

Article

Black Feminist Resistance in *Hidden Figures* (2016) Film: Applying Patricia Hill Collins' Theory

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ABSTRACT ENGLISH:

This research analyzes feminist values in *Hidden Figures* (2016), a film portraying the experiences of three African American women—Katherine G. Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson—who contributed significantly to NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) during the 1960s. Despite their achievements, these women faced systematic discrimination based on both race and gender. This research aims to identify feminist values within the film through the lens of Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Theory*, supplemented by a post-nationalist theory. Post-nationalist theory helps reinterpret American identity by centering the voices of marginalized groups, particularly Black women, whose contributions are frequently overlooked in mainstream narratives. A qualitative method is used, the research focuses on key scenes, dialogues, and character development. The analysis reveals core feminist values such as self-definition, independence, solidarity, and resistance to oppression. These values reflect how Black women in the movie challenge racial and gender-based inequalities while asserting their identity and agency. The findings show that *Hidden Figures* not only celebrates individual empowerment but also promotes a broader understanding of equality and social justice. This research contributes to feminist and cultural studies by showing how movies can be a powerful tool for representing underrepresented voices and reshaping national identity through inclusive narratives.

Keywords: Black Feminist Theory, Film, *Hidden Figures*, Black women, Women's empowerment.

ABSTRACT INDONESIAN:

Penelitian ini menganalisis nilai-nilai feminis dalam film *Hidden Figures* (2016), yang menggambarkan pengalaman tiga perempuan Afrika-Amerika, yaitu Katherine G. Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, dan Mary Jackson, yang memberikan kontribusi signifikan bagi NASA (*National Aeronautics and Space Administration*) pada tahun 1960-an. Meskipun telah meraih berbagai prestasi, mereka tetap menghadapi diskriminasi berdasarkan ras dan gender. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi nilai-nilai feminis dalam film tersebut menggunakan Teori Feminis Hitam karya Patricia Hill Collins, yang didukung oleh teori pasca-nasionalis. Teori pasca-nasionalis membantu menafsirkan kembali identitas Amerika dengan memusatkan suara kelompok-kelompok yang terpinggirkan, terutama wanita kulit hitam, yang kontribusinya sering diabaikan dalam narasi arus utama. Metode kualitatif digunakan, dengan fokus pada adegan, dialog, dan pengembangan karakter. Analisis mengungkapkan nilai-nilai feminis inti seperti penentuan diri, kemandirian, solidaritas, dan perlawanan terhadap penindasan. Nilai-nilai ini mencerminkan bagaimana perempuan kulit hitam dalam film tersebut menantang ketidaksetaraan rasial dan gender sambil menegaskan identitas dan otonomi mereka. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa *Hidden Figures* tidak hanya merayakan pemberdayaan individu, tetapi juga mempromosikan pemahaman yang lebih luas tentang kesetaraan dan keadilan sosial. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada studi feminis dan budaya dengan menunjukkan bagaimana film dapat menjadi alat yang ampuh untuk mewakili suara-suara yang kurang terwakili dan membentuk kembali identitas nasional melalui narasi yang inklusif.

Kata Kunci: Teori Feminisme Kulit Hitam, Film, *Hidden Figures*, Perempuan Kulit Hitam, Pemberdayaan perempuan.

Introduction

All human beings are born with equal dignity and fundamental rights regardless of gender, race, or social background. Every person is born with the same basic rights. Unlike gods, animals, or robots, humans have emotions, flaws, and other human characteristics (Gender, 2024; Huizinga, 1918; Margolis, 1955). This means that both men and women have equal rights and are created equally. One of the most important human rights is the full and equal participation of women in all areas of society. However, in many parts of the world, women and girls are still underrepresented. This happens in the workplace, entertainment, and politics (Santonniccolo et al., 2023; Women, 2020). Patriarchal systems and traditions often harm women and girls by affecting their personal lives, financial stability, and future opportunities (Zulia & Rahman, 2024). These effects also impact their families and communities. To build a better and more equal future, no one should be left behind. In a survey by the Gallup Center for Black Voices, one in four Black employees (24%) said they experienced discrimination at work in the past year. Most said this happened because of their race or ethnicity (Lloyd, 2021).

Films are not only made to entertain but also to reflect society and educate viewers. As a form of mass media, movies have a strong artistic impact because they combine language, music, visuals, and actions to tell stories (Danesi, 2011; Klevan & Clayton, 2011). Films and visual media do not merely reflect reality but actively construct social meanings and cultural identities. Hall (1997) explains that representation shapes how audiences understand race, gender, and power relations in society. Similarly, Mulvey (2013) argues that cinema often reproduces dominant ideological perspectives through visual narratives and character positioning. Movie stories often include messages or ideas that are connected to real social issues. These messages can be direct or hidden and are presented in a way that makes people think in new ways (Mudjiono, 2011). Movies can influence how people think, feel, and act in different social groups. They show how society changes over time (Kubrak, 2020; Sobur, 2004). Watching movies is important because they are a big part of daily life and communication. Audiences often learn something from movies. The main goal of movies as media is to share messages with the public. One important message often found in movies is feminism, which is a movement that influences the way people think (Aldo et al., 2023).

Theodore Melfi directed the 2016 movie entitled *Hidden Figures*. This movie was based on the biography *Hidden Figures: The American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Who Helped Win the Space Race*, written by Margot Lee Shetterly in 2010 and published in September 2016. The movie tells an important but often overlooked part of NASA's history. Its main purpose is to highlight the people who were not recognized for their role in the "Friendship 7" mission. The story focuses on three African American women, Katherine G. Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson, who worked as human calculators and played a key role in launching astronaut John Glenn into orbit. At that time, the segregation in the United States kept Black women and white men apart. The women faced discrimination and were looked down upon by their white co-workers. Because of their race and gender, their talents were not fully appreciated. Today, their contributions are honored, and their names are remembered as American heroes (Andrianto et al., 2022; Chusna & Panuntun, 2021; Puspita & Ramdhani, 2022).

Feminism is a social, political, and cultural movement that supports women's rights and gender equality in many areas, such as voting, workplace equality, and ending gender discrimination (Ilaa, 2021; Sagita et al., 2024). However, a general feminist perspective is not enough to fully understand the challenges faced by Black women. Black feminist scholars argue that Black women experience overlapping systems of oppression based on race, gender, and class, which cannot be fully explained through mainstream feminist approaches alone. Kimberlé Crenshaw describes this condition through the concept of intersectionality, emphasizing how multiple forms of discrimination interact simultaneously (Crenshaw, 2013). Similarly, Hooks (2000) explains that Black women's experiences have historically been marginalized both in feminist discourse and in racial justice movements. To better explain their experiences, feminism also looks at how racism and sexism are connected. This part of the movement works to fight both racial and gender injustice. Many American movies show the struggles of certain groups against inequality and unfair treatment. Without ignoring the cultural diversity in the United States, Black feminism in American movies focuses on the unique problems that Black women face and gives them a platform to express their hopes and experiences (Collins, 2022).

In this study, the researcher reviews several previous studies. Reviewing the existing literature, the researcher aims to highlight the gaps and limitations in current knowledge. First, Andrianto et al. (2022), their paper aims to discover what liberal feminism represents in *Hidden Figures*. The results show that the Black community faces particularly pertinent issues today, such as workplace discernment and the involvement of getting their accomplishments unnoticed in the indulgence of their white counterparts. Meanwhile, Amanda's et al. (2024) research article is based on descriptive analysis methods. Descriptive analysis is used to reveal the representation of gender inequality, racial injustice, and Black women's feminism in *Hidden Figures* by examining the characters' interactions, dialogue, and narrative choices. Third, Eliyana et al. (2021) aimed to describe the types of discrimination and explain their impacts on Black female characters. The researcher used qualitative research as the method and applied feminist literary criticism as the research approach. Chusna and Panuntun (2021) aimed to describe the aspect of patriarchal culture in the *Hidden Figures* movie. The researcher used descriptive qualitative research as the design of this research. The last is the study from Maryam and Astuty (2022), the objectives of this research are to find gender inequality and to show what factors cause gender inequality in the "*Hidden Figures*" movie. This research used the descriptive qualitative method.

Based on the previous research above, the writer decided that this research aims to identify feminist values in the movie *Hidden Figures* using Patricia Hill's *Black feminist theory*. Black Feminist theory provides an important framework for understanding the experiences of African American women in society. Collins argues that Black women experience interconnected forms of oppression caused by racism, sexism, and class inequality. Unlike mainstream feminism, which often centers white women's experiences, Black feminist thought developed as a response to the exclusion of Black women's voices within traditional feminist theory and civil rights discourse. Davis (2011) argues that race, gender, and class oppression are interconnected structures that shape Black women's social realities. King (2016) further describes this condition as "multiple jeopardy," where Black women face

overlapping systems of inequality simultaneously. Black feminist thought emphasizes the voices, struggles, and lived realities of Black women. According to Collins (2000), Black women develop a unique standpoint through their social experiences, allowing them to challenge dominant systems of power and create their own definitions of identity, empowerment, and resistance.

Collins also explains that Black women's empowerment is closely related to self-definition, self-respect, independence, solidarity, and resistance against oppression. These concepts become important tools for understanding how Black women survive and challenge discrimination in everyday life. According to Collins (2022), Black feminist theory also functions as a form of resistance knowledge that challenges dominant ideologies and empowers marginalized communities through collective awareness and solidarity. In the context of *Hidden Figures*, the theory helps explain how Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson resist racial and gender discrimination within NASA's segregated work environment. Their struggles demonstrate that Black women are not passive victims but active agents who challenge injustice through education, professionalism, solidarity, and determination.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to feminist and cultural studies, especially in examining how films represent marginalized voices and reconstruct American identity from the perspective of Black women. This study also highlights how *Hidden Figures* functions not only as entertainment but also as a cultural text that educates audiences about racial and gender inequality during the 1960s in the United States. By applying Collins' Black Feminist Thought, this research provides a deeper understanding of how Black women's experiences are represented in film and how these representations contribute to discussions about equality, empowerment, and social justice. Based on the explanation above, this research addresses the following research questions:

1. How are feminist values represented in *Hidden Figures* (2016)?
2. How does Patricia Hill Collins' Black Feminist Theory explain the experiences of the Black female characters in *Hidden Figures*?
3. How does the movie represent resistance against racial and gender discrimination through its female characters?

Method

This research employs a qualitative research methodology to examine feminist values represented in *Hidden Figures* (2016). Unlike quantitative research, which seeks generalizable findings, qualitative methods emphasize an in-depth understanding of specific aspects of a subject. As Rahmiaty et al (2022) note, qualitative research assumes that the nature of one problem differs from another, thus requiring context-specific analytical tools. This approach involves detailed case-by-case examination to uncover deeper insights. According to Semiawan (2010, p. 1), the aim of qualitative research is to achieve a profound understanding of symptoms, issues, truths, or realities within social life. The primary data source in this study is the movie *Hidden Figures*, with particular attention to its visual

imagery, dialogues, and scenes. These are supported by secondary sources such as academic journals, books, and other relevant literature.

The analysis is conducted through a post-nationalist lens, which reinterprets American identity by amplifying the voices of minority and marginalized groups. Rowe (2002) argues that American identity must be reconsidered within a global framework, incorporating the lived experiences of ethnic minorities, African Americans, women, and other historically marginalized populations. This perspective challenges dominant narratives that prioritize white, mainstream American norms, instead highlighting alternative viewpoints that offer a more inclusive understanding of national identity and social struggles.

To guide the analysis, this research applies Collins' *Black Feminist Theory*. This theory focuses on the unique experiences of Black women, who often face the combined effects of racism, sexism, and classism. Collins argues that Black women develop a distinct standpoint shaped by their struggle against multiple forms of oppression. Her theory highlights five key concepts: (1) the importance of relationships among Black women; (2) the value of self-definition; (3) respect and self-esteem; (4) independence and self-reliance; and (5) transformation through awareness and resistance. These ideas help explain how the characters in *Hidden Figures* demonstrate feminist values through their words, actions, and personal growth. This theoretical lens also challenges dominant narratives and allows the researcher to center the voices and experiences of Black women in American society and history.

This research also considers ethical aspects related to the representation of marginalized groups and historical figures. Since *Hidden Figures* is based on the real experiences of African-American women at NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration), the analysis is conducted respectfully and carefully to avoid misrepresentation or oversimplification of racial and gender issues. The researcher acknowledges the historical significance of the struggles faced by Black women during segregation in the United States and aims to present the analysis in a way that values their contributions and lived experiences. In addition, the researcher ensures that all secondary sources are properly cited to maintain academic integrity and avoid plagiarism.

Result and Discussion

This discussion section presents the findings of the research based on the three research questions formulated in the introduction. Using Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Theory* as the primary theoretical framework, the analysis focuses on how feminist values are represented in *Hidden Figures* (2016), how the experiences of Black female characters reflect Black feminist concepts, and how the movie portrays resistance against racial and gender discrimination. The findings reveal that the movie strongly represents feminist values such as solidarity among Black women, self-definition, self-respect, independence, empowerment, awareness, and resistance toward oppression. These values are reflected through the actions, dialogues, and experiences of Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson throughout the movie.

The Feminist Values in *Hidden Figures* movie

To examine the goals of this study, the researcher primarily employs a theory of Black feminism from Patricia Hill Collins' book *Black Feminist Thought*. Because the movie demands that women's equality be the subject of analysis, this theory is applied to uncover the feminist values in *Hidden Figures*. According to this theory, women should not be separated based on their race or ethnicity.

The Relationships Among Black Women

Hidden Figures shows how African American women support one another through close, respectful, and empowering relationships. The characters in the movie, Katherine Goble, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson, encourage each other in their daily lives and careers. Their bond shows how deeply they value each other's humanity, intelligence, and presence. These strong connections are not only personal but also a source of strength and empowerment for Black women as a group. This type of relationship is seen clearly in a scene where Katherine Goble defends the abilities of her fellow Black women to Colonel Jim Johnson. When he questions her role at NASA with a sexist and dismissive tone, Katherine quickly stands up for herself and her colleagues.



Figure 1. Mr. Johnson speaks with Katherine.

Mr. Jim Johnson : “Pastor mentioned you're a computer at NASA. (LAUGHING)
That's pretty heady stuff.”

Katherine : “There are 20 bright, highly capable Negro women in the West
Computing Group. And we're proud to be doing our part for the
country.”

(*Hidden Figures*, 36:12–37:23)

In this moment, Katherine not only challenges the disrespect in Johnson's comment, but she also proudly affirms the value and competence of Black women in science and technology. This is an example of what [Collins \(2000\)](#) calls the importance of relationships among Black women, which often develop through bonds of family, friendship, and shared struggle. These relationships are built through everyday acts of care and mutual support and serve as a foundation for empowerment.

Collins also explains that Black solidarity, the idea that Black people should support each other because of their shared experiences, has long been central to Black women's political and social thought. In *Hidden Figures*, this solidarity is shown through the women's teamwork and emotional support, which helps them succeed despite the racism and sexism they face. By encouraging one another, they resist oppression and create a space where their worth and dignity are affirmed.

Awareness as an Area of Liberty

To establish specific views about the rights for attaining equality and combating the concepts of male domination, racial hierarchy, and economic hierarchy, Black feminists essentially need to raise awareness. The United States has looked into Black women's secret realm of consciousness. The efforts of Black women intellectuals enable African American women to transcend and overcome the intertwined oppression of sexuality, gender, race, and class (Collins, 2000, p. 98). Collins claims that by giving African-American women intellectuals new perspectives and experiences, Black Solidarity is one of the websites that provide a safe space to advance African American thought in day-to-day life. She claims that the concepts that are established in the safe space include the significance of self-definition, self-reliance, and independence, self-valuation and respect, self-change, and personal empowerment.

The Value of Self-Definition

Self-definition is an important part of developing self-awareness and self-worth. According to Collins (2000), self-definition is a key step in both personal and community empowerment. It helps African American women understand how racism, sexism, and classism have affected their lives and identities. In the scene below, Mary expresses her doubts.



Figure 2. Mr. Zielinski tries to convince Mary to become an engineer.

More importantly, it allows them to speak for themselves and reject harmful stereotypes that society places on them. This idea of self-definition is clearly shown in the character of Mary Jackson in *Hidden Figures*. Mary is given the chance to apply for an engineering training program recommended by Mr. Zielinski, the head engineer. Although she

is qualified, Mary hesitates because she knows that her race and gender might make it difficult for her to be accepted.

- Mr. Zielinski : “Mary, a person with an engineer’s mind should be an engineer. You can’t be a computer the rest of your life.”
- Mary : “Mr. Zielinski, I’m a Negro woman. I’m not gonna entertain the impossible.”
- Mr. Zielinski : “Let me ask you... if you were a white male, would you wish to be an engineer?”
- Mary : “I wouldn't have to. I'd already be one.”

(Hidden Figures, 15:16–15:46)

Mary's words show that she understands how race and gender limit her opportunities. At the same time, her awareness of these limits is the first step toward changing them. This is what Collins (2000, pp. 113–114) means when she says that self-definition helps Black women reflect on their experiences and resist oppression. Instead of letting society define who she is, Mary begins to shape her own future by confronting the barriers that hold her back. Self-definition continues to be a powerful way for Black women to build confidence and challenge social injustice in professional spaces (Lewis, 2022; Harris-Perry, 2020). Mary’s journey in the movie is not just about becoming an engineer; it is also about learning to believe in her own worth, despite the limitations others place on her.

Respect and Self-Esteem

African American women are often disrespected and underestimated, not only by white people but also by Black men, because of their low position in the social hierarchy. Black feminist thought challenges this treatment by encouraging Black women to recognize their own worth, even when society tries to ignore or reject them. Collins (2000) argues that Black women must build self-esteem by valuing and respecting themselves, especially when others do not. This is an important part of Black feminism, which believes that Black women are valuable and deserve to have their needs recognized and respected (Collins, 2000, p. 116).



Figure 3. Katherine speaks with Mr. Jim Johnson.

- Mr. Johnson : “They let women handle that sort of... Uh... That’s not what I mean.”
- Katherine : “What do you mean?”

Mr. Johnson: "I'm just surprised that something so... taxing... Mmm-hmm."

Katherine : "Mr. Johnson. If I were you, I'd quit talking right now."

Mr. Johnson : "I didn't mean no disrespect."

Katherine : "I will have you know I was the first Negro female student at West Virginia University Graduate School. On any given day I analyze the manometer levels for air displacement, friction, and velocity, and compute over 10,000 calculations by cosine, square root, and lately, analytic geometry. By hand."

(*Hidden Figures*, 36:28–37:14)

This idea is clearly shown in *Hidden Figures* through the character of Katherine Goble. After church one Sunday, she talks to Colonel Jim Johnson about her work at NASA. Johnson responds with surprise and doubt, revealing that he does not take Katherine's job or abilities seriously. His comments reflect both sexism and a lack of respect for her as a professional. Katherine, however, does not stay silent. She confidently defends her position and her accomplishments. In this scene, Katherine refuses to let Jim Johnson's assumptions define her. Instead, she asserts her intelligence, experience, and achievements. This is a strong example of self-definition and self-respect as core values in Black feminist theory. Even though she is not treated with dignity at first, she demands it. As Collins explains, developing self-esteem and insisting on respect are powerful ways that African American women resist the systems that try to devalue them (Collins, 2000).

Independence and Self-Reliance

African American women are often seen as strong and independent, a trait that comes both from their personal strength and the difficult environments they have faced. According to Collins (2000), this independent spirit is a key part of Black feminist thought. Collins explains that Black women's self-reliance is not only a response to oppression but also a powerful way to challenge traditional ideas of femininity and gender roles (p. 116). Their determination to survive and succeed helps them care for themselves, their families, and their communities (Collins, 2000, p. 157).

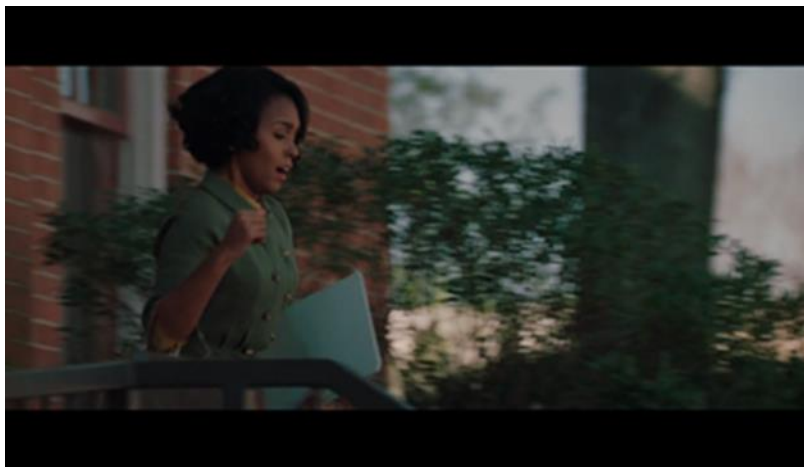


Figure 4. Mary ran happily after the court allowed her to continue her education.

Judge : “What’s the point?”

Mary : “The point is, Your Honor, no Negro woman in the state of Virginia has ever attended an all-white high school. It’s unheard of.”

Judge : “Yes. Unheard of.”

Mary : “And before Alan Shepard sat on top of a rocket, no other American had ever touched space. And now, he will forever be remembered as the US Navy man from New Hampshire, the first to touch the stars. And I, sir, I plan on being an engineer at NASA, but I can’t do that without taking them classes at that all-white high school. And I can’t change the color of my skin. So, I have no choice but to be the first. Which I can’t do without you, sir. Your Honor, out of all the cases you’re gonna hear today, which one is gonna matter a hundred years from now? Which one is gonna make you the first?”

Judge : “(Chuckles) Only the night classes, Mrs. Jackson.”

(*Hidden Figures*, 1:12:01–1:13:13)

In *Hidden Figures*, the character of Mary Jackson clearly represents this kind of independence. Mary wants to become an engineer at NASA, but to qualify, she must take graduate engineering classes, which are only offered at a whites-only school. Although state law prevents Black women from attending this school, Mary refuses to give up. Instead, she takes her case to court and argues for her right to an education. This moment shows her courage and self-belief. This powerful courtroom scene shows Mary’s self-reliance, as she speaks for herself and demands the chance to reach her goals. Instead of waiting for others to help her, she takes control of her own future. Mary’s success not only breaks racial and gender barriers but also inspires other Black women to fight for their dreams, even when the odds are against them. As Collins (2000) explains, this kind of independence is both a personal strength and a form of resistance against the systems that try to limit Black women’s potential.

Self, Transformation, and Individual Empowerment

Black feminist theory emphasizes how important it is for African American women to recognize the injustice and inequality around them. According to Collins (2000), when Black women become aware of these problems, they are more likely to take action either by improving the situation or by transforming themselves. This awareness leads to self-empowerment, where women develop the strength to change their own lives and influence the lives of others. However, Collins also notes that true empowerment begins with a commitment to self-awareness and a shift in thinking, or what she calls a transformation of consciousness.

In *Hidden Figures*, Mary Jackson is a strong example of this transformation. Despite the barriers she faces as a Black woman in a white male-dominated field, she refuses to give up on her dream of becoming an engineer. In one scene, her husband Levi expresses doubt about her ambitions, using both racial and gender-based arguments to discourage her. Instead of agreeing with his view, Mary pushes back and defends her vision for the future:



Figure 5. Levi argues with Mary.

Levi : “I don't understand it.”

Mary : “I don't wanna talk about this again, okay?”

Levi : “A female engineer? We're Negro, baby. Ain't no such thing. Understand it.”

Mary : “It's not like that there, Levi.”

Levi : “You can't apply for freedom. Freedom is never granted to the oppressed. It's got to be demanded. Taken.”

Mary : “Stop quoting your slogans at me. There is more than one way to achieve something. You better settle down, Levi Jackson. Unless you want this female's mind, right here, in front of everybody.”

Levi : “All I'm saying... don't play the fool. I don't wanna see you get hurt. NASA's never ever given you guys your due. Having a couple of extra degrees ain't gonna change that. Civil rights, ain't always civil.”

(Hidden Figures, 33:35–34:40)

This scene shows how Mary refuses to let her husband's doubts become her own. Levi's words reflect a harsh truth about racial injustice, but Mary chooses a different path, one based on hope, action, and belief in herself. Rather than waiting for change to happen through protest alone, she focuses on education and personal advancement. This reflects Collins' idea that self-awareness can lead to transformation and empowerment. Mary's determination to succeed becomes a form of resistance and self-liberation. Through her actions, she proves that there is more than one way to challenge injustice and that believing in one's own worth is a powerful starting point.

The Resistance of Black Women

Black women often face discrimination, pressure, and negative stereotypes, which push them to fight for equality and improve their lives. According to Collins (2000), this struggle is an important part of self-definition, where Black women recognize their worth and resist the way society tries to define them. In the movie *Hidden Figures*, this resistance is clearly shown through Katherine Goble's experience with racism and workplace inequality. Although she is highly skilled and temporarily assigned to NASA's Space Task Group, she is still treated

unfairly. She must walk half a mile to the only restroom available to Black women, wasting time and energy every day. Her colleagues and supervisors are unaware of this burden until Mr. Harrison confronts her for “disappearing” during work hours. Katherine finally speaks out.

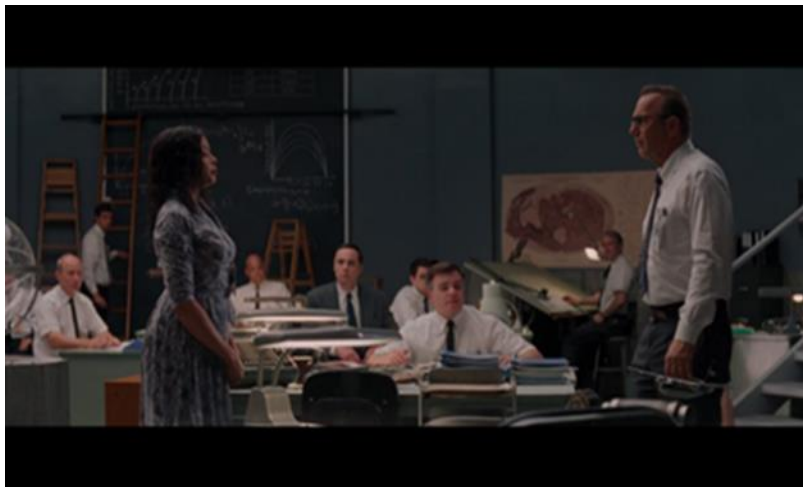


Figure 6. Mr. Harrison scolds Katherine for always disappearing to go to the restroom.

Mr. Harrison : “Where the hell have you been?... Now where the hell do you go every day?”

Katherine : “To the bathroom, sir... There’s no bathroom for me here.”

Mr. Harrison : “What do you mean there’s no bathroom for you here?”

Katherine : “There are no colored bathrooms in this building... I have to walk to Timbuktu just to relieve myself.. And I work like a dog, day and night, living off coffee from a pot none of you want to touch... So, excuse me if I have to go to the restroom a few times a day.”

(Hidden Figures, 1:01:14–1:02:56)

This powerful scene shows Katherine’s resistance. She refuses to stay silent about the unfair treatment she faces. Instead, she tells the truth about her daily struggles, expressing both her frustration and her pride. This act of speaking out is an example of self-appreciation and resistance through self-definition, which Collins defines as “the power to name one’s own reality” (Collins, 2000, p. 16). By standing up for herself, Katherine reclaims her dignity and challenges the systems that exclude her.

Collins also explains that Black women’s resistance is not only individual but also collective. It grows out of family and friendship ties that help women support one another. This collective awareness allows Black women to reject the negative labels placed on them and create their own definitions of who they are (Collins, 2000, p. 17). Collins traces this tradition of resistance back to early figures like Maria Stewart, whose 1831 speech called for justice and education for Black women. She also highlights the importance of safe spaces, where Black women can speak freely, think critically, and challenge the forces that try to silence them.

In *Hidden Figures*, Katherine's moment of resistance is not only personal, but it reflects a long history of Black women demanding to be seen, heard, and respected. Her courage is a part of the broader journey of Black feminist thought, which calls for freedom, self-worth, and the right to define one's own life. This resistance also reflects broader traditions of Black feminist activism that emphasize survival, collective struggle, and cultural resistance against systems of oppression (Hooks, 2014; Davis, 2011).

Women's Awareness

Many Black women seek change that reflects their real-life experiences and challenges. This desire for change often begins with awareness, the understanding that their living conditions and societal roles are unfair and need to be improved. Collins (2000) explains that this awareness plays a central role in self-definition and encourages Black women to take action and reshape their lives. Through this process, they become empowered not by seeing themselves as victims, but as survivors who have the strength to transform their own conditions.

In *Hidden Figures*, Dorothy Vaughan shows this awareness and determination. Although she is repeatedly denied a promotion to supervisor, Dorothy does not give up. Instead, she teaches herself how to program the IBM computer and takes the initiative to train other Black women to do the same. Eventually, Mrs. Mitchell recognizes Dorothy's abilities and offers her a temporary leadership role. However, Dorothy insists that she will only accept the position if her team, the other Black women, can join her. This powerful exchange shows her awareness of injustice and her refusal to succeed alone.

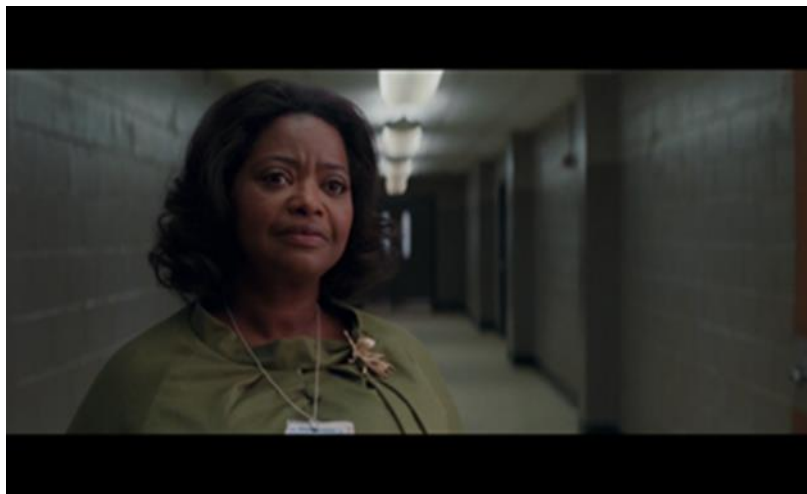


Figure 7. Mrs. Mitchell offers Dorothy a job.

Dorothy : "Me?"

Mrs. Mitchell : "Temporarily, yes. We need the IBM for Glenn's launch. The lead engineer says you're good with the cards, programming and such."

Dorothy : "What about the girls here?"

Mrs. Mitchell : "Well, human computers can't calculate an orbital flight in the time we have. They'll stay put for now."

Dorothy : "What about after now?"

Mrs. Mitchell : "(Stammering) After Glenn's launch, NASA's dissolving the computing groups."

Dorothy : "I'm not accepting reassignment unless I bring my ladies with me."

Mrs. Mitchell : "Excuse me?"

Dorothy : "We're gonna need a lot of manpower to program that beast. I can't do it alone. My gals are ready. They can do the work."

(*Hidden Figures*, 1:26:50–1:27:36)

Dorothy's decision to stand up for her colleagues reflects a deep understanding of both personal and collective empowerment. She does not just seek success for herself; she brings others with her. Collins (2000) explains that this kind of group awareness is crucial for resisting the overlapping systems of oppression based on race, gender, class, and sexuality. Dorothy's leadership shows that awareness of inequality can lead to powerful acts of solidarity and change.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Hidden Figures* (2016) successfully portrays the struggles and achievements of African American women within a racially and gender-discriminatory society. Through Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Theory*, this research finds that the movie represents important feminist values, including solidarity, self-definition, self-respect, independence, awareness, empowerment, and resistance against oppression. Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson demonstrate how Black women challenge dominant systems that attempt to marginalize them while simultaneously asserting their identity, dignity, and professional capability. The findings also reveal that *Hidden Figures* functions as more than a historical drama; it serves as a cultural representation of Black women's contributions to American history that were previously overlooked in dominant narratives. By highlighting the voices and experiences of marginalized women, the movie promotes broader discussions about equality, social justice, and inclusive national identity. Therefore, this research contributes to feminist literary and cultural studies by emphasizing the importance of Black feminist perspectives in analyzing movies and understanding the intersection of race and gender in American society.

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