

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The term "feminism" may be unfamiliar to some people, leaving them wondering about its purpose and goals. According to Cambridge Dictionary, feminism defined as the belief that women should be allowed to the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way. Unfortunately, there are some misunderstanding surrounding feminisms, which sometimes leads to the belief that feminists hold hostility towards men or stand in opposition to their spouses.

One notable perspective within feminism is Black feminism, which specifically addresses the distinct experiences and challenges encountered by Black women within the broader feminist discourse. Black feminism acknowledges and confronts the intersecting forms of oppression, including racism and sexism that Black women encounter in society. According to bell hooks, a black women's activist, apart from problems originating from the patriarchal system, women experience discrimination from sexism, racism and classism fostered by Western culture. In her book entitled *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, hooks emphasizes the need for feminist movements to move beyond mere awareness-raising and towards a deeper understanding of the structural forces against inequality. She argues that while feminism has been effective in raising awareness about gender-based oppression and discrimination, it fails to adequately address broader systemic problems such as capitalism, the

exploitation of women workers, and interconnected forms of oppression such as racism and imperialism. (1984:154).

The movie *Hidden Figures* (2016) directed by Theodore Melfi was based on the historical account of NASA's successful space journey. A group of black African-American female mathematicians are highlighted in this movie, which is significant in NASA history. A group of untapped and mathematically talented African American women has been found by NASA. The movie presents Kathrine Goble Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson as three examples of black women. They greatly contribute to the launch of America's spacecraft in 1961 under the leadership of NASA. Although they encountered a number of difficulties, they made a significant contribution to the achievement of the space program. However, they are able to accomplish incredible feats because of their dedication and hidden intelligence.

According to the writer, *Hidden Figures* is an outstanding work because of the uplifting stories of its hidden figures, which give the detail of challenges experienced by African-American women whose existence in the United States is deemed to be a minority. In spite of their circumstances, they continued to fight for equality and the abolition of racism and sexism. These theories encouraged the author to discover more about Black feminism. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the portrayal of intersectionality and development of black feminism within the main female characters depicted in the movie *Hidden Figures* (2016). The choice of this film as the subject of study is justified by its basis on true

events and its adaptation from a famous novel of the same title by Margot Lee Shetterly.

1.2 Research Problems

Based on the background of the study, this thesis discusses the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of the *Hidden Figures* movie. The writer formulates it in 2 research question.

1. How do intersections occur in the NASA work environment and in the state of Virginia that are perceived by black women in the film *Hidden Figures*?
2. How are the three main characters struggle to finally be categorized as black feminists in the film *Hidden Figures*?

1.3 Objective of the Study

The objectives of the study are the following:

1. To elaborate on the intersections experienced by the main female characters in the film *Hidden Figures*.
2. To identify the act of black feminism by the main female characters in the film *Hidden Figures*.

1.4 Previous Study

Hidden Figures is a movie directed by Theodore Melfi in 2016, adapted from the novel *Hidden Figures* which tells the true story of black female mathematicians who work at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and are able to succeed in the mission of sending humans to space

despite the pressure of racism and sexism. In analyzing this film, the writer studies several papers related to this topic.

First, in Erinda Wanti's analysis in her undergraduate thesis in 2018 entitled *White Savior in Melfi's Hidden Figure* explores how racism in NASA is depicted not only through overt violence and segregation but also through the subtler white savior narrative, perpetuating notions of white superiority and privilege. The film portrays the new racism, where Black people start receiving privileges or kindness from Whites.

Second, in a study by Farisa Najmi Fauziah from Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah in 2019, the film *Hidden Figures* was analyzed to understand the challenges faced by black women, particularly within NASA. Using the concepts of multiple jeopardy and multiple consciousness, the study revealed how characters like Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson faced discrimination based on race and gender.

Next, the third study by Andrianto, Ramadhan, and Gogani (2022), they investigated the portrayal of Black and liberal feminist movements in Theodore Melfi's film *Hidden Figures*. Through qualitative analysis, they explored how the movie addressed racism, sexism, and societal inequalities faced by Black women, particularly in the workplace like NASA during the Space Race era.

The fourth research analyzed the film *Hidden Figures* from a semantic perspective, conducted by Tasya Putri and Mia Rahmawati Yuwita from Universitas Komputer Indonesia. The results of the study concluded that the term

"computer" in the film has a broader meaning than its conventional definition. It referring to someone who assists in calculations and is involved in space missions.

The fifth study entitled *Representasi kekerasan simbolik dalam film Hidden Figures* by Wijaya, Aritonang, and Wahjudianata, have looked at how symbolic violence appears in *Hidden Figures*. They used qualitative methods and John Fiske's TV semiotics to see how it's shown in the characters' actions, especially regarding race, gender, and work. These studies found that symbolic violence is a big part of the story, showing the challenges African American women faced in the 1940s and how they pushed back against society's limits.

The sixth study explored Margot Lee Shetterly's novel *Hidden Figures* from a feminist perspective written by Jaha and Darmastuti from Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa. Their research aimed to uncover the gender biases experienced by women in the book and to delve into its feminist themes. Through qualitative analysis, they identified five forms of discrimination encountered by women in the narrative, including marginalization and stereotyping.

The seventh study entitled *Racial and Gender Discrimination in the Workplace: A Critical Analysis of Social Inequality in Margot Lee Shetterly's Hidden Figures* by Citra Suhadi, Ceysi Wuntu, and Clara Mamentu from State University of Manado provided a thorough examination of the themes of racial and gender discrimination portrayed in Margot Lee Shetterly's novel. Through qualitative textual analysis, the research reveals patterns of social inequality experienced by African American women in the workplace during the 1940s and

1950s. It highlights instances of limited access to education, unfair treatment in welfare benefits, and gender biases in hiring and promotion.

The eighth study entitled *African-American Women's Power in Margot Lee Shetterly's Hidden Figures* by Rumbayan and Lolowang from the Manado State University, explores the portrayal of African-American women's power in Shetterly's novel. Focusing on their resilience and racial discrimination in the 1940s, the research investigates how the characters navigate educational and workplace challenges imposed by limitations, prohibitions, and segregation. Despite encountering severe discrimination, these women demonstrate bravery, determination, and self-defense, challenging societal norms and laying the groundwork for future generations.

Then, the ninth previous study was written by Maya Hermawati from Darma Persada University. She conducted a study analyzing the movie script of *Hidden Figures* using both intrinsic and extrinsic approaches. The study concluded that the intrinsic approach effectively revealed the character traits of the main characters Katherine, Mary, and Dorothy, highlighting their bravery and resilience. Additionally, it found that racial discrimination, depicted through institutional and individual discrimination, was prevalent not only at NASA but also in various other settings in America.

Finally, the last research written by Fatmasari and Gustina from Peradaban University examined the women language used by female characters in the movie script of *Hidden Figures*, focusing on its features and functions. Women's language features include lexical hedges, tag questions, rising intonation on

declaratives, empty adjectives, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, super polite forms, avoidance of strong swear words, and emphatic stress. Among these, intensifiers are the most dominant. The language functions observed are referential, emotive, and conative. Women tend to use more language features compared to men, reflecting social expectations and gender differences.

In this research thesis, the writer will conduct a detailed analysis of the oppression faced by the main female characters using the theory of intersectionality. By applying this theory, the study aims to understand how multiple factors, such as race, gender, and socio-economic status intersect to shape the experiences of these characters. Additionally, the study will identify the behaviors exhibited by the characters that align with the principles of black feminism.

1.5 Scope of the Study

Scope of the study limits the discussion of this research thesis. The writer will make a clear border to keep focusing on the direction of research. The writer will analyze some intrinsic element of the movie such as characters, settings, conflicts, and cinematography. The writer also analyzes the extrinsic elements that focus to the feminism reflected in the film *Hidden Figures* by elaborate the intersectionality and black feminism reflected in the movie.

1.6 Writing Organization

The organization of this thesis is divided into four chapters:

Chapter I: INTRODUCTION

This chapter is composed of the background of the study, research problems, objective of the study, previous study, scope of the study, and organization of the study.

Chapter II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This chapter consists of theoretical frameworks and research methods that can be used as guidance and references for analyzing the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects.

Chapter III: RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter contains the data on the intrinsic aspects including characters, settings and conflicts. For the extrinsic aspect, the writer will analyze the intersectionality experienced by Black women and identify the Black feminists' characteristics that are reflected in the main female characters.

Chapter IV: CONCLUSION

The last part is the conclusion where the whole of the discussion and analysis is put together into summary, containing the focus of the study.