THE REPRESENTATION OF BLACKNESS IN MEGAMIND
CHARACTER OF TOM MCGRATH’S MEGAMIND

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ABSTRACT

African-American Stereotypes or the so-called blackness can be seen in many aspects of life. For example is an animated movie, Megamind. In Megamind, the blackness appears in stereotypical, historical, social, psychological aspects of the film and the character. Therefore, this research is conducted to analyze how a representation of blackness is shown in Megamind character. The type of this research was qualitative research. The method of data collection used Megamind film as data source. The method of data analysis used Narrative and Non-Narrative analysis. The discussion was divided into two sub-analysis, otherness and blackness. The results of this research find that blackness is represented in Megamind character through characteristics of blackness from the stereotypical, historical, social, and psychological aspects. The results also indicate that stereotypes can be found even in an animated film with non-human character. However, this research focuses only on blackness, which means there are so many blackness and other racial stereotypes in other animated films. Therefore, the further research is highly suggested to gain more comprehensive research.

Keywords: Blackness; Representation; Otherness; Megamind

1. Introduction

Racial stereotypes have been a continuous issue that is difficult to be recognized. This kind of stereotypes is usually associated with racism and is unavoidable in cultures, even in texts. Although many critics have appeared concerning racial stereotypes in texts, it is still hidden in anywhere, even in children animated films. Even in an animation film that has non-human characters, racial stereotypes are still presented. This kind of racialization is called racialized anthropomorphism:

Racialization—including racialized anthropomorphism—takes place on various levels within these animated films. On a basic level, such films provide children with important signifiers that chart racialized, and racist, dynamics. On a more profound level, these films serve as tools that help to teach children to maintain the racial (and racist) ideologies that maintain the status quo… (Bloodsworth-Lugo, & Lugo-Lugo 2008, p.10)

Anthropomorphism is the smoothest aspect for children to learn and follow any form on stereotypes. The non-human characters originally have no race, whether aliens or animals or cars. However, animation films use an approach to make children familiar with aliens, animals, and other non-human characters. Hall (1997, p.263) argues that stereotyping happens by the work of representation, that representation is only ‘half of the story’ while the other half is what Hall claims ‘being fantasized’. The representation or ‘half of the story’ in animated films is often seen in the physiological characteristics of non-human characters. While the other half is seen as stereotypes, the fantasized side of the story that goes along with the representation.

The examples of the issue of blackness are in three infamous animated films from DreamWorks Studio: Shrek Tetralogy, Shark Tale, and Madagascar Trilogy. Those films have been analyzed to conduct the research in the representation of blackness in non-human characters. In Andrew Adamson’s Shrek Tetralogy, a character Donkey is a donkey that can speak and act like human. It represents the physiology of an African-American through its wide-big lips and its big bottom, while the blackness is seen in Donkey’s attitudes (Brabham 2006). Donkey’s character is also voiced by an African-American, Eddie Murphy. The second animated film is Rob Letterman’s Shark Tale (2004). In Shark Tale the main character Oscar is a bluestreak fish that represents the physiology of African-American, with its attitudes also match the representation. Oscar is stereotyped as a working-class that loves gambling. He desires wealth and fame. He speaks fast and in rap-style, as he is also voiced by an African-American, Will Smith (Bloodsworth-Lugo & Lugo-Lugo 2008). The third animated film is Tom McGrath’s Madagascar Trilogy. In Madagascar, a Zebra
character named Marty has the same characteristics as well as Donkey and Oscar. Marty also has big lips and the rap-style tones. Marty is voiced also by an African-American, Chris Rock (Fischer 2010).

Another children animated film that represents racial stereotype is another Tom McGrath’s work, Megamind (2010). The character of Megamind represents blackness through historically, socially, psychologically, and stereotypically. However, there is one interesting fact. In three films mentioned previously, Donkey, Oscar, and Marty are voiced by an African-American Actors. While Megamind character is voiced by a Caucasian and an impersonator, Will Ferrell. Ferrell’s ability to impersonate people’s voice and tones creates Megamind character as a non-white. The difference in voice cast is an interesting issue since the blackness appears even with the voice cast of a white Caucasian. It creates different result from previous research that analyzes character with African-American voice cast. This is the reason why the writer of this research chooses to analyze Megamind for further analysis.

2. Methods of the Study

The approach that is conducted for the analysis is qualitative approach. Specifically, this research is conducted with two different techniques, technique of data collection and technique of data analysis. The data sources taken for this research are conducted using technique of data collection. Subsequently, the conducted data is analyzed or interpreted by using the technique of data analysis.

The primary data for this research is Megamind by Tom McGrath (2010). The writer chooses Megamind because there are still few animated films that produce blackness in a non-human character regardless from the voice actor who is a Caucasian. Meanwhile, the sources for this research are divided into primary source and secondary source about blackness and blackness in animated films to help writer to complete this research. The primary sources are conducted as theories, which are used to analyze the research. The secondary sources are the offline as well as online research. These sources are conducted to find information about books, journals, articles, thesis, and other sources related to the topic and the theory.

In film, Megamind has two phases, villainy phase and hero phase. The hero phase does not represent Megamind’s blackness because he is already accepted by the society.

Meanwhile, this research focuses on Megamind’s representation of blackness that involves the work of othering. Therefore, the villainy phase is the focus of this research. It is also necessary to compare the Megamind character with another alien, Metroman, to analyze the racial stereotypes that present. Racial Stereotypes can be analyzed through many studies, such as Post-Colonialism. However, this research only focuses on Stuart Hall’s theory of Representation and Grammar of Black Race, supported by Richard Dyer’s Stereotyping for the process of othering. Focusing on stereotyping and representation is enough to find racial stereotyping depicted in Megamind character. Therefore, another Post-Colonialism theory is only used to explain mimicry performed by Megamind.

Data collecting technique is conducted by sorting the scenes and transcribing the dialogues that represent narrative and non-narrative aspects of blackness on Megamind character. Secondary sources are also sorted to strengthen the comprehension of blackness represented in Megamind character. The contents of the scenes are thus classified into two categories, Otherness and Grammar of Black Race.

To analyze those categories, there is specific theory that guides the analysis. In film analysis, Rachmah Ida (2011) suggests the narrative and non-narrative analysis, while the category organization is conducted in Data Collection. Therefore, each Otherness and Grammar of Black Race data analysis conducts narrative and non-narrative analysis.

The first approach discusses about narrative analysis. To use narrative analysis, Ida mentions two major essences of a film to be analyzed: story and plot (p.92). The analysis is then combined with non-narrative essences. These essences are conducted according to Stuart Hall’s Representation (1997), Stuart Hall’s Grammar of Black Race (1981), And Richard Dyer’s Stereotyping (2006). Within narrative aspects, there are several questions to be asked to achieve a comprehensive analysis
suggested in *Critical Theory Today* (Tyson 2006). Those questions are thus simplified and adjusted into the following strategies: First, finding binary opposition. Tyson (ibid.) suggests about the operations of cultural difference and their relations in shaping the perception of self, other, and the world to find the process of othering. Such suggestion is then elaborated to analyze the binary opposition of society and other. Second, analyzing the representation of blackness. For this strategy, Tyson (ibid.) suggests to find the historical context, experience, and racial issue of blackness and their relations to the blackness represented in the text. Third, analyzing the representation of blackness through the character. For this strategy, Tyson (ibid.) suggests to analyze deeper through the characters, including the social and psychological effect of discrimination experienced by the character. By conducting these strategy, a comprehensive and justified analysis can be achieved.

The second approach discusses about non-narrative analysis. The in-depth analysis is conducted as well as analyzing the representation of blackness in Megamind character. Ida (2012, pp. 97-98) also mentions some technical essences in Non-narrative analysis: camera works and movements, costumes, setting, color composition, sounds, characters, and environment. Such technical essences are needed by the writer to find anything that relate the character with racial stereotypes, particularly blackness.

3. Discussion

3.1 Otherness: The Birth of Blackness

The otherness in *Megamind* is represented through the concept of stereotyping by Richard Dyer (2006, p.355). According to Dyer, socio-types are people who follow the rule of society and stereotypes are ‘those whom the rules are designed to exclude’. Dyer’s statement indicates that there is ‘us’ and ‘them’, where ‘us’ are the society and ‘them’ are the other. In *Megamind*, the representation of otherness is represented from Megamind’s arrival to earth, the process of becoming the other, to Megamind’s disguise as a form of mimicry.

3.1.1 The Arrival of Megamind

Megamind and Metroman’s arrivals on earth is assumed to be similar to the history of African and Puritan’s arrivals in America. Megamind represents the African and Metroman represents the Puritan. According to David Mauk and John Oakland (2005), Africans came to Virginia as slaves not long after the English established their first permanent settlement in Virginia. The Africans were the *indentured servants*, a contract to work without wages in four to seven years as their payment to North America. However, even after the slavery had ended in 1863, by 1930s ‘the African Americans remained dependent on their former masters for work and a place to live’ (ibid., p.39).

The history matches Megamind and Metroman’s story. Metroman falls to a decent mansion, where the huge mansion indicates richness and power. As a baby, the family that lives in mansion finds that Metroman is has bulletproof body, ability to fly, and superpower (03:15). On the contrary, Megamind falls to Metro City Prison. After his arrival, he is kept in prison as one of the prisoners. A prison is a place to exclude people that are unwanted by society, or as mentioned previously, the other. As Megamind falls to it, he is also considered by the society as the other. Comparing Megamind’s arrival to prison to African’s arrival to US, both arrivals are very similar. The Africans are not allowed to leave the plantation without permission, similar to Megamind’s life as a prisoner. Both are captivated and marginalized from society.

3.1.2 Being the Other

In this analysis, there are two major parts that show how Megamind is as the other and how the citizens of Metro City is as the society/self. Those two parts are when Megamind is a child at school and when society responds to Megamind as an adult.

3.1.3 Megamind in Lil’ Gifted School: How He Becomes Villain

In Lil’ Gifted school, there are many evidences that indicate Megamind’s otherness. The most obvious evidence is his photo class. Below is the scene of the photo class (04:43).
The color composition on this scene works differently on Metroman’s side and on Megamind’s side. On Metroman’s side, Metroman stands between two windows, bright colors from the windows strengthens Metroman’s happy moment with his friends. The lights from the camera also falls right behind Metroman. It is seen from the shadow angle of the kid behind Metroman falls right behind him, and shadow behind Megamind falls far on the right. The lights from the window and from the camera indicate Metroman as the center of the picture and representatively center of the society. Meanwhile on Megamind, the clear shadow behind him represents darkness. Megamind’s prisoner suit also indicates that he is marginalized as a criminal, therefore nobody wants to take picture beside him. The absence of white is clearly seen, that Megamind is not considered as white society. His face expression also indicates that he is oppressed by his friends, or representatively, by the society. Therefore, this scene indicates Megamind as the other and the non-white at the same time.

3.1.4 Society Responses of Megamind

Hall (1997, p. 243) argues that racial discourse is structured by set of binary oppositions. Especially on stereotyping, there is much binary opposition that occurs (ibid., p.258), such as between ‘normal’ and ‘deviant’, ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’, ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’, ‘us’ and ‘them’. Such binary opposition can be categorized into ‘society’ and ‘the other’. Douglas (1966, in ibid.) defines that ‘whatever is “out of place” is considered as polluted, dangerous, taboo. Negative feelings cluster around it.’ For such reasons, it can be concluded that ‘us’ or society is defined as normal, acceptable, and insiders. Meanwhile, ‘them’ or the other is defined as deviant, unacceptable, outsiders, polluted, dangerous, and taboo.

Therefore, this section analyzes about how the society in Metro City, the representation of ‘us’, response to Megamind as the representation of the other. There are several responses experienced by Megamind, such as from Media and the whole citizens of Metro City.

The first response is shown in the media, especially in newspapers cover scene (06:00). The headlines are ‘Battle of the Century’, ‘Good Beats Evil’, ‘Loser’, ‘Metroman!!!’, ‘Defender of Metro City’, and ‘Megamind Behind Bars Once Again’. The words that describe Metroman such as ‘good’, ‘Metroman!!!’, and ‘defender’ indicates positivity, that Metroman is not only accepted in society; he is the center of society. On the other hand, the words that describe Megamind such as ‘bad’, ‘evil’, ‘loser’, and ‘behind bars’ refer to negative reception.

Moreover, it is the media that publishes such news. Media has a power to ‘construct’ rather than ‘reflect’ the world around them (Williams, 2003), which means media has a huge role to construct the perception of the society. Therefore, the construction of Megamind as the other is shown on how Media’s perception upon Megamind with negative headlines that is constructed within Megamind. He is considered by the media as dangerous, someone who should be always locked out from society. That also indicates that the society considers Megamind as the other who is dangerous.

The second response is shown in the citizens at the opening of Metroman Museum (15:11). On Megamind’s entrance, the citizens are exclaiming “Boo!” at the same time, making a huge ‘boo’ exclamation. Oxford English Dictionary (2013b) defines Boo ‘to show disapproval or contempt’. This
ultimately indicates society’s rejection upon Megamind, that he is never be accepted even only his projection. This response represents Megamind as the other who is unacceptable.

3.1.5 Mimicry of Megamind

According to Tyson (ibid.), mimicry is ‘the attempt of the colonized to be accepted by imitating the dress, behavior, speech, and the lifestyle of the colonizers.’ The statement indicates that to be accepted by the colonizers, colonized person needs to mimic them. Such statement synchronizes with the difference between society and the other mentioned previously. In Megamind, the colonizers are represented by the society, or the citizens of Metro City. Meanwhile, the colonized are represented by Megamind, the other. From the synchronization, society in Megamind is now determined as powerful, superior, insiders, normal, and acceptable. Meanwhile, the other in Megamind is determined as weak, inferior, outsiders, deviant, and unacceptable.

Meanwhile, the characters Megamind take as a disguise are all white characters. This indicates that Megamind considers the white people as society and himself as the other. As the other, there is also a desire to be a part of society. For Megamind, he is already being the other from his appearance and his environment, unlike Metroman who grows up in a wealthy family, looks like another human being, and even white. Therefore, in order to be part of them, Megamind performs disguise as a form of mimicry.

Megamind disguises four times in films. Those characters are Warden, a prison supervisor, Bernard, a librarian, Space Dad, and Metroman. However, the writer of this research focuses on analyzing Warden, Bernard, and Metroman because those three characters are the citizens of Metro City, the representation of society. Therefore, Megamind’s disguise as Space Dad is not analyzed.

First, Megamind disguises as the prison supervisor, Warden (09:36). His choice to perform mimicry as Warden is interesting because Warden can be considered as Megamind’s owner. Megamind and Warden relationship is also similar to slave-owner relationship. Warden represents the overseer, the one who watches the work of the slaves (Durant & Knottnerus, 1999). As an overseer, Warden holds the authority of giving reward and punishment to Megamind. From such authorities, Megamind considers Warden as a powerful person in the prison.

Second, Megamind disguises as the normal person, Bernard. This disguise shows that he wants to be considered as normal. As the other, his perception of ‘being normal’ is being the society itself. While he is not accepted by the society, Megamind disguises as the normal person. Bernard. Megamind’s thought about being normal also appears at restaurant with Roxanne. He then asks her about it (53:55):

Megamind: ‘Say I wasn’t so normal. Say I was bold and had a complexion of popular primary color. As a random, not a specific example. Would you still enjoy my company?’

The dialogue clearly states that Megamind is talking about being his own self. It is Megamind’s thought about himself. He even considers himself as is not ‘so normal’, ‘bold’, and has ‘a complexion of popular primary color’. This clearly shows that Megamind does not feel like a normal person based of his appearance.

Third, Megamind disguises as Metroman. It is the last disguise Megamind does. This shows that Megamind wants to be powerful, good, and even white like Metroman. Megamind’s desire to be Metroman actually appears since they were arriving on earth. Megamind wants to grow up in a fancy mansion where Metroman grows up. He also tries to do what Metroman does to please his friends. Megamind also wants to get along with his friends and play with them like Metroman; however, none is going so well for Megamind. Megamind also desires Metroman’s superpower. However, all those desires are buried in his childhood memory. Therefore, this time he takes Metroman’s form as his perception for being white and center of society at the same time; a person society truly accepts to be part of them.

3.2 Megamind’s Blackness through Grammar of Black Race

According to Hall’s Grammar of Black Race (1981), there are three tropes that represent blackness, such as slave trope, native trope, and clown trope. Specifically, the writer chooses two tropes as the theoretical framework, slave trope and clown trope. Native trope is not included regarding the fact
that Megamind is not primitive, savage, nor barbaric. He applies the correct table manner and invents more sophisticated technology than society’s technology, indicating his civilized character and intelligence. His only similarity with the native trope is only his tendency to always kidnap the beautiful heroine, Roxanne, which is considered not comprehensive as it only contains one evidence in similarity. Therefore, Megamind’s character related to native trope is not analyzed. However, the loss of one trope does not influence the strength of analysis comprehension for the research.

3.2.1 Slave Trope: Act Like Slave, Live Like Slave

The slave trope is represented in Megamind’s character through several factors. The first factor is through his life in prison. Megamind’s prison life represents a life of slave during slavery period and a life of an African-American in ghetto. The second factor is through his bad slave character who always tries to escape and harm Metroman. The third factor is through his dependency to his master, Metroman. For the factors above, Megamind’s character indicates a representation of slave trope.

3.2.2 Clown Trope: The Humorous and Entertaining Part of Megamind

According to Stuart Hall (1981), a clown is also an entertainer at the same time. A clown is depicted to have an ‘innate’ humor; being humorous in both physic and actions, expressive, and sometimes does stupid things. As the other, in order to be accepted by society, a clown also always tries to amuse them. Therefore, the analysis of the clown trope in this research is divided into two main themes, childish behavior and amusing presentation. The childish behavior Megamind has in his character includes stupid things, expressive, and humorous. Meanwhile, the amusing presentation of evil actions shows his struggle to be accepted, even as a villain.

The ‘innate’ humor appears in many scenes of the films. Megamind’s clown trope is all about humors. As Hall (1981) mentions ‘It is never quite clear whether we are laughing with or at the figure’, there are many aspects in Megamind characters that indicate his ‘innate’ humor and eventually lead to clown trope. Such aspects are childishness, expressions, and actions.

The first aspect is his childishness. The childishness appears in every aspect of his behavior. One of them is when Megamind is welcomed by the citizens in the mass derision of ‘Boo!’ Megamind replies them ‘boo! Yes, I can play along too. Boo!’ (15:14). Megamind’s reply indicates that he is still childish, compared to Metroman’s reaction on Megamind’s attack. Metroman replies heroically, with a posture of a hero. His reply really shows that the citizens do not accept his existence, and Megamind is already used to it. He already spends his whole life as an outcast knowing the response of the citizens will not be too far from derisions. Metroman’s reaction shows that he is shocked but still can carry himself as a hero.

The second aspect is expressions. Megamind’s expression that indicates clown trope can be seen in many scenes, especially when the spider is on his eyes (14:02), and when Megamind’s hand is bitten by his brainbots (14:10). Megamind’s misfortune does not make Roxanne entertained; it is intended for audience’s entertainment. As Brabham (2006) insists that ‘it is for the white hegemonic ideal—the white audiences—who can reassert their superior whiteness by seeing a black character meet mishap and misfortune physically’, misfortune is included by Brabham as a representation of slave trope. Megamind’s misfortune is also included as a part when the clown is being laughed at.

The third aspect is amusing presentation. The amusing presentation is a part of Megamind’s slave trope. The presentation is indicated to show how Megamind is made to get society’s attention as villain. As implied by Hall (1981), a clown always tries to amuse the audience whether with ‘innate’ humor or his ‘nature’ entertainer soul, in order to be accepted by society. Therefore, Megamind is created as an other who always creates evil presentations so that the society recognizes him as a super villain. The presentation usually happens before or after Megamind appears.

There is also a dialogue strengthens Megamind’s struggle of being amazed. Below is the dialogue between Megamind and Tighten (01:16:07).

```plaintext
"Boo!"
"What if I can't, Megamind?"
"It's okay."
"You'll know when I can't."
"I'll know when you can't."
"I'll know when I can't."
"It's okay."
"You'll know when I can't."
"I'll know when you can't."
"I'll know when I can't."
"It's okay."
"You'll know when I can't."
"I'll know when you can't."
"I'll know when I can't."
"It's okay."
"You'll know when I can't."
"I'll know when you can't."
"I'll know when I can't."

It's okay.
You'll know when I can't.
I'll know when you can't.
I'll know when I can't.
It's okay.
You'll know when I can't.
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I'll know when I can't.
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Tighten: ‘This town isn’t big enough for two super villains!’
Megamind: ‘Oh, you’re a villain alright. Just not a super one’.
Tighten: ‘Yeah? What’s the difference?’
Megamind: [Walks out from the swarm of brainbots] ‘Presentation!’

The dialogue above really strengthens Megamind’s struggle of creating an amusing presentation for either the society or his rivals. He clearly states that being a super must have super presentation that represents him. However, such belief is only from Megamind’s perception. Megamind’s statement is gained from his childhood experience. As he used to fail to do good things, he thought his destiny was being bad. Therefore, he held that thought until now. Since then, he always tries to his best to be the bad person for the city. However, his true motivation since he was a child never changes;

he wants to be accepted like Metroman. Therefore, he does his best to bring presentation for society in order to be recognized by the society, at least as a villain. His attempts are very similar to the clown trait as mentioned by Stuart Hall (1981).

In addition, the dialogue below strengthens his blackness. However, it does not included in any trope. Below is the dialogue from Megamind when he asks Warden to release him (01:13:40).

Megamind: ‘If you want to hear me say it, I’ll say it. Here it is, from the blackest part of my heart; I AM SORRY!’

The interesting part of the dialogue above is when Megamind says ‘from the blackest part of my heart’. Instead of saying darkest, he uses the word blackest. The use of words ‘dark’ and ‘black’ often overlaps in daily life. Oxford English Dictionary claims (2013a, 2013c), the word ‘dark’ [adj] means ‘with little or no light’, while the word
‘black’ [adj] means ‘of the very darkest colour owing to the absence of or complete absorption of light’ or ‘belonging to or denoting any human group having dark-coloured skin, especially of African or Australian Aboriginal ancestry’.

From the explanation above, it is clear that ‘dark’ and ‘black’ is different. Dark is the absence of light, while black is the term used to characterize dark. However, Megamind uses the word ‘black’ instead of ‘dark’, which means the ‘black’ word here is not associated with dark, leaving one meaning of ‘black’ as any human group having dark-colored skin, and in this case, it is African-American.

Therefore, the word ‘blackest pit of my heart’ indicates that he is actually has a black heart, and he wants to say something from the blackest part of him, the most identity of Megamind. This strengthens the identity of his blackness, because he admits that he is actually a black person, an African-American.

4. Conclusion

Representation is a wide concept that enables us to explore the historical, stereotypical, social, and psychological aspects, including the othering process of the blackness in a body of an alien, Megamind. By the concept of otherness, Megamind is categorized as the other based on his historical and thus stereotypical aspects. Historically, Megamind is excluded because of the place where he grows up, a prison. The prison is also a representation of plantation, where the slaves who work there are also imprisoned and excluded from the society. The discrimination as the other is also experienced by Megamind from all aspects of society, including from friends at school, media, Metroman (the hero), and the citizens of Metro City, which also indicate the history of discrimination experienced by African Americans in USA. Stereotypically, Megamind’s otherness is indicated also from how society treats Megamind as the other. Society imprisons Megamind and treats him as dangerous, deviant, polluted, unacceptable, outsider, and taboo. Such stereotypical judgments result his mimicry performance (disguise as 4 white characters). Megamind’s imprisonment influences his consideration that society is more superior to himself. Therefore, Megamind’s mimicry performance becomes a result of stereotyping and othering.

Subsequently, blackness is also represented within the social and psychological aspects of Megamind through his character. Blackness can be represented as three tropes, including slave, clown, and native. From all those tropes, Megamind’s character represents blackness through slave and clown trope. Slave trope is represented through Megamind’s similar experience as the slave in the
slavery era with the similar reward-punishment system, which indicates social aspect. Slave trope is also represented through his character as a bad slave who also has master-slave relationship with Metroman and overseer-slave relationship with Warden, indicating social and psychological aspect of blackness. Meanwhile in clown trope, the blackness is represented in Megamind’s ‘innate’ humor as an entertainer, who purposively and accidentally entertains both society and the audience, indicating his psychological aspect of blackness representation.

As a conclusion, Megamind successfully delivers a blackness representation in a non-human character covertly, even without black vernacular and black physical characteristics. However, as nothing is perfect, this thesis also has various limitations. The result does not necessarily represent that otherness is experienced by all African Americans because each person may response differently upon blackness depending on their cultural background.

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