

# THE REACTIONS OF THE MINORITY TOWARDS RACISM IN *CRASH*

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## ABSTRACT

*Crash* shows the life of a community in a multicultural city of Los Angeles in a variety of separate scenes. At the end of the story will be seen a common thread that connects each of the characters and events that they experience with other characters. The interaction of the players in the movie *Crash* is highly dominated by racial conflict as a result of racism. In the society nowadays, most people usually see racism only by how the majority discriminate the minority like what is reflected in *Crash* without knowing that *Crash* also portrays as vividly how the minority react towards the discrimination by the majority. For this reason, I am really interested in analyzing how the minority react towards racial discrimination by the majority and how the main characters of the minority react towards racism by the majority in *Crash* based on John P. Myers definition of reactions which are deviance, defiance, and avoidance.

Keywords : Racism, reactions, avoidance, defiance, deviance.

## INTRODUCTION

American drama is about the realities of the American society that are rarely depicted on films. American dramas are usually about romance and actions, positive sides of American life rather than the negative sides of American life. According to Paul Haggis, a good American Drama Films is "that a good film makes you ask questions of yourself as you leave the theatre" (Haggis). In my thesis, I would focus on the American Drama Producer named Paul Haggis. The Reason why I choose Paul haggis is because for me Paul Haggis is a brilliant American Drama Producer. For the proves, he won many nomination awards such as Best Film Oscar winners back-to-back - Million Dollar Baby (2004), he won Academy Awards for Best Picture and Best Original Screenplay for *Crash* itself. The film also received an additional four nominations including one for Haggis' direction. *Crash* (2004/I) reaped numerous awards during its year of release from associations such as the IFP Spirit Awards, the Screen Actors Guild, and BAFTA (Albertson, Cammila (2009). "Paul Haggis - Biography". *Allmovie*. Macrovision Corporation. Retrieved 2009-10-28). *Crash* trying to tell exactly how multicultural life in the United States in general and the city of Los Angeles in particular since this city is one city that has a very diverse racial composition. Inter-racial prejudice or sentiment became the foundation of the characters in this film in assessing other characters. From the explanation above, the significant issue to be analyzed is about racism.

I am really interested in analyzing and showing how the main characters of the minority races react towards racism by the majority in *Crash*. Racism is the belief that characteristics and abilities can be attributed to people simply on the basis of their race and that some racial groups are superior to others (Anup, 2010). Racism involves the belief in racial differences, which acts as a justification for non-equal treatment (which some regard as "discrimination") of members of that race.

Deviant acts can be assertions of individuality and identity, and thus as rebellions against group norms of the dominant culture and in favor of a sub-culture. When a minority group continually experiences rejection and discrimination, some of its members cannot identify with the dominant society or accept its norms (Myers, p. 259). In deviance, I found one supporting concept which helps in analyzing the reaction of the minority towards racism in *Crash* which is called as revenge. 'Revenge' is a harmful action against a person or group in response to a grievance, be it real or perceived. It is also called payback, retribution, retaliation or vengeance; it may be characterized as a form of justice, an altruistic action which enforces societal or moral justice aside from the legal system, referred to as a kind of "wild justice", as described by Francis Bacon (Bacon, 2012).

Defiance means resistance to anything that is considered as unjust. In term of defiance, John P. Myer state that “If a minority group is sufficiently cohesive and conscious of its growing economic or political power, its member may act openly to challenge and eliminate discriminatory practices whether by peaceful or violent action”. Meanwhile, the violent action of defiance could be seen if the minority group tries to take down the opposite group of the majority position from higher to lower position by anything that is considered legal by the law regarding of the strong position of the minority group (Myers, p. 513). In defiance, counter-argument also happens. 'Counter-Argument' is an objection to an objection. A counterargument can be used to rebut an objection to a premise, a main contention or a lemma. Synonyms of counterargument may include rebuttal, reply, counterstatement, counter-reason, comeback and response (Jolla, 2012).

Avoidance is a minority group reaction to prejudice and discrimination based on powerlessness, fear for personal safety, or economic security, or fatalism by migrating or withdrawing to escape further problems. ). In avoidance, we simply find ways of avoiding having to face uncomfortable situations, things or activities. The discomfort, for example, may come from unconscious sexual or aggressive impulses. Avoidance may include removing oneself physically from a situation. It may also involve finding ways not to discuss or even think about the topic in question. Avoidance is a simple way of coping by not having to cope. When feelings of discomfort appear, we find ways of not experiencing them. Avoidance is a major defense mechanism in phobias (Myer, p. 227). In avoidance, I found 2 supporting concept which help in analyzing the reaction of the minority towards racism in *Crash* which are obedience and silence. 'Obedience' itself has the meaning of compliance with an order, request, or law or submission to another's authority based on oxford dictionary. Obedience occurs when you are told to do something (authority), whereas conformity happens through social pressure (the norms of the majority). Obedience involves a hierarchy of power / status (McLeod, 2007). 'Silence' itself has the meaning of relative or total lack of audible sound. By analogy, the word “Silence” can also refer to any absence of communication, including in media other than speech (Harper, 2010).

All these results happen in a big process of Racial Discrimination or Racism. This theory would work best in revealing the reaction of the minority towards the discrimination by the majority like what is reflected in the movie *Crash* and in the real life of the society in the United States of America.

## **REACTION BY DEVIANCE**

Deviant acts can be assertions of individuality and identity, and thus as rebellions against group norms of the dominant culture and in favour of a sub-culture. ). In *Crash*, I found out that deviance is done specifically by revenge. Revenge is a harmful action against a person or group in response to a grievance, be it real or perceived. It is also called payback, retribution, retaliation or vengeance; it may be characterized as a form of justice, an altruistic action which enforces societal or moral justice aside from the legal system, referred to as a kind of "wild justice". This is basically saying that when a person takes revenge on someone, they are taking the law into their own hands and becoming a vigilante, which is not acceptable. It says that the more people do this, the more the actual justice system and laws should make provisions to prevent people from getting revenge by their own means, rather than through the legal system or the proper channels. In *Crash*, I find that deviance happens through revenge which violates the law for a personal justice. The revenge starts when discriminations happen to the black people named Anthony and Peter Water. In the movie, the first discrimination to Anthony and Peter can be seen as a form of restaurant's service where the waitress does not give a good service to Anthony and Peter regarding they are from black race. It has become a stereotype that black people never give a tip and black people are mostly rude and demanding. From the waitress view, this is clearly seen as disadvantages for them if they serve the black people even if the waitress is from a black race (Newsone). The second discrimination to Anthony and Peter can be seen when Jean and Rick Cabot step out of the blockbuster and head for their car. As Jean notices Anthony and Peter, she takes Rick's arm. Taking a man's arm is a sign of fear for a woman if they see something terrible. This is the way a woman seeking for protection. As Anthony notices that Jean takes her husband's arm, Anthony concludes to his friend Peter that Jean is scared when she saw Anthony and Peter. It is clearly seen that Jean is scared when she saw Anthony and Peter because

they are from black race which is well known for the high crime rates for rape, robbery and thievery in the United States. Thus, for these two reasons of discrimination, Anthony and Peter carjacked Jean and Rick's SUV because they think that there is no way to change the stereotype like what Anthony said to Peter. I found that this is the major reason why Anthony and Peter use the violent way instead of peaceful way. This type of action which is done by Anthony and Peter is the same as revenge and according to the psychologist Ian McKee, people who are more vengeful tend to be those who are motivated by power, by authority and by the desire for status that they do not want to "lose face" or lose the respect of others, to be humiliated or experience public disgrace. Moreover, revenge which is done by Anthony and Peter is also the same as wild justice that has been stated by Francis Bacon because it is an altruistic action which enforces societal or moral justice aside from the legal system. The justice, which is done by Anthony through revenge is to defend the "face" of the black race from the discrimination of the white race because mostly black people try to avoid and lose their respect instead of fight back. From what has been written by philosopher Martha Nussbaum, it is become a pain for the black people because of the discrimination by the white people, and the only way that can cured it just with revenge. Revenge which is done by Anthony and Peter is also match with John P. Myer's definition of Deviance which says that deviant acts can be assertions of individuality and identity, and thus as rebellions against group norms of the dominant culture and in favour of a sub-culture. People at the bottom of socioeconomic ladder, particularly members of victimized racial and ethnic groups, may respond to the pressure of everyday life in ways they consider reasonable but others view as deviance, a characteristics or behaviour violating social norms and thereby negatively valued by many people in that society, for example theft and robbery.

### **REACTION BY DEFIANCE**

Defiance means resistance to anything that is considered as unjust. In defying discrimination peacefully, the minority group usually challenges the opposite group of the majority by debates in order just to defend their rights. Meanwhile, the violent action of defiance could be seen if the minority group tries to take down the opposite group of the majority position from higher to lower position by anything that considered legal by the law regarding of the strong position of the minority group.

### **EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT**

The way emotional engagement could be seen in the society is when the minority tries to counter racism politically with anger. In emotional engagement, counter argument happens. Counter-Argument is an objection to an objection. A counterargument can be used to rebut an objection to a premise, a main contention or a lemma. In *Crash*, defiance through cognitive engagement happens as the same way as counter argument. The first part that I am going to analyze is about emotional engagement. In the movie, Farhad is a 50ish Persian shopkeeper who could not counter-argument a racist argument from Dirk the gun store owner with emotional engagement when Dorri and his father Farhad wants to buy gun to protect his family. Dirk says a racist argument to Farhad because he becomes impatient of Dorri, and his father speaks to each other with Persian language which Dirk takes it as an Arab language. However, Dirk does not know that Dorri and his father are speaking Persian, while Persians are not Arabs, they are different. Moreover, from what has been said by Dirk, it is clearly indicates that Dirk dislikes Arab because Arab were known as a terrorist. From this incident, racism to Arab and the people who looks like Arab including the Persian happens in America like what has been said by Dirk to Farhad. Because of Dirk said a racist argument to Farhad, Farhad becomes very angry and tried to defend his right by insulting Dirk back with anger. In the movie, Dorri's father could not counter-argument Dirk's racist argument because he counters it with anger and insulting Dirk back. In countering racist argument by emotional engagement, Farhad was told to get out from the store by Dirk instead of making Dirk understand that his argument was a racist argument. It is clearly seen that countering racism with anger is a bad way of eliminating racist act although Farhad has the same rights with Dirk considering the race that Farhad is from the minority and Dirk is from the majority. Dori Chandra stated that the boss will always right and the servant will always wrong (Chandra, 2010), because the boss has everything in terms of money, authority, et cetera, so there is no way that the servant

could be angry to the boss and correct him although the boss do some mistakes. In other words, in Farhad case, Dirk is the same as the boss because he is from the majority in America, and Farhad is the same as the servant because he is from the minority in America, this is why Farhad could not win the argument against Dirk although Farhad is not guilty.

### **COGNITIVE ENGAGEMENT**

While the emotional engagement could be seen when the minority tries to counter racism politically with anger, cognitive engagement could be seen in the society when the minority tries to counter racism politically with logic. In emotional engagement, Farhad tries to counter argument dirk's racism argument with anger, but this makes the situation more severe. Knowing that the situation was getting more severe, Dorri told his dad to wait in the Car because she does not want her father to get arrested. Dorri defiantly finishes the gun purchase by cognitive engagement and using the power of leverage in business which also means the rule of a trade that "Customer is a king" to defend her rights as American citizen. Emotional engagement and cognitive engagement are both matched with John P. Myer's definition of defiance which means resistance to anything that are considered as unjust. In term of defiance, John P. Myer state that "If a minority group is sufficiently cohesive and conscious of its growing economic or political power, its member may act openly to challenge and eliminate discriminatory practices whether by peaceful or violent action". In defying discrimination peacefully, the minority group usually challenge the opposite group of the majority by debates in order just to defend their rights. Meanwhile, the violent action of defiance could be seen if the minority group tries to take down the opposite group of the majority position from higher to lower position by anything that considered legal by the law regarding of the strong position of the minority group.

### **REACTION BY AVOIDANCE**

Avoidance is a minority group reaction to prejudice and discrimination based on powerlessness, fear for personal safety, or economic security, or fatalism by migrating or withdrawing to escape further problems. Although avoidance maintains the superior position in the society of the majority and the subordinate position of the minority group, it does diminish the open tensions and conflicts between the two groups. In avoidance, we simply find ways of avoiding having to face uncomfortable situations, things or activities. The discomfort, for example, may come from unconscious sexual or aggressive impulses. Avoidance may include removing oneself physically from a situation. It may also involve finding ways not to discuss or even think about the topic in question. Avoidance is a simple way of coping by not having to cope.

### **OBEDIENCE**

Obedience itself has the meaning of compliance with an order, request, or law or submission to another's authority based on oxford dictionary. Obedience occurs when you are told to do something (authority), whereas conformity happens through social pressure (the norms of the majority). The first idea of obedience is obeying everything although the person knows that he is right or in other words, it is called as blind obedience. Moreover, many people also believe that true obedience is blind. That is, they believe if a person in authority makes a decision or gives a command, that decision or command should be followed without question simply because a person in authority gave it even if self-pride is the cost (Gray, 2006). In *Crash*, I found out that avoidance through obedience happens. In the movie, Cameron Thayer is a 40ish black television director who is treated racist by officer John Ryan in a traffic stop although Cameron Thayer and his wife are innocent. So obedience Cameron Thayer is, he even let Officer John Ryan molest his wife and let himself getting ashamed by Officer John Ryan in front of his wife. Moreover, he obeying all of officer Ryan's order and apologizing to him although he is innocent and Officer Ryan has already molest his wife. The second idea of obedience is obeying the people who do not have the authority even though the person who is obeying actually holds the authority itself. As stated by Saul McLeod in the first definition of obedience, obedience can also happen to the people who has a higher authority which obeys the lower authority based on racial term.

## SILENCE

Silence itself has the meaning of relative or total lack of audible sound. By analogy, the word "Silence" can also refer to any absence of communication, including in media other than speech. According to cultural norms, silence can be positive or negative. Avoidance of conflict with silence creates tension in the relationship with another person. The main idea of silence in this analysis is "Silence is Golden" which means it is often wise to say nothing. In conclusion of avoidance, both obedience by Cameron Thayer and silence by Daniel Ruiz are matched to John P. Myer's avoidance definition which tells that avoidance is a minority group reaction to prejudice and discrimination based on powerlessness, fear for personal safety, or economic security, or fatalism by migrating or withdrawing to escape further problems. Although avoidance maintains the superior position in the society of the majority and the subordinate position of the minority group, it does diminish the open tensions and conflicts between the two groups. In avoidance, we simply find ways of avoiding having to face uncomfortable situations, things or activities. The discomfort, for example, may come from unconscious sexual or aggressive impulses. Avoidance may include removing oneself physically from a situation. It may also involve finding ways not to discuss or even think about the topic in question. Avoidance is a simple way of coping by not having to cope. When feelings of discomfort appear, we find ways of not experiencing them. Obedience and silence are the way of how the minority avoid racist problem in their life because they are afraid to risk their personal safety, economy, job, family, et cetera like has been stated by John P. Myer definition of avoidance.

## CONCLUSION

This study dealt with reactions of the minority which exist in the movie *Crash*. Specifically, I would like to find out how the reactions of the minority towards racial discrimination or racism by the majority. In order to find out the answers, I use John P. Myer's definition of reactions which are deviance, defiance, and avoidance as the main tool to analyze the reactions which happens in the movie *Crash*. In avoidance, it could be divided into obedience and silence, and in defiance it could be divided into cognitive engagement and emotional engagement.

To sum up, I find out that the reactions which is mostly done by the minority in *Crash* is the avoidance because there are about 4 scenes in the movie which the reactions are avoidance, while in defiance, there are only 2 scenes, and deviance is only 1 scene. From this analysis, it indicates that *Crash* also portrays as vividly how the minority reacts towards racism by the majority in the real society as reflected in the movie. In result, we can understand that racism is not only about how the majority discriminates the minority, but also how the minority reacts towards racism by the majority.

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