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TRAUMATIC ELEMENTS OF OPPRESSED BLACK AMERICAN: MICRO-AGGRESSION IN COLSON WHITEHEAD'S THE NICKEL BOYS.

Mehvish Bashir¹, Dr. Sahibzada Aurangzeb², Aisha Bibi³

¹ M. Phil Scholar, Department of English, Language and Literature, The University of Lahore, Sargodha Campus, Punjab, Pakistan.

² Assistant Professor, Department of English, Language and Literature, The University of Lahore, Sargodha Campus, Punjab, Pakistan

³ M. Phil Scholar, Department of English, Language and Literature, The University of Lahore, Sargodha Campus, Punjab, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The current research deals with the identification of those elements of oppressed black American which leads to trauma. Micro-aggression as a theoretical frame work is used to analyzed the text of Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys*. Micro-aggression is an exchange of verbal or non-verbal cues to denigrate others in various situations. The three types of micro-aggression are identified in the text and analyzed accordingly. These three types are micro-insult, micro-assault, micro-invalidation. Micro-insult means a verbal comment to the intended victim in such a way as to convey rudeness or harm to black people or people in the minority. A micro-assault means a verbal or nonverbal, disgusting attitude that offends an intended person by negating their identity or conveying rudeness to their heritage, either intentionally or unintentionally. Micro-invalidation that causes psychological harm or negates the feelings or emotions of black people. The researcher analyses these three types of micro-aggression to meet the objectives and answer the targeted questions. The present study is conducted through qualitative method. This study exposes that how micro aggressions are negatively associated with various aspects of psychological harm of black Americans. The three main types of Trauma are also identified in the selected text. First is Acute Trauma which is a result of single incident, second is Chronic Trauma that is a result of repeated domestic violence or some kind of abuse, third type of trauma is Complex Trauma that is the result of several or multiple kind

of events even interpersonal in nature. It is hoped that this study would help to motivate the future researchers to delve the same in another literary text along with its consequential effects by applying various approaches.

INTRODUCTION

The present study is based on Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel boys* with identification of elements of micro-aggression and trauma of Black American through the perspectives of Micro-Aggression Theory. It will also highlight the issues and situations which lead to marginalized people. This theory is based on three main components. These components are micro-assault, micro-insult and micro-invalidation. In this novel, whitehead presents the attitude of white Americans against black American by describing that whitehead delineates the character who is thrown to the nickel academy by misconception of white people that causes the traumatic situation for the protagonist Elwood Curtis, a black African American teenager. In this study the researcher follows the qualitative method of research and textual references have been described to highlight the micro-aggressions and trauma in the lives of American.

Whitehead born in New your city on November 6, 1969 and grew up in Manhattan. He is one of the most renowned writers and his most celebrated work is *The Underground Railroad* (2016). This novel has received so many awards including 2017, Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the 2016 National book award for Fiction. The other most important masterpiece of whitehead is *The Nickel Boys*; this novel is deeply rooted in history and American mythology.

This novel is based on real story of the Dozier school. This novel published in July 16, 2019 and won the 2020 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction so in this study the researcher has traced the issue of micro aggression, psychological micro aggression that causes of trauma. Whitehead's other notable work including his debut novel.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The present study aims to explore Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys* in the light of micro aggression, the main focus of this research is to explore the occurrence of micro aggression and trauma in the selected text. The researcher highlights the issues of racism and institutional racism. This research copes with the study of white people's supremacy and suppression and oppression of black American. The racism is the main issue in a American history but after 2016 election and after the civil right movement, this system of segregation is stopped in many institutions and places, on the other hand nickel academy still imposed this system of segregation. The present study unmasks the social practices of racism, oppression, suppression and mental disorder of marginalized people in minority that how black peoples face different type of Micro aggression at the hands of white Americans and how this micro aggression leads them towards the traumatic situation. This study is based upon the theoretical framework of micro-aggressions the influence and implications by Gina Torino et.al. Colson whitehead is one of the most renowned writers of the decade. He wrote eight novels including his debut work.

Furthermore, this research focuses on how marginalized people and black Americans are forced to live with the white American. The study interpreted the social, cultural and institutional practices. Furthermore, it shows the different types of micro aggressions and how these social evils cause traumatic situation for the black American and deprived them from their rights of living

Research Objectives

1. To find out the physical abuse as depicted in *The Nickel Boys*.
2. To trace what are the strategies do the black people use to a counter the traumatic practices utilized by Colson Whitehead in *The Nickel Boys*.
3. To find out the instances of micro aggression attitude in Colson the whitehead *The Nickel Boys*.

Research Questions

1. How does school serve as a place of physical abuse as portrayed in *The Nickel Boys*?
2. What strategies do the black people use to counter the traumatic practices utilized by Colson whitehead in *The Nickel Boys*?
3. Which various types of micro aggressions do the black people face in Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys*?

Significance of the study

The present is decisive because it studies an Americans writer, Colson Whitehead whose work is not limited to the day to day issues but he touched the historical facts in his fictions specially *The Nickel Boys*. The significance of this research is to exposes a social injustice based upon color and breed. It also highlights the detail that are left by other researchers because this research deals with the micro aggression and trauma of black Americans that how these micro aggression and traumatic situation brought changes in personality and behavior of black Americans that can be categorized as confusion and delirium. This study exposes that how micro aggressions are negatively associated with various aspects of psychological harm of black Americans.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study the researcher has followed qualitative research and focused on the text, *The Nickel Boys* as a primary source of data. Textual evidence and direct paragraph from the text are quoted to analyze the concept of Micro aggression and trauma. The researcher utilized the critical references of other published work of renowned writers to sport the research findings. For this purpose, the researcher has collected data through different research articles of different journals through different websites. Researcher has followed the close reading of the text and review of different authors. Researcher highlighted these types of issues in society to sport research evidence and finding to make the reader understandable.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review is a brief discussion of some renowned scholars and researchers. In this section, the researcher highlights the work that is already done on the same issue to support the research findings of the current study.

Rodrigues, (2007) in his research paper stated about African culture, their beliefs and traditions also highlighted Achebe's ability to produce African culture in a new way. The key purpose is to educate Africans but Achebe started new tradition of the appropriation of the language of colonizers. In this way, he finds a possibility for the production of African literature. But there is a question that a text is written in English language while the official use in Africa has diminished to be a force of social, political and linguistics omit. In this paper, there is a satisfactory answer for the use of English and the Africans are traumatically unable to spoke and they remained unspoken, because they considered themselves inferior in the eyes of white Americans in this way their voice has been suppressed.

Lewis (2017) in his article, titled *Gender, Race, and violence A critical examination of Trauma in The color purple*, contends that gender and race are the root causes of the violence and suffering faced by Celia, Sophia, and Squeak, three of Walker's female protagonists. While violence may not always result in internal strife, it often does. This critical assessment focuses mostly on violence-related trauma. As a stimulant for identity categories, particularly female and African American, are investigated in relation to targeted violence. Their oppressive roles are analyzed. As a result, the concept of identity-based marginalization gains traction and the concept of double discrimination are explained. The ramifications of intersectional analysis are discussed in this essay. Female and African American identities, reveals a shocking link between the two. Susceptibility to trauma is influenced by one's gender and race.

Walker's story provides a paradigm for how trauma related to gender and race is depicted in literature. The novel is intended to simulate the sentiments connected with trauma, in addition to displaying trauma in a tangible form through different violent physical and sexual acts. To comprehend how Walker operates, consider the following: "To grasp the essence of trauma, one must first comprehend the general symptoms of trauma from a psychological standpoint. from a psychological perspective if an event resulted in death or threatened death, it is considered traumatic death, serious bodily injury, or the prospect of serious bodily injury" (Walker,7)

Dawson (2012) stated that how the repressed past cause traumatic situation for certain characters through of uncanny repetitions, the protagonists in both *Heart of Darkness* and *House of Leaves* are forced to confront aspects of their repressed pasts. Conrad's Marlow and Danielewski's Johnny Truant both have repressed pasts formed through a sequence of terrible occurrences rather than a single disaster. These were discovered throughout the investigation. *Heart of Darkness* and *House of Leaves* model the feeling of trauma as suppressed occurrences. Sometimes repressed feelings and painful memories causes trauma for person.

Katabasis is a fall into Hell. Both Conrad and Danielewski defy conventional wisdom by leaving their characters stuck in darkness or frozen to death, of descent and return to light the blues, as both works use color to underscore the trauma's recurrence.

Bueno, U, (2006) McCarthy places a strong emphasis on the father's and son's psychological traumas. On the other hand, the father has several reasons to be traumatized. To begin with, he has been a direct witness to the world's decay: witnessed how, from one day to the next, both the natural world and the human world have changed. Civilization is on the verge of extinction; with the last vestiges of life making their way to the surface a gradual process of complete extinctions. He has also lost his wife who, in light of the circumstances, has decided to commit suicide. Finally, in a world torn by violence, the father is forced to fend for himself. Live without knowing whether or not he and his little and only son would be alive at the end of the day the next day we can find him guessing when at one point in the novel." How many days to death?" Ten? Says the narrator. Ten? There won't be many more. (p6) This is the effects of psychological trauma that a father suffers because his mental condition is not capable of handling the current situation. He faces great disaster in his life; the cruelty of natural world and his wife's suicide place terrible effects on his psyche.

Sue, et.al, *Racial micro aggression in Everyday Life* stated that there are certain types of attitude which are adopted by white Americans to negate or underestimate the blacks or people those who are in minority. Racial micro aggression is seen when intentionally or unintentionally black peoples were neglected or discriminatory behavior is imposed on them this is the worst situation for black peoples. This racist attitude is the result of micro aggression which has negative impacts on the health of black people that they lost their self-control and face the bias attitude. White American inflect the racist situation towards black and considered themselves as superior and we'll mannered on the other they themselves are not following any rules and regulations related to the rights of black. This cause racial micro aggression. (P, 6).

Machado Gomes "*Trauma and Healing in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye and Home* (2019) described that there is different types of traumatic situation and experiences of different characters is described. It also presents the impact of these experiences; this examination shows the result that some characters are able to heal from trauma, while others are not. In this way ending of Home is "happier" and different from that of the Bluest eye.

Doharty *I Felt Dead* (2018) Students' experiences of studying Black History are dominated by various types of racial micro aggressions, including: micro-invalidation, micro-insults, and micro-assaults. This paper examines the impact of a non-statutory Black History unit, at an English secondary school.

Doharty's *I Felt Dead* (2018) also deals with the same issues. The term "white supremacy" is used to refer to a political system, a particular power structure of formal or informal rule, socioeconomic privilege, and norms for the distribution

of wealth and opportunities that privilege those who identify as White in the U.S., in this way micro aggression is created in the blacks.

Bilal, et al. (2020) state that about the traumatic situation of the black woman, Women are considered inferior to men by nature. They have no equal social rights. Even in the United States, black women are treated as the personal property of their masters. They have no right to vote. Or they become the victims of all kinds of violence, physically mentally, or sexually, either by their masters or by their partners. This situation leads them to trauma. In the United States, the condition of black women is very bad. They are sexually abused and sold naked. This becomes their daily routine that they are forced to do. They were victims of forced rape by their master and by the enslaved people, whereas women were generally considered only to produce children and bound to the kitchen. Culturally, there were no more opportunities for women, especially black women, and they were doubly victimized: first as women, and secondly as black women, which meant they became the victims of social, moral, and sexual abuse because of their race and color. Living at the crossroads of inequality by race, class, and gender can further exacerbate the rape experiences of black women.

Before conducting this research, I went through different research journals and research articles to make it clear that there is no work on the topic I chose for my current research. The researcher is interested in highlighting the micro aggression and trauma of black Americans in the selected text of Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys*. Other scholars, on the other hand, investigate different concepts in the novel, *The Nickel Boys*, for example, racial discrimination towards black Americans means the theme of racism is explored before and the texture of gendered, sexual violence is explored. The "jail within a jail" narrative structure and political issues are highlighted by other scholars in research articles, but the current research is different and provides more in-depth information about micro aggression and trauma of black Americans. No one in Pakistan before this highlighted the issue in the lives of black Americans in this way. The current research is interesting and informative because it is totally different from what has already been done before.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Harvard university psychiatrist professor Chester Pierce, in 1970s coined the term 'micro aggression' to describe the insult and slights he had witnessed against black people, and the insults which he observes the white people inflicting on African Americans.

Merriam Webster defines, "micro aggression a comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group", Webster, (1828). When we studied about the micro aggression this term is used for disabled and poor people e.g. African American means marginalized group. micro aggression restrict one's own freedom and cause emotional harm. it leads to atrophy, language connoting violence means derogatory language is used for victimized people. Psychologist Derald Wing Sue defines micro aggression as 'brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their

group membership “.According to Sue et.al. Micro aggression seem to appear in three forms; 1, Micoassult, 2 Micro insult, 3 Micro invalidation.

There are so many kinds of Micro aggressions. Micro aggression can be intentional or unintentional everyday subtle interaction or behaviors that communicate some sort of bias towards marginalized group, it is a form of discrimination .Trauma is a Greek word, meaning a great physical injury but now a days Trauma is used to described a mental wounds. “According to Merriam Webster "Trauma is a very difficult or unpleasant experience that causes someone to have mental or emotional problems usually for a long time .A Trauma is a disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury”. Webster (1828). There are three main types of Trauma first is Acute trauma which is a result of single incident , second is Chronic trauma that is a result of repeated domestic violence or some kind of abuse, third type of trauma is complex trauma that is the result of several or multiple kind of events even interpersonal in nature.

In this study the researcher selected the perspective of micro aggression theory of influence and implications. The terms micro insult and micro assault and micro invalidation are directly linked to that theory. This theoretical framework of micro aggression dealt with different perspectives on this novel the nickel boys has been viewed through the lens of micro aggression. This theory of micro aggression influence and implication is edited by different literary scholars those who present different aspect of micro aggression, psychological trauma, Whiteman ‘s intrigues, institutional racism, rudeness of white people discriminatory behavior at work and how white people intentionally victimize black African Americans is shown in this novel and would be analyzed and interpreted through this theory of micro aggression influence and implications . The term micro insult is clearly interlinked with disrespectful treatment are abuse that are verbally or non-verbally send denigrating message to the intended victim.

Micro aggressions impact on mental health is also seen and interpreted by the researcher. As Sues (2010) observed racial micro aggression or most similar to the aversive racism is that they generally occur below the level of awareness of well-intentioned people. In this system of Aversive racism black Americans are treated as mean and devalued by the other group of white Americans. Dovidio stated in the second chapter of the theory of micro aggression influence and implications about aversive racism and implicit bias micro aggressions. Aversive racism is a type of racial micro aggression in which white Americans are prominent groups in the United States. They negate the value of black Americans either intentionally or unintentionally. This discrimination has a strong impact on black Americans. There is no end to discrimination or the system of segregation in the United States of America. We see the same attitude of white Americans toward black Americans in *The Nickel Boys*, and aversive racism is seen through whites' representation of black Americans. Elwood Curtis, the protagonist of the novel, throughout the novel, faces this situation of aversive racism that is the main reason for his physical or mental trauma. He no longer escaped the cruel behavior of white people because they thought they had the right to rule over black Americans.

Traumatic events are extreme stressors that disrupt one's psychological well beings as well as one's life function. (Foa, et.al, 2008) As mentioned above, micro aggression is one of the main factors in causing trauma because it directly hits the emotions of one's life. In this way, micro aggression causes emotional pain, or the painful memories that are the cause of trauma. In this novel, *The Nickel Boys* Turner faces this type of traumatic situation at the end of the novel when he recalls his past memories at the Nickel Academy with his friend Elwood Curtis. Racism and the attitude of white people also brought trauma for black students at the Nickel Academy.

Media is also one of the most important source to cause micro aggression for individuals that media convey message that are harmful for the sensitive individuals in this way media play an important role in establishing micro aggression and psychological trauma. In chapter three of the theory of micro aggression, Lewis et al. describe the intersection of race and social class micro aggressions as both types of micro aggressions are interlinked with the bias attitudes of white Americans and arouse feelings of inferiority complex in people of color who belong to lower socioeconomic strata. This intersectional race and class micro aggression is the result of the oppression of black people, who are considered less intelligent and poor. By incorporating these terms of intersectional micro aggression, the researcher can relate the story of *The Nickel Boys* to this term, showing how Harriet's entire family was neglected by white Americans and how her father died as a result of white women's intrigue. The researcher also examines the intersectional micro aggression in teaching that the white masters treat white students differently from those of the black Girrrff. The story of *The Nickel Boys* is a vivid example of this type of micro aggression. Intersectional micro aggression also reveals the traumatic condition of historically marginalized people and how they cope with a society that is totally strange to them and does not relate to their customs, habits, and traditions.

The other important elements are eating dis order normality and abnormality physical assaults and lack of representation of one's own group curriculum based micro aggression shock trauma and strain trauma historical trauma and overt and explicit and racism. In this study the researcher discusses the cumulative impact of micro aggression by implementing this theory of micro aggression influence and implications.

Data Analysis

For the analysis of the selected text of *The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead, the researcher chose the theoretical framework of Micro-aggression Influence and Implication by Gina C. Torino, David P. Rivera et al. Micro-aggression is a term coined by professor Chester Pierce in 1970 to describe the insults and slights he had witnessed against black people. Through the use of this theoretical framework, this study aided the reader in comprehending the matter and issues raised by the researcher, as well as providing suggestions for dealing with these issues. In chapter two of *The Nickel Boys*, the researcher critically analyses the physical abuses that are thrown at black African Americans by white people. As in this chapter, the story of six year old girl Yolanda who is forbidden to go to Fun Town amusement Park due to her skin color. She was black and her

physical appearance was made a hindrance and abuse to moving in society confidently. As white people for themselves, they used the term white supremacy, so they considered themselves superior and treated black people, especially African Americans, as inferior or exotic. As in Chapter Three of *The Nickel Boys*, Elwood, the protagonist, becomes a victim of physical abuse when he hitches a ride with a man named Rodney. On the way, he comes to know that Rodney has stolen the car, but Elwood is thrown to Nickel Academy because he was mistaken for a thief. Nickel Academy was actually a prison where he faced a critical situation because this academy, named "Reform School," was actually a prison for black African Americans. He was beaten physically for a little mistake. The system of segregation is imposed upon black students even after the rules of the Jim Crow era. The other physical abuse for black people is that they go to uphill dormitory and the white goes downward hills. Jaimie, a half Mexican teenager, faced physical abuse due to his appearance. He was shifted from campus to campus because the administration could not decide if he was black or white. Corey, Elwood, Lonnie, and Black Mike were taken to a white house where they were physically beaten to death. The white boys were abusive and called this Whitehouse a place that was used for beatings as an ice cream factory. In this way, they manipulated the innocent black African Americans. In chapter nine, there is a boxing match between black students and white students. Accidentally, a black student won the match. For this act of winning, he was terribly beaten by white. Black beauty is actually a leather strap that is used for the beating of black Africans. In this way, black African Americans became the victims of physical abuse, verbally, nonverbally, or physically.

Trauma is a Greek word which means a physical wound, but nowadays, trauma is used as a psychic or mental disorder, emotional stress, psychological disorder, or as a result of some disturbing events. In *The Nickel Boys*, the researcher analyses different strategies that black people used to adopt to handle the traumatic practices. In the prologue of the novel Elwood, the protagonist faces historical trauma, because in the newspaper he reads about the reform school in Florida that is going to be demolished and some archeologist who find a secret graveyard in the reform school, the Nickel Academy, where black students of the Nickel Academy were buried, becoming the victims of white people. Elwood used the strategy to leave the Nickel Academy because he was much disturbed by facing the segregated system of this academy. So he, along with Turner, left the Nickel Academy, but on his way, he met his tragic end by ending his life. Another strategy adopted by Turner is that he eats soap powder and pretends to be ill, so that in this way he would stay with Elwood and not have to do work. When Turner finished up the vomit, Elwood said, "Doesn't that hurt your stomach"?

Sure it does, man," Turner said. "But I don't feel like going to work today" Whitehead (P 64). This shows the trauma of the Nickel students that how difficult a situation they faced to escape from doing work disturbed their health. This strategy adopted by Turner is good to escape from hard work but harmful to his health." Nickel boys are traumatized that they can never really succeed in being normal".(Chap 13).

Micro-aggression has three types. Micro-insult, micro-assault, micro-invalidation. Micro-insult means a verbal comment to the intended victim in such a way as to convey rudeness or harm to black people or people in the minority. A micro-assault means a verbal or nonverbal, disgusting attitude that offends an intended person by negating their identity or conveying rudeness to their heritage, either intentionally or unintentionally. Micro-invalidation that causes psychological harm or negates the feelings or emotions of black people. The researcher analyses these three types of micro-aggression to meet the objectives or answer his questions. In *The Nickel Boys*, the researcher analyses the instances of micro-aggression. Elwood, the protagonist of the novel, faces the micro-assault when he receives an encyclopedia as a gift but the pages were blank on all of them. Every volume in the first box was blank except for the one he had seen in the kitchen. All the books were empty. Pete said, "I hope you get a lot of use out of them." Whitehead, (P.16). In this way, they demean Elwood by making fun of him by giving him empty encyclopedic material. The researcher examined Micro-assault in this study through the representation of black Africans in the Nickel Academy. There is a totally different system of treatment for black and white students. They are considered black as others and have no self-respect. Even if blacks were loyal and sincere, their loyalty means nothing to them. Different tricks were used to create micro-aggressions among black African Americans. You need to remember who you are. Whitehead (P, 25). Micro-invalidation, which means negating one's emotional and psychological sense of self-respect and feelings, In Chapter three, when Mr. Hill gave books to Elwood and other black students that books were used by white students, the white students remarked, "choke Nigger you smell." Eat shit". Whitehead, (P, 26). Black American were treated badly which caused traumatic expression in the novel.

CONCLUSION

It is a common observation that man is dominated by the desire of physical objects rather than mental development. There are some who interpret power as self-fulfilment and strive for it. They establish their superiority over others through physical extension. The researcher has explored micro-aggressions in the lives of black Americans along with the identification certain issues which lead to the causes of micro-aggression and trauma. The black is unable to move in American society independently. This has very devastating impacts upon black African lives. That is the reason for the trauma. The researcher analyses the three types of micro-aggression to meet the objectives and answer the targeted questions. The present study is conducted through qualitative method. This study exposes that how micro-aggressions are negatively associated with various aspects of psychological harm of black Americans in the novel. The researcher also provides a solution to cope with these types of issues. That it is necessary to eliminate the segregated system between black and white Americans, which has been identified in the novel, that the civil rights movement eliminated this system of segregation.

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