



Bakalářská práce

Representation of female social status in the United States of America in the 1960s through the movie Hidden Figures

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Studijní obory:

Geografie se zaměřením na vzdělávání (dvouoborové)

Anglický jazyk se zaměřením na vzdělávání

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Zadání bakalářské práce

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Cílem této práce je analyzovat vyobrazení role amerických žen v 60. letech minulého století ve Spojených státech amerických v biografickém filmu Skrytá čísla. Použitím metod kulturních studií, filmové kritiky a genderové analýzy práce klade za cíl zjistit, jaké charakteristické rysy mají ženy různých etnicit společné či odlišné a z jakých důvodů.

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Anotace

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na analýzu vyobrazení role žen v 60. letech minulého století ve Spojených státech amerických na základě biografického filmu *Skrytá čísla*. Práce se primárně zabývá afroamerickými ženami a jejich postavením ve společnosti na základě spojitostí s tehdejší společenskou a kulturní problematikou jako byl sexismus, rasismus, nebo rasová segregace. Dále se zabývá myšlenkovými směry jako je feminismus, černošský feminismus, či Afroamerické hnutí za občanská práva. Analýza se také zabývá ženami různých etnicit a zkoumá jejich společné či odlišné charakteristické rysy.

Klíčová slova

Skrytá čísla, sexismus, feminismus, Afroameričané, rasismus, segregace, postavení žen ve společnosti, Spojené státy americké, 60. léta 20. století, mezirasové vztahy

Annotation

This thesis focuses on the analysis of the portrayal of the role of women in the 1960s in the United States of America based on the biographical film *Hidden Figures*. The thesis primarily focuses on African-American women and their social position based on connections to social and cultural issues of the time, such as sexism, racism, and racial segregation. It also discusses schools of thought such as feminism, black feminism, and the African American civil rights movement. The analysis also includes women of different ethnicities and examines their common or distinct characteristics.

Keywords

Hidden Figures, sexism, feminism, Afro-Americans, racism, segregation, the status of women in society, The United States of America, the 1960s, interracial relationship

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1. Introduction

The 1960s was a tumultuous period in the United States that brought many political, social, and cultural changes to society, which, amongst others, meant both new opportunities for women and more rights for African American citizens. However, much has changed since the 1960s, sexism and racism still remain major themes in the 21st century, enough to think of Harvey Weinstein's history of sexual harassment and the MeToo Movement, or the George Floyd police brutality case and the Black Lives Matter Movement, to mention just one major incident and one major, related movement.

It is exactly this hardly ideal situation in 21st-century US that has inspired me to try and explore the appearance of these issues in an earlier historical phase, namely the 1960s. My choice for this period beyond the already mentioned fact that major changes happened in this decade was that I saw the biographical film *Hidden Figures*, which presents the everyday struggle of African American women in the 1960s.

Thus, below, I analyze the portrayal of the social, and especially employment, roles available to women in the United States in the 1960s, with particular attention to African American women, in the film *Hidden Figures*. Relying primarily on works of cultural history and theories of race, I map the changes in employment positions, work conditions, as well as rights and responsibilities of African American women at the workplace, as exemplified by this filmic representation of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's facilities. Comparing the strategies employed by the three major African American women characters, Dorothy, Katherine, and Mary, I argue that their technically equal rights notwithstanding, positive changes mostly only

happened, or at least happened at a much faster pace, through the active struggle of women in the workplace.

Therefore, the original idea of this thesis has slightly changed. The film, *Hidden Figures*, does not represent enough white women to compare their situation to the Afro-American women. The film is primarily concerned with a biographical character, Katherine Johnson, who, along with her colleagues Dorothy and Mary, is African American.

2. Cultural-historical introduction

The 1960s, in the United States of America, were a decade of many upheavals that shaped the States both socially and politically. They were marked by the Vietnam War and anti-war protests, political assassinations, and also counterculture protests and the civil rights movement (Onion, Sullivan, and Mullen 2022).

As a result, not only the country was changing, but also individual households were slowly shifting towards reform. Although, after the war, women were expected to return to the traditional domestic roles, the labour market's increased demand for women in the workplace created a conflict between the expectation and experience of women in the domestic environment and the new opportunity for work and possible independence (Campbell and Kean 1997, 191):

After the social dislocations of Depression and war, suburban Americans were eager to return to domestic normalcy, and their fantasy of it tended to be exaggerated, with parents and children assuming clearly demarcated roles (Weiss 2000). Dad was to be the breadwinner; Mom, the homemaker; childhood was sentimentalized (Coontz 1992). (Belgrad 2008, 232)

However, women in the 1960s also joined the paid workforce even though they were significantly restricted by job position offers and unequal paychecks. Therefore, the gradual dissatisfaction among women regarding unfair treatment, disparities in pay and promotion, or even sexual harassment in the workplace, grew. Historians Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin in *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* stress that “Most young women, at least in the middle class, expected to have access to the same careers and to receive the same compensation as men” (Isserman and Kazin 2000

in Walsh 2010). Those changes took some time to shape and evolve through feminist trends of the 60s (Walsh 2010).

Although an equal pay legislation was passed in 1963, low pay remained in jobs that were classed as “female”. One of these “female” positions was that of human computers, as portrayed in the movie *Hidden Figures*. The movie presents women as mothers, receptionists, secretaries, librarians, or as human computers (Melfie 2016,). Kirstie Brewer (2017) in *The Guardian* explains:

As Hicks’ book *Programmed Inequality* illustrates, women were the largest trained technical workforce of the computing industry during the second world war and through to the mid-sixties. They operated the huge room-sized electromechanical computers that cracked codes, worked out military logistics and made ballistic calculations during the second world war. Later they went on to work for civil service departments – operating the computers needed for government to gather data and run properly. “It was viewed as unskilled, highly feminised work,” explains Hicks. “Women were seen as an easy, tractable labour force for jobs that were critical and yet simultaneously devalued.”

Women in the 1960s faced new challenges and changes. They were given the opportunity to develop outside the home environment and to start working and earning their own money. However, patriarchy made women's work environment uncomfortable and restricted in areas of, e.g., job positions or pay. Sexual harassment, discrimination, or even racism in the case of African-American women were present. Therefore, women gradually realized that their workplace treatment was not fair; thus,

feminist and civil rights movements started to form to remove the injustice of the ruling patriarchy.

2.1 Race

Race is one of the most controversial topics even in the 21st century. Race is defined in many ways by many people with countless different opinions. Therefore, race is a topic that does not have one definition, contributing to how controversial debates about this issue are.

As anthropologist Ruth Benedict (2000) wrote:

Chinese have a yellowish skin and slanting eyes. Negroes have a dark skin and wide flat noses. Caucasians have a lighter skin and high thin noses. The colour and texture of the hair of these peoples differ as much as do their skin and noses. These are outward and visible signs by which we recognize race; they are racial characteristics. In briefest possible definition, race is a classification based on traits which are hereditary. Therefore, when we talk about race we are talking about (1) hereditary and (2) traits transmitted by heredity which characterize all the members of a related group. (113)

Anthropologically, thus race is, according to Benedict (2000), defined merely as a classification based on hereditary traits. Hereditary traits can be skin colour, texture, hair color, or the shape of a nose. In other words, only physical characteristics.

Race can be specified as the idea that all humans are divided into distinct groups based on inherited differences, both physical and behavioral (Wade and Takezawa 2020). However, in the late 20th century, some genetic studies refuted the

existence of biogenetically separate races. Some scholars now claim that "races" are invented. They are cultural interventions reflecting specific historical attitudes and beliefs imposed on different populations since the European conquest began in the 15th century (Wade and Takezawa 2020). Ian F. Haney Lopez (2000) claims:

The rejection of race in science is now almost complete. In the end, we should embrace historian Barbara Fields's succinct conclusion with respect to the plausibility of biological races: "Anyone who continues to believe in race as a physical attribute of individuals, despite the now commonplace disclaimers of biologists and geneticists, might as well also believe that Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny and the tooth fairy are real, and that the earth stands still while the sun moves. (968)

It is essential to realize that even though definitions of race still differ, and in the end, we could claim that they are uncertain, race still is and probably will be talked about and struggled with in the future. Some argue that race is based on hereditary traits, while others believe that race is a social and political construct. One way or another, race is connected with one colossal problem called *racism* that shapes the problem of race, especially in the United States of America since slavery in American colonies. From the 17th century until this very day, people follow series of protests and movements such as the Black Lives Matter movement starting in 2013 ('Black Lives Matter About,' n.d.) or The George Floyd protests from 2020 (Taylor 2020).

2.2 Racism

Racism can be defined as the belief that humans are divided into separate biological entities that we refer to as "races." The belief also states that some races are superior to others (Smedley 2022). According to Smedley (2022), the term (racism) is

also applied to political, economic, or legal institutions and systems that engage in or perpetuate discrimination based on race or otherwise reinforce racial inequalities in wealth and income, education, health care, civil rights, and other areas. Such institutional, structural, or systemic racism became a particular focus of scholarly investigation in the 1980s with the emergence of critical race theory, an offshoot of the critical legal studies movement. Since the late 20th century, the notion of biological race has been recognized as a cultural invention, entirely without scientific basis.

Franz Fanon, in his work *The Fact of Blackness* which was published in 1996, described racism very directly, and his text captures the frustration and some problems of racism clearly:

It [colour prejudice] is nothing more than the unreasoning hatred of one race for another, the contempt of the stronger and richer peoples for those whom they consider inferior to themselves, and the bitter resentment of those who are kept in subjection and are so frequently insulted. As colour is the most obvious outward manifestation of race it has been made the criterion by which men are judged, irrespective of their social or educational attainments. The light-skinned races have come to despise all those of a darker colour, and the dark-skinned peoples will no longer accept without protest the inferior position to which they have been relegated (Fanon 2000, 261-62).

2.3 Racial Segregation

Segregation is a policy that keeps one group of people separated from another group of people and treats the segregated group differently. Usually, segregation is based on race, sex, or religion (Cambridge Dictionary 2022).

Regarding *racial segregation*, Afro-American people in the United States of America were restricted to certain areas of residence, separate institutions such as schools, libraries, and churches, or they had restricted facilities e.g., restrooms, parks, restaurants, or playgrounds. Racial segregation provides superior social status and economic advantages to the dominant group (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2022).

In the United States of America, segregation, started to shift in the mid-1950s:

The landmark 1955 Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* marked the beginning of the gradual desegregation of the American South. At that time, the Supreme Court reversed the 1896 decision of its predecessors and declared racially segregated school systems unconstitutional. Gradually, then, not only schools but also waiting rooms, transportation facilities, and restaurants were desegregated. Racial separation thus officially ceased to exist (Pospíšil 2001, 149; my translation).¹

Although, racial separation ceased to exist in the form of a federally sanctioned policy after *Brown v. Board of Education*, Tomáš Pospíšil (2001) ironically illustrates the reality of American segregation in the 21st century through an anecdote in John Sayles' film *The Brother from Another Planet*:

The protagonist, a mute alien who looks strikingly like an African-American, travels on the New York subway. A street performer

¹ Přelomové rozhodnutí Nejvyššího soudu *Brownová versus Školský úřad v Topece* z roku 1955 znamenalo počátek postupné desegregace amerického Jihu. Nejvyšší soud tehdy zvrátil rozhodnutí svých předchůdců z roku 1896 a označil rasově rozdělené školství za neústavní. Postupně pak byly desegregovány nejen školy, ale i čekárny, dopravní prostředky a restaurace. Oddělení ras tak oficiálně přestalo existovat.

approaches him and starts performing card tricks. After two tricks, the highlight comes. "What would you say if I made all the white people disappear at the next station?" he suggests to our hero. The mute alien just shakes his head in disbelief. But at the next stop, all the whites do indeed get up and get off: beyond that, there is only Harlem or the Bronx, worlds where whites do not live and where they have no particular reason to go (Pospíšil 2001, 149-150; my translation).²

Pospíšil (2001) explains that segregation, in the United States of America, at present, does not officially exist. On the contrary, the law prohibits it. However, although segregation is not enforced by state apparatuses, it is still present in the US. It exists in the form of tradition, education, and the alpha and omega of everything: money. As an example, Pospíšil describes the phenomenon of culturally black neighbourhoods like Harlem and the Bronx in New York City, or the division of neighbourhoods in Los Angeles into the black south, white northwest, and Latino east (Pospíšil 2001, 150-151).

2.4 Sexism

Sexism, similar to racism, is based on prejudice or discrimination against a particular sex or gender. Sexism is mainly connected with discrimination against women and girls. However, sexism includes the oppression of any sex – men, intersex people, or transgender people. Sexism can be a belief that one sex is superior and more valuable than the other sex.

² Hlavní hrdina, němý nepozemšťan nápadně připomínající Afroameričana, cestuje newyorským metrem. Přistoupí k němu pouliční umělec a začne předvádět karetní triky. Po dvou tricích přichází na řadu zlatý hřeb, „Co bys tomu řekl, kdybych na příští stanici nechal zmizet všechny bělochy?“ navrhně našemu hrdinovi. Némý nepozemšťan jen nevěřičně zakroučí hlavou. Jenže na příští zastávce se skutečně všichni běloši zvednou a vystoupí: dále jsou již jen Harlem nebo Bronx, světy, kde bílí nežijí, a kam nemají ani žádný zvláštní důvod jezdit.

Sexism against women in society presents itself through ideologies that patriarchy is superior and society is based on male domination. A common form of socialization based on sexist concepts teaches about traditional gender roles for males and females. According to such theory, women are opposite to men. Women are seen as the weaker sex; women are considered less capable than men and especially in the case of logic and rational reasoning. In such a view, women should stick to domestic work and be caretakers. It suggests that women cannot be good leaders in business, politics, and academia. They are not equal to men. Therefore, oppression against women takes the form of economic exploitation and social domination. Sexist behaviour, conditions, and attitudes perpetuate stereotypes of gender roles based on biological sex. (Masequesmay 2022)

2.5 Feminism

Feminism, according to Brunell (2022), is a belief in the sexes' social, economic, and political equality. As already written in the chapter "sexism," women were, and in some cases still are, confined to the domestic sphere, while other areas of life were/are male-dominated.

Historically as late as the early 20th century, women were prevented from conducting business without a male representative (e.g., father, brother, son, or legal agent). They could not vote nor hold elective office in Europe and most of the United States. Women also had little or no access to education and were banned from most professions. These listed are only a glimpse of what women faced in the past; unfortunately, in some parts of the world, such restrictions still challenge women even today (Brunell and Brukett 2022).

2.6 Black feminism

As in feminism, *black feminism* is asking for equality for all sexes; however, black feminism also highlights the problem of race and sex. Peterson (2019) wrote: "The black feminist tradition grows not out of other movements, but out of the condition of being both black and a woman."

Although black feminism is founded on many different views, the foundational principles are the same. They agree that black women's experiences with racism, sexism, and classism are deeply connected. Further that their needs and worldviews vary from those of black men and white women (Peterson 2019).

Afro-American writer and activist bell hooks (1984) wrote:

Feminism in the United States has never emerged from the women who are most victimized by sexist oppression; women who are daily beaten down, mentally, physically, and spiritually-women who are powerless to change their condition in life. They are the silent majority. A mark of their victimization is that they accept their lot in life without visible question, without organized protest, without collective anger or rage. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* is still heralded as having paved the way for contemporary feminist movement-it was written as if these women did not exist. Friedan's famous phrase, "the problem that has no name," often quoted to describe the condition of women in this society, actually referred to the plight of a select group of college-educated, middle and upper class, married white women-housewives bored with leisure, with the home, with children, with buying products, who wanted more out of life. Friedan concludes her first chapter by stating: "We can no longer ignore that voice

within women that says: 'I want something more than my husband and my children and my house.'" That "more" she defined as careers. She did not discuss who would be called in to take care of the children and maintain the home if more women like herself were freed from their house labor and given equal access with white men to the professions. She did not speak of the needs of women without men, without children, without homes. She ignored the existence of all non-white women and poor white women. She did not tell readers whether it was more fulfilling to be a maid, a babysitter, a factory worker, a clerk, or a prostitute, than to be a leisure class housewife. (1-2)

Despite different visions of the problematics of feminism, it is essential to realize that feminism and black feminism are different. Black women fight for equality of the races and also of the sexes, even among other women.

3. Film Analysis

The analysis of *Hidden Figures* film is based on individual scenes, mostly dialogue, which mainly involve racial or sexist issues women struggled with in the 1960s. The main characters are three black women who are affected by the dominant white work environment and daily discrimination, racial segregation, and racism among white men but also women. In addition to the work environment, the analysis explores women's status and opportunities in the family environment, marriage, or everyday life outside the workplace.

In the scene where Dorothy, Katherine, and Mary are on their way to work at NASA, when their car breaks down, and a police officer stops the women, the viewer can witness numeral aspects of racism that have accompanied African Americans since the beginning of the 17th century. Before the police officer gets out of the car. A private conversation takes place between the three women:

Dorothy: No crime in a broken-down car.

Mary: No crime being Negro neither.

Katherine: Button it up, Mary. Nobody wants to go to jail behind your mouth.

Mary: I'll do my best, sugar. (Melfie 2016, 0:04:09-0:04:18)

As Campbell and Kean (1997) wrote: "Douglass writes that there evolved a 'maxim' for slaves defined by these boundaries: 'a still tongue makes a wise head. They suppress the truth rather than take the consequences of telling it, and in so doing prove themselves members of the human family'" (77). Although Douglass in Cambell and

Kean describes problems current at the time of slavery, the logic behind it is very similar. Katherine warns Mary to stay silent so she does not get them in trouble.

The police officer also shows his "master" position when he immediately gets offensive toward Mary's answer. Even though, as Mary says, "No crime being Negro neither," they all realize that they do not have the same rights and are not treated equally as white Americans. Although centuries have passed, the core of white supremacy continues to operate on a very similar principle:

Police officer: Not a great place for three of y'all be having car trouble.

Mary: We didn't pick the place, Officer. It picked us.

Police officer: You being disrespectful?

Mary: No, sir.

Police officer: You have identification on you?

Mary, Katherine: Yes, sir.

Katherine: We're just on our way to work...at Langley. NASA, sir.

Dorothy: We do a great deal of calculating. Getting our rockets into space.

Police officer: All three of you?

Dorothy: Yes, sir.

Mary: Yes, Officer.

Police officer: NASA. Now that's something. I had no idea they hired...

Dorothy: There are quite a few women working in the space program.

(Melfie 2016, 0:04:32-0:05:07)

The same scene also highlights that Dorothy realizes that they face two disadvantages. They are not only black; they are also women. She uses her position of being a woman to neutralize the policeman's racism. She turns a possibly racist comment by the police officer into a sexist one, suggesting that racism might be a bigger problem than sexism.

This scene, which introduces several issues that can be encountered throughout the film, also highlights the issue of *double consciousness*:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world. It is peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, - An American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (DuBois [1908] 2000, 125)

This so-called twoness is represented through the police officer figure. He changes his attitude completely when he realizes that all three women are working for NASA. It can be argued that Katherine, Dorothy, and Mary only become American in that very moment. Until then, they are seen as “merely” black women.

The police officer's attitude change is also well presented in the scene immediately following the previous one, when, having realized that all three women work for NASA, he changes his attitude and offers to escort them to work, elicits Mary's sarcastic comment: “Three Negro women are chasing a white police officer

down the highway in Hampton, Virginia...1961. Ladies, that there is a God-ordained miracle” (Melfie 2016, 0:06:39-0:06:49).

Mrs. Vivian Mitchell is a white female supervisor with many racist comments during the movie. In one of the scenes, Mrs. Mitchell refers to the West Computing Office as "down here" (Melfie 2016, 0:11:52-0:11:54). Her comment might be considered as an act of superiority since the office was designated only for black workers. They were segregated into the periphery of the Langley Research Center. "Down here" could; however, also represent a scale of superiority since Mrs. Mitchell arguably looks down on the Afro-American workers she is in charge of.

Later on, Dorothy visits Mrs. Mitchell and politely asks if she could be promoted to the position she actually does. Mrs. Mitchell denies Dorothy's request for a supervisory position, even though Dorothy has been fulfilling the job's description:

Dorothy: Mrs. Mitchell. If I could...My application for supervisor, ma'am. Was just wondering if they're still considering me for that position.

Mrs. Mitchell: Yes. Well, the official word is no. They're not assigning a permanent supervisor for the colored group.

Dorothy: May I ask why?

Mrs. Mitchell: I don't know why. I didn't ask why.

Dorothy: We need a supervisor, ma'am. We haven't had one since Miss Jansen got sick. It's been almost a year.

Mrs. Mitchell: Things are working just fine as is.

Dorothy: I'm doing the work of a supervisor.

Mrs. Mitchell: Well, that's NASA for you. (Melfie 2016, 0:12:03-0:12:37)

Mrs. Mitchell does not question or challenge the racist and sexist rules. She accepts them as they are and does not seem aware of the problems. The whole system is racist and oppressive to black women. Vivian Mitchell sees herself as part of this system of superiority and makes this clear through her behavior and speech toward her black subordinates throughout the film (Lieway et al. 2017, 608).

Internalized racism is theoreticized in another scene, along with signs of sexism. Mary offers a solution to a technical issue that has occurred during testing of a space capsule. Mr. Zielinski, the head of engineering department, suggests that Mary should apply for a position as an engineer in the Engineering Training Program:

Mr. Zielinski: There is another opening in the Engineer Training Program.

Mary: Flat head rivets would reduce wind drag.

Mr. Zielinski: Mary, a person with 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. (Melfie 2016, 0:15:05-0:15:22)

There is internalized racism in Mary's reaction, as she immediately responds to his suggestion that it is impossible for her, as a black woman, even to attempt to apply for the opening. Mr. Zielinski's reaction is telling: "Let me ask you...if you were a white male, would you wish to be an engineer?" to which Mary responds: "I wouldn't have to I'd already be one" (Melfie 2016, 0:15:38-0:15:46). Internalized racism is "The acceptance and acting out of an inferior definition of self, rooted in the historical designation of one's race. Over many generations, this process of disempowerment

and disenfranchisement is expressed in self-defeating behaviors." (Seattle Government 2021). Mary realizes that she is at a disadvantage. She fully accepts her situation. In addition, Mr. Zielinski's question is what if she was a white male proves that Mary's struggle is not only a question of race but also of sex.

Mrs. Mitchell and her representation of typical views on black people appears again when she feels responsible for, and worried about, Katherine's output in the Space Task Group. She feels uncomfortable with a black woman working in an office this important. She immediately seeks failure based only on skin colour: "Mrs. Mitchell: They've never had a colored in here before, Katherine. Don't embarrass me" (Melfie 2016, 0:16:20-0:16:23). As Lieway et al. (2017) quote Fannie Barrier: "The colored girl. ..is not known and hence not believed in; she belongs to a race that is best designated by the term 'problem,' and she lives beneath the shadow of that problem which envelops and obscures her" (607). Barrier's quote appropriately describes Katherine's struggle. Katherine belongs among gifted children, and due to her intelligence and outstanding mathematic skills, she skipped a couple of grades and received a full scholarship at university. Her skills outperformed anyone else's, so she was chosen to work for the Space Task Group. Despite all that, Mrs. Mitchell looks down on her and fears that Katherine will embarrass Mrs. Mitchell in front of the high-priority office. Since Katherine is African American, no one expects her to know or handle anything better than white people, which is prejudice based on her race.

Racial prejudice and sexism are also captured in scene where Katherine walks into the Space Task Office for the first time, and one of her white male co-workers hands her a full bin assuming that Katherine is a cleaning lady or janitor: "Co-worker: This wasn't emptied last night. Katherine: I'm sorry, I'm not the...custodian" (Melfie 2016, 0:16:51-0:16:55). This calls to mind DuBois's concept of the veil: "The Negro

is sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only let's him see himself through the revelation of the other world“ (DuBois, [1908] 2000, 125).

Campbell and Kean (1997) explain:

DuBois's sense of the veil that must be seen through is a valuable image, for it suggests the difficulty of asserting a self in a world that continually seeks to place and determine what you are and can be by prescribing your history and denying you any opportunity to express your thoughts or feelings. Later, James Baldwin wrote, 'The details and symbols of your life have been deliberately constructed to make you believe what white people say about you... Please try to be clear, ...about the reality which lies behind the words[.]' (Baldwin 1963, 16 in Campbell and Kean 1997, 77)

This scene is an excellent example of the "veil" metaphor. A black woman wears this "veil" based on her race and gender, and her colleague directly assumes what position Katherine holds in the office – a janitor.

We can assume that internalized racism is also present here, as Katherine accepts the whole situation rather than getting into conflict with a white man. She knows where she supposedly belongs and realizes that working in an all-white male-dominated office is uncommon for a black woman.

Dorothy, Mary, and Katherine are on their way home after a full day at work. Katherine and Mary have been both promoted. Dorothy has not. She complains how unfair it is to do the job and have the responsibility of a supervisor without being one (no title, no pay): “Dorothy: Watching you two move on. Now, don't get me wrong.

Any upward movement is movement for us all. Just isn't movement for me" (Melfie 2016, 0:27:40-0:27:49).

This scene follows up on the one where Dorothy visits Mrs. Mitchell and asks her for promotion. Although Dorothy was unsuccessful with her promotion, Katherine and Mary moved forward, which means a step forward for the black community. Campbell and Kean (1997) point to the collective power and its importance by quoting Tate (1983): "Thus, the push for self-definition, 'the claiming of the I', was only a stage in the political process, which aimed at transforming the I to a 'We': 'We must move past always focusing on the "personal self" because there's a larger self. There's a "self" of black people"' (Tate 1983, 134 in Campbell and Kean 1997, 86). Dorothy was unsuccessful in getting a promotion; however, Katherine and Mary were both promoted. Dorothy points out that although she failed as an individual, Mary's and Katherine's success ultimately means that they all succeeded. Their success pushes the boundaries for all other African Americans, and the impossible becomes possible through this. The rules change, and new opportunities open up for all black people.

Another scene presents marriage and relationship between husband and wife in the 1960s together with different approaches to racism. Levi, Mary's husband, perceives only one way to accomplish rights for Afro-American people. He does not even consider that Mary could become an engineer by a different approach than by protest or force:

Levi: A female engineer? 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.

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. (Melfie 2016, 0:33:35-0:34:31)

In the 1960s, the increased political demands for Black Power claimed that any movement "must speak in the tone of that community...[so that] black people are going to use the words they want to use – not just the words whites want to hear" (Carmichael 1996, 5 in Campbell and Kean 1997, 73). Levi believes that nothing will change unless the black community protests, also marches and takes rights by violent means. He does not believe in any other approach that could cause a difference.

Levi also seems to intersect race and gender without even realizing he talks about two problems, not only one. Although he focuses on race, his expressions are sexist. Levi claims that Mary cannot become an engineer because they are black, yet, he mentions a female engineer first, not a black engineer.

At the same time, not only African American women were discriminated against at the workplace in the 1960s. For example, colonel Johnson accidentally insults Katherine as a woman, irrespective of her race, by automatically degrading her intelligence and capability to pursue complex tasks just because she is a woman. Although Mr. Johnson does not mean any harm, Katherine manipulates the situation to the point that she, as a feminist, confronts Mr. Johnson. Katherine tells him about

her success and abilities and stands up for all women capable of managing more than men assume:

Katherine: We calculate the mathematics necessary to enable launch and landing for the space program.

Colonel: That's pretty heady stuff.

Katherine: Yes, it is.

Colonel: They let women handle that sort of...That's not what I mean.

Katherine: What do you mean?

Colonel: I'm just surprised that something so...taxing...

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

Colonel: 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. 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. So, yes. They let women do some things at NASA, Mr. Johnson. And it's not because we wear skirts. It's because we wear glasses. Have a good day. (Melfie 2016, 0:36:20-0:37:34)

In post-1945 America, two conflicts appeared to shape the women's world. The first was a "new outburst of domestic ideology, a vigorous revival of traditional ideal of woman's place" (Woloch 1994, 493 in Campbell and Kean 1997, 191); however, changes to the labor market and increased demands for women in the workplace happened at the same time pushing social norms in the opposite direction. Quoting Walby (1990): "Patriarchy is a concept at the center of much theorizing and debate within gender studies and is best defined as 'a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women' " (Wolby 1990, 20 in Campbell and Kean 1997, 185).

Although Colonel Johnson does not mean any harm and tries to avoid misunderstanding, it is evident that the logic of patriarchy still ruled American society in the 1960s. Mr. Johnson is not exploiting women per sex, but he is used to being in a dominant position as a man. He has been a part of the patriarchal system for a very long time, and women in the 1960s have seen a position of some vague, undefined equality only recently. Men and women are still getting used to this new view of women in the workplace or even in the same positions as men. The relationships between women and men have been slowly changing and shaping into a new society. Lauter et al. (1994) describes the situation of women in the 19th century, the earlier model that is being displaced in the 60s, as either an object to admire or a servant of men:

Whilst woman has been taught to lean upon an arm of flesh, to sit as a doll arrayed in 'gold, and pearls and costly array', to be admired for her personal charms, and caressed and humored like a spoiled child, or converted into a mere drudge to suit the convenience of her lord and master. (Lauter et al. 1994,1866 in Campbell and Kean 1997, 184)

Even though Lauter et al. (1994) talks about the 19th century, arguably, the same logic is reflected in this scene. Although the film takes place in the 20th century and women have the opportunity to work and be independent, the patriarchy and its logic still prevails in the 1960s. Colonel Johnson does not expect Katherine or women generally to be capable of doing the same job as men, of doing the “heady stuff” as he says.

The issue of systemic racism or institutional racism which represents practices and policies of a continuous unfair treatment of others based on race is also present in the film. Such practices exist throughout a whole society (Cambridge Dictionary 2022). The procedures and culture of the system or institution work better for white people, sometimes even inadvertently (Seattle Government 2021). It can be seen in the scene when Mrs. Mitchell comes to the cafeteria for colored only to reach out to Mary about her engineering application:

Mrs. Mitchell: NASA doesn't commission females for the Engineer Training Program.

Mary: That position is available to any qualified applicant.

Mrs. Mitchell: Right. Except, you don't have the educational requirements.

Mary: I have a bachelor's degree in mathematics and physical science. It's the same as most engineers around here.

Mrs. Mitchell: We now require advanced extension courses through the University of Virginia. It's in the employee handbook. In addendum. In case you haven't read it.

Mary: Every time we have a chance to get ahead...they move the finish line.

Mrs. Mitchell: I just follow the rules around here. And I expect everyone who works for me to follow them as well. There are no special circumstances for anyone. Y'all should be thankful you have jobs at all.
(Melfie 2016, 0:46:44-0:47:22)

Mrs. Mitchell first tells Mary that she cannot apply for the job because she is a woman. However, when she discovers that gender is not specified on the application form, she assures Mary that she cannot apply for the post because she does not have the required extension courses. Mary confronts her because she has the same degree as the other engineers; however, she cannot take the courses as they are at an all-white school. Vivian Mitchell justifies the situation by saying that it is written in the rules and claims that no one is privileged. Speculations can be made if Mrs. Mitchell knows that the circumstances are not the same for everyone or if she believes it is fair this way. She also presents racism when she states: "Y'all should be thankful you have jobs at all." This note is arguably used again to remind the women that they are inferior to Mrs. Mitchell and other white people and that the system is not built in their favor.

Similarly, systemic racism is present in the scene when Dorothy and her sons are in the library. Dorothy looks for a book while the boys sit on the floor and read. A white woman, probably a librarian, speaks to Dorothy through a bookshelf. She has an issue with them being outside the colored section.

Librarian: We don't want any trouble in here.

Dorothy: Oh, I'm not here for any trouble, ma'am.

Librarian: What are you here for?

Dorothy: A book.

Librarian: You have books in the colored section.

Dorothy: It doesn't have what I'm looking for.

Librarian: That's just the way it is. (Melfie 2016, 0:49:42-0:49:57)

The colored section does not have all the books; they have only limited quantities and titles. Therefore, black people's access to knowledge and free choice is once again reduced. The librarian; however, does not question the problem. She accepts it as part of the system.

Dorothy tries to explain to her sons the problems of segregation and equality to raise her children to understand the situation of the black race:

Dorothy: Separate and equal are two different things. Just 'cause it's the way, doesn't make it right. Understand?

Older son: Yes, Mama.

Dorothy: You act right, you are right. That's for certain. Understand?

Older son: Yes, Mama.

Dorothy reaches for her coat and hands out a book.

Younger son: You took that book, Mama?

Dorothy: Son, I pay taxes. And taxes pay for everything in that library. Can't take something you already paid for. (Melfie 2016, 0:50:18-0:50:47)

As DuBois ([1908] 2000) wrote: "And yet, [being] a problem is a strange experience, - peculiar even for one who has never been anything else, save perhaps in babyhood and in Europe. It is in the early days of rollicking boyhood that the revelation first bursts upon one, all in a day, as it were" (DuBois 2000, 124). DuBois's text indicates

how difficult it was to raise black children. Dorothy has to explain to her sons that it is not their fault that they cannot have the same books as white people. She tries to tell them that they are the right people if they act right. No institution tells them if they are the right people or not. Only their actions do. To quote DuBois again, “That sky was the bluest when I could beat my mates at examination-time, or beat them at a foot-race, or even beat their stringy heads. Alas, with years all this fine contempt began to fade; for the words I longed for, and all their dazzling opportunities, were theirs, not mine” (DuBois [1908] 2000, 124). As a symbol of injustice, Dorothy borrows a book from the white section to show her boys that, theoretically, she has the right to borrow the book since she pays the same taxes as white people. However, the unfair system does not allow it. It is not considered their fault. It is the system's.

When Dorothy, Katherine, and Mary have a day off, they play cards, and Mary complains about the requirements necessary to complete to become an engineer, Dorothy encourages her to go to court to do something for a change rather than complain:

Katherine: That’s still a segregated school, Mary.

Mary: Virginia acts like Brown versus Board of Education never happened. They are never gonna allow a colored woman to just take classes at an all-white school.

Dorothy: Well, sounds about right.

Mary: That’s all you gonna say?

Dorothy: I’m not gonna sit here all day and listen to you complain about the way things are. We’re trying to play cards. Petition the court. Fight for what you want. But quit talking about it. (Melfie 2016, 0:47:37-0:47:58)

The women do support each other in this struggle from within. As bell hooks writes:

We could not learn to love or respect ourselves in the culture of white supremacy, on the outside; it was there on the inside, in that 'homeplace', most often created and kept by black women, that we had the opportunity to grow and develop, to nurture our spirits. (hooks 1991, 42 in Campbell and Kean 1997, 81-2)

Mary thus goes to the court to have a hearing from a judge. She needs permission to attend classes at a white school; therefore, she can become an engineer:

Mary: Good morning, Your Honor.

Judge: Hampton High School is a white school, Mrs. Jackson.

Mary: Yes, Your Honor. I'm aware of that.

Judge: Virginia, still a segregated state. Regardless of what the federal government says, regardless of what the Supreme Court says, our law is the law.

Mary: Your Honor, if I may. I believe there are special circumstances to be considered.

Judge: What would warrant a colored woman attending a white school?

Mary: May I approach your bench, sir? Your Honor...you of all people should understand the importance of being first.

Judge: How's that, Mrs. Jackson?

Mary: You were the first in your family to serve in the Armed Forces. U.S. Navy. The first to attend university. George Mason. And the first state judge to be recommissioned by three consecutive governors.

Judge: You've done some research.

Mary: Yes, sir.

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: Yeah. 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 U.S. 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 100 years from now? Which one is gonna make you the first? (Melfie 2016, 1:10:47-1:12:52)

At the end of her hearing, the judge "changes the law" and allows Mary to attend the night classes.

This scene that was a turning point in the movie is a step forward for Mary, who would become the first black engineer at NASA. She convinces the judge about why she needs to be the one who gets his permission. Therefore, it is another example

of black women fighting segregation in their way, with no protest, no complaining. Mary uses manipulation to get what she wants. When she highlights the judge's achievements, she acts patriotic and compares her situation to the judge's. In addition, she does not make the case about her race and compassion for black people as much as for people in general. She achieves what she needs without violence and anger like the black men in their protests which is another example in the movie of how women move forward by using completely different methods than men.

When Mary walks to the court to get a date for her trial, what the receptionist first tells her is where her place is: "Receptionist: Mrs. Jackson. Colored seats are at the back of the courtroom. Mary: Thank you, ma'am." (Melfie 2016, 0:58:13-0:58:18). Afro-American people dealt with segregation daily. The movie includes e.g., separated offices and areas in NASA, bathrooms for people of color only, a color section in the library, or selected seats in the court room.

The movie, at the same time, also presents different approaches to the fight against segregation and racism by men and women. In one scene the viewer sees Dorothy as a mother protecting her children from violence that follows up protests. The protest in this scene is very vocal and aggressive in terms of the body language of the protestants – women in the movie fight for their rights in a significantly different way than men. While men fight segregation and racism by engaging in public protests, women work within and for the system. This is signalled by Dorothy's claim, while passing the protests, "Don't pay attention to all that. We're not part of that trouble. Go on" (Melfie 2016, 0:49:07-0:49:23). In fact, all three women strategically disrupt and challenge sexist and racist practices from the inside (Lieway et al. 2017, 608).

In one of the scenes a dialogue between Katherine and Ruth, the secretary, illustrates the extent segregation: “Katherine: Excuse me. May I ask where the ladies’ room is? Ruth: Sorry. I have no idea where your bathroom is” (Melfie 2016, 0:21:21-0:21:26). The scene calls attention to the fact that there is no bathroom for women of color in the Space Task Office at all.

Later, Katherine runs to the bathroom in the storm. When she returns to the office, she gets yelled at for taking too long. After that, she has a nervous breakdown. She speaks her mind and leaves the office. In fact, during the movie, Katherine struggles multiple times with the ladies’ room being out of the campus where she works because there are no bathrooms for women of color. Therefore, she felt exhausted and constantly under pressure. When Mr. Harrison confronts her about her time out of the office during work hours, Katherine has a mental breakdown, thanks to which she finally complains and stands for herself:

Al Harrison: Where the hell have you been? Everywhere I look, you’re not where I need you to be. It’s not my imagination. Now, where the hell do you go every day?

Katherine: To the bathroom, sir.

Al Harrison: To the bathroom? To the damn bathroom. For 40 minutes a day? What do you do in there? We’re T-minus zero here. I put a lot of faith in you.

Katherine: There’s no bathroom for me here.

Al Harrison: What do you mean there is no bathroom for you here?

Katherine: There is no bathroom. There are no colored bathrooms in this building or any building outside the West Campus, which is half a mile away. Did you know that? I have to walk to Timbuktu just to relieve myself. And I can't use one of the handy bikes. Picture that, Mr. Harrison. My uniform...Skirt below my knees, my heels, and a simple string of pearls. Well, I don't own pearls. Lord knows you don't pay colored enough to afford pearls! And I work like a dog, day and night, living off of the coffee from a pot none of you wanna touch! So, excuse me if I have to go to the restroom a few times a day. (Melfie 2016, 1:01:15-1:02:47)

That said, the fact that she has never complained shows how segregation works. Katherine and the others were used to long distance to bathrooms or no bathrooms. Katherine does not have a problem confronting Colonel Johnson; she acts like a feminist during the movie when she is in the black environment; however, it is very different when she speaks to Mr. Harrison. As bell hooks put it: "Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side, a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life, and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of 'talking back' that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of moving from object to subject, that is the liberated voice" (Mariani 1991, 340 in Campbell and Kean 1997, 72).

Katherine's emotional scene; however, leads to a change. Mr. Harrison, who has not realized Katherine's situation, goes and tears down the sign "Colored Ladies Only" in the West Area Computing division: "There you have it. No more colored restrooms. No more white restrooms. Just plain old toilets. Go wherever you damn well please. Preferably closer to your desk. Here at NASA, we all pee the same color" (Melfie 2016, 1:03:55-1:04:26).

This scene is crucial because it frees Katherine and gives her more rights than she has had until now. Another accomplishment is that her white male boss stood by her and did not fire her for speaking up and standing up to him. However, this never happened in real life, and the movie gave credit for breaking down racial barriers to a white male hero. In reality, Katherine Johnson took the risk and used the White women's bathroom (Shetterly 2016 in Lieway et al. 2017, 609).

In connective scenes Katherine struggles to convince her colleague, Mr. Stafford, to let her attend Pentagon briefings, so she has access to the newest data for her calculations. These data may change in minutes (changes in mass, weight, speed, time, distance, friction, or a puff of wind). These changes affect the successful mission to send the first American to space. Yet still, Mr. Stafford will not let her to the meetings because she is only a female computer. Interestingly enough, those barriers are there even if they are directly detrimental to the success of NASA's space mission.

Mr. Stafford: What, Katherine?

Katherine: If I could attend the briefings, I'd be more useful to the project.

Mr. Stafford: Pentagon briefings are closed door.

Katherine: Yes, but if we don't have the information of the changes...we can't keep up. I need those changes as they occur. As you said, it's a pinhead.

Mr. Stafford: Katherine, that's the job. You asked for this assignment, so just calculate with what you have. Or we'll find someone who can. (Melfie 2016, 1:18:40-1:19:02)

Katherine: Sir, the parameters for Friendship 7.

Mr. Stafford: Oh, this is all moot. We're altering the window on the capsule.

Katherine: When did this happen?

Mr. Stafford: Six minutes ago. The math is changing. Start over.

Katherine: Sir, if I could attend the briefings, I could stay current...

Mr. Stafford: Katherine, we have been through this. It is not possible. There is no protocol for women attending.

Katherine: There's no protocol for a man circling the Earth either, sir.

Mr. Stafford: Okay. That is just the way things are. (Melfie 2016, 1:20:03-1:20:24)

The issue is finally solved in another scene where Katherine hand out a report to Mr. Stafford, where she put her name next to his:

Mr. Stafford: I have told you this. Computers don't author reports. Fix it.

Katherine: Those are my calculations. My name should be on it.

Mr. Stafford: That is not the way this works.

Al Harrison: Paul. What's happening here?

Katherine: Mr. Harrison, I would like to attend today's briefing.

Al Harrison: And why is that?

Katherine: Sir, the data changes so fast. The capsule changes. The weight and the landing zones are all changing, every day. I do my work, you attend

these briefings, I have to start over. Colonel Glenn launches in a few weeks. We don't have the math figured out yet.

Al Harrison: Why is it she can't attend?

Mr. Stafford: Because she doesn't have clearance, Al.

Katherine: I cannot do my work effectively if I do not have all of the data and all of the information as soon as it's available. I need to be in that room, hearing what you hear.

Mr. Stafford: Pentagon briefings are not for civilians. It requires the highest clearance.

Katherine: I feel like I'm the best person to present my calculations...

Al Harrison: You're not gonna let this go, are you?

Katherine: No, I am not.

Mr. Stafford: And she is a woman. There is no protocol for a woman attending these meetings.

Al Harrison: Okay, I get that part, Paul. But within these walls, who makes the rules?

Katherine: You, sir. You are the boss. You just have to act like one. Sir.

Al Harrison: You keep quiet. (Melfie 2016, 1:21:03-1:22:15)

Mr. Stafford is a white man who has been very clear about his stance with Katherine. He despises her presence in the office because she is a black woman who corrects his numbers. That suggests that he will not agree with Katherine's demand to attend the all-white male meetings held between the highest-ranking men in NASA.

Despite the fact that it would give NASA a higher chance to calculate the correct numbers and be successful in their mission.

In connection with post-war America, Campbell and Kean (1997) wrote: “One of the implications of this was a fear within males that their 'masculinity' was under threat. In particular, this definition of masculinity was concerned with employment, 'bread-winning', protection and authority, all of which appeared under fire from potential encroachments of women into these areas” (191). Mr. Stafford is a great example of a man who does not want any woman close to his work. During the movie, he repeatedly shows that he is uncomfortable with working alongside Katherine. He does not trust her calculations and does not want to give her access to many information that Katherine needs for her work. He also argues with Katherine because he does not want to give her credit for her work. In his defense, he reasons using rules and laws that oppress women and does not seem to care to change them. "That is just the way things are" (Melfie 2016, 1:20:24). Sentences similar to this one arise during the movie many times. When white people no longer have arguments with rules and protocols that restrict the rights of either black people or even all women, they usually respond with a sentence along the lines of "that's just the way it is" and that ends the conversation. It proves that systematic racism and sexism exist without any picture of logic in many cases.

Katherine eventually manipulates Mr. Harrison into agreeing with her presence at the meetings. This is another major feminist move from Katherine and an excellent accomplishment. The protocols that forbid women at the meetings represent sexism in the system, and Katherine has succeeded in disobeying them.

While another scene presents one of the most famous cases in American black history, the firebomb attack on the Freedom Riders bus in Alabama, Levi's and Mary's conflict about the use of violence; however, is also a great example of different parenting roles. Levi and the children watch the news when Mary comes home, and she does not want the children to watch it. Two diverse approaches to parenthood present the difficulty of raising black children in a world of racism:

Mary: Hi, babies.

TV: The bus filled rapidly

Children: Hi, Mama.

TV: With black smoke. We all hit the floor. AH of us realized the bus was on fire...and had to go out into the mob.

Mary: The kids don't need to be watching this.

Levi: They need to see this.

TV: When we got off the bus in Birmingham...

Levi: Everybody needs to see this. (Melfie 2016, 1:10:02-1:10:23)

Although it is the 1960s, not much has changed in the approaches of black parents through the decades. In the novel *Passing* by Nella Larsen, a similar conflict between a husband and wife arises. *Passing* takes place in the 1920s, and Brian, the father, talks about lynching of people of color with his sons. His wife, Irene, does not want him to discuss the topic with their children, just like Mary does not want the children to see violent scenes on TV. Part of the conversation between Irene and Brian proves that mothers and fathers fill different roles:

Irene: “It was really inexcusable for you to bring up a thing like that at dinner. There’ll be time enough for them to learn about such horrible things when they’re older.”

Brian: “You’re absolutely wrong! If, as you’re so determined, they’ve got to live in this damned country, they’d better find out what sort of thing they’re up against as soon as possible. The earlier they learn it, the better prepared they’ll be.”

Irene: “I don’t agree. I want their childhood to be happy and as free from the knowledge of such things as it possibly can be.” (Larsen [1929] 2020, 102)

The roles of mother and father do differ. Mothers are more nurturing and caretaking than fathers. They show more emotional support and protection. Mothers satisfy the need for love and safety. Fathers, on the other hand, offer guidance and support to the outside world. They discipline the children and assist them in becoming initiative and independent (Cimprichová Gežová 2015, 48-9). This is why the conflict between Irene and Brian is the same as the one between Mary and Levi. Typical parenting roles mean that mothers have a more protective and nurturing nature than fathers do. In contrast, fathers try to prepare their children for the outside world.

Dorothy asserts her power through black feminism throughout the whole movie. The scene where Mrs. Mitchell hands Dorothy a file with her temporary reassignment to help with the IBM computers is another turning point for black women and their movement in the system.

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: 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: 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. (Melfie 2016, 1:26:55-1:27:36).

As written earlier in the chapter "Black Feminism," black feminists seek justice and equality among all men and women. This scene present Dorothy as black feminist using her voice for all other women, regardless their race, against Vivian Mitchell. She stands her ground, knowing that Mrs. Mitchell does not have the upper hand for the first time and needs Dorothy's help. This further significant move of black women has required intelligence and a clever strategy, but Dorothy knows she has to prepare her division for the coming changes in NASA. She knows that to save her job and other women's jobs, she has to outsmart the system, and she does just that (Lieway et al. 2017, 608).

Evidence of sexism is also transparent in scene where Mary attends her first night class:

Mary: I'm enrolled.

Professor: Well, the curriculum is not designed for teaching a woman.

Mary: I imagine it's the same as teaching a man. I don't see a colored section. Should I just take any seat? (Melfie 2016, 1:31:13-1:31:29)

In the 1960s, the main subject of feminism was the experience of women under patriarchy and its way to silence women's voices (Rivkin and Ryan 2004, 765). Men assumed that women cannot handle the same tasks as men did. Mary again shows signs of feminism with her comment on the curriculum being built just for men.

Mary also turns the attention away from sexism to racism when she points out that there are no seats for people of color. The reason behind missing segregation in the class is not that there is no segregation at the school, but that person of color could never attend such a class before due to laws and requirements that an Afro-American person could not fulfill. Mary has found a gap in systemic racism and took her opportunity to sit in the front of the class. The absence of the colored section proves that systemic racism is imperfect, and Mary has discovered how to outsmart it. Her accomplishment is a step forward for black people in general and especially a momentous move forward for black women.

As previously argued, Mrs. Mitchell represents a woman who acts in openly racism manner but believes that her behavior is not racist. This is explicitly discussed in the scene where Dorothy and Mrs. Mitchell accidentally meet in the ladies' room:

Mrs. Mitchell: You know, Dorothy. Despite what you may think...I have nothing against y'all.

Dorothy: I know. I know you probably believe that. (Melfie 2016, 1:34:49-1:35:03)

Institutional racism harms people of color and is built to advantage white people; however, it often is inadvertently or unintentional (Seattle Government 2021). Mrs. Mitchell does not seem to realize that she acts racist. She often justifies her actions with phrases such as "those are the rules," and "that is how it works." Her decisions are, in the end, not hers but the system's. Dorothy gains lots of strength during the movie and confronts Mrs. Mitchell politely with indirect disagreement.

4. Conclusion

This bachelor theses focuses on historical and cultural aspects of the 1960s in the United States of America in women's life. Therefore, it was necessary to include a theoretical part that studies and further explains women's life in the 60s, with the main focus on the changes that appeared during that period. It was proven that women in the 1960s found themselves on a frontier that expected them to return to their roles as mothers and household caretakers after the war period and, on the other, offered them new opportunities for self-development and work. However, the rule of patriarchy did not make the opportunities for women equal to men. Women were oppressed and discriminated against, sexually harassed, and restricted in terms of equal positions or paychecks.

Therefore, the analyses of the film *Hidden Figures* discovered and described the portrayal of women's social, especially employment, roles in the United States in the 1960s with the main focus on Afro-American women. The three women, Katherine, Dorothy, and Mary, proved that change for the better was possible even when they were oppressed not only on the basis of gender but also race. They showed that women had to work within the system, not against it. That discovery points out a huge difference between Afro-American men and women. The men were loud and fought against racism and segregation through protests and by using violent force. In contrast, women worked and manipulated their struggle within the system, which allowed them to move faster. Katherine, Dorothy, and Mary manipulated the system to reach better job positions or gain greater rights as black women. Their struggle required tactics and support from each other. It also showed that moving forward for one of them was a move forward for all of them because their changes not only inspired but also challenged "the law" for the whole minority.

Other findings of this thesis proved that women were seriously restricted by the labor market. The film showed that women, both white and black, worked strictly in female positions such as e.g. secretaries, receptionists, librarians, cleaning ladies, supervisors of female departments, or human computers that were considered unskilled work. Furthermore, this thesis demonstrates that women were seen as inferior to men. They were considered less intelligent, capable, and skilled than men, not only in the workplace but also in their households where men were the head of a family.

The original aim of this bachelor thesis was to compare and analyze common or different characteristics between women of different ethnicities, white and black. However, the main source, the film *Hidden Figures*, lacked white women's presence to be able to accomplish the comparison between the two. Therefore, this thesis focused on women generally and Afro-American women mainly since the film is a biography of Afro-American women.

In my opinion, this bachelor thesis could have a greater potential in the future for a deeper understanding of the problems of sex and race or women's position in male dominating fields. Furthermore, this work could be extended in terms of cinematography studies. I believe it would be interesting to explore how and why the film changes the actual narrative and facts to create a film based on a true story.

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