



JEWELL PARKER RHODES' *BLACK BROTHER, BLACK BROTHER*: A DEPICTION OF RACIAL STIGMA

Dian Krismala, Sari Fitria
Universitas Pamulang
Tangerang Selatan, Indonesia
melodian04@gmail.com
dosen01462@unpam.ac.id

Article History	Abstract
Submitted date: 2022-11-05 Accepted date: 2022-12-25 Published date: 2023-02-01 Keywords: Sigma; Black; racial discrimination	This study aims to analyze the racial stigma of the main character in the novel <i>Black Brother, Black Brother</i> (2020) written by Jewell Parker Rhodes. It focuses on the stigmatizing action done by Whites against the biracial black kid. As a guide for this study, the theory uses the perspective of Erving Goffman (1963). This study applies qualitative research that collects data from different sources to analyze and support the object of this study. The results showed in this study are the main character experience racial stigma actions like cynical stares, underestimation, and taunt by society. He took some steps such as avoiding contact with society, showing the achievement, self-isolation and feeling guilty to respond to the racial stigma.

Introduction

In this world, several races can be found. There are two dominant races in the United States of America, including White-Americans and African-Americans as black people. Nonetheless, they have different amounts. White Americans become the majority while African-Americans become a minority. It causes a very wide tendency. For instance, African-Americans are prone to be labeled and underestimated as unintelligent people. Steele and Aronson (1995) state that African-Americans historically have been stereotyped as intellectually inferior to other groups. It means that African-Americans are labeled as unintelligent and have lower status than others. Furthermore, when a person or group has different attributes such as race, religion, or gender, they are prone to be labeled and underestimated by society. Therefore, the above situation is considered a depiction of stigma.

Stigma depicts a situation in which a person or group is rejected by society because they have dissimilar attributes. Thus, society gives a negative view to the person who is stigmatized. Dudley (2000) points out that stigma is stereotypes or negative views attributed to a person or groups of people when their characteristics or behaviors are viewed as different from or inferior to societal norms. It means that an individual who has dissimilar attributes such as race or gender would be disqualified and viewed badly by society. A person or group with a dissimilar attribute from society would be rejected and disqualified by society as a substandard person. As pointed out by Link and Phelan (2001) stigma grows from four processes including labeling

human differences, stereotyping such differences, separating those labeled from “us”, and status loss and discrimination against those labeled. It can be concluded that a person or group who has different attributes from society will experience a process of stigma in interacting with society. They will experience a condition of being labeled and rejected by society.

The racial stigma occurs in real life. As written by Glanton and published in Chicago Tribune in 2021, he announced that Meghan Markle is an American member of the British royal family and a former film and television actress who was born biracial in which her dad is Caucasian and her mom is African-Americans, she is half black and half white. She is discriminated against by the royal family because she is biracial with black skin, whereas the entire royal family is white. It portrays that she is stigmatized by the royal family based on her complexion. She felt sad and scared because her black complexion affected her child and the royal family worried that Markle’s child would be black like her. Therefore, Meghan said that before she married Prince Harry, she liked being ethnically ambiguous, she enjoyed living in a gray area. But it changed when she became a royal, Meghan was forced by the world to declare her blackness. She was not white like the entire royal family but she was the black duchess and that was how the royal family saw her and how the world defined her.

Racial stigma has existed since many years ago and until now. Racial stigma issue is not only in real life but also in literary works. One of the literary works is the novel entitled *Black Brother, Black Brother* by Jewell Parker Rhodes. This novel talks about a dark-skinned, biracial boy with a white father and a black mother who gets stigmatizing action from students and teachers at Middlefield Prep. Furthermore, the main character shows his achievement by mastering fencing skills to get his own back on the people who stigmatize him. This novel after its release nearly one year ago, the story has won numerous awards and most recently was nominated for an NAACP Image Award for outstanding literary work. Recognition and Accolades awarded to this novel such as Chicago Public Library’s Best of the Best 2020, Top 10 Kids’ Indie Next Pick, Kings County Library System’s Best Children Books, Nebraska Golden Award Finalist, Sunshine State Young Reader Award, and many more.

Hence, the writer is interested in analyzing racial stigma in this novel, in which the main character experiences stigmatization by society. It could help the readers and the people get an understanding of the stigma concept, including racial stigma action and its responses. This can build and increase awareness of people to their attitude toward the people with stigma in societal life. Furthermore, the title of the thesis is “Racial Stigma in Jewell Parker Rhodes’ *Black Brother, Black Brother* Novel”.

In this study, the writer deals with the theory from Erving Goffman that is suitable for the issue. This theory represents the stigma that happens in real society. The explanation would be explained below.

Racial stigma actions could be explained when society as normal encounters the stigmatized person who possesses different looks from society. Society gives negative actions such as disqualification and discrimination toward the stigmatized person. According to Goffman (1963, p. 7), normal society does several negative actions toward the person who possesses a different look, in which the stigmatized person would be discriminated against and labeled as a substandard person that should be disqualified by society. The normal would be to avoid the person with stigma, it certainly made the stigmatized person realize that they are rejected and discriminated against by society. Besides, they feel like they do not want a present in their

lives. Moreover, Goffman provides negative actions by society towards the person with stigma, such as cynical stare, underestimated action, and taunt.

A cynical stare is a stigmatizing action done by society. Society gives a cynical stare to a person with a different look. According to Goffman (1963, pp. 112-113), giving a cynical stare depicts society as curious about and feeling weird toward people with different looks. It is because the normal is curious about and gives a cynical stare toward strange people. It also portrays that society gives cynical stares toward the individual to strengthen what they see as different from the society. Hence, stigmatizing actions that have been done by society through a cynical stare make the individual feel threatened.

Underestimated action is one of stigmatizing actions done by society. Society gives unusual interaction to the person with a different look. It indicates that people or groups with white skin as superior would underestimate people or groups with black skin because people with black skin are assumed as inferior. White people do underestimate the action of black people based on their skin tones. Goffman (1963, pp. 84-85) states that people or groups who possess different looks like a minority would be underestimated by society as the majority. It refers to the condition in America, in which white Americans underestimate actions toward African-Americans. Hence, white people have a privileged life in American society.

Taunt is stigmatizing action done by society. Society insults the stigmatized individual, and that action makes the stigmatized person feel hurt. As Goffman (1963, p. 30) states that normal society gives a taunt action to the stigmatized person to make the stigmatized people feel hurt. Furthermore, taunt action usually can be found during childhood which happened in a public place such as the school. The stigmatized people became a target of bullying by the normal, they would be yelled at and mocked in the public place. Usually, the normal mocking in a loud voice that makes a stigmatized person feel hurt and inferior.

The response of stigmatized people is the condition in which the people with stigma show the reaction toward the normal or society. They would respond to each other when the people with stigma encounter society or the normal. According to Goffman (1963, p. 13), when the people with stigma encounter the normal or society, the stigmatized people would be shown the response toward the normal. The stigmatized people can take several responses, it depends on the choice of stigmatized people. It can be said that people with stigma will show the response to society without the slightest doubt since the stigmatized people are rejected by society. The stigmatized people would do things such as avoiding contact with society, showing their achievements, self-isolation, and feeling guilty.

Avoiding contact with society or normal is one of the responses which is done by the stigmatized people. They choose to stay away from communication directly with society or normal or not face to face contact with society because normal gives a bad perception toward them. Goffman (1963, pp. 13 & 17) points out that people with stigma try to keep away from contact with the society or normal and avoid face-to-face contact with the normal. The stigmatized person tries to stay away from their life from being rejected because the stigmatized person feels uncomfortable when converging normally. It means that a stigmatized person chooses to avoid society or normal and tries to stay away from contact with normal people.

Showing the achievement is a response done by the stigmatized person with different looks proving that they deserve to live in society. According to Goffman (1963, pp. 11 & 91), the people with stigma will find their shortcomings and then attempt to dig into their ability to cover the deficiencies. They also will seek solutions to the problems and show their achievements that they deserve credit for their effort. It indicates the stigmatized individual can arise and persist in any condition to make the society cherish their effort.

Self-isolation is one of the responses done by people with stigma. The people with stigma feel better staying indoors than encountering society. It indicates that people with stigma try to keep away from the normal to make their life feel relaxed and comfortable at home. Goffman (1963, pp. 13-15) points out that stigmatized people would like to do self-isolation at home to try not to meet and interact with society. It is because the people with stigma fear that society can disrespect them when they encounter them. The people with stigma feel that society cannot receive them, so they feel comfortable staying at home and locking themselves in their rooms.

Feeling guilty is a response done by stigmatized people. The stigmatized people feel unhappy and feel bad about doing something wrong. Goffman (1963, pp. 55-56) states that stigmatized people feel guilty, regretful, and disappointed in the mistake they have made. It depicts that people with stigma were doing self-blame. It means that stigmatized people assign themselves for a fault or wrong. They realized the mistake was done before. It means that stigmatized people are unhappy and they think that they have done something wrong. Besides, they feel like committing some offense, then they feel guilty and self-blame about what they have done.

Methodology

In analyzing racial stigma action and responses of stigmatized characters in *Black Brother*, *Black Brother* novel by Jewell Parker Rhodes, the writer used a qualitative approach. This approach is in a descriptive form, where the data contains an explanation, not in numeric form. Morgan (2014) points out that qualitative is research using verbal data and other non-numeric data as the basic analysis and in solving the problems. It can be said that the qualitative approach is a match for this study because analyzing the novel focuses on meaning and explanation to get the depth of understanding of analysis in the textual description.

Furthermore, the writer used some steps in collecting data to analyze *Black Brother*, *Black Brother* novel. It was conducted to find out the right data associated with the study. There are some steps in collecting the data. Firstly, I read the novel several times to understand the whole story completely. Secondly is identifying the sentence and dialogue that were used to provide the racial stigma issue accurately. Thirdly is the data based on the theory of stigma by Erving Goffman. Then, lastly is classified and verified the data on the racial stigma issues and then organize it well.

Finding and Discussion

Stigma actions happen when society as normal encounters the stigmatized person who possesses different looks from society, then normal gives negative actions such as disqualification and discrimination towards the stigmatized person. The stigmatized person

feels unhappy and does not want a present in their lives. Stigmatizing actions discovered in Black Brother, Black Brother novel are cynical stare, underestimated action, and taunt.

Cynical Stare

A cynical stare is a common stigmatizing action done by society. Society or normal feel curious about and feel weird to a person with a different look by giving cynical stares to make the stigmatized person feel threatened.

The secretary, Mrs. Kay, even the assistant headmaster, Mr. Waters, with his tartan tie, avert their eyes. They've been staring, wondering: How come he gets in so much trouble? why can't he be good like his brother?... (Rhodes, 2020, p. 10)

The quotation above describes Donte's surroundings, Mrs. Kay and Mr. Waters giving cynical stares as a stigmatizing action to Donte. A stigmatizing action describes that the normal or his surroundings would pay more attention to Donte because he is different from his brother, who is black while his brother is white like his surroundings. The words "they've been staring, wondering" means that Donte's surroundings feel curious about him and give him a stare to Donte. They wonder why Donte and his brother are so different, they look at Donte with an unfriendly stare and curious, as if claiming that Donte was unfit to be among them. The phrase "how come he gets in so much trouble" indicates that Donte is labeled and disparaged as a troublemaker who is always full of problems in his life. Besides, his surroundings compare Donte to Trey, in question "why can't he be good like his brother?", it is clear that his surroundings compare Donte who is not as good as his brother, which is in their eyes, Donte is always bad and full of problems. It certainly makes Donte feel sad and unconfident at the same time.

Underestimated Actions

Underestimate action is one stigmatizing action done by society. It happened when Donte's surroundings at his school gave him different treatment to Donte because Donte was black not like his friends who have white skin. Donte was labeled as a troublemaker by his surroundings.

"It's 2:46 PM. Couldn't you have finished the day without getting in trouble?" This isn't the way it's supposed to go down. He's supposed to call me into his office. Shut the door, talk privately with me. Now, he's scolding me in public. (Rhodes, 2020, p. 11)

From the quotation above, the headmaster underestimated and labeled Donte as a troublemaker. It can be seen from the words "couldn't you have finished the day without getting in trouble?", it is clear that the headmaster labeled Donte as a troublemaker without knowing what happened. He judges Donte just because Donte is different from other students who have white skin. The headmaster should have spoken privately and nicely with Donte, it depicts from the words "he's supposed to call me into his office" asked Donte what happened, not judged him unilaterally. The headmaster should speak with Donte face-to-face, in his room, and close the door to avoid the others knowing and hearing what they were talking about from the phrase "shut the door, talk privately with me". However, it never happened. In reality, what Donte expected was contrary to reality, it can be seen from the words "now, he's scolding me in

public”. The headmaster embarrassed Donte in the public area instead of in his office. It certainly makes Donte ashamed and uncomfortable.

Taunt

Taunt is one stigmatizing action usually done by society to a person or a group with dissimilar looks with insulting remarks. The stigmatized people became a target of bullying by the normal, they would be yelled at and mocked in the public place. Usually, the normal mocking in a loud voice that makes a stigmatized person feel hurt and inferior.

“Everybody here bullies me. Teachers. Students. Whispers, sometimes outright shouts follow me. Seems like everybody has something bad to say: ‘You dress thug.’ ‘Your dreads are dreadful.’ Girls laugh and point at me. ‘Why can’t you be like your brother?’ ‘Can your brother find you in the dark?’” I breathe. “It hurts. All of it.” (Rhodes, 2020, p. 11)

The quotation above depicts that Donte’s surroundings insult him when they encounter each other in public places, at their school. It can be seen from the words “everybody here bullies me”, indicating that Donte gets stigmatized by his surroundings including teachers and students. This action happened and was performed by his surroundings because Donte is a different look from them. They are not only whispers but also shouts to mock Donte from the words “whispers, sometimes outright shouts follow me”. It represents that Donte’s surroundings provoke him with insulting remarks, it can be seen from the words “you dress thug” meaning his surroundings taunt Donte with abusive speech and indicates that his surroundings were labeled Donte as a criminal. Besides, they said “your dreads are dreadful”, which means that they talked in a sarcastic way to make him feel hurt and ashamed at the same time. Donte is considered terrible and scary, having curly hair like black people, so they make fun of Donte through his hair. They have done stigmatized actions against Donte based on his different looks from theirs. Furthermore, they compared Donte to his brother, where his brother is white while he is black, then his surroundings mock him by saying “can your brother find you in the dark?”. It explains that they made fun of Donte without feeling. Donte was considered so black that it was invisible and could not be found in the darkroom. It made Donte feel hurt, sad, and suffer from stigmatization in his school, it depicts by the words “it hurts. All of it”.

Responses of Stigmatized Person

Avoiding Contact with Society

One of the common responses performed by people with stigma is avoiding contact with society or normal in which the stigmatized people choose to stay away from communication directly with society or not face to face contact with society or normal.

I wish I were invisible. Wearing Harry Potter’s Invisibility Cloak or Frodo Baggins’s Elvish ring. Whether shrouded in fabric or slipping on gold, it wouldn’t matter to me. I’d be gone. Disappeared. (Rhodes, 2020, p. 10)

The quotation above describes Donte as having a wish of being invisible. The phrase “I wish I were invisible” indicates that Donte’s wishes cannot be seen, he chooses to avoid contact with society or normal. His wishes were invisible to avoid contact with a society that disqualified

him. He wants to possess and wear a cloak of Harry Potter and the ring of Frodo to be invisible and avoid interacting with society, because Donte was unhappily interacting with others, he felt uncomfortable and rejected by society. The phrase “whether shrouded in fabric or slipping on gold, it wouldn’t matter to me” portrays that Donte does not care where he goes, all he wants is to avoid society. Donte tries not to contact society or normal, it is ensured that Donte did not have the desire to contact his surroundings. The words “disappeared” can have meaning to Donte’s wishes to be invisible by staying away from contact with society or normal. Donte preferred to be invisible and disappear because he did not want to have contact with society or his surroundings.

Showing the Achievement

One of the responses of being a stigmatized person is showing achievement. The stigmatized person with different looks proved that they deserve to live in society. The stigmatized people strive to prove to be good people. There are ten pieces of data revealed in the novel. The quotation below shows Donte showing the achievement through fencing.

“Then I’ll learn fencing.”

Trey chokes. “What?”

“I’ll learn fencing.”

He belly-laughs.

“Don’t laugh,” I shout.

“You and sports? You don’t like sports.”

“I’ll learn.” (Rhodes, 2020, p. 29)

From the quotation above, Donte tried to show the achievement through learning fencing. The words “then I’ll learn fencing” indicate that Donte was trying to prove to himself that he was able to do the fencing, he was determined to be serious about learning fencing. He also proves to his brother that he is learning fencing based on his will. It is done by Donte to make his surroundings not underestimate him. The words “you don’t like sport” mean that his brother did not believe that Donte likes sports, it is really weird. His brother knew that Donte had never been interested in sports, especially fencing, that is why his brother said that Donte did not like sports. Even though Donte did not like sports as his brother said, he tried hard to learn fencing and tried to show his fencing skills. It can be seen from the phrase “I’ll learn fencing” proves that Donte tried to achieve his desire and proves that he is capable of learning fencing.

Self -isolation

Self-isolation is a common response done by people with stigma. The people with stigma feel that normal or a society cannot accept them, so they feel comfortable staying at home and locking themselves up in a room to have no contact or interaction with normal or a group of people.

My comforter covers my head. I pretend-sleep. No more dinner table chatter...No need to fake a smile. No need to avoid looking, Trey...Alone, cocooned, I pretend there’s no hurt in the outside world. (Rhodes, 2020, p. 32)

The quotation above obviously gives the details that Donte took self-isolation from indirect talking. "My comforter covers my head. I pretend-sleep." Illustrates that Donte took self-isolation, he preferred staying at home and even locking himself in his room and did not move from his bed. Intentionally he chose to immerse himself in a blanket, covering his whole body from his feet to his head, and closing his eyes, pretending to sleep. The phrase "No more dinner table chatter" underlines he did not want to meet anyone including his family members, so he would not have to fake a smile to them in the dining room. Besides, he did not want to interact and encounter others and try to avoid contact with normal from the words "no need to avoid looking at Trey". The word "alone" is a mark that reinforces Donte was taking self-isolation since he chose not to meet or communicate with someone else, he did not want anyone else's presence. The word "cocooned" can have the meaning that Donte wrapped up the whole body in a blanket like a cocoon in his room and stayed at home all day long. It strengthens that people with stigma took self-isolation to protect themselves from uncomfortable situations. He chooses to stay at home to avoid the negative actions and unpleasant circumstances of the normal or his surroundings from the phrases "pretend there's no hurt in the outside world".

Feeling Guilty

Feeling guilty is a response done by stigmatized people. Donte feels regrets for what he has done, so he feels guilty about what he assigned himself for a fault or wrong.

Besides, Alan never would've challenged Trey if he weren't my brother. I feel guilty. What was I supposed to do? Not stand by him when he was humiliated? I had to stand together. (Rhodes, 2020, p. 69)

The quotation above explains Donte was feeling guilty. He is disappointed in himself because if Trey were not his brother, Alan would never be hostile to Trey as Alan did to Donte. The words "I feel guilty" describe that Donte felt guilty about something wrong he had done and got his brother into trouble with Alan. He said to himself "what I was supposed to do? Not stand by him when he was humiliated?" This describes that Donte was confused with himself, he was asking himself what should do to stop Alan's action. Donte must be helping his brother to stop Alan from insulting him and his brother. Donte does not want his brother to get involved and insulted by Alan continuously. Donte decided to help his brother from the words "I had to stand together". It portrays that Donte chooses and decides to stick with his brother, he should be together with his brother to stop Alan's actions who always insult him and his brother. It indicates that Donte would not feel so guilty if he was able to cope and help his brother to stop Alan's humiliation.

Conclusion

Based on data findings and analysis above, the novel of Jewell Parker Rhodes in *Black Brother*, *Black Brother* depicts a biracial black kid named Donte Roman Ellison who studies in a white school and he gets racial stigma action from students and teachers at Middlefield Prep. He underestimated action by his surroundings at his school. It happened when Donte's surroundings at his school gave him different treatment to Donte because he is black, while his brother and friends are white. His surroundings give a cynical stare to him because they feel curious about and feel weird about Donte, who has black skin that studies in the white school. Besides, his surroundings taunt Donte to insult him and make him feel hurt and inferior. They mocked and called Donte black brother, black brother.

Describing stigma includes responses to a person with stigma in which this study talks about the main character responses who have black skin tones. In responding to his surroundings, Donte shows achievement through fencing. He can prove to his surroundings that he can be a good fencer. In avoiding contact with society, Donte chooses to stay away from communication directly with his surroundings or not face to face contact with them. In taking self-isolation, Donte feels comfortable staying at home and locking himself up in a room to have no contact or interaction with normal or his surroundings. He does not want anyone else to encounter him, he just wants to be alone in his room. Furthermore, Donte feels guilty and regrets what he has done, so he self-blames his mistake.

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