

Gender-based Discrimination in “*the Hidden Figures*” Novel by Margot Lee Shetterly

Yulisnawati¹, Geni Kurniati²

Universitas Pamulang^{1,2}
Email: yuliss.nobi@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aimed to examine the issue of gender based-discrimination and women struggle in selected novel. In this study, the writer focused on how women were discriminated. It also analysed how they struggled facing the discrimination. The object of the study is Hidden Figures (2016) by Margot Lee Shetterly. The novel talks about the story of the discriminations experienced by three main female characters, named Dorothy Vaughan, Katherine Johnson and Mary Jackson, female mathematician in NASA who help Astronauts by calculating computer program in order to orbit the earth during 1960s. As women during this time, they were being discriminated such as disapprove of equal job as men, their prospect to having a high job were limited by the inequality system, gender barriers that women are not supposed to have a higher position than men. Moreover, women are paid less than men although they have same position. Conclusively, with the strong-willed and hard work, lead them to become the first African-American mathematicians who succeed at National Aeronautics Space Administration (NASA). As guidance, the concept of feminism by Simone De Beauvoir entitled the Second Sex (1956). To be added, this study applied descriptive qualitative research method. The result based on the data analysis showed that the women characters were being discriminated domestically and institutionally. Women received limited access to education and career advancement compared to men. They were also given double burdens due to societal values that women must do the households. Moreover, the discrimination toward women caused them to struggle. It was because of the unequal treatments and stereotypes given by the society. This study also portrays how the female characters effort to deal with the gender-based discriminations by working against systems, focusing on hard work to get the high level of career advancement.

Keywords: African American, discrimination, gender, women, Hidden Figures

A. Introduction

There is an assumption that women are less diligent, therefore they are not suitable to be the head of the household. As a consequence of such a view many women, especially from lower class families, have to work extra hard to maintain the cleanliness and tidiness of the household, starting from cleaning, mopping floors, cooking, sweeping, washing and caring for children. On the other hand, men are not

culturally obligated to pursue 44ncidens types of domestic works, all of this has strengthened the cultural and structural perpetuation of women’s workload. Woman decision in public is frequently criticized asbeing irrational, emotional, and subjectiv e. Contrarily, men have always been viewed as being logical, rational, and objective. However, women should be given the freedom to decide and pursue their interests. It will put women to be on the subject position where they can have the potential as well as the feasibility to make their own choices like men”.

Throughout history, the practice of gender-based discrimination never ends. Alfianto (2022) reports that Google pays female employees \$16,794 per year less than males in the same position. It shows that women employees are being discriminated. Although, they are in the same level with male employees, they are paid lower. There is no equality between female and male workers. Because if they are in the same position, they do the same job and have the same responsibility. Therefore, female workers must be paid as much as the male workers.

Not only happens in a real life, gender-based discrimination is also represented in many literary works. One of the novel that represents the issue mentioned above is *Hidden Figures* by Margot Lee Shetterly. The issue in this study is seen in the novel and it is still relevant to be discussed. It is because the issue of gender discrimination still happening these days.

Hidden Figures (2016) talks about three brilliant black women named Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson. They work at NASA in which is portrayed as a male-dominated area. NASA gives workers only computer (hand calculator), secretary, or janitor positions, but not higher positions as engineers or scientists. Catherine, Mary, and Dorothy, who work as computers, are separated from a white female computer.

Like American society at the time, NASA applied the rule of segregation, or “separate but equal”. This leads to greater discrimination against black female workers. Mary, who wants to become an engineer, has to face several obstacles from different sides. Dorothy doesn’t get paid what she deserves as a supervisor. Catherine, on the other hand, is consistently under-credited for her own work and abused by her white colleagues.

In short, they are hidden characters whose work is underappreciated throughout the film, and despite being geniuses, they have remained in a subordinate position for years. From the explanation above, the writer aims to arrange a scientific study discussed about gender-based discrimination faced by woman using Simone De Beauvoir theory of Feminism entitled “Gender-based Discrimination Reflected in *Hidden Figures* by Margot Lee Shetterly”.

The second related study was conducted by Pasaribu (2019) entitled “The Struggles against Multiple Discrimination in *Hidden Figures* Movie”. This study aims to analyze the multiple discrimination done by the main characters in *Hidden Figures* Movie by using black feminism theory of bell hooks (1984). Pasaribu uses the

descriptive qualitative method to analyzed. The script of *Hidden Figures* Movie has been selected as the subject of the analysis. The result of the study showed that the main characters in the object receive some discrimination. The black women characters are being discriminated racially and domestically. To be black women, they receive racial discrimination from their white colleagues in the society. The black women characters are also treated wrongly by black men character in household. Moreover, Pasaribu also adds that the women characters shows a respond to against the discrimination.

B. Method

This study was categorized as qualitative study. According to Blaxter et al. (1997, p. 60) in a qualitative study numeric data are not used in collecting and analysing data. Meaning that the data is uncountable. Meanwhile, the data are presented in sentences. Concerning with the issue discussed, the purpose of qualitative method is to obtain in depth data about gender inequality. Qualitative study tends to be associated with words or images as part of the analysis (Denscombe, 2007, p. 272). It means the data collected are qualitative data which analysed descriptively. The data are taken from the lines in the novel which have been carefully selected in accordance with issue of the study. Thus, the study would absolutely be explained and concluded in the form of sentences. To analyse the data of the study, *Hidden Figures* (2016) novel by Margot Lee Shetterly was used as the primary data. Data findings are obtained from the dialogues and narrative in the story. They are taken and interpreted to reveal and to answer the gender-based discrimination issue in the discussion. In collecting the data, the writer read the novel repeatedly and carefully. After reading the whole story, the writer identified and selected meaningful lines in related to the issue discussed and ignored the irrelevant one. Lastly, the writer highlighted the chosen lines that would be analysed. The data collected taken from *Hidden Figures* (2016) novel in this study were analyzed using the feminism theory by Simone De Beauvoir (1953). The theory was used to respond the statements of the problem. The collected data were classified according to the term of gender-based discrimination including position in society, decision making, and private-public space roles. After doing an analysis, the writer concluded and arrange the finding in the form of essay

C. Findings and Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings and analysis of the study. Writer uses the data to clarify and verify that the characters in the novel experiences and facing their gender-based discrimination. The story of *Hidden Figures* (2016) is about three intelligent black women named Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson. They work for NASA in what is portrayed as a male-dominated area. NASA gives workers only computer (hand calculator), secretary, or janitor positions, but not higher

positions as engineers or scientists. Catherine, Mary, and Dorothy, who work as computers, are separated from a white female computer. Like American society at the time, NASA applied the rule of segregation, or “separate but equal”. This leads to greater discrimination against black female workers.

Mary, who wants to become an engineer, has to face several obstacles from different sides. Dorothy doesn’t get paid what she deserves as a supervisor. Catherine, on the other hand, is consistently under-credited for her own work and abused by her white colleagues. In short, they are hidden characters whose work is underappreciated throughout the novel, and despite being geniuses, they have remained in a subordinate position for years. Therefore, this chapter discusses about gender inequality and the women struggle of the characters in *Hidden Figures* (2016) by Margot Lee Shetterly. The analysis of gender inequality and the women struggle collected by the narrative from the novel. De Beauvoir (1953, p. 77) mentions that: Woman is shown to us as enticed by two modes of alienation. Evidently to play at being a man will be for her a source of frustration; but to play at being woman is also delusion: to be a woman would mean to be the object, the *Other* – and the Other nevertheless remains subject in the midst of her resignation. There is no place for women to be in the two sex categories, which is why they are considered as the *Other*.

1. Gender-Based Discrimination Portrayed in *Hidden Figures* Novel

1.1. Women’s Inferiority and inequality in Educations

Gender-based discrimination is experienced by the main female characters; Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson. The first gender-based discrimination will discuss about women’s position who are referred more inferior compared to men either in family, work-place, and social life. Due to the society constructions and societal values women are put in the unfavourable position.

During our time home, I spent afternoons with my mother catching matinees at the local cinema, while Aran tagged along with my father and his friends to Norfolk State University football games. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 1)

The quotation above declares gender-based discrimination in term of women’s inferiority. It can be known from how the women and men family member’s activity. There is difference in which the women member of the family goes enjoying movie and the men member go to play football. The difference of activities clearly symbolizes that women are limited to go outside. To stay inside of the room definitely limits women’s activity. There are no many choices outside activity for them. Therefore, it impacts on their knowledge of outside world. However, the man members can go outside. It shows that the men in the family are given more options to what they want to do. They gain more knowledge outside. The football game also is the symbol of power. It can be concluded that men are described as powerful. On the other hands, women are powerless because their activity inside of the cinema does not need a lot of energies.

While the black women are the most hidden of the mathematicians who worked at NACA, they were not sitting alone in the shadows. The white women who made up the majority of Langley’s computing workforce over the years have hardly been recognized for their contributions to the agency’s long-term success. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 3)

The quotation above shows gender-based discrimination in term of women inferiority. It can be known from how the black women mathematicians are stated to be not as recognized as men. Moreover, this problem is also faced by the white women. The women have given their role that leads to the success of the agency they work in. However, their existences are unseen. Women's works are not valued by the society. To be hired as mathematicians and computers prove that women are considered to be less professional compared to men counterparts. On the other hands, men are employed as engineer because they are considered to be more professional and competent than women. To be added, there is also a stratum in between men and women's job desk. As mathematicians and computer women, they are obliged to wait for men's instruction and direction. However, male engineers are given role to lead the research. This idea denotes women are man's follower. Because they are women, they cannot be a leader.

Langley's first female computing pool, started in 1935, had caused an uproar among the men of the laboratory. How could a female mind process something so rigorous and precise as math? The very idea, investing \$500 on a calculating machine so it could be used by a girl" (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 5)

The quotation above proves how men consider women as ingenious. By stating 'how could a female mind process something so rigorous', clearly explains that the male reflects themselves as the most intelligent person. Moreover, it emphasizes how women are depicted in man's perspective. Women are seen as irrational, unintelligent, and unprofessional. Therefore, Langley's first female computing pool becomes a discussion for its existence.

In the Workplace women's capability and ability are being questioned. Meanwhile, men engineer is never given a questioned for their presence. They are considered to be smart and rational. This notion portrays women's position in society as inferior gender. There is no equality between the two genders. Men and women have discrepancy in accessing the resources such in health, education, and career. For example, women are not given equal chance in term of carrier in NASA. It can be seen from

But there was no way that Randolph, or the men at the laboratory, or anyone else could have predicted that the hiring of a group of black female mathematicians at the Langley Memorial Aeronautical Laboratory would end at the moon. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 8)

The reality that women only hired as mathematicians proves the idea of gender-based discrimination. Langley Laboratory only give women mathematicians position. It cannot be predicted when this discrimination will stop. This proves that women are given limited access to widen their career. However, for men they have the position to rule women. It is because men are considered as superior while women are inferior.

Male and female employee are standing in the opposite way. Male employees are the leader, while female employees are the follower. In other words, men are powerful because of their position, while women are powerless because they are below men.

Another woman in Dorothy's situation might have seen taking the laundry job as unthinkable, regardless of the economics. Wasn't the purpose of a college degree to get away

from the need to work dirty and difficult jobs? And the location of the camp, thirty miles southeast of Farmville, meant that she lived in worker housing during the week and got back home only on weekends. But the 40 cents an hour Dorothy earned as a laundry sorter bested what she earned as a teacher, and with four children, a summer of extra income would be put to good and immediate use. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 11)

From the quotations above, it can be known that woman is given double burdens. Not only a housewife, Dorothy also works as a teacher. Moreover, she also takes the job as a laundry worker. When a women work, they still need to do the domestic work while the men in the house do not require to do this. These things are undoubtable tiring. Although Dorothy has a title, she is still being discriminated by her own family. The reason is because of her gender as a woman and wife. After an exhausting work as a teacher, Dorothy has to work as a laundry worker. Laundry is a symbol of feminism. For she is married, it can be concluded that she experiences gender inequality in a household. Her position in the family is under her husband. Dorothy is in inferior while her husband is superior.

For many men, a computer was a piece of living hardware, an appliance that inhaled one set of figures and exhaled another. Once a girl finished a particular job, the calculations were whisked away into the shadowy kingdom of the engineers. “Woe unto thee if they shall make thee a computer,” joked a column in *Air scoop*. “For the Project Engineer will take credit for whatsoever thou doth that is clever and full of glory. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, pp. 58-59)

The quotation above describes woman struggle and discrimination. It can be seen from the line “a girl finished a particular job; the calculations were whisked away into the shadowy kingdom of the engineers”. It means that when female workers have a contribution on the project, all the complement still goes to the engineers. The engineers refer to the male workers in NASA. It is because the female workers’ positions are unseen. They are behind male workers. The engineers claims that they are the one who make the research successful. It is because every technology in NASA is designed and built by the engineers.

However, when the research is being unsuccessful, all the blames go to the female computers. It can be seen from the quotation below:

But if he slippeth up, and maketh a wrong calculation, or 48ncide a boner of any kind of whatsoever, he shall lay the mistake at thy door when he is called to account and he shall say, ‘What can you expect from girls computers anyway?’” (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, pp. 58-59)

The statement, “What can you expect from girls computers anyway?” clearly shows how the male consider the female workers as stupid people. The narration definitely describes women do not have the ability to make right decision. It is because women are irrational rather than rational human being. In contrast, they secretly declare themselves as rational and smart.

Perhaps more striking than the racial integration of the female mathematicians, which had been spreading organically throughout Langley for years, was the fact that a group focused on computing now employed increasing numbers of men. The function of computing had been promoted from an all-female service organization with minimal hardware requirements to a top-level division with

an eight-figure operating budget; it was starting to look a lot more like a launchpad and a career path to ambitious young men. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 205)

The increasing number of men on computing illustrate how men dominate the Langley. Men worker becomes the main employees; being leaders, being in charge, making decisions, even in areas that are said to be women's areas, men are often in the most important positions. Pratama and Chaniago (2017) argue that when comparing the best decision-making, women's decision-making is emotional and full of complicated considerations, and it takes a long time, whereas male decision-making focuses on logic and rationality, and it is quick. Therefore, man is suitable chosen as decision-maker.

For Katherine, being selected to rotate through building 1244, the kingdom of the fresh-air engineers, felt like an unexpected bit of fortune, however temporary the assignment might prove to be. Most of the people in the space were men, but interspersed among them a few women consulted their calculating machines or peered intently at slides in film viewers. Along one wall was the office of the division chief, Henry Pearson, with a station for his secretary just in front. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 122)

The issue of gender based-discrimination is also seen in the selected quotation above. It can be seen from the number of women who become engineers in building 1244. The dominant gender there is men. Women are doubted about their professional abilities. Moreover, it also describes about women feeling who feels her position is completely side-lined by society. This happens because woman experiences repression as a minority where the dominant group is taken by men. De Beauvoir (1953, p. 25) states that people have spent a lifetime trying to verify that a woman is stronger, weaker, or equal to a man. This statement shows that women are still a gender whose position and ability are doubted by society so that they are compared with men. This also leads to the position of a man where they are the more visible position in society, while women are only a comparison even though both are part of social beings. It means that being a minority in a society that only recognizes the position of men is a form of women's discrimination. It can be known from how women are given responsible related to calculating machine and film viewers.

The position and the job given are not appropriate. Despite Katherine is rotated to the engineer building, she is still a follower there because she is a woman. It can be seen from her boss who is a man. Leadership positions or leadership values in a company are often associated with masculinity and men. Women are considered to have no place because they do not have the values that have been owned by men. Women are given limited rights, one of which is in making a decision only because of social assumptions regarding nature they have. The nature that is taught to women creates a paradigm in society. Women are believed to take a long time in making decisions and the results will be very complicated. De Beauvoir (1953, p. 283) sum ups that a woman is deeply concerned about everything that goes on within her, and she is far less visible to her own eyes, more thoroughly involved in the mysterious wonders of existence, than a man is.

The gender discrimination also can be seen from how men are given more budget than women. The path going to success for men is likely easier. They are

supported by the institution and society. However, career of women is being blocked by the society and institution. It can be proven from the limited access given to women and unlimited access for men workers.

Male supervisors warned Gloria to “stay away from the woman stuff,” but the woman stuff was just as important to Gloria as it was to Mary Jackson. She had seen how dependent her mother, who was smart but valued for her beauty, had been on her father and stepfather. Gloria vowed never to be in the same situation; she never entertained the idea of not working, even after her three children came along. It was a decision that helped her to bear up when she separated from and then divorced her husband in the mid-1960s, leaving her a single mother and the head of her household at a time when the majority of white women still didn’t work outside the home. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 259)

From the quotation above, it can be known how Gloria is being subordinated by her male supervisor. It also seen how an intelligent woman is only valued for her beauty. The society refuses woman’s power as they consider themselves as the most powerful people.

Moreover, the society construction about women is untrue. It can be known from how strong they live their life. It is known from how Gloria carries double burdens; working and raising their children. This proves that women are powerful not powerless. In addition, the discrimination of women also happens to the white. It is mentioned that the majority of white women are prohibited to work outside of the house. De Beauvoir (1953, p. 273) says that being feminine implies being weak, futile, passive, and docile. It can be interpreted that women are required to obey a rule or the words of a certain person, while women also want to participate in deciding things for themselves without being forced by any group. In the lines above, women have limits on their bodies and are closely related to the word obedient which makes women more passive in social life. This treatment creates discrimination of women where women have limited rights to make decisions about their own lives. It can be concluded that woman is given responsible to do the domestic work, and is restricted to see the outside world. It limits women knowledge. The role of women has always been more dominant in domestic work, while it is men who leave the house to earn money.

1.2. Limitation of Career Advancements and Workplace’s Facilities

Another of gender-based discrimination is about the limitation of career advancements. The women who work at NASA get minimum appreciation and advancements. Moreover, there are inequality in term of the wages. It can be seen from the quotation below,

But the “girls” had been good, very good— better at computing, in fact, than many of the engineers, the men themselves grudgingly admitted. With only a handful of girls winning the title “mathematician”— a professional designation that put them on equal footing with entry-level male employees— the fact that most computers were designed as lower-paid “subprofessionals” provided a boost to the laboratory’s button line. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 5)

The lines above prove women are paid unequally. The underpaid salary is supported by the institution; therefore, it can be defined as institutional

discrimination. This gender discrimination portrays the violent because they are not achieving the salary same as the men in the same level of job career. Giving underpaid salary exploits women's mind, time and energy as an employee. Women deserve to receive the same wage as man because they did the same job with man. This condition is a biased for woman as the employees. In addition, it demotes women as professional employee, limit their opportunities for their personal growth because they never get the promotion and salary which they deserve. Without proper salaries and promotions, these women will always fall behind man in their career path.

Her honors degree in mathematics, her time in graduate school, and her years teaching math added up to the very modest job rating of SP-3: a level 3 subprofessional, the entry-level fate of most of the women hired at Langley, regardless of their professional and educational credentials. (Shetterly, 2016, p. 121)

The quotation above shows gender-based discrimination in term of limitation of career advancement that experienced by Katherine Johnson. No matter how good degree she had in mathematics, as a woman Langley's put her in SP-3 which was the low rank of the job for practically all female employees at Langley at the time. This indicates that the workplace has constructed women to be inferior to male. As a result, it is difficult for women to gain their professional growth. The society tends to mistreats woman. They consider that men's position is above women. That is why it is appropriate to pay them higher. It can be concluded that woman is still a gender whom the ability is doubted by society. Therefore, woman's job is paid lower compare to man. While men workers make mistakes, they blame the female workers. This happens because men are considered as the subject and the decisive. While, women are the object. "But where will I find the job?" Katherine asked. "That will be your problem," said her mentor. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 74)

By asking "But where will I find the job?", Katherine herself realizes that in the society she lives in, there is no as many job opportunities as given to men. By stating I, she stresses the fact that it is harder for woman to get a job rather than men. She expresses her inner feelings about the injustices that women experience, one of which is limited access to a career. This proves the idea of gender-based discrimination. To find a job, women will be more struggled compare to men. It because women are being stereotyped as gender whose stupid, weak, and irrational. However, men are assumed to be more genius.

Women, on the other hand, had to wield their intellects like a scythe, hacking away against the stubborn underbrush of low expectations. The work most of the women, like that of the Friden, Marchant, or Monroe computing machines they used, was anonymous. Even a woman who had worked closely with an engineer on the content of a research report was rarely rewarded by seeing her name alongside his on the final publication. Why would the computers have the same desire for recognition that they did? Many engineers figured. They were women, after all. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 83)

The quotation above illustrates gender-based discrimination in term of limitation of career advancements. Women's work is not as appreciated as men's

work. It can be known from the word “anonymous”. Women are not supposed to mentioned their name on the content research report they make since the research reports is one of step to every engineer for the next level. However, for the engineer which refers to men employee, they attach their name on the research publication. The engineer is not done it by himself rather than being help by the female co-workers. Therefore, this case can be said as gender-based discrimination. This treatment surely puts women in a lower position compare to men. Different pattern of treatment done by the society clearly causes her to struggle. It is because they feel ignored. No matter how hard they work, they will not be appreciated.

There were too few women at Murroc to warrant sending them off into a separate section. In the isolation of the dessert, in close working conditions at bare-bones facility with ramshackle dormitories, the Murroc computers stepped easily into the role of junior engineers. Upward mobility was more difficult to achieve in the larger, more bureaucratic operation at Mother Langley, with all well-developed management structure. Getting one’s name on a research report was a necessary first step in the career of an engineers. For a woman, it was a significant and unusual achievement. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 85)

Another quotation above describes gender-based discrimination in term of limitation of career advancement. It can be seen from the phrase ‘too few woman’. It refers to the number of female workers who work there. The number of female and male workers are imbalanced. It is because the available place for women is limited. Women get smaller place to work compared to men. It can be said that women are dominated by men. It is mentioned that to be engineer is unusual achievement for women. This term proves that women are not given the equal opportunity as men. There is imbalance representation in the workplace. Women are less dominant while men are exclusively addressed. Moreover, men workers are also given more crucial roles than women such as to be engineer.

Whereas the black women enjoy the support that came from being part of a group, starting in a pool was not an option for a male engineer. William and the other black men who were soon to follow in his footsteps had a more solitary work life and faced aggressions that the women did not. But even though it was the black women who broke Langley’s color barrier, paving the way for the black men now being hired, the women would still have to fight for something that the black men could take for granted: the title of engineer. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 114)

Another quotation above shows gender discrimination issue in term of limitation of career advancements. The engineer positions are stereotyped to be a place only for men. Engineer has been so far identified as an industry dominated by men. It can be proven from, although the men and women have the same colour, they are in the different position. Black men are easily hired as engineer because their gender is male. However, the black women employees still have to fight to become engineer. Once again, this proves that men are considered to be more intelligent than women. Men are superior gender while women are inferior to them. However, this must not go this way. It is because female employees at Langley are the one who broke the stereotype stamped to black people. Moreover, women employees also

have given their big contribution to the company. Therefore, they must be given the equal opportunity like men.

The majority of Langley's female professionals had spent their time at the laboratory classified as computers. Some, like Dorothy Vaughan and Dorothy Hoover, made the grade as mathematicians from day one; others earned the designation over time. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 143)

The quotation above represents gender discrimination. It can be seen from the majority of computers and mathematician in Langley who are female. Mathematician in NACA create models that demonstrate complex processes or solve problems. Therefore, this job is suitable for women, because problem solving is identical with them. However, Engineer position is dominated by men. Engineer in NASA is reflected as superman. De Beauvoir (1953, p.567-568) says that women themselves recognize that the world is masculine as a whole; those who created it ruled it, and still dominate it today are men. This statement further reinforces that a set of rules is still dominated by men as decision-makers.

Cited from NASA website, it is written that Engineer is able to turn the dream into reality. They design and build powerful rockets for space exploration. From the job description above, it can be seen that there is a different depiction of engineer and mathematician. Engineer is seen to be superior while mathematician is inferior. Although, they are team. People will consider that engineer is a lot greater than mathematician.

"Why can't I go to the editorial meetings?" she asked the engineers. A postgame recap of the analysis wasn't nearly as thrilling as being there for the main event. How could she not want to be a part of the discussion? They were her numbers, after all. "Girls don't go to the meeting," Katherine's male colleagues told her. "Is there a law against it?" Katherine retorted. There wasn't, in fact. There were laws telling her where she might answer nature's call—a law she ignored at Langley—and which fountain to drink from. There were laws restricting her ability to apply for a credit card in her own name, because she was a woman. But no law applied to the editorial meeting. It wasn't personal: it was just the way things had always been done, they told her. Restricting the computers from joining the editorial meetings wasn't a rule: it was a rule of thumb. It was rooted in practice and widely implemented, but it did not apply without exception to every situation. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 179)

The quotation above shows genders the limitation of work place's facilities. It can be known from how women employees are restricted to join the meeting just because they are women. There is no law prohibition about women attending a meeting. However, the social implementation in the workplace at Langley has been this way. Women employee have not been able to freely play their roles in public spaces as mention in lines "Why can't I go to the editorial meetings?". This line means that women are still not allowed to attend meetings directly or indirectly.

Female employees have the same right as male to join the meeting. Therefore, the male counterparts cannot authorize the female employees to do it. They should be given the same access to the meeting. They also have the right to know the result of the analysis of their works. There has been a wrong

implementation about restricting women to join meeting. Therefore, it can be said that women employees are received injustice treatment from the society they are in. Moreover, Katherine is not only discriminated in her workplace but also in a bank. Katherine mentions that she cannot apply for credit card using her own name. It clearly depicts discrimination. Women are considered to be economically weak.

Women were “supposed” to wait for the assignments for their supervisors, and weren’t expected to take the lead by asking questions or pushing for plum assignments. Men were engineers and women were computers; men did the analytical thinking and women did the calculations. Men gave the orders and women took notes. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, pp. 180-181)

The line above reveals gender discrimination in term of women’s inferiority. It can be seen from how women should follow men’s order. In other words, man is the subject while woman is the object. It also talks about the position of women who are considered unimportant or even only seen as objects so that they can be controlled and ignored.

De Beauvoir (1953, p. 273) argues that it is only normal for the future woman to be offended by the limitations posed by her sex. This further underlines the meaning of the lines that women have limitations related to their rights because of their position who was born as a woman. They are also considered only as objects that make others think that women can be controlled by others. Thus, gender-based discrimination is identified because women are given limitations which makes women not treated equally. Women employees do not have the capacity to lead men as for they are men’s subordinate. Male are the director who leads female’s direction. Women are men’s followers. To be added, the line above also shows the depiction of woman. Women are stereotyped that they rely more on their emotions and cannot think logically referred to irrational while men are told that they are strong and think logically referred to genius. This leads to women who will face difficulty to get the opportunity to make decisions in society. It is because society believes that decisions taken by women will be complex because of their unreasonable way of thinking. In contrast, men have reasonable way of thinking since they are considered as smart human being. Men use brain to analyse, whereas women use instinct.

Whatever personal insecurities Katherine Goble might have had about being a woman working with men, or about being one of the few blacks in a white workplace, she managed to cast them aside when she came to work in the morning. The racism stuff, the woman stuff: she managed to tuck all that way in a place far from her core, where it would not damage her steely confidence. (Shetterly, 2016:P.181)

West computing’s first supervisor, who eventually joined Katherine’s branch, she said, “She was extremely smart, and she didn’t get half the credit she deserved.” She enjoyed bragging about Christine Darden’s accomplishments more than she wanted to talk about her own work. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 250)

The quotations above describe gender discrimination in term of limitation of career advancement. It can be known from how Katherine is not credited for the work which has been done by her. There is no appreciation for her. The credit for

her work is all go to her male counterpart. This shows how Katherine has been neglected.

The injustice treatment is given because of the society construction about women. The society label woman as fragile human. They do not have the power to oppose the discrimination. Katherine will not have choice except to accept it. The conditions at her workplace are not in her favour.

Henry Pearson had the reputation of being less than supportive of the advancement of female employees, but whether it was circumstance, the triumph of hard work over bias, or an incorrectly deserved reputation, it was on his watch that Katherine put the finishing touches on her first research report on the Friday after Thanksgiving 1959. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 192)

From the quotation above, it can be known how the development of women is based on their male leader. It proves that women positions are as followers. As followers, they cannot take a lead. They will stay behind the men. It also shows man as superior and women as inferior. This idea is intended as an intangible barrier of a hierarchy that prevents women or minorities from gaining top-level positions. The women position is shadowed by the men. Cited from Wikipedia in the United States, Thanksgiving holiday, which always falls on Thursday, is the first day of a 4-day weekend. However, the situation above is a contradiction. As women, Katherine is also asked to finish her research report right after Thanksgiving. This proves that there is gender-based discrimination.

She was also a quick study with computers: Mary Jackson taught her how to “reprogram” the computers in the Human Resources Division, going deep into the databases that fed the systems in order to run statistical reports on employee qualifications and promotions. These reports revealed that female graduates with the same degrees as men were still more often hired as “data analysts,” the upgraded term for the center’s mathematicians, than as engineers. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 259)

The quotation above shows gender based-discrimination. Gender equality in the workplace includes fair recruitment, equal pay distribution, equal capacity building and training facilities. In society there is a growing perception that physically, men are stronger than women. The effect of this assumption also spreads to the world of work, where women are considered less productive and contribute less than male workers. Therefore, women are given lower position in the workplace. It is proven from the line ‘female graduates with the same degrees as men were still more often hired as “data analysts,” the upgraded term for the center’s mathematicians, than as engineers.’ Although both man and women are graduated with the same title, they are not given the same option. Female is always given a job as mathematician rather than engineer. Both genders have the same ability and knowledge but the society treats them differently. This term also effects economically as engineer position is higher than mathematician.

2. The Female Characters’ Effort to Deal with Gender-Based Discrimination in *Hidden Figures*

Women struggle because of their position as inferior to men, societal value expects them to be a wife and mother, and given double burdens. It can be seen from how the women characters experiencing injustice. Therefore, they fight for her and other women rights in some social aspect such as workplace and educational institution.

2.1. The Female Characters’ Deal with women’s Inferiority and inequality in Educations

To be added, their existence is never seen as laundry workers. They have important role in society, but no one considers it as an important work. They paid less, although it is a tough work. It can be said that the women laundry workers are side-lined by the society.

Many black teacher women were called upon to do whatever was necessary to keep the schoolhouses clean, safe, and comfortable for pupils. They shoveled coal in winters, fixed broken windows, scrubs dirty floors, and prepared lunch. They reached into their own threadbare purses when the schoolroom kitty fell short. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 11)

The quotation above indicates how women effort to deal with the gender-based discrimination. As teachers, their responsibility undeniable is to teach. However, because of they are women teacher, they have to extra work to do the cleaning, keeping the school safe and comfortable, making lunch, and scrubbing the dirty floor. Again, double burdens are carried by women. They are not only teaching but also doing the domestic work such as at home. All of these are stereotyped to be a women’s job. It all becomes women responsibility to clean, cook, mop, and etc. These ideas are not fair for women. Every teacher regardless of their gender should be given the same responsible. The situation in the school illustrates women’s position. They are inferior and weak. They are being oppressed because of their gender. In another side, there is a man supremacy.

Their lives and futures informed ever decision she made. Like virtually every Negro woman she knew, she struggled to find the balance between spending time with her children at home and spending time for them, for her family, at a job. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 12)

The quotation above shows women effort because of double burdens. Having a career outside of the house, women are still given responsibility to take care of the children. After finishing their duty at work, women are demanded to be a good mother for the children. However, the head of the family is not given this kind of job. Women in a household are being objectified by the men. They should clean, cook, wash, and take care of the family while men are free from these duties. In consequence, women have unbalanced life. They feel pressured. Therefore, women should be given free time for themselves like men because they also have the right.

Dorothy, though only nineteen years old felt it was her responsibility to ensure that the family could make its way through the hard times, even though it meant closing the door on her own ambition, at least for the moment. She opted to earn a degree in education and pursue teaching, the most stable career for black women with college degree. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 13)

The lines above reflect the women's effort to deal with the gender-based discriminations in term of inequality of education. It can be seen how Dorothy is responsible for going through the difficult times experienced by her family. Being responsible here means sacrificing one of Dorothy's dreams to do something else. "Closing the door on her own ambitious, at least for the moment" explains that Dorothy will continue to struggle. It means that after the situation improves, she will continue her struggle to achieve her success. And then the sentence continued "She opted to earn a degree in education and pursue teaching, the most stable career for black woman with a college degree." The line indicates the beginning of Dorothy's life. This is further clarified that several characteristics of women who still have difficulty to have stable career is women with black skin.

Dorothy starts working as a Mathematic and English teacher at a Negro School in rural Tams, Illinois, ending after her first school year. Teacher job is stereotyped to be suited with woman. However, luck was not on her side. The reason is that the falling cotton prices hit the countryside which sulted in schools being closed without leaving general education for students in these villages. This makes Dorothy have to look for part-time work because since the 57ncident Dorothy has not been paid by the school.

With the shadow of the Depression always at the back of her mind, Dorothy Vaughan sewed clothes for herself and her children, clipped coupons, and wore shoes until her feet started to push through the worn soles. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 79)

The quotation above depicts women's effort in facing gender-based discrimination. As women, Dorothy Vaughan is given double burden. Not only work at office, she also responsible for the domestic work. Sewing clothes is identical with women's work. Therefore, Vaughan as a mother and wife must be the one who do this. Mother is the only one who must take care of the children.

However, she returned to Hampton to help care for her ailing father. Nepotism laws forbade her from teaching in one of Hampton's public Negro elementary schools since the school system already employed two of her sisters. But her excellent organizing skills, fluency with numbers, and good marks in a college typing course made her the perfect fit for the King Street USO, which in 1943 was looking for a secretary and bookkeeper. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 95)

The quotation above expresses Mary's effort. It can be seen when Mary faces with the situation of her father who is sick. Mary has to leave her career and return to Hampton to help care for her ill father. Woman is the one who must give up her dream to take care of her father. In can be interpreted that there is no choice for woman. Woman is the one who must sacrifice for man. Returning to her hometown limits her to broaden her knowledge. Mary is a hard-working woman. While at Hampton Mary still tries to find work. "Nepotism laws forbade her from teaching in one of Hampton's public Negro elementary schools since the school system already employed two of her sisters." The sentence explains that Mary must struggle to get a job. With that rule, anything Mary wants to do would be very difficult. It is a lot harder for woman to be hired. Although woman is smart, they still become the second option gender.

Most of the country’s top engineer school didn’t accept women. Kitty O’Brien Joyner, the laboratory’s first female engineer from the time Pearl Young Left until the middle of 1950, had been forced to sue University of Virginia to enroll in school’s all-male undergraduate engineering school in 1939. As for black female engineers, there weren’t enough of them in the country to constitute a rounding error. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 144)

The prohibitions in enrolling women to be engineer student are a form of institutionalized which supported by the educational institution and the law. This sexism assumes that women as less intelligent compare to men. Women get lack of appreciation and acknowledgement as skilled employee who are equally contributing to space exploration research. Being approved by NASA is tangible proof that they are more than qualified. Nevertheless, their capabilities are still doubtfully by male workers. This situation is experienced by Mary Jackson when she moves to the Four-by-Four-Foot Supersonic Pressure Tunnel. John Becker, the chief of the Compressibility Division gave her an assignment.

John Becker gave Mary Jackson the instructions for working through the calculations. She delivered the finished assignment to him just as she completed her work for Dorothy Vaughan, double-checking all numbers, confident that they were correct. Backer reviewed the out-put, but something about the numbers didn’t seem right to him. So, he challenged Mary’s number, insisting that her calculations were wrong. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 115)

The quotation above Indicates gender discrimination that p’rceives woman as less intelligence from man. John Becker has degraded Mary’s prestige as mathematician in NASA. In addition, the way he treated Mary also indicates the inferiority of gender in work place, assuming that woman is less competent and creative to solve the complex problem.

For two weeks, Katherine worked the desk, learning the ropes. Her honors degree in mathematics, her time in graduate school, and her years teaching math added up to the very modest job rating of SP-3: a level 3 subprofessional, the entry-level fate of most of the women hired at Langley, regardless of their professional and educational credentials. Despite the fact that hundreds of women had gone through the position, it was still expected that the women would accept their new jobs with a little gee-I’m-just-glad-to-be-here gratitude. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 121)

The quotation above describes how women employees have different starting point in job compare to men. It indicates how women effort to have a carrier path. Men and women should be given the same opportunity to build a career. However, all women employees start their career to be a computer, their education background and experience are not being considered as crucial as men. Computer is examined as a feminine work. That is why it is dominated by female. For men, they can directly start their career as engineer. Engineer is constructed as men’s job. Therefore, it can be concluded as gender based-discrimination as there is different treatment from the company to men and woman employees.

While “Red engineering schools” in the Soviet Union were “loaded with women”—one third of Soviet engineering grads were female, the Washington Post

reported in 1958—The United States still struggled to find a place for women and Negroes in its science workplace, and in society at large. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 158)

The quotation shows gender-based discrimination and women efforts in term of inequality in education. It can be seen from the limited space available for woman. Nevertheless, the majority of grads are women, the country does not provide appropriate place for them to contribute in engineering world. This proves that women are still being questioned by the society about their engineering science. The engineer position is not suitable for woman due to gender stereotyped. Whereas, the existence of multi gender in one team will help the team to develop. Different perspectives can create different points of view. The involvement of women will become increasingly important to ensure that the resulting technological innovations can serve the needs of society at large regardless of their gender.

It was a concept easily grasped, empirically proven, but far from simple to execute: if a woman wanted to get promoted, she had to leave the computing pool and attach herself to the elbow of an engineer, figure out how to sit at the controls of a wind tunnel, fight for the credit on a research report. To move up, she had to get as close as she could to the room where the ideas were being created. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 166)

The quotation above tells how women deals with the men as a superior. Women are depicted as inferior gender for they have to stick to men if they want to get promotion. This idea creates the women' image as helpless and worthless. They cannot reach the upper position without the help from men. Here, man as an engineer is depicted as a hero for woman. They are powerful to do so. Women are always considered incompetent to lead something, therefore women should only follow directions and stay behind. They should not surpass men.

The progress that the black women had made in the last fourteen years was unmistakable. Demand for their mathematical abilities had opened Langley's front door to them, and the quality of their work had kept them in their desks. Through the familiarity that came with regular contact, they had been able to establish themselves relied upon to swiftly and accurately translate the raw babble of the laboratory's fierce machines into a language that could be analyzed and turned into a vehicle that cut through the sky with grace and power. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 167)

The quotation above describes woman struggle gender-based discrimination. It can be seen from how they have been miserable for such a long time. Their effort on their works is unseen just because they are women. Their ability call into doubt by the society. Therefore, it is proven that when women are given the equal chance to develop themselves, they can be aligned with men.

2.2. The Female Characters' Deal with Limitation of Career Advancements and Workplace's Facilities

In a workplace, everyone has the right to work comfortably and get the same chance to develop. Starting from an objective recruitment process, work placement according to ability, and the opportunity to pursue a career path to eventually lead a team or division. Men employees are given higher position than women from the

beginning. This shows that they are considered to be more powerful and smarter. However, women are standing in the opposite way. They are powerless and less smart than men.

The female mathematicians' job security wasn't immediately threatened by the machines, but Dorothy Vaughan perceived that mastering the machine would be the key to long-term career stability. When Langley Sponsored a series of computation courses to be held after work and on weekends, Dorothy wasted no time enrolling. She encouraged the women in her group to do the same. To keep moving forward, they needed to take advantage of every opportunity to make themselves as valuable as possible to the laboratory. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 139)

The quotation above shows how women effort in term of the limitation of career advancement. It can be known from how the female employees work and learn extra hard to mastering the machine in the hope for to be preserved by the company. If they don't try to move forward, they will feel unable to actualize themselves. Their efforts to maintain themselves are much more difficult than male workers. Dorothy Vaughan and her female co-workers' existence is not considered as something important by the company. Therefore, women are employed contractually. The women employees are also given double burdens as for they need to spend extra hours to attend the course after working and on Saturday, Sunday.

The prejudice to women is unfair. They are seen as powerless human being. However, they can be as powerful as men. Women have been limited to prove how strong they are. Gender discrimination is not supporting women to grow and develop by having a foundation to prove themselves with achievements.

Mary's career frustration wasn't unique, she knew. When she looked around, she saw many women and minorities at Langley trapped in the sticky middle grades, unable to rise to the level that their ability would otherwise merit. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 256)

The term of women struggle can be seen from the quotation above. It is mentioned how hard for Mary and the other girls to level up their carrier. They all have the abilities like men but they are limited because of their gender. Female employees at Langley cannot proceed their male counterparts. The limitation in the workplace for women cause them to make an extra effort. It can be concluded that male workers paid more compare to female as their position and status is higher. However, the female employees are far from prosperous as they stuck with their same position and status as a contract worker.

Many computers and other female employees at the laboratory exchanged the daily routine of office life for a full-time position at home. No small number of them married the men they worked with. Many women tendered their resignations during their pregnancies and reapplied to the laboratory when they were ready to work again, hoping they would find a way to wrangle back their old jobs. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 80)

The quotation above shows women's effort. Family is the smallest social institution with its own social structure and system, as well as a group of people living under one roof who have close ties and blood relations through descent and marriage. However, it is mentioned that female employees are the only who

responsible for the domestic work. This proves that there is no equality for wife in a household. Although both wife and husband work in the same office, wife has to do all the cleaning, washing, cooking, etc. after exhausting work at office. For men, they can directly take a rest while home. Women are not given a chance to grow. In general, society still adheres to the notion that women are a second-class group, and their position is below men.

The laboratory was still hiring women into the the pool faster than they were being sent out to other positions. Women who did get assigned to another section were usually staffed on temporary duty and eventually returned, keeping the two offices full, at least for the moment. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 88)

The quotation above shows how women are blocked to have more higher career. Women workers are stuck on the bottom level. They forced to stay there. Ironically, women are usually work temporarily. There is smaller chance for them to be permanent employee in contrast to men workers. Consequently, women's income is less than men. This idea proves the relationship of women and men is the relationship of weak-strong, leader-follower, superior and inferior gender. Women and men are standing on the opposite way. To be men, they are directly being supported by the society even though when men do nothing. However, being female worker is a pressure. It is because the society creates a lot of expectation. People expect woman to be at home becoming a wife and mother. There are no many options for women to do what they really want to do. This cause women to struggle.

There were limited ways for a white computer to break into management at Langley. Finding a way to move from being one of the girls to one of the Head Girls took time and persistence, pluck and luck, and there were only so many slots available: white even lower-lever male managers might supervise the work of female computers, it was a simply unthinkable for a man to report to a woman. Women with an eye on a management job were limited to heading a section in one of the now-decentralized computing pools or in another division with many female employees, such as personnel. (Shetterly, *Hidden Figures*, 2016, p. 91)

The quotation above proves how women effort to deal with gender-based discrimination in term of limitation of career advancement. It can be known from the difficulties faced by female employee to have carrier path like male employee. There is limited chance available for women to lead men in workplace. Once again, this shows inequality in term of opportunity. The phrase 'unthinkable for a man to report to a woman' means that men's position is above women. Therefore, the who must report is women. In conclusion, men are more powerful rather than women. To be added, women's ability is also being stereotyped. It can be seen from how there are a lot of female employees in personnel. The HR department's task area does not only deal with personnel management, but has also developed into a very comprehensive management issue which involves understanding people.

D. Conclusion

After selecting and analysing the *Hidden Figures* (2016) novel by Margot Lee Shetterly, it can be concluded that woman regardless of their race; black or white are

discriminated by the society because of their gender. The discriminations of women characters in the novel not only happen in the workplace but also at home. The discrimination is in the forms of education, job advancement, societal value, and decision making. Therefore, it can be said that the women characters in *Hidden Figure* novel are discriminated institutionally and domestically. Domestic discrimination towards women members in a family happens because there is patriarchy cultural structure. This structure puts men’s position above woman since they are considered as strong and smart people. However, women are weak and stupid. Women are given the responsibility to do the households such as; cooking, washing, cleaning, and taking care of the children. Women are restricted to work outside of the house. It happens to Mary who wants to be an engineer. However, her husband does not support her to do so.

Another gender-based discrimination that reveal in this study is harder for women to get education. It can be seen from how most top engineer school do not accept women. Women characters of the novel also receive unequal treatment in the workplace. In term of wage, Dorothy also does not get paid as the deserve although she does the same amount of job. Katherine as a computer is not allowed to mention her name on the report that she makes. This proves that women’s work is discriminated and unappreciated. To be added, it is also restricted for Katherine to go to the editorial meeting though she is part of the engineer team. The available position for women is also limited and the position given is men’s subordinate. Women employees are also only man’s follower. Additionally, women also struggle in living their life in society. It is because women are considered as the second sex by the society. Inferior always sticks to women’s depiction. Therefore, men are seen as powerful, rational and intelligent human being while women are powerless, irrational, and unintelligent.

In addition, societal values also make women carry double burdens. When women work, they still obligate to do the tiring domestic works. In comparison, men do not need to do these kinds of job as all already done by the women. Moreover, women are also struggle to get a job at NACA since there are limited positions for women in which mathematician and computer. To be a women engineer, they must work harder than men do. Women’s carrier path is not as easy as men. They are not given the equal chance to reach their dream in the workplace.

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