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**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS *THE SECRET LIFE OF BEES* (2008) AND
THE BLIND SIDE (2009) TOWARDS THE PERSPECTIVE OF WHITE
PEOPLE ON AFRICAN-AMERICANS.**

MAKALAH NON-SEMINAR

**TIFFANY VINKA VILLA
1206203421**

**FAKULTAS ILMU PENGETAHUAN BUDAYA
PROGRAM STUDI SASTRA INGGRIS
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NPM : 1206203421

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Fakultas : Ilmu Pengetahuan Budaya

Jenis Karya : Makalah Non Seminar

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Fakultas : Ilmu Pengetahuan Budaya

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Comparative Analysis *The Secret Life of Bees* (2008) and *The Blind Side* (2009) towards the Perspective of White People on African-Americans.

Tiffany Vinka Villa

Program Studi Sastra Inggris, Fakultas Ilmu Pengetahuan Budaya, Universitas Indonesia,

Depok, 16424, Indonesia.

vinkavilla@gmail.com

Abstrak

Makalah ini membahas pandangan orang kulit putih terhadap orang kulit hitam dari dua film yaitu *The Blind Side* (2009) dan *The Secret Life of Bees* (2008). *The Blind Side* merupakan film yang menampilkan keluarga kulit putih mengadopsi anak lelaki kulit hitam. Sementara itu, *The Secret Life of Bees* menampilkan saudara kulit hitam merawat gadis kecil berkulit putih. Makalah ini bertujuan membandingkan dua film tersebut karena keduanya menggambarkan tema yang sama yaitu memperlihatkan hubungan orang kulit putih dengan orang kulit hitam. Konsep yang digunakan untuk analisis makalah ini adalah teori *color-blind racism* dan *color-blindness* oleh Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2010). Makalah ini menggunakan metode analisis tekstual. Makalah ini menghasilkan bahwa film *The Blind Side* dan *The Secret Life of Bees* menunjukkan adanya pandangan *color-blind racism* dan *color-blindness*.

Keywords : Orang Kulit Hitam; Membaur; *Color-blind*; *Color-blind racism*; Orang Kulit Putih

Comparative Analysis *The Secret Life of Bees* (2008) and *The Blind Side* (2009) towards the Perspective of White People on African-Americans

Abstract

This paper discusses the perspective of Whites towards African-American from two movies which are *The Blind Side* (2009) and *The Secret Life of Bees* (2008). *The Blind Side* presents a white family adopting an African-American boy, while *The Secret Life of Bees* portrays African-American sisters adopting the white girl. This paper aims to discover the comparison of these two movies as they share the same theme which is depicting the relationship between Whites and African-American. The concepts used for this analysis are *color-blind racism* and *color-blindness* as theorized by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2010). This paper uses textual analysis as the method. This paper finds that *The Blind Side* and *The Secret Life of Bees* show *color-blind racism* and *color-blindness*.

Keywords : African-American; Blending; *Color-blind*; *Color-blind racism*; Whites

1. Introduction

Nowadays, African-Americans are more sophisticated, spread throughout the United States, and represented in any kind of occupation. The most important social progress of African-Americans can be seen through the election of Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States. Besides that, many African-Americans have become the most successful, the most respected, and the wealthiest people in the world such as Martin Luther King Jr., Muhammad Ali, Mariah Carey, and many more. Moreover, many African-Americans lead some of the most significant and reputable American corporations, such as American Express and Time Warner. Despite the fact that African-American has been socially accepted in the society, the basic forms of black inequality and white supremacy have remained. Without denying the signs of progress in the African-Americans community, some problems related to racism issue still appear. It can be seen from a large percentage that shows black Americans remain on the margins of the society: excluded, segregated, and victimized by persisting inequalities in opportunity, education, health care, housing, and jobs. It happens because of the problem that is related to the structure and functioning of modern American society. Racism towards African-American today cannot be addressed apart from the trends of change in the larger society.

However, we do not see an extreme inequality for African-Americans because the term of an old racism has disguised itself as a color-blind racism. Color-blind racism is a new ideology of racism in America since the end of segregation. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2010) said that color-blind racism is contemporary racial inequalities that are practiced, subtle, institutional, and apparently nonracial. Whites use color-blind racism as a tool to continue racial inequality without themselves sounding racist. It means that whites still conduct racial inequality in a shrouded way and not being too obvious. On the other hand, when the word color-blind stands alone, it has a different meaning from color-blind racism. According to Monnica T Williams (2011), color-blind is the racial ideology that posits the best way to end discrimination by treating individuals as equally as possible, without seeing race, culture, or ethnicity. Color-blind can be also defined as the idea that ignoring or overlooking racial and ethnic differences to promote racial harmony. Since color-blind racism sees no difference and wants to show racial harmony, it somehow shows close relationship between Whites and African-Americans.

There is a study conducted by Sydney Thomas-Ware (2011) that discusses color-blind issue which appears in films. This type of film is called white savior films. White savior films show the characteristic of whiteness as ways of teaching and saving people from other races. One of white savior films that are being discussed in this study is *The Blind Side* (2009). This film stars Sandra Bullock as Leigh Anne Tuohy who adopts a black and underprivileged teenage boy into her family. Moreover, it shows Leigh Anne Tuohy who comes from the whiteness needs to sacrifice her time, money, and space in her house, so she can take care of that black teenage boy. In addition, this movie also shows that a white character has to possess the characteristics of being self-sacrificing, charismatic, and considered to be alienated or a misfit of a group.

On the other hand, there is also a movie that is similar with *The Blind Side* but in a different perspective. The title of this movie is *The Secret Life of Bees* (2008). Unlike *The Blind Side* that portrays white family adopting an African-American boy, *The Secret Life of Bees* presents African-American women taking care of a white girl. *The Secret Life of Bees* tells a story of fourteen-year-old Lily Owens, a white girl who has been raised by her African-American maid and an abusive father. Lily then decides running away to the South Carolina town with her maid Rosaleen to find out about her mother's past. There she meets African-Americans women, the Boatwright sisters, who take her in and teach her about beekeeping, honey, and the Black Madonna.

Even though there are many issues that can be discussed in *The Secret Life of Bees*, there are no studies about this movie. Therefore, I am interested in comparing these two films *The Blind Side* and *The Secret Life of Bees*, because these films share the same idea which is depicting the relationship between white people and African-American. In this paper I am going to analyze how an African-American feels being raised by white people and vice versa through the characters from each film. In order to do this analysis, I am going to use textual analysis method. Besides that, my discussion will also focus on social issue that comes up along this close relationship between white people and African-Americans.

2. Analysis and Discussion

2.1. *The Blind Side*

The Blind Side is a movie that is directed by John Lee Hancock. Hancock is famous for directing the sport drama films *The Rookie* (2002) and *The Blind Side* (2009). This movie is based on the book *The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game* that is released in 2006 and written by Michael Lewis. Both of them present a true story from one of American football player which is Michael Oher. As it is stated above that *The Blind Side* is a movie that shows an African-American boy blends with white family. In this part, I am going to analyze and discuss several things. First, I will discuss the perspective of white family toward the African-American boy, second, how the African-American boy changes the perspective of white family, third, how the African-American boy feels blending with white family, and finally what social issue that happens to both African-American boy and the white family. White family here does not only refer to Tuohy family, but also all the characters in the movie that surround the African-American boy. Meanwhile, the African-American boy here refers to the only one character which is Michael Oher.

2.1.1 The Perspective of Whites toward the African-American

The Blind Side is a movie with mostly white characters, and some of them show good perspective on Michael Oher as a minority who plays an important role. At the beginning of the movie, there is a football coach who is very interested in Michael's capability on sport, so he really supports Michael to join his football team. Other white characters that show good perspective on Michael can be seen from several pictures that are provided below.



Picture 1



Picture 2

Picture 1 shows Michael with his biology teacher at school. When Michael first enters the biology class, he cannot do anything as he is not well-educated. However, the teacher tries to talk and support him because she believes that Michael actually has a potential to be smart.

Besides that, picture 1 presents tight framing shot which gives feeling of oppression and depression. This scene somehow symbolizes that Michael is imprisoned. Imprisoned here means he is still stuck on his previous life which is depressing. He is still learning the process to get a better life. This picture of him learning somehow represents the idea that he is not good enough yet to be accepted in the society. Picture 2 presents Michael with Tuohy family. The white little boy named Sean Junior or SJ is very kind to Michael ever since their first meeting. While other kids are afraid of Michael as he is very big, SJ comes closer to Michael, introduces himself, and becomes friends to each other. Moreover, SJ's parents, Sean Tuohy and Leigh Anne Tuohy show a good perspective toward Michael. Both of them are very sympathetic of Michael and let him to stay in their house as Michael is a homeless. Compared to Picture 1, Picture 2 somehow shows Michael is free from his previous depressing life. In this picture, Michael stands at the back towering the Tuohy family as he has a big body size. It somehow represents Michael will protect the family as the family gives him a better life. Moreover, his big body size fits to his characteristic that is good at sport. From this explanation, these whites are welcome with the presence of Michael as an African-American. They do not discriminate him as he comes from the minor community. Their attitude somehow can be seen as color-blind because they ignore the racial difference between them and Michael.

2.1.2 How the African-American Changes the Perspective of Whites

There are also some white characters that do not show good perspective on Michael because of his personality. However, as Michael's personality changes because he blends with white family, those people change their perspective too towards Michael. One of white characters that show perspective changing is Collins Tuohy. Collins Tuohy is the first child of Sean Tuohy and Leigh Anne Tuohy.



Picture 3

Picture 3 presents Collins sitting together with Michael. At the beginning of the movie, Collins seems unhappy with the presence of Michael in her family. This might happen because Collins feels shy and cannot imagine what her friends would say that she is living with a big African-American boy that is going to be her brother. Unlike SJ that always spend time together with Michael, Collins does not want get too close with Michael especially in school. However, as the time goes by, Collins changes her perspective towards Michael because she can see that Michael is actually a good brother. Moreover, she is also a proud sister as Michael is really good at sport. Picture 3 tells when Michael is sitting alone in the library, and Collins leaves her friends to accompany him. She no longer cares of what her friends say about Michael. Picture 3 shows shallow focus shot which only focuses to one object in front of the camera and the background around is blurred. It somehow wants to emphasize changing characteristic of one character which is Collins. Collins attitude toward Michael can be said as a shift from racism towards color-blind attitude because she no longer discriminates and sees Michael's race. Besides that, I am going to show how an African-American character can change the personality of white character. This case happens through characters Leigh Anne and Michael. Leigh Anne has a strong personality as she is a very firm and perfect woman. Before meeting Michael, she can be described as a selfish woman who always wants other people to do things as what she likes. She is a little bit arrogant, and she does not really respect other people until she meets Michael.



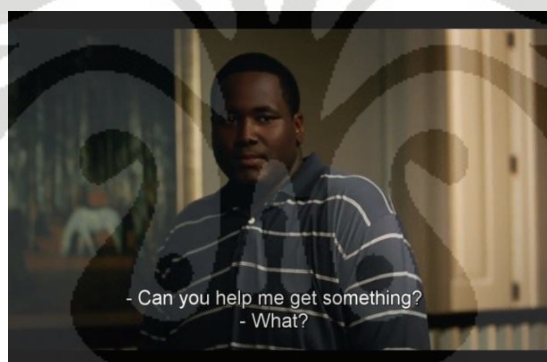
Picture 4

Picture 4 is a scene when Leigh Anne eating together with some of her friends talking about Michael. Her friends think that she is changing Michael's life by adopting him as Michael gets better education and life. On the other hand, Leigh Anne thinks the opposite. She tells her friends that Michael who is actually changing her life. She becomes more respectful to people around her, and she is no longer arrogant anymore. By this explanation, it can be seen that even an African-American, the one that likely to be judged and underestimated, can

change white people's perspective and personality who tend to be superior in a social community.

2.1.3 The Feeling of African-American Blending with Whites

Blending with the Tuohy family means a lot for Michael as the family gives him a new better life. At the beginning of the movie, Michael is quite person. When someone tries to talk to him, he just responds with a simple answer. He seems very pessimistic with his previous life as he is homeless, and he cannot perform well at his new school. However, his character changes as long as he meets the Tuohy family. He is still a quite person, but he can respond someone who talks to him in a good way. Moreover, he becomes optimistic and happy with his new life because the Tuohy family really supports him. Even though the white family takes care of him, it does not make him an arrogant person. He still positions himself as an inferior coming from the minor community, so he behaves politely toward the white family that he thinks is more superior.



Picture 5

Picture 5 presents a scene when Michael wants to ask Leigh Anne's permission to get him a driving license. Even though he already becomes the part of the family, he does not ask fiercely what he wants. He still considers himself as an inferior, so he needs to ask the permission first. Besides that, after seeing Michael's great performance on football, many coaches from different universities are interested in him. They come to see Michael, but again it does not make him cocky. He still feels that he has a lower social status compared to those coaches who are mostly white people. From this explanation, Michael's attitude somehow shows the internalization of racism. It can be proved from the fact that there is a power relation between Michael and the Tuohy family. Michael feels that the Tuohy family and other white characters are more powerful compared to him, and they have a higher social status as they come from the major community.

2.1.4 Social Issue

As the Tuohy family adopting Michael, other white characters do not seem showing good responses. One of the relatives from the Tuohy family named Bobby is very shocked seeing Michael in their Christmas postcard. Bobby contacts them on phone and asks their approval whether they realize that there is a colored guy in their postcard. Besides that, Leigh Anne's friends do not agree with her decision to adopt this African-American boy considering she has a daughter. However, the Tuohy family does not really care about this problem as they will prove them that Michael is good guy that can be proud of. Meanwhile, as the one who blends with major community, Michael also experiences some social issue. For instance, Collins's friends underestimate and act that they do not like Michael although he does nothing wrong. Therefore, at the beginning, Collins is not really close with him unlike SJ. Another example can be taken from Michael's friends who have bad intention considering Michael living with the white family. They try to push Michael to use this family. Michael feels angry with his friends. However, Michael prefers to control his feeling, and proves them that he will be good to the Tuohy family as the family has given the best things for him.

2.2 *The Secret Life of Bees*

The Secret Life of Bees is a movie that is directed by Gina Prince-Bythewood and produced by Will Smith and his wife. This movie is based on the book that is written by Sue Monk Kidd. The time setting of the story is 1964 where a difficult circumstance of loss and betrayal existed. Unlike *The Blind Side* that portrays minority blends with majority, *The Secret Life of Bees* depicts white girl living together with African-American family. For this second analysis, my discussion will be as similar as the first one which are the perspective of white girl towards African-American, how the perspective changes until she meets the African-American family, and how the African-American family feels taking care the white girl. White girl here refers to the major character in the movie which is Lily. Meanwhile, the African-American family here refers to the three sisters which are August, June, and May.

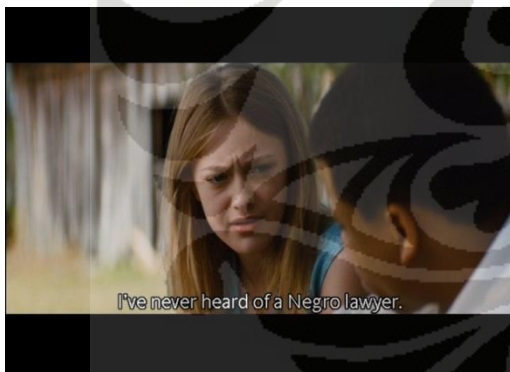
2.2.1 White Girl Perspective towards African-American

As it is stated before, the white girl, Lily, lives with her African-American maid named Rosaleen. At the beginning of the movie, it can be seen that the relationship between Lily and Rosaleen is good. However, Lily somehow acts that she is more powerful and superior compared to Rosaleen. This can be proved by the way Lily talks to Rosaleen.

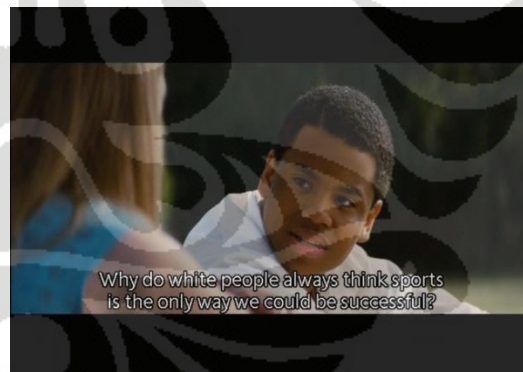


Picture 6

Picture 6 presents a scene when Lily and Rosaleen are running away to the South Carolina. In this picture, it can be seen that Lily is angry to Rosaleen because instead of thanking Lily for saving her life, Rosaleen thinks that Lily is using her. Back then, Rosaleen stays in the hospital after getting beaten by the whites who oppressed her. Lily picks Rosaleen and asks her to run away together because if Rosaleen stays there everything will get worst. When Rosaleen finds out Lily's intention to run away, she feels upset because it will also cause trouble for both of them. However, Lily becomes selfish and thinks she has done the best thing. The word dumb in picture 6 somehow depicts that Lily generalizes all African-Americans are dumb just like most other Whites, and she still sees Rosaleen with that stereotype. She can talk like that to Rosaleen because she thinks that she is superior, and Rosaleen is inferior.



Picture 7



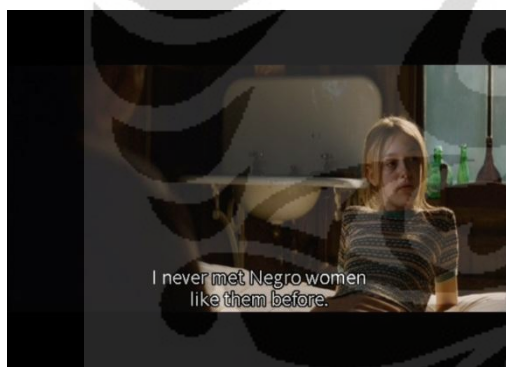
Picture 8

Besides Rosaleen and the three sisters, there is also another African-American character which is Zach Taylor. Zach is the boy who helps the three sisters with the bee business. Lily and Zach also have a good relationship as they are in the same age. However, it can be seen that Lily still feels she is superior as she comes from the majority compared to Zach who comes from the minority. Picture 7 and picture 8 present a scene when both Lily and Zach are talking what they want to be in the future. Lily is surprised knowing that Zach wants to be a lawyer because she never heard of a Negro lawyer. Instead of becoming a lawyer, Lily thinks

that Zach wants to be a football player, a common stereotype of black's occupation. Seeing Zach's respond in picture 8 somehow illustrates that Lily sees Zach with that streotype of African-Americans who are dumb yet good at sports as they have strong physical and stamina. Both pictures 7 and 8 present close up shot which stresses to each character's emotion. Both pictures want to stress Lily and Zach's emotion which is confused and wondering. From this explanation, it can be concluded that Lily's perspective somehow shows color-blind racism because she still continues racial inequality but not being too obvious by having a good relationship with them.

2.2.2 White Girl Perspective Changing towards African-American

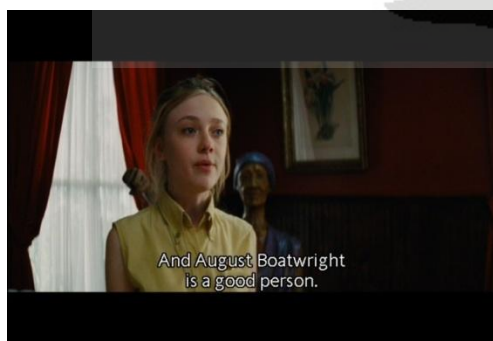
Living together with the Boatwright sisters somehow changes Lily's perspective towards African-American. The Boatwright sisters here refer to August, June, and May. These African-American women live in a big house and own a bee business that is very famous. Before she meets them, Lily may see that all African-American women are the same just like Rosaleen. Getting to know the Boatwright sisters, Lily can see another type of African-Americans who are independent and successful. Because of this meeting, Lily becomes respectful towards African-American.



Picture 9



Picture 10



Picture 11



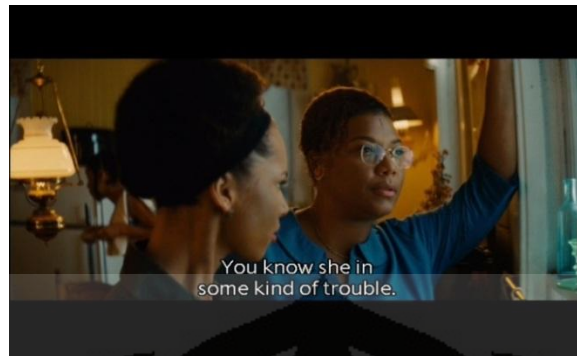
Picture 12

Picture 9 presents a scene when Lily talks to Rosaleen right after they arrive in the African-American sisters' house. The African-American sisters especially August and May really welcome Lily by giving her a space to stay. This picture shows that Lily feels impressed with them because she never met African-Americans like them before who have a big house and look successful. This happens as previously Lily still generalizes that all African-American will not be that lucky. Picture 10 depicts a scene when Lily is having a chit-chat with one of the Boatwright sisters which is May. Compared to her father who is really rude, May is a woman who always uses her feeling when she does everything. This personality makes Lily adores her and makes her saying that she rather be like May. It can be seen that an African-American can be a role model or an inspiration for a White. Picture 11 portrays a scene when Lily talks to her father who picks her up and asks her to come back home. However, Lily refuses her father as she already feels comfortable living with the Boatwright sisters who really take a good care of her. Her statement in this scene which says August Boatwright is a good person proves that although Lily and the Boatwright sisters come from different race, they can live together and respect each other. Picture 12 illustrates a scene when Lily walks back to August, May, and Rosaleen after meeting his father. His father somehow permits her to stay with them. Lily feels so relieved because she sees the Boatwright sisters and Rosaleen are the moons that shine Lily's new life. Even though her real mother is already died, she finds her new three mothers who also truly love her. From these four pictures, It can be seen that Lily's perspective towards African-American changes after she meets the Boatwright sisters. Moreover, Lily no longer positions herself as a powerful even though the Boatwright sisters are African-Americans. Lily really respects and acts politely towards them. Unlike with Rosaleen previously that she can ask to do what she likes, living with the Boatwright sisters makes her do what she is asked to do, such as beekeeping and cooking. Lily really enjoys her life taking care by the Boatwright sisters. She feels content, and she even follows the Boatwright sisters' habit which is praying to the Black Madonna. Blending with the Boatwright sisters makes Lily no longer continues racial inequality. Her attitude changes from color-blind racism to color-blind because she overlooks the racial difference.

2.2.3 The Feeling of African-Americans Taking Care the White

Not just Lily who has her own perspective towards African-Americans around her, the Boatwright sisters also have their own perspective towards Lily. August and May welcome the presence of Lily and Rosaleen in their house. In return Lily and Rosaleen are given some

tasks as they stay in other people's house. On the other hand, at the beginning, June shows that she does not like her sisters' decision to let Lily and Rosaleen stay with them.



Picture 11



Picture 12



Picture 13

Pictures 11, 12, and 13 illustrate June's feeling to let Lily stay with the Boatwright sisters. When Lily comes to their house, Lily tells them that her mother dies because of tularemia and her daddy gets killed. June already has a feeling that Lily lies to them that is why June thinks Lily is actually in some kind of trouble. Picture 11 also presents close up shot as it wants to stress June and August's emotions which are worried and curious with Lily. Meanwhile, picture 12 and 13 represents June's perspective towards Whites. It can be seen in picture 12 that June still generalizes that all Whites hate African-American, and she sees Lily with that stereotype. Both pictures 12 and 13 somehow show June's objection on Lily's presence in their house. She feels that Lily will still see that African-Americans are different even though they already save and help Lily's life. However, June's perspective towards Lily changes as Lily behaves nicely and shows respect to them. Therefore, June no longer sees Lily with the stereotype of African-Americans on Whites. Unlike June who at first does not welcome Lily, August and May act nicely toward Lily since the beginning Lily comes. In addition, August and May do not show any objection towards Lily as they stay together. August and Lily show their care on Lily. August teaches Lily about bee as Lily needs to help her with the bee business. August also introduces Lily to the Black Madonna.



Picture 14

Picture 14 provides a scene when August introduces the bee farm to Lily. August helps Lily to wear a special uniform that must be worn in the bee farm. From this picture, it can be seen August treats Lily in a special way. August actually can let Lily wears the uniform by herself without giving any help. However, this scene somehow wants to show that August really cares about Lily. May also acts nicely towards Lily by cooking meals for her, and May sometimes likes to spoil Lily.



Picture 15

Picture 15 portrays a scene when Rosaleen, August, and June meet Lily's father, T. Ray. T. Ray is going to bring Lily back home, but she refuses as she prefers to stay with the Boatwright sisters. Moreover, these three women in the picture do not allow T. Ray to take her back because they know T. Ray is abusive, and he will not take a good care of his own child. The statement in this picture somehow shows that Lily is better with the Boatwright sisters because they will take care of her. For instance, they will send Lily to school, so she will have a better education. Besides that, living with the Boatwright sisters makes her know how to run a business that probably useful for her future. This scene also proves that the Boatwright sisters will give special treat to Lily. From these five pictures, it can be concluded that at the end of the movie, the Boatwright sisters including Rosaleen do not see any racial difference towards Lily. Even though Lily is White, they let Lily live with them and blend with their habits.

3. Conclusion

From this comparative analysis between *The Blind Side* and *The Secret Life of Bees* movies, it is found that these movies share two similarities and one difference. For the first similarity, the major characters in these movies show color-blind attitude. As it can be seen, both movies present the characters with different races which are African-Americans and Whites, but as the audiences, we do not see any discrimination among them, we see close relationship between these two different races instead. For the second similarity, before showing color-blind attitude, some of the characters in these movies show color-blind racism. The characters still conduct racism, but they are not being obvious. However, these characters' perspective changed as they get to know each other well. The characters that show perspective changing are Collins from *The Blind Side* and Lily from *The Secret Life of Bees*.

Besides sharing two similarities, *The Blind Side* and *The Secret Life of Bees* also show one difference which is the implicit issue that is portrayed in these movies. Both movies may present their characters with color-blind attitude, but this does not happen in the whole issue that is portrayed in *The Blind Side* movie. *The Blind Side* implicitly can be seen having color-blind racism. It is true that there is no discrimination in this movie, but the film somehow shows that Whites have higher position in the society compared to African-American. Even though the movie shows Michael, the African-American boy blending with White family, the movie makes Michael doing internalization racism on himself as the movie portrays Whites as the powerful characters. On the other hand, *The Secret Life of Bees* does not depict color-blind racism as the implicit issue in the whole movie. Even though we see some of the White minor characters still conduct racism towards African-Americans, we can also see successful and powerful African-American characters, which are the Boatwright sisters. Therefore, Lily, the White girl, does not position herself with higher social status because she lives and blends with different kind of African-Americans. She becomes respectful towards them instead.

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