



Popular Culture and Identity Formation in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

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Abstract

The theme of identity is one of the recurrent themes in Afro-American literature. In America blacks were exploited, humiliated for more than three hundred years because they are black, ugly and poor. They are whipped, slashed segregated by dominant white people. As the time pass by Afro American writers started delineating their humiliation, wretched condition in America. The present paper analyses the concept of invisibility and identity crisis of the main characters in the novel *The Bluest Eye*.

Key words: identity, poverty, humiliation, whit.

In our society culture is established by the people with most power and their actions, beliefs are considered dominant. Dominant people spread their ideologies through institutions such as education, religion and politics by suppressing minority cultures. Identity is a socially and historically constructed concept, of which we learn through interactions with; family, peers, social institutions, the media, and such other connections that we make in our everyday lives. *The Bluest Eye* addresses the social forces that drive understanding and definition of cultural constructs such as beauty, normalcy, family, and sexuality. These constructs are a particular issue for African- American communities that often are excluded from representation. The novel demonstrated the difficulties of Afro American young girls' survival and their growth in white society. The Afro –American literature throws light an provide keen insight on black's quest for identity and their struggle to find their self in white land .Through the wretched character of Pecola , Pauline breedlove and Cholly Breedlove ,*Toni Morrison* reveals the destructive impact of social hierarchies and of social invisibility in *The Bluest Eye*.

Pecola Breedlove: is the protagonist in the novel, is ill-treated because she is black and ugly. Pecola is the eleven-year-old black girl around whom the story revolves. She is abused by almost everyone in the novel. Tormented and even tortured by almost everyone with whom she comes into contact, Pecola never fights back. If she had had the inner strength of Claudia and Frieda, she would have been able to counter the meanness of others toward her by assuming a meanness of her own. She does not. She is always the victim, always the object of others' wrath. She thinks that because of her ugly physical appearance people disrespect her. She thought, if she changes her appearance, she can be loved by all .So that onwards started wishing for blue eyes. Pecola believed that only when she has blue eyes then only she can transcend from her ugliness to live in that white dominant world. The white standard and concept of beauty is a girl/ boy should have white skin, blue eyes, blonde hair. But the blacks all these and looks ugly, so they struggled psychologically and physically to reach that standard, but in this venture, they started despising their own color and self. Pecola is ignored and

despised by her own family and friends, which created feeling of self hatred in Pecola. She feels that she is not good enough to be loved. She suffers from her own father, mother and strangers and other children. At the very tender age of eleven raped and impregnated by her father and driven into madness from the persistent abuse, but continues to search for blue eyes to cure her alleged ugliness and societal rejection. At the end she fails to fulfill her desire and became insane. She internalizes society's racism and allows this to reaffirm an already weakened perception of her and her low esteem disables Pecola to form herself. She is unable to experience relationships and relate to others, which are key aspect in forming an identity. Throughout the novel physical beauty affects the self esteem of every character. Pecola believed that only when she has blue eyes than only she can transcend from her ugliness to live in the dominant world. So to acquire that blue eyes she worships beautiful white models. She always wished to drink milk in a cup which has the picture of Shirley Temple and wishes to buy Mary Jane candies and admires blue eyed, blonde haired girl on the wrapper. She falsely believed that by drinking milk in that cup and eating Mary Jane candies which have the beautiful white images would provide her beautiful blue eyes. But her craziness and desire is not fulfilled instead she became mad.

Pauline: Through the family of Breedlove, Morrison shows the horrid impact of dominant culture on blacks. They face conflict between their real self and ideal standard of white society. Pauline, the mother of Pecola affected by white society. She has deformity on her foot. Her deformity led her to humiliation in the society. She was isolated from other women. She lives the life of a lonely and isolated character who escapes into a world of dreams, hopes, and fantasy that turns into the movies she enjoys viewing. However, after a traumatic event with a foul tooth, she relinquishes those dreams and escapes into her life as a housekeeper for a rich white family who gives her the beloved nickname "Polly." In her family she does not care for her own children. She hates and ignored her daughter Pecola because she does not reach the criteria as she wants in her daughter. Pauline,

saddled with an alcoholic husband, a rootless son, and an ugly daughter, turns to a picture-perfect white family for happiness and fulfillment. Transformed herself into the white family's "perfect servant," she becomes Polly, parroting the Fishers' white attitudes and even consoling the little pink-and-white Fisher girl at the expense of her own confused and injured daughter's feelings. This tendency of Pauline shows the impact of dominant culture in which blacks' strive to get their identity

Cholly: Cholly Breedlove is one of the male characters in *The Bluest Eye* whose life is negatively impacted by his inability to identify with his ancestral past. Cholly is abandoned by his father before his birth, abandoned by his mother nine days after birth, and is rescued and raised by his grandmother who does not hesitate to remind him that he owes her his life. Cholly is unable to have bond with his parents, and his grandmother, even though she takes it upon herself to save Cholly and raise him, remains at an emotional distance. Not only is the failure to progress beyond the first stage of development to blame for Cholly's fractured identity, but Cholly is also disturbed by the fact that he is not his father's namesake. Cholly's formation of self-identity is delayed not only by the abandonment of his birth parents but also by the origin of his name. Cholly is upset because he is not named after his father, but instead he is the namesake of a distant relative who is deceased before Cholly is born. The origin of one's self is important in identity formation Since Cholly cannot identify with anyone he is related to, he lacks any resemblance of a sense of self and his maturation is stunted, which makes it easier for Cholly to internalize society's racism. Cholly's first encounter with sex, a natural human experience, is perverted by two white hunters. As Cholly tried to stand up and dress himself, the hunters shined their flashlights on the couple and ordered Cholly to finish. 'With a violence born of total helplessness, he pulled her dress up, lowered his trousers and underwear' (*Bluest* 147). The white hunters repeatedly refer to him as a 'coon' and order him to mate with Darlene like crude animals. The ease with which hunters demand Cholly to continue intercourse with Darlene is reminiscent of the systematic mating strategies

slave owners practiced with only 'breeding' in mind. This humiliating and dehumanizing experience and traumatic events like these influence him to become violent husband and father and creates within Cholly a hatred for women which is demonstrated later in the novel by his domestic violence toward his wife and the molestation of his daughter.

Pecola and her parent's poverty, ugliness and blackness become the source of all unfair treatments and circumstance in the white dominated society. Pecola, the main character in the novel finally at the end raped by her own father which caused her insanity. Pecola, Pauline and Cholly's self hating, diffident, white adoring nature reflects their identity crisis because they feel they have low self esteem and they have insecure feeling in the family as well as in society in which they live-in. At the end we can say that all three major characters fail to fight the oppression which comes from the society. They are unable to accept their real self. They feel insecure and desperate when they are neglected by people in society. They are neglected, humiliated, avoided because they are poor, ugly black nigger. Though they are exploited, neglected and humiliated they cannot fight against it because they have no power. Pecola and her parents just embraced that exploitation, humiliation silently. In the case of Pecola, she just tried to change herself to get admired, put efforts to have blue eyes. It shows her desperate condition to earn love, respect and attention. Through the character of Pecola, Pauline and Cholly Breedlove, Toni Morrison delineated the horrid condition of blacks and their struggle to frame their own identity in white dominated society.

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