



SKEETER'S STRUGGLE FOR LIFE EQUALITY OF BLACK WOMEN IN *THE HELP* FILM

Nor Holis¹, Ratna Asmarani²

Fakultas Ilmu Budaya, Universitas Diponegoro, Jl. Prof. Soedarto, S.H., Tembalang, Semarang 50269

¹e-mail: olis.nor93@gmail.com, ²e-mail: ratna_asmarani@yahoo.com

Article history:

Received

29 Januari 2021

Received in revised form

29 Maret 2021

Accepted

3 Mei 2021

Available online

Mei 2021

Keywords:

Individual Psychology, Film,
Black Community.

DOI

10.22216/kata.v5i1.68

Abstract

The Help is a film that is adopted from Kathryn Stockett's novel with the same title. It tells about a young white woman named Skeeter who wants to make black and white people live equally in the society. This research aims to analyze Skeeter's struggle for life equality between black and white people. In order to analyze it, the writer applies Adler's individual psychology to the data from the film such as dialogues, monologue and scenes. Furthermore, this research is assumed to be useful for the following researchers with the same topic or idea. Adler's individual psychology is used to analyze Skeeter's life of style and her struggle for superiority or striving for superiority. Hence, those aspects would give understanding how Skeeter fights for black people's life. This research concludes that Skeeter struggles for making black people's life better. It is influenced by her childhood experience that is called style of life and social inequality. Her style of life encourages her to do an action to make black people well-accepted in the society. Therefore, her struggle is also called as striving for superiority that is not for herself but for social interest.

INTRODUCTION

Film as communication of idea to the audiences is able to construct a community perception about lives. *The help* is film that presents about social condition between black people and white people who live in America. This film sets in 1960s and reflects of true story at the time (Szulkowska, 2017:43). It tells about a young woman who fights for living equally between black and white people in the society. She is Skeeter. Skeeter is portrayed as a young white woman who does not treat people based on their skin colors. She believes that all people in the country have the same right and must be equal (Dwirasanti, 2016:137).

Skeeter decides to write a book in order to make people able to understand the real condition of black people community in the country. They often get discrimination from the government by its law and from other white people around them. The black people always help the whites' life but they still get terrible feedback. The white people underestimate the black people because they think that blacks are dangerous in several ways. White people assume that blacks spread disease to the whites when they use same certain things like toilet and plates.

From that situation, Skeeter tries to approach a black maid who works for white family, Aibileen. She talks to Aibileen about many things and after Skeeter feels close enough to Aibileen, Skeeter asks about her life and her feeling about living among white people. She actually wants to interview Aibileen. It is not only Aibileen's story that Skeeter writes but also many black maids' story. Furthermore, Skeeter publishes the book in order to convey the black people's perception about living in the community and working to the white families. Skeeter wishes people who read the book would understand about black's life so that there would be no discrimination and racial problems in the society.

Corresponding author.

E-mail address: olis.nor93@gmail.com

This film has been analyzed by Abdulwahab Halima Jumoke from Eater Mediterranean University entitled *The Representation of African-American Women in Hollywood Film*. Jumoke explained how the African-American women are described by the mammy, jezebel and sapphire stereotypes (Jumoke, 2016). He concluded that African-American women are the sexual objectification portrayed by Hollywood films. This research uses three films as the objects and *The Help* (2011) is one of the objects.

Other research was done by Nurindah Khusnul Khotimah from Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta entitled *Racial Discrimination Reflected in Tate Taylor's The Help (2011): A Sociological Approach*. She explains that there are some racial issues that make discriminatory acts against black people committed by white people in *The help*. She also concludes that the film is the reflection of social condition in America (Khotimah, 2013).

Based on those researches, there is no research that examines Skeeter's personality and her actions to defend the black women's life. Skeeter is a white woman who belongs to superior community. She neither gets problem nor discrimination in the society. However, she is willing to fight for racial problems. She spends her time to write stories about black's life even though she knows that it is forbidden. Skeeter's decision emerges a question that is why she wants to struggle for problem that is not hers.

In order to answer the question, this research would analyze about a psychological side of Skeeter who stands for black women in the film. Specifically, this research would describe the phenomena that is probably able to answer the question 'how Skeeter's style of life influences her superiority goal?'

The individual psychology that was introduced by Alfred Adler is the dynamic psychology which influences the present phenomena. Those influences come from past situation of individual and take control of them. It also becomes motivation to the person's life whether in conscious or unconscious (Adler, 1956:3).

Individual psychology defines an individual as the social human being which means the individual has tight relation to the society since that individual was born. Furthermore, social condition such as culture, rules and other phenomena would give contribution to the individual appearance and behavior (Alwisol, 2010:64). Therefore, the individual psychology views the personal orientation toward the future that is influenced by person's experiences. It talks about person with his experiences and his expression to the social interest. The experiences and expression encourage him to give response to the social phenomena (Adler, 1956:10).

Adler explains that the theory tries to define the individual life process in terms of the goals. The social condition and its values which come since early childhood become references to create individual's life. Those references are able to control the individual's behavior and help him to create power to decide his later life. Therefore, Adlerian psychology is not talking about the individual itself but people around him. The people and community such as family contribute in forming personal psychology of a person (Watts, 2015:125). Fortunately, even though the individual's behavior is influenced by the social environment, it does not mean the social environment decide to individual decision. The individual has freedom to decide and struggle for his own life. His experiences with his society help him to arrange both decision and struggle. Furthermore, the experiences are called the individual style of life (Adler, 2001:5).

Adler states that personality was formed early in life and all the person's experiences since childhood could lead and contribute in reacting to the life-long personality orientations. Those orientations might be a goal of the person that are due to experiences and trauma of being subordinate, assumed to be different from others and so on (Adler, 2011:92).

The experience of being subordinate or inferior encourages an individual to have strength in survival. The experience of being inferior that a person gets from family or social

environment makes him tries to get out of that inferiority line and sets a goal in his life to become superior (Adler, 2011:11). The very simple way of being superior is trying to distinguish himself different from others such as in dress, work, and other ways (Adler, 2001:11).

Striving for superiority arises when an individual gets sensitivity that comes from feeling failed or feeling inferior. It would probably make an individual insecure and being emotional. This feeling leads to the struggle for security and calmness. Someone who struggles for his goal and his perfection shows his ambition solely concern with the individual himself. Occasionally, this striving takes other negative forms such as greediness, envy, jealousy and avarice (Adler, 2011:90-91). In another definition, striving for superiority is a struggling of individual who is motivated by social interest. It happens to the individual who does not have bad experiences or unbalanced situation in his past life (feeling failed and feeling inferior) (Semiun, 2012:238).

Style of life is the very important part of Adler's individual psychology. It is mentioned in every part of discussion of the individual psychology. Style of life is an individual potential in deciding his goal of life. Style of life stimulates an individual to react of his own life. This allows the individual to be free for his struggle for perfection fulfillment. The style of life comes from social environment where the individual lives (Adler, 2011:5).

According to the definition above, every individual grows differently based on their social environment. It could be recognized as different when it is seen against the background of their social environment (Adler, 1956:173). Adler recognizes that the heredity and environment are very important in shaping personality. Every child is born with unique genetic trait then they would have different experiences from other human experiences. Thus, individual is more than the product of the heredity and environment, he is creative and does not only react to the environment but also act on it (what he believes in) (Semiun, 2012:261-262).

The environment and heredity influences are not enough to give individual impetus to carry out certain reactions in order to achieve his goals. another thing is creativity that is built by an individual at a time when he could not find adequate language or idea as his expression to the life (Adler, 2011:7).

Compensation is the situation when an individual develops his strength to gain his superiority goal. It may be a conscious or unconscious process of striving for superiority. The idea of compensation is the central of Adler's individual psychology. It sees all individual's struggling as the response to his feeling inferiority or anxiety (Association, 2019).

The term of striving for superiority, life of style and compensation have close relationship in understanding Adler's individual psychology. Individual psychology discusses about individual's life process. It means it would be helpful to understand human behavior and the underlying behavior (Dewi, 2015:490).

Feeling of being inferior often occurs to an individual and he would try to repress his feeling to make his life pleasant in society. Compensation exists as an effort to eliminate feeling of inferiority or fail in the past. An individual shows it by optimizing his strength in his social environment (Adler, 2011:59). The individual always dreams for it and it is like his natural tendency. The dreams that are built by the individual whether in his childhood or adulthood aims to gain superiority. Those dreams come from encouragement given by his experiences and his creativities. The dreams are the compensation to maintain or to get psychological balances and imagination (Adler, 2011:142-143).

RESEARCH METHOD

This research deals with a film entitled *The Help* that is directed by Tate Taylor in 2011. The writer uses contextual methodology. This method is done by applying extrinsic

element of the film (Adlerian individual psychology) through the character, conflict and setting of the film. Moreover, the library research is chosen to collect data. It is done by reading the book of Adlerian individual psychology and watching the film itself.

The primary data of this research is from Tate Taylor's film entitled *The Help*. The writer collects the data or statements that show Skeeter's struggle for the black women's life equality from the story of the film through the dialogue, monologue and scenes. Those data would be interpreted using Adler's individual psychological approach and decides the data which show Skeeter's struggle.

Watching the whole film is the way to find the data. The writer decides the data and interprets them in order to answer the research question. The researcher chooses data to be analyzed from the film such as scenes, dialogue and monologue. The researcher uses the monologue, dialogue and scenes which inform about Skeeter's struggle and her style of life. The interpretation of the data is done by applying Adlerian individual psychology.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The Help film is directed by Tate Taylor. It is based on the novel written by Kathryn Stockett as the same title. The film tells about a young white woman who tries to make white people realize and understand what really happen to the black people in the society. Her name is Skeeter. She writes a book that is assumed to be able to show the blacks' perception toward society. Her effort in publishing the book is motivated by her environment and her ability in writing. Psychologically, Skeeter cares about the bad situation faced by the blacks because she has much experience with the blacks and the experience create her striving to gain a goal.

Skeeter always fights against the social rules and activities of white people which are always demean black people. Those are done by Skeeter with the aim of eliminating negative perception about black people in society. The aim is based on her experience and her different understanding from the white's about the black people community in the society. Here are some data which show Skeeter's experiences or style of life influence to her action in fighting the blacks' problem in society.

SKEETER'S STYLE OF LIFE

In this part, Skeeter's style of life would be described in order to understand her striving for superiority. Here are some evidences that show why she works very hard to show the blacks' perception to make whites understand to the blacks' life in the society.

Skeeter's style of life is created by her interaction with the society. Her good connection with black people is the thing that contributes to the style of life. Evidence that shows her good relationship with black people is shown by scene below. The scene shows how close their connection. Skeeter feels calm when Constantine tries to give an advice or motivation when Skeeter faces problems. The situation on the scene below happens when Skeeter has problem with her mother. She remembers Constantine's kindness. She misses Constantine who always by her side and gives advice and motivations. This situation states that Skeeter gets positive perspective about black women because she feels the black women's dedication to the white families.

Constantine is her former family maid. She also takes care of Skeeter since she was born. Skeeter considers that Constantine has big contribution in her life and her family. It is because Constantine dedicates her life to Skeeter's family. The dedication and contribution influence Skeeter's perception to the blacks' life and become her style of life.



Image 1: Constantine gives advice to Skeeter when Skeeter has problem
(Taylor, 2011: 00:24:18)

Other scene that shows how close their relationship is shown by the picture below.



Image 2: Constantine takes care of Skeeter
(Taylor, 2011: 01:52:33)

Skeeter visits Constantine's home after her mother tells her that Constantine died. Skeeter recalls her memory when she was child and often visits and plays at the house (the environment). Skeeter remembers her happiness childhood with Constantine. She also remembers that Constantine considered Skeeter like her own daughter.

Her life is surrounded by her family that has positive feeling to the blacks especially Constantine and the blacks society themselves. Thus, the situation defines that Skeeter has good point of view of the black people. Her activities also make her understand of the whole thing about blacks, their life, and their society. Therefore, the condition contributes to Skeeter's life of style. It is the part of her life that creates her opinion in seeing the black people in the society. She knows much about black people and she also believes that blacks should have same right as the whites.

Below is further evidence that shows Skeeter's closeness to the black people contributes to her style of life.

Skeeter: Well, I have one more story to type before I put it in the mail, but other than that, we're done.

Minnie: Which one you got left?

Skeeter: Uh, mine.

(Taylor, 2011: 01:48:25 - 01:48:35)

The conversation above occurs in Aibileen's house. Aibileen is the black maid of Skeeter's friend. She helps Skeeter to write book that tells about blacks' life based on true story. She and her friend Minny are the main sources of the book's story. In that

conversation, Minny and Aibileen think that they just finish the story well and it is ready to be published. Skeeter says that the book is not complete yet because she wants to put her story in that. She wants to write her experiences with Constantine that has given dedication to her family.

Skeeter tells Aibileen and Minny that she has some references to support to the book's goal. She ever lives with her black maid who loves her since she was child. Skeeter shows that she has much understanding about the blacks' life because she gets experiences by living with Constantine.

The book that she writes is the story about the black maids among the whites. The story is real because it is based on her direct interview with the maids themselves. She thinks that her experiences would give big contribution to her point of view and understanding about black people.

Arranging the book with Aibileen and Minny (black women) shows that Skeeter has good relationship with the black people in community. The relationship makes Skeeter understands and more care about the blacks' problem in society. Her understanding which is called as her style of life creates her a sense of sympathy and care to the blacks' problem and make Skeeter wants to fight to the blacks' stereotypes in the society.

Skeeter cares and nice to the black people in community. It is because she understands to the real situation of the blacks. She gets much experience with blacks. Her experience and understanding which called her style of life make her cares and pays attention to the racial problem faced by black people so that Skeeter wants to fight for the problem.

SKEETER'S SUPERIORITY GOAL

Striving for superiority concerns to the personal satisfaction. In other way, striving for superiority is motivated to struggle for social interest. It also happens to an individual who never got inferior feeling in the society. This situation happens to Skeeter as the young woman who tries to change the whites' perception about the blacks. Knowing that black people become the objects of discrimination, Skeeter wants to make white people understand about the condition of black people. She thinks that it is serious problem when black people help whites to make their house works easier but the white people still underestimate them.

Skeeter knows about black people's life. She has experience living with the blacks and she believes that the white people's assumption about black people is wrong. Her experience and understanding encourage Skeeter to fight for the situation. According to Takwin (2019), Skeeter's experiences psychologically contribute her personal development and movement toward society.

She writes a book that might help people to know about black people in the blacks' point of view. It is her effort to make her psychological side balance. Thus, she concerns with herself in struggling for social interest. She does it as her striving for superiority. She does not get such inferiority feeling in her life because she was born as the white. Furthermore, she is aware that black people have important roles in her life and other whites'. They help the whites to raise their children, preparing their food and other house works.

Here are some evidences that show Skeeter's striving for superiority or superiority goal.

Skeeter: I'd like to write something from the point of view of the help. These colored women raise white children, and in 20 years, those children become the boss. We love them and they love us, but they can't even use the toilets in our houses. Don't you find that ironic, Miss Stein?

(Taylor, 2011: 00:26:17 - 00:26:29)

Skeeter calls Mrs. Stein from Harper and Row Publishing in New York. She tells Mrs. Stein her plan to write a story about black maids. Her planning is motivated by the social condition. The black maids dedication to the whites' family is not considered and they still get discrimination from the white people even they always try to help the white families in household affairs and parenting. The black maids are not allowed to use same facilities as the whites. That shows discrimination happens and it makes the black people become more inferior group in the society. The dialogue between Skeeter and Mrs. Stein above shows that Skeeter is struggling for superiority in social interest form.

Skeeter wants to show all the situations that are never realized by the whites like how the black people treat the white families and how they are treated by the whites and the law. Intentionally, that book would make people able to understand the blacks' life and their condition.

Skeeter really wants to make people treat well of the black community. Spreading her idea and black people's thought through the book is assumed as the best way to do. She hopes the book that she wants to write is able to make separation between blacks and white do not exist anymore and there is no discrimination among the differences in that society.

Skeeter: I know now that it's against the law, what we're doing.
(Taylor, 2011: 00:41:25 - 00:41:25)

The statement above shows Skeeter's struggling to get her goal. It describes how hard she would do because she would fight the government's regulation. The government applies racial rules to the multi-ethnic society that is shown in the film. They are applying the rules that make those ethnics separated in every activity. The black people are not allowed to use same facilities as the white people. "*Book shall not be interchangeable between the white and colored schools*" (Taylor, 2011: 00:37:29). Black children cannot study at the white schools and even at the libraries. They cannot read the books that have been read by the whites. Black people are not allowed to come and participate to the general election.

Racial discrimination rules also happen in every white people's house. Their maid should be careful in washing the dishes. They have to make separation to the plates, spoons and forks. The black maids have to use different plate and spoon when they want to eat at the whites' houses. They are also not allowed to use same toilet so that the white families should build additional toilet for their maids.

Skeeter is fighting for those racial rules that are made by the government. Moreover, it is Skeeter's striving for superiority to get her goal in making the black's life equal in the society and it would make her in dangerous situation. She has strong determination to see black people and white people live equally. She wants to see the black people live happily as the white people in the society. She wishes those racial rules can be removed after white people read the book. Spreading the idea by giving real story of the blacks' life is her way to get the superiority. She might think her superiority goal is that when the black people are able to live without discrimination and get same rights as the whites in society. The consequence is that she must be ready to lose her friends who are supporting the racial constitution.

Minnie: And just what makes you think colored people need your help? Why do you care?

Aibileen: Minny.

Minnie: Maybe you just want Aibileen in trouble.

Skeeter: No. I want to show her perspective. So people might understand what it's like from your side.

Minnie: Well, it's a real Fourth of July picnic. It's what we dream of doing all weekend long. Get back into they house, polish the silver. And we just

love not making minimum wage or getting Social Security. And how we love they children when they little. And then they turn out just like they mamas.

Skeeter: I know. Maybe things can change.

Minnie: What law's gonna say you gotta be nice to your maid?

(Taylor, 2011: 00:57:45 - 00:58:31)

The conversation above occurs when Skeeter comes to Aibileen's house in order to collect the black maids' story. Aibileen is the maid of Skeeter's friend who is willing to tell about her life. Aibileen is also ready to have some questions from Skeeter. In the middle of their conversation Minny comes. Minny is Aibileen's best friend. They are neighbors and Minny is also a maid who works for another Skeeter's friend. Minny is angry because Skeeter is interviewing Aibileen. She assumes that Skeeter would just take the advantage from the blacks and make them get worse living in country.

Skeeter tries to make Minny understand of her purpose in writing the blacks' story. She is aware why Minny gets angry to her because her decision against the law and dangerous for the black people. It would make the blacks get worse situation if the white people know that black people speak for right. Still, Skeeter explains that the book she wants to write has potential to change social perception about black people. Minny still does not want to hear Skeeter. She goes out from Aibileen's house and slams the door. Fortunately, Minny comes back and she also wants to be a source of the book. *"All right. I'm gonna do it. But I need to make sure she understands this ain't no game we playing here"* (Taylor, 2011: 00:58:55-00:59:01).

Writing controversial book is the way that is chosen by Skeeter to make white people perceive how hard black people's life among them. It would be probably able to make them realize and stop doing discrimination to the black people and underestimate them. Erase the discrimination and make white and black people live equally in the society is Skeeter's goal. She dreams of that situation and struggle to realize it.

It is a serious decision for Skeeter to show blacks' perspective toward society. She has to think how the government would response to her action. Besides, she probably would get cynical treating from her friends and other white people in her community. Meanwhile, she also gets unkind response from the blacks when she decides to interview black maids and write their story.

Therefore, she combines her experience which is called as style of life with her creativity to gain her superiority goal. Her goal is to change white people's perception about black people. Hence, she writes a book as the way to remove the racist perception in the society. Struggling the goal, Skeeter has to accept the consequences like fighting the government's rules and shunned by her friends and other white people.

CONCLUSION

Skeeter has positive perspective about the black community in her society. It is because she was taken care by the black maid who always loves her. She feels her maid's love and also does not see negative things from her maid and other black people in the society. Skeeter's experiences bring Skeeter to her striving of superiority. Personally, she does not have inferior feeling but she has attention to the blacks' condition because she feels that it is not fair if the whites do not treat the blacks as good as the blacks do to the whites. Skeeter struggles for the blacks' right in the society. She tries to open up the whites' mind of the black by writing the book that is exactly motivated by her experiences. She would feel guilty if she does not fight for that condition as the educated and open minded woman. In this condition, Skeeter's striving of superiority is called as compensation. The black people have

big contribution to her family such as doing house works, gardening, taking care of her etc. Skeeter would feel satisfied of her life if she fights for black people's live better.

It is as the compensation in her life as human in recompensing to the black people because her life and other white families' are helped by the Blacks to finish their house works and other activities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I thank you to Ratna Asmarani as my lecturer and my advisor. I appreciate of her patience and time. She always gives me motivation and idea in learning about literature. Therefore, this article is produced from our interaction and discussion. It is also the result of her in guiding me so far.

REFERENCES

- Adler, A. (1956). *Individual psychology of Alfred Adler (A Systematic Presentation and Selection from His Writings)* (H. L. Ansbacher & R. R. Ansbacher (eds.)). Basic Book, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0072190>
- Adler, Alfred. (2001). *The Neurotic Constitution: Outlines of a Comparative Individualistic Psychology and Psychotherapy*. Routledge.
- Adler, Alfred. (2011). *Social Interest : A Challenge to Mankind*. Martino Fine Books.
- Alwisol. (2010). *Psikologi Kepribadian Edisi Revisi* (1st ed.). UMM Press.
- Association, A. P. (2019). *Compensation*. <https://dictionary.apa.org/compensation>
- Dewi, E. O. (2015). Kajian Psikologi Individual Alfred Adler Novel Mimpi Anak Pulau Karya Abidah El-Khalieqy dengan Metode Hermeneutik. *NOSI*, 3, 488–496.
- Dwirasanti, E. (2016). Identity Construction of Skeeter in the movie The Help (2011). *Paradigma, Jurnal Kajian Budaya*, 3(2), 132–142. <https://doi.org/10.17510/paradigma.v3i2.39>
- Jumoke, A. H. (2016). *The Representation of African American Women in Hollywood Films* (Issue June). Eastern Mediterranean University.
- Khotimah, N. K. (2013). *Racial Discrimination Reflected in Tate Taylor's The Help Movie (2011)*.
- Semiun, Y. (2012). *Teori-Teori Kepribadian* (1st ed.). Kanisius.
- Szulkowska, A. (2017). The problem of racism in Kathryn Stockett's novel The Help. *Crossroads. A Journal of English Studies*, 16(1), 41–53. <https://doi.org/10.15290/cr.2017.16.1.04>
- Taylor, T. (2011). *The Help*. Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures.
- Watts, R. (2015). Adler's Individual Psychology: The Original Positive Psychology. *Revista de Psicoterapia*, 26(102), 123–131.