

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

As the salad bowl of the world, United States is known for its racial issue, specifically about racial discrimination, which experienced by non-WASP people and those who belong to the minority group members. WASP or *White Anglo-Saxon Protestant* is an American trope which refers to all white Protestant Americans who are British or Northern European and Northwestern European descent (Anderson 1970, 43). These people have a great domination in every aspect of the United States due to their massive influence as the first colonial settler in the American continent (Rujito 2008, 1). Not only established the basic principles in political, economic, social, and cultural systems, WASP circle also gives some privileges for its people such as a better opportunity to pursue their future career or educational life. As a result, those who are not included in this circle will be easy to be marginalized and even discriminated.

The emergence of WASP circle domination also successfully enlarged the complexity and overlapping causes and forms of racial discrimination in American society (Rujito 2008, 10). It is because everyone will be able to get discriminated based on their skin color, race, ethnicity, and even religion. Italian Americans, for example, generally portrayed as mafia or gangster in the past Hollywood movies – e.g. *The Godfather* (1972), *Goodfellas* (1990) – due to the negative stereotypes and

prejudices toward their ancestors during their first immigration movement to the United States in 1890 to 1930. This negative portrayal is remained the same until nowadays although there are some developments of Italian Americans character in the latest Hollywood movies— e.g. *Unbroken* (2014) and *Little Italy* (2018). Recent research purposed by Piersanti (2019) declares that the new depiction of Italian Americans character in the latest Hollywood movies is not necessarily a better one and it only causes the continuation of negative portrayal towards Italian Americans on the screen. Italian Americans are likely to portray as a temperament and less educated person, a trickster, or even a pizza and pasta maker (116).

Another minority group member which is not included in WASP circle and always being discriminated is African Americans. African Americans have to face a complex form of racial discrimination due to their dark skin color, race, as well as the origin of their ancestors who are brought to the American continent as slaves. They are usually stereotyped as inferior, unintelligent, lazy, and usually associated with violent and criminal acts (Taylor, et al. 2019, 213). According to the recent research conducted by Taylor, et al (2019), the negative stereotypes that perceived by African Americans in their everyday life lead to the disadvantage position among the American society in terms of judicial system, economic outcomes, employment opportunities, public health facilities and services, or educational achievements.

The social prejudices and government policies, which tend to favor certain dominant parties, eventually force non-WASP people to solve their race-related problem through another way, such as applying coping strategies. Coping strategies are individuals' actions and responses in dealing with stressful situations and other

life's problems (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 141). These strategies are divided into two basic tenets. The first one is problem-focused strategies which emphasize on individuals' direct actions to overcome the problem (152) while the second one is emotion-focused strategies that rely on individuals' indirect actions to manage their emotional responses when dealing with the problem (150). Joseph and Kuo (2009) in their research mention that most of the minority groups previously tend to use problem-focused strategies to deal with racial discrimination. However, as the time passed, their tendency to deal with sort kind of issue has already reversed or even changed into the combination of both strategies (93).

These conditions surprisingly portray in one of the latest Hollywood movies titled *Green Book* (2018). *Green Book* (2018) is an American biographical movie that inspired by a true story about the struggle of two non-WASP people named Dr. Donald Shirley, an African American classical and jazz pianist, and also his Italian American chauffeur, Tony 'Lip' Vallelonga, when dealing with numerous racial discrimination issues during their eight-week tour concert to the Deep South in 1962. This movie is directed by Peter Farrelly who also finished its screenplay with Bryan Hayes Currie and Tony Vallelonga's son, Nick Vallelonga.

Green Book (2018) is named after a mid-20th century guidebook *The Negro Motorist Green Book* which aims to provide the safest routes and places for African American travelers who are going to visit the segregated South region, especially during the enactment of Jim Crow Law. Its storyline is written based on interviews with Tony 'Lip' Vallelonga and Dr. Donald Shirley as well as Vallelonga's letters to his wife, Dolores Venere (Diamond 2018). This movie premiered at the Toronto

International Film Festival on 11th September 2018 and successfully became one of the most popular films of the year according to the National Board Review (Chow 2019). After theatrically released on 16th November 2018 in the United States by Universal Pictures, this movie won three categories of Oscar Awards and numerous appreciations for its storyline and the performance of Mahershala Ali (Dr. Donald Shirley) and Viggo Mortensen (Tony 'Lip' Vallelonga) (Gonzalez 2019).

As a response to the massive emergence of Hollywood movies over the years, there are a lot of scientific studies which try to criticize about unequal power relation between WASP and non-WASP people. Recent study proposed by Azifah (2019), for example, shows that racial inequality still becomes the most common issue to be found in contemporary American society although it has already become subtler. In the meantime, another study proposed by Rizqiandhani (2019) found that non-WASP people are always stereotyped as inferior persons and thus never able to win against WASP people. However, none of these studies are specifically talked about coping strategies in the movie. It is because most of the study which examines about coping strategies actually belong to the psychological working field and held in field research through the distribution of questioners or interview with particular respondents.

This study attempts to build a bridging between psychological and cultural studies in terms of analyzing coping strategies which related to racial discrimination issues. A previous study titled *Death and Coping Mechanisms in Animated Disney Movies: A Content Analysis of Disney Films (1937–2003) and Disney/Pixar Films (2003–2016)* by Graham, Yuhas, and Roman (2018) is a prominent example of how

psychological theory can be integrated with cultural studies point of view through analysis of a movie. This previous study aims to seek the changes of death depiction in the last 14 years of animated Disney movies and coping strategies used by its characters in dealing with sort kind of situations. By using content analysis as the main tools to examine the data, this study reveals that animated Disney movies have developed a more realistic and common cause of death by following the social and cultural issues over the years. In order to cope with sadness and grieving after death, Disney characters are depicted to adopt different coping mechanisms which depend on their cultural values or beliefs of death.

In contrast to the previous study above, this current study uses *Green Book* movie (2018) as the object to analyze. By using narrative and non-narrative research approach to examine the data, the writer wants to focus on the portrayal of two main non-WASP characters in *Green Book* movie (2018) and also their different form of coping strategies when dealing with racial discrimination issues during their eight-week tour concert to the Deep South in 1962. This current study also tries to seek a new perspective in understanding the cultural issue portray in *Green Book* movie (2018) which different from other movie reviews about it. The article posted in The Washington Post (2019) focus on the racial discrimination issue experienced by its main black character. Meanwhile, two articles posted in TIME (2019) and The New York Times (2019) focus on its storyline that considered as a White Savior Film.

Compare to other Hollywood movies which also proposed the same issue of non-WASP people and minority group members in the 1960s, such as *Hidden Figure* (2016) and *The Help* (2011), *Green Book* (2018) is more complicated and

interesting to analyze. In *Hidden Figure* (2016) and *The Help* (2011), black-colored characters are depicted as the ones who receive racial discrimination. However, in *Green Book* movie (2018), it can be seen that racial discrimination also happens to white-colored people like Tony 'Lip' Vallelonga since his Italian American identity does not belong to the dominant parties. Moreover, *Green Book* movie (2018) also gives a new revolution of black people appearance in American movies through the shifting role of its major characters. In this movie, Dr. Donald Shirley, who is a black man, is depicted as a boss from upper class society. Meanwhile, Tony 'Lip' Vallelonga, who is a white man, is depicted as a chauffeur from lower class society.

Although the setting of *Green Book* movie (2018) is taken in the 1960s, the social and cultural conditions portray at that time somehow is still related to the recent condition of the United States under the administration of Donald Trump. The 1960s era is known as the most critical state of social and cultural conditions in the United States due to the enactment of Jim Crow Laws that legally allowed any discriminatory practices in American society (Fremon 2000, 27). By promoting its remarkable jargon "separate but equal", Jim Crow Laws increase the number of racial discrimination issues through segregation in all public facilities and services as well as marginalize colored people to participate in any political events (42).

In the present day, racial discrimination is still clearly experienced by non-WASP people although in some aspects it has already become subtler. Segregation in public facilities is no longer become an issue in contemporary American society. But, limitations to get a proper job still become a common issue to be found (Taylor, et al. 2019). Racial discrimination has been internalized in WASP people's mind as

a common practice to be done in everyday life (Tyson 2015, 354). This condition is getting worse after the election of Donald Trump as America president, which is surprisingly has WASP ancestors who come from German and Scotland. Through his racist government policies, Donald Trump tends to ignore the interest of the minority group members. Based on the social and cultural phenomena that have been mentioned above, the writer reveals that the topic about racial discrimination and coping strategies are still relevant and important to be discussed further.

1.2 Statement of the Problems

In order to analyze this movie further, the writer formulates one statement of the problem:

1. How do two main non-WASP characters in *Green Book* movie (2018) cope with racial discrimination?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

According to the statement of the problem above, this study aims to:

1. Reveal the coping strategies that used by two main non-WASP characters in *Green Book* movie (2018) to cope with racial discrimination.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is important and interesting to be conducted since there is no available publication which examines about coping strategies of minority group

members specifically in the movie. By taking an issue about coping strategies, the writer wants to fill the gap among the other previous studies that usually discuss about racial discrimination towards black people. This study is expected to give a significant contribution to black studies in the movie especially for the students of cultural studies and psychological studies in terms of analyzing coping strategies that related to racial discrimination. Moreover, this study is expected to give such a new perspective to the reader in general about race-related problem and the best way to deal with it.

1.5 Definitions of Key Terms

Coping Strategies : individuals' actions and responses in dealing with stressful situation and other life's problems
(Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 141).

Non-WASP : anyone who is not included in WASP circle or belongs to minority group members
(Rujito 2008, 6).

Prejudice : the negative feelings, judgment, and attitude toward others, especially to the minority one
(Nguyen 2019, 7).

Stereotype : an over-generalized assumption about a particular group member or culture based on some reality as well as individuals' interpretation (Nguyen 2019, 2-3).

White Supremacy : a racist ideology which promotes superiority of white people among the others (Wildman 1996, 87).