

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter presents double discrimination against the three Afro-American women in *Dreamgirls*. After analyzing the scenes found in the film, the writer divided the discussion about double discrimination into race discrimination and women discrimination.

#### **4.1 Race Discrimination**

*Dreamgirls* tells a story about three Afro-American girls named Effie White, Lorell Robinson, and Deena Jones who are part of a group of singers called Dreamettes. They experienced difficulties when they were in the entertainment music industry which maintained color lines. *Dreamgirls* shows that the three women experienced double discrimination as black people and as women. *Dreamgirls* shows that black people in America suffered from disadvantages. Jones (2000) divides racism into three levels.

The first is institutionalized racism, which focuses on the differences races faced when trying to acquire opportunities, products, and services. The kind of racism is shown when Dreamettes had the number one single on the Rainbow Hit R&B charts, but the white radio stations would not play it, because to them it was just another race record—Afro-American musical genres such as jazz and blues (Roy, 2004).

#### **Figure 4.1**

*White radio stations would not play it*



*Note: Condon (2006)*

Furthermore, discrimination occurred when C.C. White's work entitled "Cadillac Car" which was originally sung by Jimmy Thunder Early and Dreamettes was re-recorded by Dave and the Sweethearts, the white people. Dave and the Sweethearts re-recorded "Cadillac Car" without acknowledging the original songwriter and singer as if those black people did not exist and had no right to own a patent. The example above implies that a group of individuals, including black people in America, suffer losses due to racial discrimination (Cashmore, 2004). Apart from that, in this case, it shows that actual intellectual property or what can be called the creativity of black artists is taken and then it can be simply forgotten.

**Figure 4.2**

*Dave and the Sweethearts (white people)*



*Note:* Condon (2006)

The next race discrimination presented in the film is when the Dreamettes wanted to perform in Miami Paradise. They had access difficulties when they wanted to perform in Miami Paradise because Miami Paradise was white people's place that did not even let black people park their cars there. It seems that Dreamettes were not accepted in the Miami Paradise because they were black. The scene implies that black people in America suffer disadvantages such as unequal access.

**Figure 4.3**

*Unequal access to perform in Miami Paradise*



*Note:* Condon (2006)

Another type of racism is mediated racism. It comes from the actions of people that can be intentional or unintentional in terms of personally mediated racism. Examples mentioned include showing disrespect, suspicion, and victimization. Mediated racism can be seen in the scene when Dreamettes was addressed by the MC in the Miami Paradise.

**Figure 4.4**

*MC discriminated black people's talent*



*Note:* Condon (2006)

First, when he said, “from the bottom of his heart that a black person, if they have enough money, can move to our place (white people),” the MC satirizes black people including Dreamettes. In the expression, it can be seen that the MC discriminated against black people and that black people could only move to white people's place because they had money, not because they had talent.

#### **Figure 4.5**

*Satire on black people*

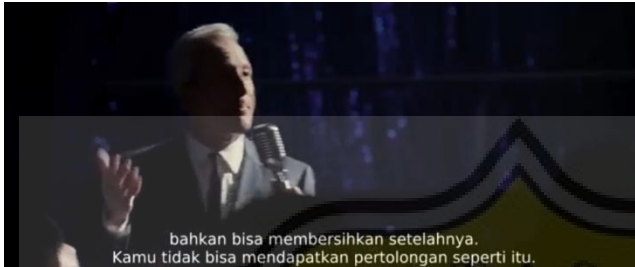


*Note:* Condon (2006)

Second, the MC continued to say at the event that there was the first black musician to ever played in Miami Paradise which was a white people's place. This expression is a satire on black people including Dreamettes. It implies that black people never perform in Miami Paradise (white people's place).

## Figure 4.6

*Black people categorized as lower social status*



*Note:* Condon (2006)

Third, when the MC said, “They are good people. They can sing, they can dance, they can even clean up afterward. You cannot get help like that,” he satirized black people including Dreamettes that the black people were often categorized as lower social status, for example, working as a cleaning lady. The sentence above also shows that black people are often interpreted as subordinates to white people; thus, they are discriminated.

### 4.2 Women Discrimination

Black women are often marginalized because they experience discrimination in more than one way. In the film *Dreamgirls*, the discrimination against women happened to Dreamettes.

An act of discrimination is shown when Effie White, Lorell Robinson, and Deena Jones performed in the Detroit theater. The women proved that they had the ability to sing really well. They showed that they had great singing skills. As a result, their group, the Dreamettes, got a big applause from the audience. In addition, the

Dreamettes attracted a jury that judged that very performance. However, the winner of the music show contest was Mr. Tiny Joe Dixon, a black man who received less applause from the audience. After hearing the unsatisfactory results in Detroit's theater performances, the Dreamettes were disappointed. It could be interpreted that although the Dreamettes were able to impress the audience, they eventually lost to a male performer, Mr. Tiny Joe Dixon.

**Figure 4.7**

*Dreamettes were disappointed with the results*



*Note:* Condon (2006)

Another discrimination that happened to these three Afro-American women is the sexualization of women. In the film *Dreamgirls*, discrimination happened to Deena Jones. There was a scene where a male MC was coming behind Deena Jones and Lorell Robinson. The MC asked about their group name and Deena Jones replied “Dreamettes”. But suddenly the male MC glanced down and touched Deena Jones's buttock. The treatment that was suddenly carried out by the male MC shows that men often see women as objects that could be humiliated and even aim only to satisfy their lust. Moreover, it could be interpreted that women were more susceptible to body

shaming and sexism, which can result in discrimination against them. Women often feel uncomfortable with sexual harassment, but bystanders usually see it as normal (Plan International, 2022).

**Figure 4.8**

*Male MC touched Deena Jones's buttock*



*Note:* Condon (2006)

Another sexualization is when the Dreamettes had to dance sensually for the audience during their performance. It happened after the Dreamettes performance at the Detroit Theatre, when Curtis Taylor suddenly appeared. During their encounter, he proposed to become Dreamettes' manager and gave Dreamettes a job as backup singers for the famous Jimmy Thunder Early. The girls accepted and traveled around with him. On the stage, they needed to dance sensually. The sensual style performed by the Dreamettes was to sing and dance in a sexy dress that exposed the singers' cleavage. It could be interpreted that women are often used as objects to satisfy man's desires.

**Figure 4.9**

*Dreamettes dance sensually in front of James Early*



*Note:* Condon (2006)

The example of the sexualization that happened to women can also be seen in the case of Deena Jones. Women are treated differently from men in society. Women are more vulnerable when they deal with the issue of sexism and body shaming which can lead to discrimination against women. Women who have dark skin color can become victims of body shaming. In other words, not only do black women have to struggle for women's equality, but they also have to deal with colorism— discrimination leads to giving people with light skin more privileges than people with dark skin (Hunter, 2007).

In *Dreamgirls*, the three Afro-American women in Dreamettes had different beauties. The most beautiful woman in Dreamettes was Deena Jones. Deena Jones was the leading singer due to the intervention of Curtis, her manager. Because Curtis had a new concept that a leader needs to have an attractive appearance to invite the attention of the Caucasian group or commonly known as white people, he told the group that Deena Jones would lead the singing. The new look of Dreamettes which was then called The Dreams was a suggested attempt by Curtis Taylor to please white men.

**Figure 4.10**



*Deena Jones as the new look of The Dreams*



*Note:* Condon (2006)

In the film, Deena's character prioritized the needs and views of white men, that having fairer skin was considered the most attractive form of beauty. Her existence was aimed at trying to please white men. Deena Jones was preferred over Effie White as the face of the group because of her looks. Deena Jones who was the most beautiful member of the Dreamettes had the sexiest body was valued more than the others. She was utilized to attract the audience, especially men. Deena Jones was favored over other singers as the face of the group because of her physical appearance. It can be interpreted that Deena Jones was sexualized, and used as an object to attract men's attention. Deena's appearance is related to beauty myths that discriminate against women who do not fit into the standard.

**Figure 4.11**

*Deena Jones becomes a beauty standard*

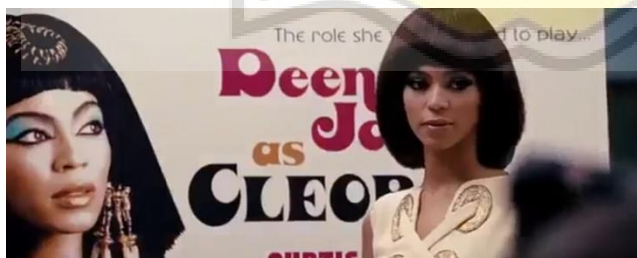


*Note:* Condon (2006)

Deena's case shows that women are associated with sexuality. Stereotypically, women are considered to attract men through seduction and appearance more than through intelligence. The beauty myth works against feminism by using female beauty as a political weapon (Wolf, 2002). The success of Dreamettes, which name was later changed into The Dreams increased dramatically once Deena Jones took over as leader. Deena's stunning beauty made the group enjoyed great success. Additionally, Deena Jones received other possibilities. She took opportunities including the documentaries and film deals that made The Dreams more popular. It could be interpreted Deena Jones was made an object of sales.

**Figure 4.12**

*Deena Jones took opportunities in documentaries*

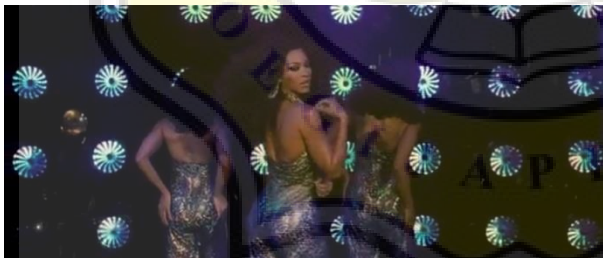


*Note:* Condon (2006)

Two other women in Dreamettes were not as beautiful and sexy as Deena Jones. As a result, they could only rely on their talent as singers. Effie White, who had a better voice than Deena Jones, was less popular than Deena Jones who was prettier and sexier. Lorell Robinson and Effie White must fight with the talent they had. The talent was inversely proportional to the beauty standards that were displayed in the poster or appeared in television shows. Even though Lorell Robinson and Effie White had the same singing talent as Deena Jones, they struggled with the talent they had to be able to stay in the group. In the end, Lorell's and Effie's talents were useless because Deena Jones, who was more beautiful and sexier, became the main figure in posters and television shows. Deena Jones had a facial figure that fit the criteria of the music industry's beauty standards of a proportional body and a beautiful face.

**Figure 4.13**

*Deena Jones a proportional body*



*Note:* Condon (2006)

Sexualization was also experienced by Effie White. Everyone in the group agreed that Effie White had the most beautiful voice, the Mezzo-Soprano or strong voice. Physically, she was a woman with black skin and a curvy body. In the film, Effie White was shown as having a special relationship with Curtis Taylor. The first time

they met, Curtis admired Effie White's beautiful voice. Then Curtis said that he wanted to make a group called The Dreams. Initially, Curtis promised Effie White that she would be the lead singer for The Dreams. Coincidentally, at that time, Curtis was still dating Effie White. It turned out that when The Dreams was formed, the one chosen as the lead singer by Curtis was Deena Jones.

**Figure 4.14**

*Curtis Taylor tells a new concept of The Dreams*



*Note:* Condon (2006)

Effie White was hurt because she was not the lead singer. The reason Curtis replaced Effie White with Deena Jones was that Effie White was considered to be less or not attractive to the white audience. Curtis' new concept was more concerned with popularity than talent. Simply said, Curtis had an opinion that Caucasian or white people especially white men would not find Effie White appealing. Instead, white people would choose Deena Jones as more appealing because she had a proportional body and fairer skin. Curtis said that if the lead singer was still Effie White, the audience would be less attractive because more appearances were needed. In other words, appearance was more important than abilities.

Curtis : You all do as I say. It is a new sound with a new look.

Effie : A new look? No one can see it on a record!

Curtis : The only way we could change something was by looking good for the audience while watching TV.

Effie : So, Deena was going to be in charge because you like the way she looked?

Curtis : Yes of course

(Condon, 2006, 00:48:42-00:48:53)

The film shows that, Effie was just Curtis' momentary love interest. Curtis broke up with Effie White because he was more interested in Deena Jones. Curtis also replaced the lead singer of The Dreams with Deena Jones because Deena Jones' appearance was more attractive. In the end, Curtis' marrying Deena Jones and replacing the lead singer showed Effie White that Curtis was more interested in appearance and attractiveness than talents. Dreamgirls shows there was an assimilation of black people to white people. Curtis Taylor aimed to fit the image of The Dreams with the white culture.

#### **Figure 4.15**

*Deena Jones's appearance was more attractive*



*Note:* Condon (2006)

The fact is Curtis did not want The Dreams to look younger, rather he wanted The Dreams to look whiter. In The Dreams, Lorell Robinson was the youngest woman from The Dreams, but Curtis Taylor did not choose her to be the new lead singer. Instead, Curtis Taylor wanted to show the beauty of Deena Jones more than Lorell Robinson youngest age. Moreover, the Dreamgirls scene shows that it was difficult for African-American women to get a job unless they had facial features like white people. Therefore, African Americans did not sell. This also shows that appearance took precedence over talent. This practice is still applied to the entertainment industry as a whole, especially as music becomes an increasingly visual medium. Yet this belief is not only reduced the likelihood of African-American and other minority women being included in commercials, films, and television shows, but also forced them to change their overall appearance to a more European-centric style, often equating a beautiful woman with a beauty standard with light skin, straight hair, and other white skin features.

Deena Jones replaced Effie White as a leader because she looked better in appearance. When making a recording of The Dream's song entitled "Heavy", the camera focus on Deena Jones. Curtis Taylor said with the cameramen, "Strengthen camera 2." It shows that women were often portrayed inaccurately in media and entertainment. Even more, highlighting Deena Jones further proved that the beauty standards wanted to show by the film were a beautiful face and a proportional body.

**Figure 4.16**

*The Camera's focus is on Deena Jones*



Note: Condon (2006)

The importance of Deena Jones' physical appearance is also added by the scene where Effie White who was supposed to be the singer of the re-recorded song of "One Night Only" written by C.C. White was changed to Deena Jones. The reason for changing the singer was that Deena Jones' beautiful face on the cover of the album would help the sale of the album.

**Figure 4.17**

*Album "One Night Only" replaced by Deena Jones*



Note: Condon (2006)

The replacement of the lead singer did not only offend Effie White but also made her angry. This can be proven by the scene that depicts the time during the recording of "Heavy", a song by The Dreams. Effie White, who was not the lead singer

of The Dreams anymore, deliberately sang in a high voice beating Deena Jones who was supposed to be the lead singer.

**Figure 4.18**

*Effie White beating Deena Jones in a high voice*



*Note:* Condon (2006)

This whole situation messed up Effie's life and mental health. The evidence was when Effie missed a long practice because Effie White was not in good health and had to go for a health checkup. At that time Effie said, "I am not feeling well. I have got pain." However, after returning from the checkup, Effie found that she was replaced by a replacement singer named Michelle. Effie was disappointed and said, "I am off for a little while, but suddenly there is Michelle as a new singer to replace me." So, not only was Effie replaced by Deena as the lead singer, she was replaced by Michelle as a singer.

**Figure 4.19**

*Effie White replaced by Michelle and was disappointed*





*Note:* Condon (2006)

Some of Effie's life and mental health were messed up by this entire incident. Effie White lost her love and her life was disrupted, her self-esteem and confidence were destroyed, and her golden voice was neglected and underestimated. Effie's self-image and confidence decreased when she faced the fact that beautiful appearances were preferable in the music industry. She said, "So, Deena's going to sing lead because you like the way she looks? Am I ugly to you, Curtis?" Even after Effie reminded Curtis of Deena's quality as a singer, "We finally get the chance to have our act and Deena's doing lead? She cannot sing as I can," she was eventually replaced and forced to find a new career on her own while Deena and the other girls become stars. It was a challenging situation for Effie White to handle because society's beliefs that demanded beauty contrasted with the fact that she did not look beautiful enough to fit in the beauty standards in the music industry. Effie White suffered badly after leaving The Dreams. When she was no longer singing with The Dreams, she had to move to a lower-income area and constantly visited unemployment offices to try and find work. She even told the workers that her only marketable talent was her voice, and she had no skills for any other job.

**Figure 4.20**

*Effie White messed up by this entire incident*



*Note:* Condon (2006)

Effie White's problems happened because Effie White as a woman was physically less attractive than Deena Jones. With the above evidence, it could be interpreted that women were often used as objects, valued because of their figures, and treated only to satisfy men. These issues were related to the issues of appearance. The example shows that in society, most women are subjected to discrimination. Women are frequently objectified in the media. Additionally, women are frequently shown as a gender that must place greater emphasis on their physical attributes than other skills. Women are frequently misrepresented in the media and entertainment.

Darker-skinned women got fewer opportunities because they were less attractive. *Dreamgirls* uncovers the unspoken acts of coloring that take place within and outside of black communities such as the Caucasian community or white people. This was shown by the direct correlation between the change of leader with Deena Jones and the success of The Dreams group. This was evidenced beyond any doubt that the coloring and effect it had on black women was real.