

Jungle fever, the answer is in black and white essay sample



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In America, we are known as the melting pot, the country of diversity, where citizens can be who they want to be. We can be who we want to be, and look at ourselves however we want to; but how are others looking at us? In many cases, an individual does not even have a chance to make an impression on somebody, because they have already been judged simply by their physical aspects. The controversy of one's color has been around since the beginning of time. In the history of the United States, the racism against African American's has put them through much oppression, and many walls have been built up over the years between African Americans and other ethnic groups.

As a result of the barrier between these ethnic groups, the movie *Jungle Fever*, written and directed by Spike Lee has many aspects of stereotypes against African Americans, not only how whites perceive them, but also how African Americans see themselves. In the movie, there is a major sign of symbolic interaction which is the study of how people use symbols to develop their views of the world and to communicate with one another. Most of these signs are easily pointed out and boldly states to the viewers.

Like it or not we all grow up with some level of self perception. Self perception is defined as seeing certain features of an object or situation, but remaining blind to others in the book *Sociology: A Down-To-Earth Approach*. (Henslin 272) An example from the movie relating to self perception is when Paulie argues with the men inside his store. Paulie says that you can't judge someone just because they are black, because they are not all the same; but the men come back by saying " its black on black", meaning that if one of them does it they all do it. Henslin reveals a result of symbolic interaction, <https://assignbuster.com/jungle-fever-the-answer-is-in-black-and-white-essay-sample/>

which is if we apply a label to a group, we tend to perceive its members as all the same (273). These men have had bad experiences with black people and therefore group every black person in a negative category; furthermore, they block out the good stuff they see blacks doing, such as the black woman that cares for Paulie's education and future.

Another example of wearing "blindness" is brought up when Flipper and Angie are discussing Drew being a mixture of white and black. Flipper puts it to the back of his mind that Drew is in reality only half black. He exclaims to Angie saying "if they look black; they act black; they are black!" The act of being black according to this movie can be a form of symbolic interactionism in itself, and this label of being black affects many of the things Flipper does in the movie. Examples of this is how he describes himself as a strong black man when talking about his will power, and he also states that he is very pro-black when it comes to women.

Flipper's brother also takes on the label of being stereotypically black, as Lee sees it. Not only is Gaitor addicted to drugs, but he likes that he is a junkie. He fully accepts the mindset that he is going nowhere soon, and that it is ok to do whatever he must so that he can get drugs. He is stereotyped in the movie as the beggar who always goes to his parents for money because he cannot take care of himself. According to Henslin, "some stereotypes not only justify prejudice and discrimination but even produce the behavior depicted in the stereotype" (273). If a group is labeled as constantly doing a certain act, that becomes acceptable to them, and they give into what society is telling them. According to this theory from symbolic interaction we see that Gaitor has given in to the stereotype that it is common for a black
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man to be dependant on others, and addicted to drugs, therefore it makes it much easier to conform to this mindset. Flipper talks about Gaitor to his mother, saying that there is no hope for him—he is too far gone. This could be a way for Lee to show that there is no hope for African Americans, which is a very bold label and statement.

Lee also likes to show that it is not only whites that label blacks in a negative sense, but that blacks label themselves in that sense as well. We see an example of this when Drew yells at Flipper, saying “ the issue is your so black you have a problem!” Gaitor also belittles black when he says that he “ swears before God and white people” when claiming he will not ask for money. In this statement Gaitor is saying that white people are sacred, and they are basically above everyone else and can be compared to God. Drew and her friends realize after they find that Flipper has been unfaithful that they are losing all of their black men.

One of Drew’s friends states that there “ aint a good black man out there”, which is a major symbolic shot to the labeling of African American’s. African Americans may look down on themselves because they are a minority group in America compared to white people. According to Henslin a minority group’s physical or cultural traits are held in low esteem by the dominant group, who treats them unfairly (266). Flipper’s father talks of the white women, or the dominant group as being a “ pure” race compared to other races. White women are seen in his eyes as very high up on the social status, with much power.

The reason many people in America today, as well as in the movie are racist is because this is how they were brought up, by the labels they were taught to live by. Past generations were exposed to segregation between ethnic groups, which has greatly carried on to how people look at others today. Up until 1967 it was prohibited for blacks to marry white people in 38 states (Henslin 276). Flipper's father gives examples of past segregations he was exposed to, saying that the act of white people and black people marrying in Alabama would be enough to get someone lynched when he grew up. The movie shows many people staring at Flipper and Angie when they are together, because this goes against the norm of the society at the time.

The waiter in the restaurant also does not serve Flipper and Angie right away because of how the two are choosing to be together, and not segregated. People of past generations are defiantly affected by this issue more, as we see Angie's father beat her for dating a black man, while yelling at her about how disrespectful such a thing is. Also Paulie's father lectures him about going on a date with a black woman, and then later disowns him for doing such a thing. These examples alone show that symbolic interaction has a major outcome in our lives which a lot of people don't notice.

In the movie we find that there is a label put on black men that they are hustlers when it comes to women, according to Henslin these labels create prejudice which is shown in the movie (273). Though it is not out in the open, one can tell that Flipper does not have many emotions when it comes to his relationships. It takes almost no time at all when he is around Angie to cheat on his wife. After his wife finds out that he cheated on her he first tries to get back together with her by bringing her flowers, when that doesn't work he

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and Angie get a house together. When Flipper goes to pick up his daughter it is evident he wants Drew by saying how beautiful she is, then he goes back to Angie and introduces her to his parents, then they break up and by the end of the movie he is back together with Drew.

Also when Flipper is harassed by the cops for “ attempting rape” he immediately questions if she is worth all of this trouble. Flippers shallow side comes out even more during the end of the movie when he states that he has never loved Angie, and he also speaks for Angie by doubting that she has ever loved him. He continues to lecture Angie by saying “ this true love prevails stuff is only in the Disney movies, it’s not real.” He then comes out to Angie and says that she was curious about black, and he was curious about white, essentially implying that the only reason they had chemistry between each other is for their physical aspects.

Jungle Fever lets its audience know that despite how far racism has come from where it was, there is still a big hurdle to be jumped. Even in today’s society though it is getting easier, the movie reveals that it would be a challenge to maintain a relationship between an African American and a Caucasian. Not only must one overcome their own perceptions of the other race, but it is another obstacle when those around them disagree with the decisions to date another race. Because of the labeling we have been victim to dealing with symbolic interaction that we have all grown up with, Lee is letting everyone know that living in a racism-free world is a long ways off. From the time most of us were born, depending on our color we have learned to judge others, take sides, and know how much authority we have over another group, or how much authority that groups has over us. It is not <https://assignbuster.com/jungle-fever-the-answer-is-in-black-and-white-essay-sample/>

impossible to live in a world where color does not matter, but the first step we all must take is everyone must participate on acceptance; ethnic groups must try to relate to other ethnic groups and see what they have been through. Once this is done we can start to break down the walls that have been built around our fears and insecurities by the color of our skin.

Bibliography

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