene that showed the last type of Allport's theory, which is extermination.

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