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LABELING AND STIGMA OF KEIKO FURUKURA IN SAYAKA MURATA'S *CONVENIENCE STORE WOMAN*

Afita Sofiani[1]*, Asih Ernawati[2], Titik Wahyuningsih[3], Sulasih Nurhayati[4]
[1,2,3,4]Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto, Indonesia
**Corresponding Author:* afitasofiani8@gmail.com

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Abstract. Labeling and stigma are closely linked to deviant behavior in individuals who do not conform to social norms. This study aims to examine how Keiko Furukura experiences labeling and stigma in society as depicted in the novel *Convenience Store Woman*. Using a qualitative descriptive method for specific events or experiences of the protagonist, this study collected narratives and dialogues from the novel. The data were analyzed using Howard Becker's (1963) labeling theory and Erving Goffman's (1963) stigma theory. The results revealed that Keiko faced social labeling through the concept of deviance as a social construction, as she was considered deviant for failing to meet expectations for marriage and holding a proper job, thereby reinforcing the role of moral entrepreneurs. Thus, society creates Keiko's master status by labeling her as deviant. On the other hand, Keiko identifies herself mainly as a part-time worker at a convenience store. Meanwhile, society stigmatized Keiko as an abnormal figure, echoing Goffman's concept of blemishes of individual character. Keiko used stigma management strategies to overcome this stigma, including passing, which involves concealing her identity, and covering, which involves attempting to minimize stigmatized characteristics. This study concludes that social labeling and stigma have shaped Keiko's identity and influenced her strategies for conforming to social norms.

Abstrak. Pelabelan dan stigma sangat erat kaitannya dengan perilaku menyimpang pada individu yang tidak sesuai dengan norma sosial. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana Keiko Furukura mengalami pelabelan dan stigma di masyarakat sebagaimana digambarkan dalam novel *Convenience Store Woman*. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif untuk menggambarkan peristiwa atau pengalaman tertentu yang dialami tokoh utama, penelitian ini mengumpulkan narasi dan dialog dari novel tersebut. Data dianalisis menggunakan teori pelabelan Howard Becker (1963) dan teori stigma Erving Goffman (1963). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Keiko menghadapi pelabelan sosial melalui konsep *deviance as a social construction*, ia dianggap menyimpang karena gagal memenuhi ekspektasi untuk menikah dan memiliki pekerjaan yang layak, sehingga memperkuat peran para *moral entrepreneur*. Dengan demikian, masyarakat menciptakan *master status* Keiko dengan melabelinya sebagai sosok yang menyimpang. Di sisi lain, Keiko mengidentifikasi dirinya terutama sebagai pekerja paruh waktu di minimarket. Pada saat yang sama, masyarakat menstigmatisasi Keiko sebagai sosok yang tidak normal, sejalan dengan gagasan Goffman mengenai *blemishes of individual character*. Keiko menggunakan strategi pengelolaan stigma untuk mengatasi stigma ini, yaitu *passing* yang melibatkan penyembunyian identitasnya dan *covering* yang melibatkan upaya untuk meminimalkan karakteristik yang distigmatisasi. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa identitas Keiko dibentuk oleh pelabelan sosial dan stigma yang memengaruhi strateginya dalam beradaptasi dengan norma-norma sosial.

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Correspondence address:

Correspondence ORCID ID:

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Program Studi Sastra Inggris, Universitas Trunodjoyo Madura. Jln. Raya Telang, PO Box 2 Telang, Kamal, Bangkalan, Madura.

prosodi@trunojoyo.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

A society is a large group of people who live together in a structured environment, sharing the work that needs to be done and deciding how to accomplish things (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Within society, there are various rules, both written and unwritten, to regulate the behavior of each individual. When an individual fails to comply with these rules, society tends to label and stigmatize that person. This occurs in Sayaka Murata's novel *Convenience Store Woman*, which depicts the life of Keiko Furukura, a 36-year-old woman. Since childhood, she has felt different and has often been considered strange because of her unusual behavior and the way she interacts with others. This can be seen in several incidents Keiko experienced, such as her reaction to the death of a bird, her intervention in a fight between her friends with a shovel, and her pulling on her teacher's skirt. These behaviors show how Keiko responded to situations that those around her considered unusual.

When Keiko turns 18, her life changes. After she decides to take a part-time job at a convenience store, she is given a handbook that helps her interact with others. With that handbook, Keiko discovers routines and rules that give her a sense of stability and serve as a guide for presenting herself and fitting in like a "normal" person. As Keiko grew older, social pressure began to weigh on her. Keiko's family and friends began to question her single status and her part-time employment at the convenience store. In this situation, Keiko felt alienated and pressured to conform to society's expectations, and she adopted several strategies to fit in. Therefore, this study explores this phenomenon by applying Howard S. Becker's (1963) labeling theory and Erving Goffman's (1963) stigma theory. to analyze the labeling process of society labeling Keiko as a deviant, the process of the construction of her identity by the labels, and the process of how she copes with the stigma that results from the labels.

According to Becker (1963), the definition of deviance does not lie in the act itself but in the set of rules in society. In the Japanese cultural context, this construction of deviance can be understood in relation to the principle of wa (和), meaning harmony. This principle emphasizes social harmony and conformity within a group, in which members tend to maintain community harmony over their personal interests (Natalie, 2018). From this perspective, deviance arises from the application of rules and the consequences imposed on rule-breakers by others, rather than from the actions that the individuals actually take. Deviant behavior is behavior labeled as such by others, and a deviant is someone who has been successfully assigned that label. Since deviance stems from how others react to a person's behavior, one cannot assume that a labeled individual has actually violated any rules or engaged in deviant behavior. The labeling process is not perfect. Some people are labeled as deviants even though they have not broken any rules. This labeling process can often develop into stigmatization. According to Jovanoski & Rustemi (2021) stigmatization is the process by which society or a community attaches negative values and characteristics to an individual (or group). Those who attach such stigmas are individuals or groups in positions of power who look down on weaker individuals or groups. Therefore, the process of stigmatization is rooted in social, economic, political, and, in many cases, legal inequalities, and is often based on stereotypes and prejudices.

Social stigma is extreme disapproval of an individual based on characteristics that distinguish them from other members of society. The stigma is so profound that it overpowers positive social feedback about how the same individual adheres to other social norms (Lupton, 2022). In discussing how the concept of stigma works, Goffman (1963) defines stigma as a particularly degrading attribute. However, it is important to understand that what is actually needed is a framework that focuses on relationships, not merely on attributes. An attribute is neither creditable nor discreditable in and of itself, because an attribute that stigmatizes one type of

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possessor can validate the normalcy of another. Therefore, stigma is a unique kind of relationship between an attribute and a stereotype, even though many attributes are discredited practically everywhere in our society. Goffman identifies three different kinds of stigma. First, there are physical abnormalities, or abominations of the body. Second, there are blemishes in an individual's character that are perceived as weak will, controlling or unnatural passions, deceitful and inflexible beliefs, and dishonesty. These are determined from a known history of conditions such as mental illness, incarceration, addiction, alcoholism, homosexuality, unemployment, suicidal thoughts, and extreme political behavior. Lastly, there are the tribal stigmas associated with race, nation, and religion, which can be passed down through generations and equally affect every member of a family.

Several studies have analyzed *Convenience Store Woman* from different approaches. Adhritama (2024) uses the existentialist approach of Jean-Paul Sartre to analyze the forms of conformity that Keiko practices in the face of societal pressure and how the social pressure suppresses and changes her real identity, which further affects her existence. Kurniawan & Samanik (2022) use a sociological approach with the theory of Sakai Junko, especially the concept of *Make'Inu* (loser) and *Kachi'Inu* (winning), to find out the norms of the "good" child, the successful person, and the nice spouse in the novel. Chambers (2023) examines the soundscape as an everyday aesthetic experience that ties Keiko's auditory awareness to her environment through Arnold Berleant's concept of aesthetic engagement.

Parambil (2025) examines how Keiko's life reflects the pressure to conform to socially constructed notions of normality. Focusing on work routines and social expectations, this study examines the alienation, economic uncertainty, and dehumanization she experiences. Chotib et al. (2023) employ new critical theory to reveal how the convenience store setting influences the development of Keiko Furukura's character, thereby shaping her identity and behavior. Orajiuka & Onyeachulam (2025) explain how female stereotypes, such as women as mothers, women as incompetent, and women as sexual objects, are present in the novel and how Keiko resists them, examining these stereotypes through Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminist theory and Mansour Fakih's concept of gender discrimination.

Despite the various approaches to this novel, there is still a lack of research that explicitly examines how social norms pressure Keiko Furukura, leading to her being labeled and stigmatized by society. Therefore, by applying Howard Becker's labeling theory and Erving Goffman's stigma theory, this study focuses on the following two questions:

1. What types of labeling does Keiko Furukura receive?
2. How does Keiko respond to and cope with the social stigma attached to her?

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method, which allows a comprehensive and straightforward description of specific events or experiences (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). This approach was selected to provide an in-depth description and analysis of the protagonist's experiences of societal labeling and stigmatization. The main source of data was the English translation of Sayaka Murata's novel *Convenience Store Woman*, by Ginny Tapley Takemori, published by Granta Books in 2019. The data consisted of narratives and dialogues about the main character, Keiko Furukura, who is subjected to social pressure, labeled deviant, and adapts to stigma. In addition, secondary data were collected from relevant journal articles and literature reviews to support the interpretation of the primary text. The data were selected using a purposive sample. Andrade (2021) defines a purposive sample as a sample whose characteristics are defined for a specific purpose related to the study. Thus, the researchers selected only the textual passages directly relevant to the representation of labeling and stigma in the novel. Data analysis consisted

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of a three-step process of identification, classification, and interpretation. First, the collected excerpts were identified with indicators of labeling and stigma. Second, the identified data were classified according to the theoretical frameworks of Howard Becker's (1963) labeling theory and Erving Goffman's (1963) stigma theory. Third, the categorized data were analyzed to reveal how labeling and stigma are constructed through Keiko Furukura's experiences. Finally, the research findings were described to show the sociological realities reflected in the literary work.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the character Keiko Furukura through the framework of Howard S. Becker's (1963) labeling theory and Erving Goffman's (1963) stigma theory. These two theories complement each other in explaining how social labeling leads to stigmatization. This discussion first examines the labels attached to Keiko through Becker's labeling theory, focusing on how her behavior and social status are labeled as deviant. Then, it examines how these labels position Keiko as a socially distinct figure and contribute to the stigma she experiences, using Goffman's stigma theory. The discussion concludes by exploring "passing" and "covering" as strategies Keiko uses to manage the stigma arising from these social labels.

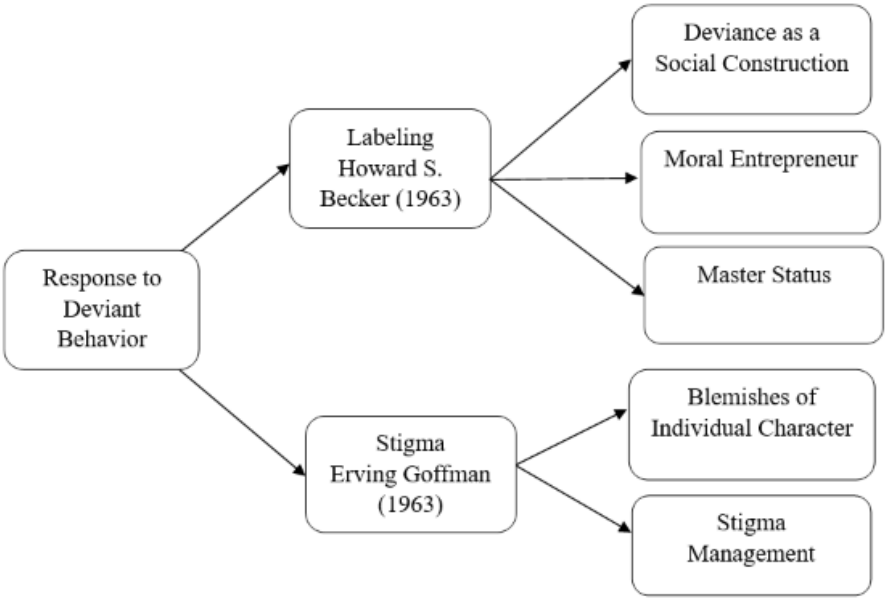


Figure 1. Labeling and stigma

1. Social Labeling Experienced by Keiko

a. Deviance as a Social Construction

As Becker (1963) pointed out, deviance is not a property of the act committed by the individual but the result of others applying rules and consequences to an offender. Thus, an individual may be labeled a deviant even though they have not actually committed a deviant act. This is what Keiko experienced; she was considered a deviant because her actions and her work did not conform to social norms. In the context of Japanese culture, the term *sekentei* (social appearance), defined as sensitivity about one's reputation, represents Japanese behavioral principles and includes pressure to conform to social norms (Murayama et al., 2019). This concern

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for social reputation is closely linked to the principle of wa (和), which emphasizes harmony and conformity within a group (Natalie, 2018). Thus, conformity allows individuals to align their behavior and thoughts with group norms in order to avoid social rejection. This cultural concept reinforces strong social pressure on people to follow social standards, to the point where individual expression is marginalized (Putri, 2025). Consequently, cultural pressure is what causes the people around Keiko to increasingly discipline her life, as reflected in the following quote:

> She'd never been this chatty with me before. Seeing how excited she was, it occurred to me that it wasn't such a stretch to say that contemporary society was still stuck in the Stone Age after all. So the manual for life already existed. It was just that it was already ingrained in everyone's heads, and there was not any need to put it in writing. The specific form of what is considered an "ordinary person" had been there all along, unchanged since prehistoric times I finally realized. (Murata, 2019, p. 98)

The scene above shows how Mami—Keiko's younger sister—is delighted by the news that she is in a relationship with Shiraha, her coworker at the convenience store. Seeing her sister's reaction, Keiko realizes that modern society is still bound by the same mindset as in the Stone Age. The Stone Age refers to a prehistoric period in Japan that spans from the earliest use of pottery to the emergence, development, and maturation of a sedentary way of life (Jomon Prehistoric Sites in Northern Japan, n.d.). This primal instinct for conformity is evident in Keiko's assertion that a manual for life is ingrained in everyone's mind. This guide sets the standards for who is considered an ordinary person. This reflects Becker's concept of deviance as a social construction, in which deviance is shaped by society rather than by the behavior itself. These societal rules indirectly bind people to comply with them. When someone does not follow this "manual for life," they are automatically categorized as deviant. Mami's unexpected kindness leads Keiko to believe she is finally accepted as she now fits into the expectations of a 'normal' person in society.

In another scene, Keiko is labeled deviant because of her job and unmarried status, reflecting the social expectations and judgments of those around her. This idea is echoed in the following quote from Shiraha–Keiko's coworker.

> "That's because you're just too far out there. A thirty-six-year-old, single convenience store worker, probably a virgin at that, zealously working every day, shouting at the top of her lungs, full of energy. Yet showing no signs of looking for a proper job. You're a foreign object. It's just nobody bothered to tell you because they find you too freaky. They've been saying it behind your back, though. And now they'll start saying it to your face too." (Murata, 2019, p. 122)

In the scene above, Shiraha conveys that society views Keiko as an outsider because she still works part-time at a convenience store at age 36 and remains unmarried. In Japanese cultural terms, Keiko is closely associated with 'freeter', a term used to describe young people who choose to earn a living through part-time work (Nagatomo, 2004). In this context, part-time work is considered an inferior form of employment (Broadbent, 2002). By societal standards, people her age are expected to have achieved certain milestones, such as having a stable job and being married. Within Japanese society, individuals who delay or choose to avoid marriage are often seen as failing to meet societal expectations, which can lead to negative social and psychological consequences (Himawan et al., 2018). Because Keiko does not meet these expectations, people talk about her, even starting to do so in front of her. This behavior is similar to Howard Becker's concept of deviance is a social

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construction. According to Becker, deviance is not a fixed or absolute characteristic of an action. It is the result of social construction, that is, the process by which society creates categories of what is considered normal and deviant. In this situation, Shiraha's comments, reflecting societal disapproval, indicate that Keiko is perceived as deviant because of her job and social status.

b. Moral Entrepreneur

A moral entrepreneur is someone with sufficient social power to influence others' values, morals, and perceptions through discourse, actions, or behaviors (Flores-Yeffal & Sparger, 2022). Furthermore, Becker (1963) explained that rules result from individual initiative, and those who take the initiative to create or enforce them are referred to as moral entrepreneurs. He classified moral entrepreneurs into two interrelated types: rule-makers and rule-enforcers. Rule-makers are those who write regulations because they think some actions are intrinsically wrong and need to be removed. They follow strict moral principles; they perceive their mission as a worthy cause and frequently attempt to persuade others to embrace their moral standards. Although they may appear to impose their own morality on others, Becker argued that many moral entrepreneurs also believe that the rules they promote will improve society and benefit those expected to obey them. Once these rules are established, they are institutionalized by rule-enforcers who implement and maintain them. Rule-enforcers, on the other hand, are generally less concerned with the content of moral rules and focus on carrying out their professional duties to enforce the rules. Through selective enforcement, they contribute to the labeling of certain individuals as outsiders or deviants. Keiko experiences this when those around her act as moral entrepreneurs, particularly as enforcers of social norms, by reinforcing the expectation that adults should marry. This is illustrated in the following scene:

> "He stared at me as though I were some kind of alien. "What, you never…? I mean, if finding a job is so hard, then at least you should get married. Look, these days there are always things like online marriage sites, you know," he sputtered. (Murata, 2019, p. 78)

The scene shows that Keiko's friends see her as an alien simply because she has never had a boyfriend. He believes that since finding a job is so difficult, Keiko should at least get married. In many contexts, being single past a certain age or not being in a committed relationship can be perceived negatively because it deviates from one aspect of heteronormative norms (Komlenac et al., 2025). This attitude suggests that Keiko's friend is acting as a rule enforcer, in line with Becker's concept of a moral entrepreneur, that is, someone who enforces existing social norms to ensure compliance. Her friend's insistence that Keiko use a matchmaking website to resolve her issues suggests that this “moral police” is not trying to save Keiko, but rather to force her to conform to social norms. Thus, online dating sites are not seen as a place to find romantic relationships, but rather as a means of standardization, so that Keiko's socially disabled status can be quickly eliminated to create harmony in society.

Besides receiving strange looks from her friends, Keiko also faces reactions from her younger sister, Mami, who acts as a moral entrepreneur, viewing Keiko's condition as abnormal and in need of treatment. This belief drives Mami to seek professional help for Keiko so she can meet standards of normality, as demonstrated in the following excerpt:

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> "Will you *ever* be cured, Keiko...? [...] I simply can't take it anymore. How can we make you normal? How much longer must I put up with this? [...] "Keiko, won't you come to see a counselor with me? Please? Let's get you help. It's the only way." (Murata, 2019, p. 131)

The quote above shows how Mami expresses despair and exhaustion in response to Keiko's behavior, which she considers odd and in need of treatment. Keiko's younger sister begs and insists that Keiko go to a counselor, which is reflected in the quote, "Keiko, won't you come to see a counselor with me? Please? Let's get you help. It's the only way." Mami's behavior is in line with Howard Becker's concept of moral entrepreneurs, especially as rule enforcers. This concept explains that rule enforcement often involves professional parties or institutions to validate the label of deviation given by other parties. Mami's initiative to take Keiko to a counselor shows that she seeks validation of her actions through official institutions to prove that Keiko's behavior is deviant and requires immediate correction or treatment so that it conforms to the standards or concepts of normality in society.

c. Master Status

Becker (1963) adopted Everett C. Hughes' concept of social status to explain the consequences of being labeled as deviant. Master status refers to the primary characteristics that define a person within a particular social status. Hughes distinguished between master status and auxiliary status, that is, the additional traits expected to be associated with that master status. Through Hughes' theory, Becker further explained that deviance functions as a master status. Once a person is labeled by society as deviant, this label becomes more dominant than other aspects of their social identity. It becomes the dominant characteristic by which others judge and evaluate them. As a result, society tends to identify the individual primarily as deviant, while other identities, achievements, and social roles become secondary. For example, a doctor is seen as competent and legally licensed to practice medicine. However, society instead looks at additional characteristics such as being male, white, or middle- or upper-class. This concept resonates with Keiko's experience. Although she is an adult woman with a job, those around her do not view these as her master status. Instead, they view Keiko as a deviant because she does not meet societal expectations regarding work, marriage, and her role as a woman. As a result, the label "deviant" becomes Keiko's master status, overshadowing her other roles in society. Meanwhile, Keiko defines herself primarily as a convenience store worker, not through the label "deviant" others have assigned to her, as depicted in the following scene.

> "I realize now," I went on relentlessly. "More than a person, I'm a convenience store worker. Even if that means I'm abnormal and can't make a living and drop down dead, I can't escape that fact. My very cells exist for the convenience store." (Murata, 2019, p. 161)

In the scene above, Keiko realizes that her existence is more than just a person; she is a convenience store worker. Despite being labeled abnormal by those around her, Keiko accepts that the convenience store has become an integral part of her identity and serves as her *ibasho*. "Ibasho" is a Japanese phrase that means "a place where one feels at home, being oneself." It provides a sense of belonging and purpose through social connections (World Bank, 2019). In Keiko's case, the convenience store served as her *ibasho* because she felt she belonged there and could be herself through her role as a convenience store worker. She remains convinced of her deep connection to the convenience store, which has become a part of her being and is deeply embedded in her identity. This is in line with Howard Becker's master status and shows that certain social labels

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become far more dominant than other identities. In this context, society views Keiko's master status as deviant because she continues to work part-time at the convenience store into adulthood and does not live a life that is considered normal. As a result, the label "deviant" overshadows Keiko's other social identities. However, unlike how society defines her, Keiko defines herself as a convenience store worker. In other words, society imposes the label "deviant" as Keiko's master status. Conversely, Keiko refuses to accept that label as her primary identity and instead defines herself as a convenience store worker.

2. Social Stigma Confronted by Keiko

a. Blemishes of Individual Character

According to Goffman (1963) blemishes of individual character are perceived conditions of moral or psychological weakness, such as weak will, dishonesty, or abnormal desires, which are inferred from a person's life history. When someone is considered to have these traits, these characteristics become very dominant and make society lose focus in assessing their main characteristics. Because of this, people find it hard to accept this person in normal social situations. Instead, they label this person with a stigma. This process creates a distinction between the stigmatized individual and those considered normal. This concept is reflected in Keiko's experience, where her behavior is seen as different from the expected response by those around her. This difference causes his reaction to be judged as inconsistent with prevailing social norms, as shown in the following quote:

> "Shall I get some more?" I asked, glancing at two or three other birds strutting around.
> "Keiko!" my mother exclaimed reprovingly, finally coming to her senses.
> "Let's make a grave for Mr. Budgie and bury him. Look, everyone's crying. His friends must be sad he died. The poor little thing!"
> "But it's *dead*. Let's eat it!"
> (Murata, 2019, p. 7)

In the scene above, Keiko is seen reacting differently to the bird's death than those around her. Her mother and friends are saddened, while Keiko considers adding more birds to their catch. This is further clarified by her statement, "But it's dead. Let's eat it!", which suggests that since the bird is dead, we might as well eat it. This demonstrates that Keiko's emotional response deviates from the social expectations held by those around her. From Goffman's perspective, Keiko's responses are viewed by others as blemishes of individual character because they deviate from socially acceptable emotional responses. From this incident, it can be seen that behavior that deviates from social expectations is easily recognized and sanctioned or reprimanded, thus emphasizing the difference between socially acceptable and unacceptable emotional responses.

In another scene, Keiko is once again seen as different because of her response when she tries to stop a fight between two of her classmates, causing panic and negative reactions from those around her.

> "But everyone was saying to stop Yamazaki-kun and Aoki-kun fighting! I just thought that would be the quickest way to do it", I explained patiently. Why on earth they so angry? I just didn't get it. They held a teacher's meeting, and my mother was called to the school. Seeing her bowing to the teachers, apologizing over and over, her face strangely

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> serious. I finally realized that maybe I shouldn't have done what I did, but still couldn't understand why. (Murata, 2019, p. 9)

In this excerpt, Keiko impulsively tries to stop a fight between two of her classmates by hitting one of them with a shovel because she believes that is the quickest way to resolve the fight. This is evident in her statement, "I just thought that would be the quickest way to do it." Instead of being praised for successfully stopping the fight, Keiko was met with fear and disapproval. Her teacher is angry, calls a teacher's meeting, and summons her mother to school, where she repeatedly apologizes for Keiko's behavior. Although Keiko eventually realizes that her actions may have been wrong, she still doesn't understand why they were deemed unacceptable. This incident reflects Goffman's concept of blemishes of individual character, as Keiko's response is considered to deviate from the socially accepted ways of resolving conflict. It seems that the people close to her do not wonder whether Keiko intends to end the conflict but rather criticize her approach, indicating how socially acceptable standards are linked to assessments of proper conduct.

Another event that illustrates the same tendency is one in which Keiko responded to an emotional outburst by a teacher in a way that deviated from cultural expectations. The following extract depicts her efforts to settle the situation:

> So in order to shut her up I ran over and yanked her skirt and knickers down. She was shocked she burst into tears, but at least she became quiet. (Murata, 2019, pp. 9-10)

In this scene, Keiko tries to stop a female teacher who is crying hysterically and screaming by pulling on her skirt and underwear. For Keiko, this action is simply the quickest way to stop the commotion, resulting in the teacher immediately becoming silent. However, her actions do not conform to social norms regarding appropriate behavior towards others, especially towards a teacher. This reflects Goffman's concept of blemishes of individual character, where individual behavior that differs is considered a weakness because Keiko resolves the situation in a way that is different from what is considered socially acceptable. Instead of considering the emotional and social consequences of her behavior, Keiko only focuses on the most practical way. As a result, this response is considered inappropriate by those around her because it goes against the prevailing social norms. The reactions of those around Keiko indicate that her behavior is evaluated based on prevailing social norms rather than the intentions behind her actions.

b. Stigma Management

Keiko uses Goffman's management strategies to maintain her social image and cope with social pressure. She uses these strategies to withstand that pressure by adapting to society, so her social interactions go more smoothly. In the Japanese cultural context, this adaptation can be related to *Honne* and *Tatemae*, which emerge in communication through behavior, speech, and language. *Honne* refers to a speaker's genuine feelings, intentions, and desires, which are not displayed publicly. In contrast, *Tatemae* refers to a speaker's feelings, appearance, and desires that are displayed for various reasons or purposes, such as obedience to superiors, politeness to the interlocutor, or avoiding the offense or embarrassment of others (Palindi, 2020; Furuoka & Kato, 2008). This cultural distinction can be seen in Keiko's efforts to adapt her

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behavior to social expectations, which are often dictated by societal norms and values. Keiko uses two main strategies to manage the stigma associated with her: passing and covering.

Passing

Goffman (1963) defines passing as a strategy in which individuals actively conceal unseen characteristics that prevent them from interacting in social settings as normal people, even as they overcome the psychological stress inherent in leading a double life. Keiko employs this strategy when she invites Shiraha to live with her, creating the impression that the two are in a romantic relationship in the eyes of society in order to gain acceptance. She deliberately lets her friends believe that they are in a relationship, using this as a way to conceal her stigmatized social status. In this way, Keiko successfully blends in, as illustrated in the following scene:

> Everyone seemed happier than when I'd told them I'd never been in love, and they were carrying on as if they knew everything about my situation. The previous me—who'd never fallen in love or had sex, who'd never had a proper job—had sometimes been hard to read. But everything about the new me—the one who had Shiraha living with her—was clear, even my future. (Murata, 2019, p. 112)

In this scene, Keiko feels that everyone around her seems happier and more accepting of her simply because she is in a relationship with Shiraha, her coworker, who faces the same situation as her: single and unemployed. Previously, when she had stated that she had never been in a romantic relationship and did not have a stable job, Keiko was considered strange. However, after starting a relationship with Shiraha, she feels accepted, and her future seems very clear, or at least brighter. This shows that being in a relationship in adulthood is considered the norm and conforms to social expectations. Therefore, when someone is not in a relationship, they are labeled as strange. The strategy Keiko uses is Goffman's concept of passing, where individuals facing stigma attempt to hide and disguise their identity or personality that is considered deviant. In this context, Keiko attempts to hide her social status by pretending to be in a relationship with Shiraha. This action demonstrates that individuals who are considered deviant try to hide their status by pretending to be normal to gain acceptance from the wider community.

In another scene, Keiko employs a passing strategy by providing a socially acceptable explanation for her reasons for working as a part-time worker at a convenience store, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

> I've made it known among old friends that I have certain health issues that make it more convenient for me to have a part-time job. At my workplace, I tell them it's because my parents are ill and I need to care for them. I have my sister to thank for thinking up these excuses for me. (Murata, 2019, p. 35)

The scene above shows Keiko explaining to her old friends that she has a health issue, which is why she works part-time at a convenience store. Meanwhile, at work, Keiko gives the reason that her parents are sick and she needs to take care of them. Instead of saying she has chosen to continue working part-time at the convenience store, Keiko uses these excuses to gain greater acceptance from society. This action shows that Keiko is conforming to social pressures and expectations that view full-time employment as the standard for adults. This action is

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representative of Goffman's concept of passing, in which individuals conceal stigmatized qualities by presenting a more socially acceptable identity or explanation. In this case, Keiko gives several explanations for her part-time work at the convenience store that seem logical to others. This method allows her to successfully project an image of herself, which fulfills the standards of society and does not lead to negative judgment from other people.

Covering

Goffman (1963) defines covering as a strategy people use when their stigma is already known or clearly visible to others. In these cases, people no longer try to hide the stigma, but instead try to reduce its visibility so they do not draw attention to themselves in face-to-face situations. The aim is to ease tension and allow interactions to take place more naturally. Keiko's decision to imitate Izumi, her coworker's style of dress to match other women her age and make her differences less obvious is evidence of this strategy, as seen in the following quote:

> Outside work Mrs. Izumi is rather flashy, but she dresses the way normal women in their thirties do, so I take cues from the brand of shoes she wears and the label of the coats in her locker. (Murata, 2019, p. 26)

In the excerpt above, Keiko observes Izumi's style of dress by noting the brands of the shoes and coat she wears. She does this because she believes that Izumi, who is her age, dresses according to the standards for women her age. Rather than choosing clothes based on her own preferences, Keiko relies on Izumi's appearance as a guide for how a woman her age should present herself. This is evident in the fact that her appearance is shaped by social standards rather than by her personal identity. This conduct is in line with Goffman's concept of covering, in which individuals try to make stigmatized differences less visible, rather than completely hidden. Keiko's appearance becomes more like that of her co-workers so that the differences which make her seem socially out of place are reduced. In the process, her clothes become a way of fitting in with her environment, rather than a way of self-expression.

In another excerpt, Keiko mimics Izumi and Sugawara—her coworkers' speech patterns by imitating and combining the ways they speak, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

> Yes! It was at that celebration barbecue, wasn't it? There were lots of us there that time. Oh, what fun that was!" I said excitedly, mixing Mrs. Izumi and Sugawara's speech patterns. (Murata, 2019, p. 32)

The above quote shows how Keiko participates in conversation by imitating Izumi and Sugawara's distinctive speech styles, even blending them. This behavior suggests that Keiko consciously imitates the speech styles of those around her and is reluctant to use her own. She views her coworkers' speech styles as models for how she should communicate in everyday social situations. This represents Goffman's concept of covering, in which stigmatized individuals try to hide the visibility of their differences. In her speech pattern, Keiko changes it to be less noticeable in her daily interactions so that she can more easily fit into her social environment. This implies that people who experience stigma adjust their behavior to lower the visibility of perceived disparities and conform more closely to dominant societal standards.

In another excerpt, Keiko mimics Sugawara's facial expression to give the impression that she feels the same way about a new worker.

> Hearing the two of them speak with such feeling, I felt a twinge of anxiety. There wasn't a trace of anger in my body. I stole a glance at

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> Sugawara and tried to mimic the way she moved her facial muscles as she spoke, the same way I did in training, and parroted, "Really, he left us in the lurch again? I can't believe he'd do that knowing how short-staffed we are." (Murata, 2019, p. 28)

In this excerpt, Keiko feels anxious because she cannot express her anger in the same way as her friends. So, she imitates Sugawara's speech patterns and facial expressions when trying to vent those emotions. Keiko doesn't understand why the situation demands that she feel angry too. Consequently, she chooses to mimic Sugawara's way of expressing anger so that her response matches that of the people around her. This shows that Keiko imitates the facial expressions and gestures her friend displays as a form of self-adjustment when faced with a situation that requires her to display certain emotions. This attitude is in line with Goffman's concept of covering, whereby an individual uses strategies to lower the visibility of their differences in social situations. In this situation, Keiko tries to reduce the distance between the ways she conveys her feelings by imitating Sugawara's expressions and emotional reactions. In other words, when a person notices a gap between themselves and social standards, they are likely to change their conduct so the gap is less visible and social contact can occur more smoothly.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study concludes that labeling and stigma in the novel *Convenience Store Woman* demonstrate how social norms shape Keiko's identity and influence her strategies for conforming to social expectations. According to Howard Becker's labeling theory, the evidence of Keiko's deviance is explained by the concept of *deviance as a social construction*. Furthermore, within the concept of the *moral entrepreneur* shows that the people around Keiko also play a role in upholding social norms. Ultimately, this labeling pressure shapes Keiko's *master status*, while she defines herself primarily as a convenience store worker. Based on Erving Goffman's stigma theory, this study examines Keiko's type of stigma, namely *blemishes of individual character*, as indicated by her irregular daily conduct. To counteract the negative consequences of this stigma, Keiko adopts *stigma management* strategies such as *passing* and *covering*. Her attempts to conceal the stigma she faces are exhibited through her making up explanations about her work at the convenience store and pretending to have a relationship with her coworkers. Meanwhile, covering involves minimizing or hiding stigmatizing features by copying her friends' clothes, voice, and facial expressions when she talks to others. This study focuses on the necessity of understanding the dynamics of stigma, labeling, and identification in a societal context, and the influence of social norms on self-perception. Future research may employ different theoretical approaches to evaluate literary works to offer a wider view on identity, social norms, and deviance.

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