

# Unveiling Color-Blind Racism: Racial Violence, Identity, and Resistance in Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*

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## Abstract

Racism is pervasive in society; its roots have been deeply ingrained into individuals' lives, hindering African Americans' ability to achieve stability and peace. It is established in favor of societal convictions that primarily benefit whites to maintain their superiority and dominance over Blacks. Naturally, white people are the foundation of racial supremacy, pretending to treat Blacks equally through practices such as color-blind racism yet limiting Blacks in different fields. African Americans continue to be victims of the dominant ideology of color-blind racism, which produces significant racial tension and conflict in American culture. Correspondingly, they face racial inequities in their daily lives. This study's primary goal is to examine how racial violence still exists in the form of color-blind racism in one of Kidd's most famous novels, *The Secret Life of Bees*, in which Lily, the white protagonist, is prejudiced against African Americans. Eventually, Lily realizes her ingrained white racial guilt and strives to change it once she embraces the Black community by valuing their identity. In addition, the study also examines how Lily recognizes society's color-blind racist approach, which attempts to instill racism in order to impact and constrain Blacks as an inferior race. Finally, the findings of this study provide a clear picture of the hegemonic ideology known as color-blind racism and how its ideals in practice affect the lives of Black people while favoring the prejudice and discrimination of white characters in the novel.

**Keywords:** racism, color-blind racism, racial inequalities, prejudice, African Americans

## 1. Introduction

Race differentiates people according to their physical features. Matthew Clair (2015) defined racism as a cultural norm commonly used to organize and distribute power among individuals. Therefore, race becomes an imminent factor in human life employed as a fundamental determinant of an individual's identity. As Fredrickson (2002) explained, racism is frequently used by one group to express their averse and strong prejudiced attitude against another racial group. For example, white people distinguish themselves from Blacks to maintain their privilege and eliminate them from society as inferiors. Hersch (2006) affirmed that white individuals are encouraged to maintain their privilege and dominant position, while African Americans often face discrimination and high unemployment rates. They were denied equal opportunities in education, employment, and various fields in America based on ethnicity and skin color (Anita, 2019). African Americans experience racial discrimination, injustice, and police brutality on all dimensions that dismantle their fundamental rights and cause "harmful effects on health and wellbeing" (National Public Radio (NPR), the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health, 2017, p.2).

Whites enjoy equity and justice, whereas Blacks are constrained and deprived. Weller (2019) pointed out that in the United States, though African Americans are highly or equally qualified as whites, they are not given much preference and find it difficult to get a well-paid job in labor-market. Couch and Fairlie (2010) elucidated that historically, African Americans have been racially segregated and received inferior education, significantly influencing their economic situation. Thus, the unemployment rate rises due to racial discrimination, making it more difficult for African Americans to obtain stable jobs. However, many white individuals deny the existence of racial disparities, arguing that "race matters much less than it used to, racial barriers have been overcome, and racism is no longer a problem" (Helms, 2015, p.139). This perception of a color-blind society has created discomfort in addressing racial issues, and color-blind racism has become a catalyst for fostering this attitude. Ultimately, in this post-racial era, racism has taken on a new form called color-blind racism. Neville et al. (2016) stated that the idea behind color blindness is to create a society that values individuals based on their character rather than their skin color. It raises awareness about racial stratification and "mandates that race not matter to individuals' outcomes in life" (Knowles et al., 2009, p.859).

However, it can be argued that color blindness as a prevailing ideology promotes racism by not addressing race. Neville et al. (2013) illustrated that ignoring race does not help people overcome racial inequality; instead, it creates disparities and encourages whites to maintain their prejudiced attitudes toward Blacks. Reece (2019) strongly alluded that the history of African enslavement is the prime

reason for the never-ending racial intolerance Black people still face in America. Neville et al. (2013) declared that since laws were established to favor African Americans, whites were not legally allowed to discriminate or show their supremacy. So, they exhibited their racist attitude by adopting the concept called color-blind racism to “mask their attitudes by either rationalizing their discrimination or avoiding racial topics and intergroup contact” (Neville et al., 2013, p.457). Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich (2011) confronted that color-blind racism is one of the underlying causes of current racial disparities in society. Furthermore, despite the historical reduction of racial discrimination against Black individuals, covert forms of racism, such as color-blind racism, still exist.

Set in 1964, the novel *The Secret Life of Bees* delves into the racial tensions and segregation prevalent during that era. By examining the ideology of color-blind racism, the study offers a lens through which to comprehend the intricate challenges and complexities of racism faced by African Americans amidst the specific historical period. The current study's primary objective of exploring the context of color-blind racism in Sue Monk Kidd's novel is to establish links between past and present racial hurdles. Through these findings, the study aims to illustrate how color-blind racism reinforces prejudice among whites by exposing the distressing experiences endured by Black characters in the narrative. By specifically delving into the concept of color-blind racism, this study sheds light on the novel's versatility, which encompasses a wide range of issues related to racial inequalities. Additionally, through this ideology, the novel encourages the readers to examine critically the multifaceted ways racial discrimination persists and operates in the post-racial world.

The novel's author Sue Monk Kidd is an American writer whose works concentrate primarily on contributing to equal treatment for African Americans. During Kidd's childhood in South America, she encountered racial tensions toward African Americans, inspiring her to write *The Secret Life of Bees* to raise racial exposure to white supremacy's brutality. This novel depicts the life path of Lily Owens, who flees from her abusive father, T. Ray, and continues her quest for identity with Rosaleen, a maid in their family. Rosaleen was severely attacked and imprisoned because of her opposition to the three white racist men. Lily rescued Rosaleen, and they headed on a journey together searching for Lily's mother, Deborah Fontanel Owen's mysterious death. They find the Bee sisters in Tiburon, South Carolina, where Lily is persuaded to live with them. At this time, Lily realizes her deeply embedded hidden racial attitude, which makes her feel guilty and ashamed of herself. Finally, with the Boatwright sisters' help and support, Lily understands the African American community and develops her identity.

## 2. Review of Literature

In the following studies on *The Secret Life of Bees*, Rajendran (2018) and Herwanti (2015) interpreted how the power of Black culture and Black women are expressed through the symbolic representation of bees throughout the novel. In addition, the study examines how each character in the narrative has a significant relationship with the bees. The two major symbols are the Bee and the Black Madonna. August Boatwright is represented as the queen bee, and Black Madonna is the one who helps Lily in rebuilding her actual future. On the other hand, Anita (2019) and Menon (2020) explored how the novel's Black characters are persecuted for endless turmoil of racial injustice and treated as minorities. Although time and law changed and brought prohibitions against racial violence, African Americans continue to be victims, as illustrated by Kidd in this novel. At the same time, Setri and Setiawan (2020) emphasized how the novel's female characters stand independently and overcome societal stereotypes that are set against them. The psychological transformations of Black women characters and how they fight against societal oppression are also highlighted. Although the majority of the research has concentrated on the novel's positive sides. Artiles (2020) and Grobman (2008) criticized how Kidd has used the Black characters in the novel as an object to enhance her white protagonist, Lily. According to the critics, Kidd has mis-constructed Blackness as a tool to promote whiteness. They also criticize the author for providing inadequate knowledge of African culture and portraying Africans as oppressors who persecuted whites. Similarly, Kidd depicts an instance in which Lily feels humiliated and rejected by the bee sisters to live among them for being white. She employs Black individuals as puppets and presents Black women as conventional mammy figures. Indeed, most Black characters function as objects that aid Lily, the white protagonist, in constructing and identifying her identity. In contrast, Hebert (2011) investigated Lily's journey to adulthood from a psychological and spiritual perspective. The study also determines the significance of Blackness, gender roles, and Kidd's use of language, style, and dialect in the novel.

The study by Beech et al. (2021) addressed the effects of poverty on a variety of factors in a person's life, including health. Additionally, the study intends to highlight how racism negatively impacts marginalized racial and ethnic groups' socioeconomic well-being, thereby harming their health. Hinton et al. (2018) asserted that Black Americans suffer significantly from the criminal justice system in America as a result of systemic racism. As the study points out, even though this inequality operates subtly, racial inequality still exists within the system, as biased decisions regarding arrests and incarceration have a profound impact on Black lives. The study by Hammond et al. (2020) examined the racial inequality that persists over generations. In particular, it investigates the inequalities in education, employment opportunities, and wealth experienced by African Americans, as well as the factors which contribute to these disparities. The racial segregation in America significantly in education field is a systemic issue throughout American history. Furthermore, the difficulties and harms of racial and socioeconomic segregation is addressed. The segregation trends from 1968 to 2018 is been analyzed in the current study to emphasis the generations of segregation and racial inequality in the American society. Orfield and Jarvie (2020) Stated that it is historically evident that racial segregation has been a systemic problem in America's education system. The problems and harms associated with racial and socioeconomic segregation is also discussed. The current study analyzes segregation trends from 1968 to 2018, to emphasize generations of segregation and racial inequality in American society,

Colorblindness is viewed as an attempt to promote equality and fairness to address racism and inequality. Yet it also serves as a means for white people to conceal their white supremacy rather than acknowledge it. According to De Saxe (2022), colorblindness is inherently

racist since it marginalizes non-white racial identities and elevates whiteness. White people adopt colorblindness more than Blacks since it allows them to maintain power rather than lose it (Plaut et al., 2009). Meanwhile, it is a prevailing ideology that affects and transforms people's perspectives on race. Color-blindness is portrayed as an egalitarian concept that allows whites to retain their discrimination while pretending to the world that they are color-blind or not prejudiced and treat everyone equally (Plaut et al., 2018). Also, white people hold color-blind racism as a shield, claiming it helps them control their biased thoughts. Furthermore, whites endorse that this approach assists them in forming an egalitarian society. However, Richeson and Nussbaum (2004) identified that it has a negative impact on Black's current social and economic developments. In this era, white individuals affirmed that they accepted African Americans as equals, stating, "I'm not racist. I have several black friends" (Sue, Derald Wing, et al., 2007, p.276). Nevertheless, the fact is that they wanted to stay superior at all times. Therefore, they disguised the truth by adapting the color-blind racial ideology. Forman and Lewis (2015) claim that colorblind racist attitudes and the belief that current era has become post-racial encourages ongoing discrimination, which these ideals ignore and downplay. Rather than focusing on the correlation between colorblindness and white prejudice, Mazzocco et al. (2016) in their study explores how the attitudes of colorblind racists and prejudiced people relate to their views on affirmative action.

### 2.1 Knowledge Gap

Given these premises, this current study uncovers the detrimental effects of color-blind racism, which systematically influences the biased attitudes among white characters. In this literary context, the concept of color-blind racism has not been adequately explored since previous research has mostly focused on different forms of discrimination. Hence, the primary objective of this study is to bridge this research gap by exploring how color-blind racial attitudes significantly impact the Black community, particularly within the Bee sisters' family, as depicted in the novel *The Secret Life of Bees*.

## 3. Methodology

The current study adopts a qualitative approach primarily based on thematic analysis to examine the significant themes identified in the novel *The Secret Life of Bees*. Throughout the narrative, the prominent themes, including color-blind racism, racial disparities and segregation of Blacks are extensively explored. The central focus of this exploration is to examine the interplay between these themes and the characters' journeys, which illuminate their quest for identity, struggle for freedom and self-discovery. In this current study, *The Secret Life of Bees* serves as the primary source and also provides a wider contextual background. Additionally, it includes secondary sources comprising relevant literature, books and academic publications that address the diverse factors of inequalities specifically color-blind racism that affects African Americans wellbeing. Through the lens of thematic analysis, this study comprehensively explores the intricate social and cultural dynamics embedded in the narrative, shedding light on the wide-ranging implications of color-blind racism, the manifestation of racial disparities, and the concept of segregation. Further, it examines the experiences of Black characters within the narrative to uncover how color-blind racism and other disparities have profoundly impacted their lives. In addition, the complexities of the characteristics attributed to fictional characters within the literary realm are focused on gaining a great insight into the novel's thematic depth and portrayal of its underlying racial dynamic.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 Color-Blind Racism: A Modern Form of Discrimination

Color blindness actively resists the stereotyping, categorization or labelling of people according to their racial background. Using this ideology white individuals claim to be color blind yet they employ it as a disguise to conceal their racist beliefs and actions is called as color-blind racism, which is the focus of this study. Anderson (2015) claimed that "The Civil Rights Movement is long past, yet segregation persists" (p.10). Similarly, DiAngelo (2016) portrayed that after the end of the Jim Crow era and the advent of the Civil Rights Movement, the new racist concept color blindness emerged as the primary means of ensuring white supremacy in America. Through legal and policy methods, this new type of racism reproduces racial disparities that were prevalent before, but it functions in a modern way by avoiding being labelled "explicitly racist" (p.127). Bonilla-Silva points out color-blind racism as:

Jim Crow racism served as the glue for defending a brutal and overt system of racial oppression in the pre-Civil Rights era, color-blind racism serves today as the ideological armor for a covert and institutionalized system in the post-Civil Rights era (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p.3).

Color blind racism is described by Bobo et al. (1996) as "Laissez Faire racism," which has reduced the overt forms of racism such as legal discrimination, stern forms of oppression, segregation and hatred directed towards African Americans. It has also restricted the disparities and humiliations of believing that "blacks are the categorical intellectual inferiors of whites" (p.3). Although it has helped to reduce the occurrence of extreme forms of discrimination, it has not restrained them completely. In addition, he argues that color-blind racism blames blacks for economic disparities between blacks and whites as well as constantly depicting them in negative ways, which in turn impedes the improvement of policies aimed at achieving justice and equality for Blacks.

### 4.2 Disregarding Racial Tension and Unconscious Bias

Powell (2012) asserted that colorblind ideologues disregard structural racism in current society by claiming that it has no substantial impact on African Americans. These idealists also hide the tensions raised by issues related to race, skin color and unconscious bias against African Americans. Similarly, Lipitz (2011) stated that "In all areas of U.S. life, we now confront the presumption that color-bound injustices require color-blind remedies, that racebased problems should be solved by race-blind remedies" (p.15).

Furthermore, centred on the idea of color blindness, Mazzocco et al. (2011) emphasized the idea of de-emphasizing race and racial categories in society stating that “Nothing good will come out of continuing to focus on race,” “America would be better off if we stopped placing so much importance on race,” “The topic of race is something that should generally be avoided,” and “Society would be better off if we all stopped talking about race” (p.4). White individuals today believe that pretending to treat everyone the same and disregarding racial differences is the best way to resolve racial issues. However, ignoring a person's race is crucial in everyone's life, as being race-blind leads to increased discrimination and marginalization of African Americans. Leonardo (2009) highlighted how colorblind thinking complicates the recognition of underlying racial inequalities, which persist today but were more evident before. However white privilege remains untouched. He states that:

The transparency of racial power is arguably more opaque in the era of color-blindness or post-Civil Rights race relations. Unlike the overt forms of White supremacy, the softened and coded/coated expressions, like normative knowledge and unequal funding in schools, are either harder to transfix on race or are confounded by class issues. However, the resulting relationship is consistent: White reigns supreme (Leonardo, 2009, p.16).

#### 4.3 Central Ideas of Color-Blind Racism

Bonilla-Silva (2006) in his book “Race without Racism” discussed the four fundamental frames of color-blind racism. “Abstract liberalism” is the first frame of color-blind racism that advocates the use of progressive language and ideas limited solely to equal opportunities without involving racial disparities and race. It suggests that these ideas “should not be used to achieve social policy and economic liberalism” (p.28). Such restrictions have adverse effects on the educational, economic and social growth of Black individuals. The “Naturalization” frame rationalizes marginalizing the Black community as something natural or normal occurrences. Whites argue that their “taste for whiteness in friends and partners is just the way things are” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p.28). Thus, this normalizes the historical discrimination of segregating Blacks from white communities and continues to be prevalent in the current era. The third frame called “Cultural Racism” is used to blame Blacks accusing them of unethical work or motivation. These stereotypes are used against them to hold them accountable for their unemployment, poverty, limited education and higher incarceration rate. “A Negro is different from other people in that he’s an unfortunate branch of the human family who hasn’t been able to make out of himself all he is capable of. He is not capable of being rushed because of the background of the jungle” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p.29). The last frame known as “Minimization of Racism” strongly insists that racial discrimination in current society “is no longer a central factor affecting minorities’ life chances “It’s better now than in the past” or “There is discrimination, but there are plenty of jobs out there”(Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p.29). Thus it is evident that the ideology called color blindness and its core concepts fail to address or represent racial discrimination rather it upholds inequality through its principles.

#### 4.4 Effects of Color-Blind Racism

Color blindness is an ideology that insists a person's racial difference or race should not be used to criticize or address them; only then race-based discrimination can be eradicated. However, equality cannot be promoted through color-blindness by eliminating one’s race. Also, the individuals who embrace higher levels of color blindness “engage in racially insensitive behavior” (Neville et al., 2013, p.456). Still, eliminating racial differences is not the appropriate method to achieve equality; relatively, it advantages whites by empowering them to “maintain an egalitarian self-image, because it allows them to believe they are nonprejudiced” (Plaut, Hurd and Romano, 2018, p.201) towards African Americans. On the other hand, Collins (2015) asserted that Martin Luther King Jr. defines color blindness as the concept that people should not be evaluated or dominated based on their skin color but instead on their traits. Racism is inherently supported by color blindness, which is ineffective in achieving equality. Indeed, it confines discussion to race, which explicitly permits and favors different forms of racism, such as systemic and institutional racism, to remain untouched (Choi, 2008).

Frankenberg (1993) highlighted two distinct components of color blindness: color evasion, which states that individuals should not discriminate against others based on their skin color. And power evasion, which claims no one is inferior and “any failure to achieve is, therefore, the fault of people of color themselves” (p.14). Nevertheless, color blindness does not deny racism; instead, it ignores racial identity and upholds racial hegemony (De Saxe, 2022). Based on Gill’s (2022) report, African Americans are highly competent but restricted from working equally with whites; thus, they “are less likely to be selected for career-enhancing activities and management positions, even after being deemed highly qualified” (p.13). Through their report, Parker et al. (2016) asserted that whites’ racial discrimination towards Blacks is a “barrier to Black progress” (p.4). Also, they never wanted Black people to attain societal freedom and equality. So, they dominated and treated them as inferiors. Therefore, Blacks were denied equal chances in education, employment, and other fields (Quintana and Mahgoub, 2012).

Color blindness is a hegemonic concept that enforces subordination, social categorization, stereotyping, and prejudice towards whites. It has been observed that when color blindness is normalized in society, discrimination and oppression cannot be eradicated (Holoien and Shelton, 2012). Hence, it is a false consciousness that recreates the marginalization of Black and eliminates their identity. Blacks wanted to celebrate their culture and ethnicity, which is rejected by a color-blind ideology that insists that by following this concept, contemporary society can be viewed as the post-race era. “A Negro is different from other people in that he’s an unfortunate branch of the human family who hasn’t been able to make out of himself all he is capable of” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p.29). Bonilla-Silva states that according to a newspaper editor in North Carolina, Black people are othered or isolated as a distinct group that has not been acknowledged or considered along with the human family in society. Despite their abilities, they were denied any fundamental support or

rights to establish a life in society.

Besides the mainframes of color-blindness emphasizing equality by disregarding race, it inherently supports whites' discriminatory acts towards African Americans (Bonilla-Silva 2006). To identify such practices of color-blindness, this study includes Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*, Black characters who are victims of racial violence inflicted against them. According to the report by National Public Radio (NPR), the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health (2017), "(51%) of Black Americans say they have personally experienced racial slurs", and violence continues against African Americans due to their race and skin color (p.16). Thus, their opportunities in different sectors are constrained due to their history as enslaved people. Further, their historical experience as enslaved people are reproduced by the idea of color-blind racism, which fails to eradicate bias and practice equality in society.

#### 4.5 Injustice Racial Treatments Against African Americans

This current study is based on the novel *The Secret Life of Bees*, which was set in South Carolina in 1964. The white protagonist, Lily Melissa Owens, is a fourteen-year-old motherless girl raised by her aggressive father, T. Ray. Deborah Fontanel Owens, Lily's mother, died when Lily was four. She had been permanently traumatized by grief over her mother's death. Equally, she felt guilty since she accidentally shot her mother during a dispute between Deborah Owens and T. Ray. Lily had always longed for her mother's affection and was eager to know more about her mother when she found the Black Mary's picture in her mother's tin box. This led her to meet the boatwright sisters, who reshaped Lily's life and inspired her to develop her coming-of-age journey. Rosaleen, a Black housemaid who took care of household work, also acted as a stand-in mother for Lily after her mother, Deborah Owen's death. In this study, color blind racism is employed as an effective approach to examine the evidence of new racial conflicts in the modern period. Further, the novel's traces of color-blind racism and its central frames are analyzed and represent that this ideology regulates racism and promotes equality among Black and white people, reflected through the novel's African American characters' traumatic experiences.

Slavery and racial discrimination were abolished, and various laws were enacted to protect Black people. However, the occurrence depicted in the novel demonstrates how slavery and discrimination persisted throughout the end of the civil rights struggle. Likewise, some scenes in the book address how society and the law encourage and empower whites to discriminate against and abuse African Americans. It also shows how Blacks were arrested and beaten to death for no apparent cause. Furthermore, this study focuses on how whites appear color blind to control and exhibit their prejudice against African Americans, represented in several situations in the novel. Along with that, the effects of racism, discrimination, Black hardship, and society's violent acts towards Black characters are determined.

Even in the post-race era, white culture considered this a crime. "I'm registering myself to vote" (Kidd, 2002, p.33). Rosaleen stated that a democratic initiation would be conducted at the colored church and that she intended to register her name to vote. Lily was horrified when she heard it since a Black guy was murdered in Mississippi while attempting to register his vote. Lily liked Rosaleen but could not support her right to vote due to the racist culture. T. Ray, the biased man, warned Lily not to be involved with Rosaleen's religion, which was recognized as an irrational idea. "Rosaleen's religion was a plain wacko" (p.37). This indicates how whites perceive Black religion as a strange culture in which they should not be influenced. Later in the novel, it is illustrated how Lily felt grateful for the Black community's religious icon Black Mary who changed Lily's life journey and helped her to find her identity.

When Rosaleen and Lily arrive at the church in Sylvan, South Carolina, frother Gerald, the white minister, denies Rosaleen access, adding, "It's funny how you forget the rules. She was not supposed to be inside here" (p.37). He also frequently heard allegations that enslaved people came to church on Sundays and worshipped with whites, which is considered a major sin. Gerald further claims that they love Black people, but he excludes them by insisting that Blacks have a separate place for worship. This situation exemplifies one of the aspects of color-blind racism known as "Naturalization". In the novel, Father Gerald naturalizes segregating Blacks from the white church. This type of racial segregation portrays how white people falsely assert themselves to be color-blind, loving, and accepting of Blacks as one of them. Nevertheless, inside the community, they disregard them and ignore their presence by hiding their racist views. Even though segregation and prejudice over African Americans were prohibited, the novel reveals how white people excluded Blacks from the white church and established a separate church for the Black population. "We loved them in the Lord, Brother Gerald said, but they had their places" (p.37). Thus, racial segregation remains a significant factor that contributes to the current ongoing discrimination against Blacks, which hinders their advancement (Sumarsono et al., 2023).

Though slavery was abolished by the Civil Rights Act, racial politics, such as discrimination, Blacks being shot to death, restricting African Americans from accessing churches, and segregation in hospitals and inns, persisted long after the civil rights war (Collier et al., 2010). Such prejudiced mentality is depicted in the work *The Secret Life of Bees*; when Lily and Rosaleen go to register Rosaleen's vote, three white racists humiliate Rosaleen and address her as "Nigger," which infuriates her. "Where're you going, nigger?" (Kidd, 2002, p.39). Hearing this insult, Rosaleen grew enraged and poured the juice over their shoes, which provoked their anger. Consequently, they began to hit her fiercely for insulting them. Her courageous attitude towards the white man caused racial tension between them. Meanwhile, they grew outrageous as white people despised being opposed by Black people. So, she was forced to wipe out the spilt juice and apologize to them, but she was too stubborn to do so. The sheriff eventually arrested Rosaleen, who charged her with "Assault, theft, and disturbing the peace" (p.40). Worst of all, she was accused of crimes she did not commit, yet the white officer left the white men who hit Rosaleen without punishing them. The abovementioned situation explains how Black people were detained and criminally charged while peacefully protesting for their rights. The white men intended to restrict Rosaleen from registering to vote. She was excited to enroll her right and also had some faith that the Civil Rights Act would transform Black people's lives. Contrarily, nothing changed; white racist

males established power and control, wounding and suppressing her brutally.

“Lily, child, there ain’t gonna be any place that will take a colored woman” (p.75). Once Lily chose to stay in an inn, Rosaleen reminded her that Black women were prohibited from staying anywhere in white society. Lily criticized the purpose of the condemned Act, but the truth was that whites never followed the laws set for Blacks’ welfare. Lewis (2016) stated that “whites as a people believe that they themselves are aracial” (p.127). However, the dominance and standards imposed against Blacks remain unseen to them. They resist accepting their power and supremacy. Likewise, whites’ vicious colorblind attitude shows how they hide their superior beliefs and seem like they welcome Blacks to stay in their neighbourhood. However, their racial politics reflect how they still abide by restrictions for Blacks.

Lily became aware of the injustices and oppressions perpetrated on Black people while socializing with the African American Bee sisters. Meanwhile, May told Lily about April’s death, caused by society’s unrighteous racial marginalization. April felt humiliated by an ice cream shop vendor in the marketplace as she was not treated equally in front of the other white children. “Nothing’s fair in the world. You might as well get that straight right now” (Kidd, 2002, p.199). When April lamented the racial humiliation, her father calmed her by saying that Blacks were still not considered humans in white society. Furthermore, he described how society was constructed and controlled by following evil racial customs. He revealed his experience that, despite being the first Black dentist, he was offered unequal pay because of his skin color. Later, April was disturbed by society’s unfair treatment, and as a sensitive girl, it strongly hit her mind. At age fifteen, April could not tolerate the discrimination forced upon Black people, so, unfortunately, she committed suicide.

“Racial segregation is a salient feature of cities in the United States” (Kollmann, Marsiglio, & Suardi, 2018, p.2). According to Kollmann et al. (2018), racial segregation is indeed a prevalent practice, particularly in America. Nevertheless, African Americans were treated as enslaved people, and their race was treated as “economically marginalized and second-class citizens” (Rigeur and Beshlian, 2019, p.271). Similarly, August, a notable African American woman entrepreneur in this story, recalled how society denied her career opportunities. In response to this rough treatment, she ended up working as a beekeeper for nine months. Then she decided to establish her own business after becoming confident in her capabilities. August and her sister June were only permitted to attend Black school, and June was also allowed to work as a music tutor for Black children. Herring (2002) stated that even when African Americans were equally and highly competent as whites but were not offered a fair chance. Whites employed only a limited number of African Americans, and those jobs were not steady either. The painful irony was that “Black workers, 56.5% work for low wages” (p.5) to survive in a discriminating society due to unemployment. The core idea of color-blind racial ideology called “Minimization of Racism” is prevalent where Blacks were blamed for their unemployment. Such a situation is depicted in Kidd’s novel *The Secret Life of Bees*, where June was a Black Homes funeral director. Besides her education and various abilities, she was driven by society to seek low-wage jobs to live and blamed her for being incapable.

#### 4.6 Engrained Racial Attitude

Even though Lily questioned the white racist criminal injustice system toward Blacks, she was also aware of her inherent racism in many events. As Awad et al. (2005) underlined, “color-blind attitudes and White privilege are both rooted in the structure of a racist society” (p.1388). A similar viewpoint is addressed in the novel, where Lily’s white prejudice was developed inside her as a result of growing up in a culture that educated whites to see African Americans as aliens and a unique species. Though Lily opposed injustice against African Americans at one time, she was the one who tried to stop Rosaleen from challenging white men’s supremacy. In this situation, she might have opposed the racists’ inhumane actions. Instead, she joined them by attempting to control Rosaleen. Especially, Lily was enraged by Rosaleen’s brave moves, and she treated her as an inferior, claiming that she had less sense to dare the white guys.

Rosaleen grew outraged at Lily, who was treated inferiorly and ordered to follow her everywhere she wanted. “I’m supposed to follow you like a pet dog. You act like you’re my keeper” (p.67). Rosaleen addressed Lily as selfish since she misled her into finding her deceased mother’s identity. Rosaleen yelled at Lily for saving her to use her in search of Deborah, Lily’s deceased mother. “Well, you are dumb!” (p.68). Lily stormed out at Rosaleen, accusing her of being dumb enough to spill the juice on the white men’s shoes. Also, she reminded her to be grateful for saving her from a dreadful condition. She further emphasized that if she had not saved her, they would have murdered her. Such superior feelings arose for Lily without conscience, revealing her true racial nature. Instead, June declined Lily’s invitation to their house, fearing they might be in danger if they allowed a white person to stay with them. “But she’s white, August” (p.107). Lily felt odd and worthless when June rejected her because of her skin tone. Lily’s racism is exhibited when she has never seen an African American marginalize a white person who offended her. In response, Lily fiercely thought, “There was no difference between my piss and June’s” (p.108). As a consequence of June’s rejection, Lily felt ashamed and assumed that all were equal and that no one should be classified and condemned based on their skin color.

#### 4.7 Lily’s Racial Realisation

Lily outlined T. Ray’s attitude toward Black women, contending that they were not smart enough. Certainly, Lily felt awful for being deceived by her father’s discriminatory beliefs that no Black woman was more competent than her. “August is so intelligent, so cultured, and I was surprised by this. That’s what let me know I had some prejudice buried inside me” (p.97). In contrast, Lily radically changes her attitude about Black women after meeting August, a well-educated and cultured Black lady. Her racial awareness led her to re-examine her belief that Black women were distinctive and intelligent in their ways. Lily admired August for acknowledging the Black Mary’s narrative, which transformed her perception of Blacks and the evil practice known as racism. “And finally, the funny wooden picture of Mary with the dark face” (p.28). At the novel’s beginning, Lily feels funny watching Mary, the mother of Jesus, as a Black lady when

looking at the Black Mary image that she found in her mother's belongings. After realizing this, she said, "I'd lived inside it the way a goldfish lives in its bowl as if that was the only world there was" (p. 309). Lily worried because she was not exposed to worldly things and not allowed to socialize with Black society and culture; she became unknowingly preoccupied with biased views and believed them.

The white police officer, Mr. Hazelwurst, visited bee sister's house to investigate May's death and discovered that Lily, a white girl residing with Black people, upset him. In that case, he warned Lily to move to her auntie's house, adding, "Anything would be better than you are staying in a colored house" (p.245). Lily became aware of his racist views and was outraged when he asked her to leave as soon as possible rather than live with Blacks. On the contrary, Lily felt proud to be with the bee sisters, represented as iconic figures who took better care of her than her violent white father, T. Ray. Therefore, she felt safe in the Black community, free of racial discrimination and cultural bias against any race. Unfortunately, Zach was arrested without a legal basis, and Lily advocated for the African American family by supporting them in getting Zach's release. Lily's helping attitude toward the colored family stemmed from their fondness for her. Furthermore, Zach was concerned that because they were of different ethnicities, he would be unable to love Lily, considered a crime in society, if a Black and a White fell in love. Then, Lily imagined herself as a Negro girl. However, Zach interrupted her thoughts and reminded her to focus on removing socially created prejudice rather than changing her skin color. This exemplified Lily's acceptance of African Americans as her family and willingness to challenge racial biases. Finally, Rosaleen boldly walked forward to register the vote again. At first, Lily was anxious and annoyed by Rosaleen's courageous act as white society's conventions influenced her. However, at last, she seemed proud of Rosaleen's brave decision. When she started living among Black people, she realized their rights and supported them in achieving them.

## 5. Conclusion

This study illustrates the critical findings by exploring the color-blind racial views of white culture and society, specifically, through the transformation of the white character in Kidd's novel *The Secret Life of Bees* named Lily. She became aware of her racial attitudes and transformed them with the support of the Black community. Lily was a motherless white girl who longed for her mother's affection. Her longingness for motherly love was fulfilled by the Boatwright sisters, who treated Lily as their own family, regardless of race. As a result of their love for Lily, she was able to overcome her biases. By rejecting her color-blind racist perspective, she was able to appreciate African Americans talents and abilities. She then emphasized that Black Americans were unique individuals who should be treated appropriately. Also, she believed Blacks were far superior to the corrupted white civilization that created racial injustice and deepened it to promote indifferences. Lily's transformation which transcended racial lines, mirrors the ongoing reality of color-blind racism that exists to a greater extent in the current era. Lily's journey represents that white individuals can break free from the constraints of color-blind racism that uphold racial disparities and create equality for Black lives. In the current era, African Americans continue to face racial violence and injustice despite civil rights legislation that promotes their rights (Apfelbaum et al., 2012). Likewise, the novel's narrative illustrates, how racism oppressed African Americans and imprisoned them by hiding white bias even after the civil rights movement. An important aspect of this novel is Lily's transformation. The study's primary objective is to shed light on the thematic analysis of color-blind racism, racial segregation, and violence in the novel, the study addresses racism's everlasting existence, which adversely affects Black people. By examining this phenomenon, the study aims to highlight the continuing relevance of racism in contemporary society and emphasize the importance of addressing it. Lily's coming of age symbolizes how she gained her racial consciousness through being aware of her racist notions and embracing the Black community by knowing their hardships and fundamental skills.

Understanding the persistence of racism within color blind ideology is crucial because it reveals how seemingly neutral or well-intentioned approaches can perpetuate discriminatory practices and hinder progress towards equality. The study stresses the need to uproot color-blind racism and its underlying ideas which hold racism hidden such practices will support to induce racial equality in the society. Lily's transformation story illustrates the possibility of dismantling racial disparities and bringing equality.

Thus the active way of dismantling can be encouraged by highlighting the struggles of African Americans, fostering empathy and seeking justice. Firstly, it is believed that by removing the concept called color-blind racism, the inherently prejudiced views that whites still hold against Blacks might be eliminated. Further, the study implies that race is structured by a society that could be abolished by human power. This can be accomplished by bringing together the two diverse groups. So that the hardships, intolerance, identities, and abilities will be admired and valued by one another. Evidently, Lily's presence in the Black community reveals her race-based knowledge and endorsement of Black people's ideas and religion as her own. Lily seemingly found her identity by inspiring the three sisters, who were powerful, independent, and desirable. In a society where people should be accepted as they are, she understood that race was not a matter of fact and that African Americans were equally qualified as whites and deserved equal treatment. The current research is limited on a specific literary text and its historical context. However, future research could explore comparative analyses of multiple literary works thereby supports to gain a deeper understanding of how color blind racial ideology is portrayed in diverse narratives and contexts, as well as exploring intersectionality and global perspectives to combat colorblind racism effectively.

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