



Qualitative Analysis of Female Oppression and Internalized Obsession through the Lens of Tony Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

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ABSTRACT

Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye is an in-depth analysis of racism, sexism, and classism which depicts how African American women and girls are oppressed in the middle of the 20th century. Tragic obsession with blue eyes of Pecola Breedlove, the protagonist of the novel, represents how society rejects blackness and internalized white beauty standards. This paper presents a qualitative analysis of female oppression and internalized obsession in The Bluest Eye, highlighting the ways in which sexism and racism, as other societal influences, affect identity and self-worth. The study shows how social rejection and beauty standards create generations- long cycles of psychological pain and self-hatred through Pecola's story and the experiences of other women. It highlights Morrison's criticism of these damaging ideas and also how families and communities support or reject these oppressive forces. It also explores how to escape oppressive structures by rejecting unrealistic beauty standards, self-love, and finding support from the community.

KEYWORDS: *Oppression, internalized racism, beauty standards, African American women, psychological trauma, self-hatred, societal pressures, identity.*

INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* explores the deep impact of racism, sexism, and classism on African American girls and women in the United States during the mid-20th century. Morrison demonstrates how cultural standards shape, how people see themselves and others, often distorting their sense of self-worth. She focuses on how beauty ideals are created, maintained, and sometimes challenged, and how they affect individuals and society as a whole. Mahdi (2015) finds that Morrison tries to show the challenges those black women faces, which hold them back from growing and succeeding in society. These challenges include both external discrimination and internalized oppression. The novel is set in a society that values white beauty standards, making it difficult for black girls to see their own worth. Nurhayati (2019) argues that the belief in white superiority leads to discrimination and injustice, particularly against Black people, who are considered to be inferior within that society. The very way of belief deeply influences the self-perception of black women and girls, as they navigate a world that constantly devalues them. The novel shows how these ideals shape the way black women and girls see themselves, often leading them to self-hatred and despair.

The story centers on Pecola Breedlove, a young black girl who becomes obsessed with the idea of having blue eyes,

believing that they will make her beautiful, loved, and accepted in a world that rejects her. Her desire for blue eyes symbolizes a longing to conform to the white beauty standards that dominate her society. Tripathy (2020) discovers that the novel examines how the white American beauty standard harms Pecola as she grows, eroding her sense of identity and self-worth. She also adds that Morrison shows how these false beauty standards make a young black girl feel bad about herself, thinking she's not good enough, weak, and unattractive. Pecola's obsession with blue eyes serves as a metaphor for the larger social problem of how internalising racial inferiority and self-hatred can result from beauty standards.

This paper looks at how Pecola's desire for blue eyes, along with the experiences of other women in the novel, highlights the harmful effects of racism and self-hatred. It focuses on how these societal pressures, racism and sexism affect people's sense of self and creates a cycle of pain that gets passed down through generations. By examining Pecola's tragic story, this analysis shows how the novel comments on the damaging effects of beauty standards and the systems that define a person's worth based on surface-level and limiting standards. The novel emphasizes how these pressures not only harm individuals but also perpetuate systemic inequality and societal divisions.

The contextual setting of the novel must be taken into consideration to fully understand its themes. The novel environment shows the influence and popularity of white culture, which was prevalent during the time. White people were highly valued in society at that time, so they took advantage of that status and used black people, exploiting them economically, socially, and emotionally. According to Braine (2022), the research shows that Toni Morrison effectively portrays how the standard of white beauty and racism impacted the lives of black girls and women during the Great Depression, a period marked by intense racial isolation and economic hardship. Mahdi (2015) highlights that black women face two types of oppression: they are excluded from fully participating in their society, and they are ignored by both white and black people. They were always neglected and dominated in society, often seen as invisible or as mere tools to be used by others.

Pecola's obsession with blue eyes is a result of her experiences and how society treats her, highlighting the destructive power of societal rejection and marginalization. At the very outset of the novel, Pecola is a fragile and sensitive child, but by the end, she has been deeply harmed by racism, self-hatred, and the loss of her sense of identity. Her obsession with beauty leads her to a tragic situation where she becomes detached from reality, believing that acquiring blue eyes will solve her problems. Pecola's tragedy underscores the destructive effects of internalized racism and societal rejection, showing how deeply beauty standards can affect one's mental health and self-perception.

Pecola represents how the black community can sometimes internalize society's negative views and come to hate themselves, believing they are ugly and unworthy. More or less, all the female characters are victims of the oppression of beauty standards in one way or another, each suffering in silence or open struggle. Pecola's tragedy stands out the most, even characters who receive less sympathy, like Pauline, are also victims in their own right, dealing with their forms of self-hatred and societal pressure. Through this discussion, the paper aims to uncover how Morrison portrays the struggles of women of color, showing how internalized racism, societal obsession with beauty, and oppression hurt individuals and perpetuate inequality across generations. Morrison's narrative is a powerful call to examine and break down the structures that enforce these damaging beauty ideals and social systems.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The novel looks at how racism, beauty standards, and societal pressures harm African American women emotionally and mentally. It focuses on Pecola Breedlove, a character who becomes obsessed with white beauty, which leads to her tragic downfall. By exploring female oppression and internalized obsession in *The Bluest Eye*, it uncovers critical themes, like how race and gender are connected, how beauty standards affect mental health, and how self-hatred can have serious consequences. Additionally, the novel delves into how society's narrow definition of beauty leads Pecola to believe

that she is unworthy and invisible. Her desire for blue eyes becomes a symbol of her yearning for acceptance in a world that values white people and dismisses her because of her race and gender. Morrison shows that Pecola's obsession is not just personal, but a result of the larger societal forces that force African American women to conform to unrealistic standards. This portrayal helps understand how these standards can lead to depression, low self-esteem, and even a sense of hopelessness. Morrison also highlights how black families, especially in impoverished communities, often struggle to break free from these societal pressures. Pecola's family, rather than offering support, mirrors the dysfunction and pain caused by these oppressive forces. Through this, the novel brings attention to how systemic racism and sexism impact not just individuals but entire communities, leading to cycles of suffering and internalized trauma.

In *The Bluest Eye*, a key theme is how African American women face oppression because of their race and gender. Scholars say that Pecola's struggles show how black women suffer from multiple layers of discrimination in a society dominated by white people and men. Mahdi (2015) states that Morrison not only blames white society for oppressing black women but also criticizes black men for being sexist toward their women. Pecola's wish for blue eyes, which represent whiteness and Western beauty standards, shows how deeply she has absorbed these harmful ideas. This highlights how racial oppression becomes even worse when combined with traditional ideas about how women should behave. Braine (2022) highlights that the novel successfully shows how women in that society faced the horrors of racial oppression, along with violations of their rights and harsh treatment. According to Nurhayati (2019), black women face unique challenges because of both racism and sexism and racism puts them in a lower position compared to white women, due to white supremacy. She also added that sexism means their experiences are different from those of black men and in America's male-dominated society; women are often treated as less important than men. Their lives were made even more miserable by the actions of the men around them.

One of the main themes in *The Bluest Eye* is the psychological damage caused by the obsession with white beauty standards. Karim and Idrus (2020) finds that *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison have focused on issues like racism, internalized racism, class struggles, gender discrimination, African American culture and traditions, black identity, self-hatred, the influence of blues music, beauty standards, the oppression of children, trauma, black feminism, and sexism. Many scholars have analyzed the novel's depiction of Pecola's desire for blue eyes as a metaphor for internalized racism. According to Tripathy (2020), Pecola believes that people will only love, admire, and accept her if she changes how she looks and this shows how much she dislikes and rejects her own appearance because of racial prejudice. Her desire for blue eyes symbolizes a deep psychological trauma; she wants to escape her black identity because she feels it's not good enough. Rose et al. (2024) finds that through Pecola's emotional journey and the similar experiences of characters

like Pauline and Cholly Breedlove, Morrison uncovers the unfairness in society and shows the deep trauma and mental struggles faced by marginalized people. This reflects how society pressures African American women to follow white beauty standards, even though these standards are impossible to reach. Sulaiman (2022) states that society beauty standard and white people's opinions suggested that if black women or the African-American community met these expectations, they would be accepted into mainstream society and because of this, many black people worked hard to fit in and follow these societal norms. The characters who contribute to Pecola's internalized obsession, such as her mother, Cholly, and the community, all contribute to the harmful idea that beauty is linked to being white.

Morrison's story also shows how family and community can help spread oppression and harmful beliefs. Muhlisin and Sudewi (2023) states that families struggle to meet the needs of their members, leading to an imbalance in family life and in such an unhealthy environment, Pecola's personality became unstable. Karim and Idrus (2020) finds that the father drinks too much, and the mother hates herself, they are not good parents and can't properly care for or show love to their daughter. Both Pecola's parents and the larger African American community fail to protect her or help her reject these damaging beauty standards. Pecola's mother, Pauline, herself internalizes white beauty ideals, which she applies to her own life and to her daughter. The lack of love from her family and the rejection Pecola faces from her community show the harmful effects of internalized racism. According to Nriagu (2023) Pecola's self-hatred about her race is influenced by her community and her parents, who are part of the same community, have inherited this trauma as well, which affects her mental health. She also added Pecola's mental breakdown comes from problems inside and outside her, influenced by both her parents and her community. Sulaiman (2022) finds that the author emphasizes how important it is for parents to show love and set a good example, helping their child develop a strong and healthy sense of identity. Morrison also criticizes how society can stop black families from offering the support needed to fight against external oppression.

The psychological trauma that Pecola experiences as a result of her internalized obsession is a major subject of analysis in literature on *The Bluest Eye*. Pecola's eventual madness is portrayed as a desperate attempt to escape the harsh reality of her life. Karim and Idrus (2020) finds that the novel shows how ideas spread by powerful groups, and accepted by smaller groups, affect the identity of dark-skinned women and Morrison's characters, broken by the idea of white beauty, become trapped in self-hatred, and their only goal in life is to look white. She believes that by attaining blue eyes, she can become beautiful, loved, and accepted. But her obsession only leads to her losing her sense of self, showing how racism and gender oppression can cause mental harm. Rose et al. (2024) states that this trauma came from society's belief that white people were superior and black people were inferior and the

story highlights how black children, in particular, suffer the most from these experiences and this deeply impacts how they see themselves and often causes them to feel broken or disconnected. According to Sofiani et al. (2019), the identity development needs the support of the significant others and surrounding, so the contexts prove that they influence Pecola's life and her identity development.

Research Gap

While *The Bluest Eye* is often analyzed for its critique of white beauty standards and racism, less attention has been given to how Morrison illustrates the role of the black community in perpetuating these harmful ideas. Much of the existing research focuses on Pecola's family issues and her rejection by the community, but it doesn't fully address how the black community's belief in white ideals contributes to self-hatred and isolation. While some studies touch on intergenerational trauma, they don't delve deeply into how this trauma, combined with societal pressures, shapes an individual's sense of identity. The key missing element understands how Morrison uses the relationships between Pecola, her family, and the broader community to show how oppression is repeatedly passed down and spread within black communities. This study aims to explore how the black community in *The Bluest Eye* helps perpetuate damaging ideas that diminish self-esteem and identity, offering a new perspective on how both community and society play roles in maintaining oppression.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative methodology to examine Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, focusing on key themes such as racism, self-hatred, beauty standards, and trauma, specifically analyzing how these issues impact the life of Pecola Breedlove. The research places particular emphasis on the effects of racism and societal beauty ideals, exploring how they shape the characters' understanding of their own identities and the broader implications of these beliefs on their self-worth. In addition to examining the characters' internal struggles, the study investigates the ways in which these issues are reinforced and perpetuated within the community, contributing to the cycles of trauma and self-loathing. A comprehensive understanding of the themes in *The Bluest Eye* is facilitated through the use of a range of secondary sources, including essays, journal articles, and other academic resources. These sources offer additional insights into how social forces such as systemic racism, class divisions, and colorism influence the characters' perceptions of themselves and their place within society. By drawing on these external perspectives, the study enriches the analysis of the novel's treatment of race, beauty, insecurity, and identity. The methods employed include close reading and thematic analysis of the text, which are supplemented by historical and cultural context to provide a fuller picture of the societal pressures. This combination of textual and secondary research methods allows for a deeper exploration of the ways in which Morrison's novel critiques and reflects the pervasive social dynamics of race and beauty.

DISCUSSION

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* closely examines the struggles of African American women, particularly young girls like Pecola Breedlove, who face the harsh realities of racism, sexism, and unrealistic beauty standards. These pressures deeply affect their self-esteem, identity, and mental well-being. Pecola, who longs for blue eyes, believes that having them will make her beautiful and loved, a reflection of how society values whiteness over blackness. Through Pecola's tragic journey, Morrison highlights the harmful effects of both societal discrimination and internalized self-hatred, showing how they continue a pattern of suffering. Pecola's experiences shed light on the unique challenges black women face when their race and gender make them targets of rejection and prejudice. This intersection of race and gender highlights the compound nature of the oppression Pecola faces, demonstrating how deeply ingrained societal standards shape her sense of worth and value in the world.

Morrison's portrayal of Pecola's struggles highlights the intersectionality of race and gender, emphasizing how these dual forms of oppression compound her suffering. Pecola internalizes the societal standards of beauty that idolize whiteness and blonde hair, leading her to yearn for blue eyes as a symbol of acceptance and love. This desire reflects how deeply racism and sexism can damage self-perception and self-worth. The novel also shows how black women, like Pecola's mother Pauline, often accept and perpetuate these harmful beliefs, making their effects even worse. Pauline's own internalized racism is evident in the way she admires the white family she works for, elevating them while rejecting her own children. This deeply rooted hatred for her Blackness creates a cycle of neglect and emotional damage for Pecola. Pauline's preference for the white family over her own children is a clear sign of how deeply racism can influence the individual psyche, sometimes leading to a distorted sense of identity and misplaced priorities. The problems black women face are not just from outside society but also within their own families. Cholly, for example, cannot handle the way he is mistreated by white people, so he tries to control and hurt those around him, especially the women. This shows how the pain from racism can lead to violence and hurt people in ways that spread through families. Cholly's inability to break free from his own history of abuse and racism only perpetuates the damage to his family. His anger, frustration, and confusion come from a larger system of oppression that leaves him struggling to maintain any form of self-worth or dignity. Morrison's story shows how being both black and a woman brings unique and deep struggles that are often overlooked. Through Pecola's tragic story, the novel highlights the need to understand these combined difficulties in order to create a fairer and kinder world where people are not judged based on race or gender.

Pecola's obsession with blue eyes is also a reflection of her deep sense of alienation and powerlessness. In a world where everything around her reinforces the idea that blackness is inferior, she believes that changing her appearance is the

only way she can gain acceptance and love. The constant comparison to white beauty standards makes her feel invisible and worthless. This desire for blue eyes becomes a desperate escape from the pain of rejection, as she imagines that having blue eyes would grant her a sense of belonging and worth that she has never experienced. Pecola believes that physical beauty, which is symbolized by having blue eyes, will bring her the validation and love that she has been denied all through her life. This desire reflects a deeply ingrained belief that physical beauty equals worth and acceptance in society, which she has been taught by both white culture and the black community. Pauline's internalized racism further reinforces Pecola's belief that whiteness is superior. Pauline's obsession with the white family's appearance and lifestyle leads her to neglect her own children, showing how deep the internalized hatred of blackness runs. Her preference for the white family over her own children shows how racism is not only about external oppression but can also be internalized and passed down through generations. Her lack of care and emotional support from her mother contributes to Pecola's isolation and growing sense of worthlessness. Pauline's psychological dissonance, where she sacrifices her own family for the idealized version of whiteness, deeply affects Pecola's emotional development. Pecola's own inability to meet these distorted standards of beauty leaves her further isolated from her own family and the world around her. The harmful cycle of self-hatred and rejection continues to hurt Pecola, showing how deeply racism and internalized racism can damage both individuals and families. This cycle, which begins in Pecola's childhood, may continue through generations if society does not address the systemic forces that perpetuate these harmful beliefs.

The way the black community treats Pecola shows how deeply racism and colorism hurt everyone, even within their own group. People with lighter skin, like Maureen Peal, are seen as more attractive and often look down on darker-skinned people like Pecola, reinforcing the harmful belief that beauty and worth are tied to skin color. This internalized colorism creates divisions within the black community, where lighter-skinned individuals are often viewed as more attractive or deserving of attention, while darker-skinned individuals like Pecola are pushed to the margins. Geraldine represents a strict, idealized version of black respectability that excludes those who don't meet her standards. She rejects Pecola, not just because of how she looks, but also because Pecola doesn't fit Geraldine's narrow view of how black people should behave. Geraldine's rejection of Pecola is a painful reminder of how racism and colorism can be self-reinforcing, where individuals who have suffered from societal oppression adopt harmful standards and treat others who are perceived as weaker or less acceptable with the same cruelty. The cruelty Pecola faces from her own community adds to her pain. Instead of finding comfort and understanding, she is met with rejection and judgment from people who have also been hurt by the same oppressive forces. This division makes it harder for the community to come together and fight against bigger issues like racism

and inequality. Pecola's rejection by both white society and her own community makes her feel trapped, with nowhere to belong. Through these relationships, Morrison shows that racism and colorism not only hurt individuals but also divide communities. This fragmentation weakens collective efforts to challenge systemic injustice. The black community's inability to give Pecola the love and support she needs shows how deeply oppression affects everyone, even in places where you would expect to find unity and understanding.

Over time, the constant rejection and cruelty Pecola faces take a serious toll on her mental health. To Pecola, blue eyes symbolize beauty and worth, something she believes she needs to be seen and valued by others. She thinks that with blue eyes, her life would change for the better. As her obsession grows, Pecola starts to lose touch with reality. She imagines that she has blue eyes and escapes into a world of fantasy world where she finally feels accepted. However, this fantasy only isolates her further, making her more detached from the real world. Pecola's attempt to create her own reality by imagining herself as someone with blue eyes reflects the extent to which external societal pressures have eroded her sense of self. Pecola begins to fantasize not only as a means of escape, but also as a coping mechanism to numb the pain caused by her reality. Pecola's story shows how harmful society's standards of beauty and acceptance can be, especially for black girls like her. The constant rejection and prejudice she faces lead her to reject herself, and this ultimately causes her to break down mentally. This psychological deterioration is a consequence of the trauma caused by a system that devalues her existence based on the color of her skin. The mental toll of these oppressive forces is a major theme of the novel, showing that racial discrimination does not just harm individuals physically, but emotionally and psychologically as well. Toni Morrison's way of telling the story in *The Bluest Eye* is fragmented, jumping between different times and perspectives. This style reflects Pecola's broken mental state, making it clear how deeply she has been hurt by her experiences. The story is not just about Pecola's personal struggles, but also about the larger societal issues of racism and the unrealistic beauty standards that damage people's sense of self-worth. Through Pecola's tragic journey, Morrison highlights the cruel effects of these standards, showing how they can destroy a person's identity and sense of belonging. Pecola's desire for blue eyes represents her desperate wish to be loved and accepted in a world that has constantly rejected her. Her tragic end emphasizes the devastating consequences of a society that enforces beauty standards based on whiteness, leaving people like Pecola to feel invisible and unworthy.

Morrison also shows how the black community and families can fight against these harmful ideas through care and support. While Pecola's family doesn't help her, characters like Claudia and Frieda, along with their parents, try to protect her from the pressure to fit into white beauty standards. Claudia especially rejects the idea that white beauty is superior. She even destroys white dolls, showing her anger at these unfair ideas and her pride in being black. Claudia's

destruction of the dolls represents a form of resistance, a way to reject the harmful messages that have been ingrained in her from an early age. This act of rebellion is a powerful statement about reclaiming black beauty and rejecting the notion that whiteness is the standard for attractiveness or worth. Additionally, Morrison shows how the community can be a source of strength and support. Although Claudia and Frieda can't save Pecola, their effort to plant marigolds as a symbol of hope shows they won't give up. This act is a small but powerful way of resisting the forces that try to make them feel worthless. The marigold planting signifies that despite the hardships they face, there is always hope for a better future. The narrative suggests that while individual efforts like those of Claudia and Frieda may not be enough to save Pecola, they take crucial steps toward breaking the cycle of self-hatred and pain. By standing up against harmful beauty standards and supporting each other, there's hope that the cycle of self-hatred and pain can be broken, and future generations can learn to love and value themselves.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison shows how racism, sexism, and narrow beauty standards hurt people, especially black girls and women. The story of Pecola Breedlove reveals how these pressures can make someone feel worthless and destroy their sense of identity. Morrison criticizes the media and culture for promoting ideas of beauty that make people like Pecola feel they don't belong. Pecola believes having blue eyes would make her beautiful and valued, like the white dolls and movie stars she admires. The novel also shows how racism and poverty break families and isolate individuals. Pecola's family struggles with abuse and hardship, which only makes things worse for her. They can't give her the love and support she needs because they are dealing with their own pain caused by society's discrimination. Despite the sadness in Pecola's story, *The Bluest Eye* encourages readers to challenge these harmful beliefs. Characters like Claudia and Frieda MacTeer show that it's possible to resist these ideas. They don't accept the idea that only white beauty is valuable and try to protect Pecola in their own way. Morrison highlights the importance of community, family, and self-love in fighting against racism and helping people heal. She shows that by telling their own stories and valuing themselves, marginalized people can begin to heal and grow stronger. The book calls on readers to create a world where everyone is accepted and loved for who they are, not judged by unfair standards. In the end, *The Bluest Eye* reminds us that love, understanding, and strong communities are key to resisting oppression and finding healing for those who have been hurt by it. By fostering environments where everyone is valued for their true selves, we can begin to dismantle the harmful structures that perpetuate oppression and self-hatred.

CONCLUSION

In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison presents a powerful critique of the intersecting forces of racism, sexism, and societal beauty standards that oppress African American women, especially young girls like Pecola Breedlove. Through Pecola's tragic journey, Morrison shows how these societal pressures

not only damage individual's self-worth and identity but also maintain a cycle of pain and self-hatred that is passed down through generations. Pecola's desire for blue eyes symbolizes her desperate need to escape the identity forced on her by a society that values whiteness and disrespects Blackness. Morrison shows the difficult relationship between race and gender in the lives of African American women. These women not only suffer from racism but also from beauty standards that make them feel unworthy. The novel criticizes these harmful beauty ideals, showing how they trap people in the cycle of rejection, self-hatred and mental suffering. Despite the struggles, characters like Claudia and Frieda against the idea that whiteness equals beauty and try to console Pecola in their own ways. Through them Morrison suggests that healing is possible through self-love, community support and rejecting harmful societal ideals. The novel reminds us how damaging societal beauty standards can be and the importance of understanding racism and sexism. Morrison inspires us to value people for not by the standards set by a dominant culture. By showing the obsession with whiteness and the resulting harm in the Black community, the book challenges readers to consider their beliefs and work toward a loving society. Morrison uses different characters perspectives to show how badly racism and sexism affect people. The Breedlove family represents how these societal forces cause pain and breakdown with Pecola's parents, Cholly and Pauline, convey their own trauma that leads to more suffering within the family. The story also shows how internalized racism, like Pauline's belief in white beauty standards, breaks a person's sense of self. This leads characters to try to fit into an impossible ideal, which only causes more harm. Soaphead Church's character, who cheats Pecola, shows how even institutions like religion fail to help in a society filled with damage. Morrison's use of symbols like flower represents the possible for growth that is crushed by a harmful environment. In facing these tough realities, *The Bluest Eye* doesn't avoid from showing the struggles of African Americans but also offers a message of toughness and strength. By showing these complex characters and their struggles, Morrison highlights the need for societal change and creating a world where everyone can grow, free from the boundaries of race, gender and beauty standards.

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