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Feminism and conformity in Black Literature
Revisiting Race, Gender, and Identity in Morrison' *The Bluest Eye*

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of Master in Language and Culture**

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Dedications

*To you; my twin, my shadow and light, I dedicate these words. As well
as to you my stranger, I have you memorized by heart.*

Seraph...

*To my loving mother, my sisters, and to everyone that has ever known
me, I dedicate these words to you.*

Elise...

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ABSTRACT

Published in 1970, *Toni Morrison's* *The Bluest Eye* tells the story of a black little girl who is destroyed by feelings of self-loathing and rejection from those around her. This work intends to analyze how the concepts of identity, race and gender are portrayed in the novel, and how they relate to issues of white beauty standards, self-loathing and racial pride. We propose that *The Bluest Eye* is a protest against the adoption of beauty as a positive and universal value, and that the novelist is suggesting the building of wholesome, healthy identities through the connection to the culture and tradition of a community instead of mere copycat, assimilation, and conformity to the dominant white community which leads to neglecting the sense of self that destroys any sign of identity for the African American people. In order to do that, we start by revisiting the concept of race, identity and gender. Then, we examine feminism and how it relates to the author as well as the characters within the novel. Finally, we explore how conformity wasn't the solution to gain respect or acceptance of the white community. Our thesis reflects that instead of supporting the assimilation to the standardized beauty of whiteness, Toni Morrison suggests that the very concept of beauty is harmful and exclusionary. Instead of promoting just the idea that blackness be considered beautiful, the writer proposes that the valorization of African Americans should originate from placing importance on their culture, traditions and connection to the community.

Keywords: *Conformity, Race, Gender, Identity, Feminism, Racism.*

ملخص

تروي قصة العين الأكثر زرقة للكاتبة توني موريسون التي نشرت عام 1970 ، قصة فتاة سوداء صغيرة دمرتها مشاعر الكراهية والرفض من حولها حيث أن الهدف من هذا العمل هو تحليل كيفية تصوير مفاهيم الهوية والعرق والجنس في هته الرواية وكيفية ارتباطها بقضايا معايير الجمال الأبيض وكره الذات والفخر العرقي. نقترح أن العين الأكثر زرقة احتجاج على تبني الجمال كقيمة إيجابية وعالمية، وأن الروائية تقترح بناء هويات صحية من خلال الارتباط بثقافة المجتمع وتقاليدته بدلاً من مجرد التقليد والتوافق مع المجتمع الأبيض المهيمن مما يؤدي إلى إهمال الشعور بالذات الذي يدمر أي علامة لهوية الشعب الأمريكي من أصل أفريقي و من أجل القيام بذلك نبدأ بإعادة النظر في مفهوم العرق والهوية والجنس ثم ندرس النسوية ومدى ارتباطها بالمؤلفة وكذا الشخصيات داخل الرواية و في الأخير نستكشف أن الإمتثال و المطابقة ليس الحل لكسب احترام أو قبول المجتمع الأبيض و تؤكد الرواية انه أنه بدلاً من دعم الاستيعاب لجمال البياض المعياري، نقترح فإن تثمين الأمريكيين الأفارقة أن ينشأ من إعطاء أهمية لثقافتهم وتقاليدهم واتصالهم بالمجتمع .

الكلمات المفتاحية: المطابقة ، العرق، الجنس، الهوية، النسوية، العنصرية

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General Introduction

1.1 The Background of the Research

The Bluest Eye is the first novel published by *Toni Morrison* in 1970; the events take place in Lorain, Ohio (the author's hometown), and tells the story of Pecola an African American girl who grew up following the Great Depression (an economic depression happened during the 1930s). Pecola Breedlove, who descends into madness after being emotionally and physically abused on several occasions by the entire community around her, especially by her family, was regarded as ugly due to her mannerism and dark skin which developed an inferiority complex and a strong desire for having *The Bluest Eye*, a badge of whiteness.

Notwithstanding that the novel deals with controversial topics other than racism, such as incest and child molestation which led to numerous attempts to ban the book from schools and libraries, the novelist is a Nobel prize winner whose works are praised for addressing the harsh consequences of racism in the United States.

When Cholly, Pecola's father, burned the house, the eleven-year little girl spends some days with the MacTeer family. Claudia, the youngest MacTeer; describes how Breedlove was bullied constantly and mistreated by the teachers, classmates, neighbours and family. She was regarded and perceived as hideous, and Pecola relates the mistreatment directly to how she looks, as she believes that no one would misbehave if she was beautiful. One of the most shocking and traumatizing events in the girl's life was the fact that she was raped by her father, getting pregnant and losing her sanity. By telling Pecola's story, Claudia is trying to make sense of everything that happened to her and to their community.

Race, identity and gender were one of the important discussion matters brought by the novel as it tells the stories of Pecola and the people who surround her, and raises questions on racial self-loathing, the white beauty standards menace, and the loss of identity.

Racism lowers self-esteem and worth; for it dims the light that might shine upon those minorities and deafens the ears that might hear any compliment that encourages those individuals suffering and uplifts their spirit as *Toni Morrison* portrayed in the novel.

The author has followed the steps of male African American who published aggressive, revolutionary fiction or nonfiction, and those who gave speeches powerful enough to echo till this modern-day, stating that they have a dream in which everyone lives in harmony with no discrimination against each other.

1.2 The Identification of Problem

Pecola Breedlove as the main character in this novel has a dream that is unrealistic for her as a black people; she has a dream to have blue eyes like white people. Having different eyes from others is never considered beautiful. This study examines the identity crisis and the assimilation from the author's feminist point of view as well as the events surrounding Pecola Breedlove as the main character that leads her to have an unrealistic dream. The writer finds some clues in the novel, which can be the causes of these problems, such as unpleasant childhood experiences and bad treatments from friends and society.

1.3 The Scope of the Research

We focus on this research on the intrinsic elements of the character Pecola Breedlove. Pecola has a dream to have blue eyes like white people. As a child born out of the black race, having blue eyes is something impossible. we analyse the crisis development related Pecola based on different aspects such as Identity, gender, race, feminism and conformity, and the factors that affected Pecola's psych to end up losing sanity.

1.4 The Research Questions

This research will answer the following questions.

- 1- What are the factors that caused Pecola to lose her sanity in the novel *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison?
- 2- Did conformity and assimilation provide any solution for Pecola Breedlove and African American's problems in general?
- 3- Is conformity the best solution to end racism?

1.5 The Objectives of the Research

The purpose of this research is:

- 1- To know the different aspects surrounding the life of Pecola Breedlove that caused her to lose her sanity in the novel *The Bluest Eye* in relation to conformity and from the authors "feminist" point of view.
- 2- To understand the factors that lead Pecola to madness and to confirm that "conformity" wasn't a solution to the problem.

1.6 The Literature Review section

In order to support this research, we need to review some of the previous studies which are related to this topic. These studies are aimed as a medium of comparison and they work as foundation base to get a deeper understanding. We review these studies conducted by researches in order to find different opinions to support this analysis.

This novel has been discussed by Iben Sienna Ade Rachman, Supiastutik and Erna Cahyawati in their article published in 2014 entitled "Child Abuse Rooted from Racism in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*". This research discusses the phenomenon of child abuse depicted in the novel *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison. Racism in America is a conflict between the two races, the black (African - American) and white people. This situation makes

black people suffered from repressive conditions such as position and low wages in jobs, lack of education and poverty. To escape from this condition, the black generally wrecks them into prostitution and alcohol. Alcoholism can make people lose consciousness which can cause behaviours. If this happens to someone, he will cause trauma to the members of his family. Children are very likely to be a victim to harassment or sexual practices. Poverty is almost the same as the two factors above. It makes people live under pressure due to lack of money. This research can support my analysis on the impact of racism, so parents seek an outlet, one of which is child abuse and sexual harassment that led to trauma and self-loathing as well as the loss of identity.

Next is an article in *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* by Mina Aghakhani Shahrezaee and Zahra Jannessari Ladani entitled “Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*: A Cultural Materialistic Approach” (2014 vol.30, pp. 17-23). It explains that the keywords of those novels are race, social class, slavery and women. In the black community, racism also occurs. Some experts argue that the novels written by Morrison are the result of racism, especially upon children. Beside the social class, the novel also describes the psychological condition of each character in the novel. However, this journal is not an exhaustive treatment of the causes of racism; it only discusses the contents of the story associated with the condition of the United State at the time.

Next is a dissertation by Shubhanku Kochar entitled “Treatment of Violence: A Study of Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*” (2013) describes that *The Bluest Eye* illustrate how white people attack the psychological mind of black people, especially women, through the concept of beauty. Most black women endure these conditions, some do not care, and some struggle for equality. Pecola is a victim of it. Actually, Pecola is not ugly; it is just because she was born from parents who are victims of stereotypes. This study can support our research from the side of how Pauline and Pecola treated badly by the white.

1.7 The Methodology of Research

We apply three steps in this research; collecting data, analysing data, and presenting data. These steps are applied in order to make good research. The first step is collecting data. There are two kinds of data used in this research, the primary data, which are taken from the novel *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison and the secondary data are taken from the literary book, article, journal related to this study. The data are collected by using library research methods: reading (the books, articles, journals), and browsing the internet. The second step is analysing the data. The method of analysing the data is descriptive analysis. The analysis starts by classifying the psychological aspects of Pecola's personality using individual psychology theory by Alfred Adler. Then continued by revealing the factors of psychological aspects of Pecola.

The last step is presenting the result of analysis. Since this research is qualitative research, the method used in presenting the result of the analysis is a descriptive method. Therefore, the data are elaborated through words, not in the form of number and picture.

Chapter one

Re-conceptualising Race, Gender, and Identity

Introduction

Toni Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, was written during the 1960s and published in 1970s. Through several layers of voices and different narrative techniques, the book tells us the shocking story of a black little girl named Pecola Breedlove, who descends into madness after being emotionally and physically abused on several occasions by the entire community around her, even—and especially—by her family. Eleven-year Pecola lives with her family in Lorain, Ohio. When her father, Cholly, burns down their house, she spends some days with the MacTeer family. Claudia, the youngest MacTeer, is one of the narrators who tells us Pecola's story. In the years covered by the narrative, 1940 and 1941, the Breedlove girl is constantly bullied and mistreated by teachers, classmates, neighbors and family. Because she thinks of herself as ugly, she attributes their mistreatment of her to her physical appearance, as she believes that no one would behave badly in front of her if she were beautiful. One of the most traumatizing events in Pecola's life is the moment when she is raped by her father, gets pregnant and loses her sanity. By telling her story, Claudia is trying to make sense of everything that happened to the youngest Breedlove and to their community.

Through the stories of Pecola and the people who surround her, the novel brings to discussion matters such as gender, race and identity, and raises questions on racial self-loathing, the menace of white beauty standards, and the loss of one's self. My intention with this work is to analyse how concepts of identity in relation to race and gender are manifested in the novel, how the book can be read as a claim for racial pride, and what Morrison's suggestion for a healthy, healed identity is.

3 Historical Overview:

Despite being miles away from the United States of America, Africa was the source of most slaves in the new world. Slavery has existed in various forms throughout history and

across a wide variety of cultures, but slavery in the early Americas (North American colonies, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean) was ultimately powered by the labour of enslaved Africans and their descendants.

There was nothing inherent to the social or psychological makeup of west Africans and their descendants in the 17th through the 19th century that made them more prone to enslavement; knowing that there's no such thing as benevolent slavery, since any system that's predicated on the exploitation and extraction of labour through violence and force cannot be considered fair. However, the purpose of this rough timeline is to sketch a comparison of assessing harm inflicted on enslaved people.

To set the scene of the early American colonies, European powers such as Spain, followed by Portugal, the Dutch, British, and French ventured out, in search of conquest and capital. Their early exploration of the America, starting in 1492 and continuing up until the 18th century, weren't driven by wander, loss, and desire for adventure, no matter what dignified versions of colonization written in history books that we learned. Instead, they were looking for one primary thing, wealth, and this could mean gold and silver, land, and commercial corps. the driving incentive for explorations was to increase European power and to fatten the royal coffers. But initially, slavery was not the source of this wealth. The early Spanish colonists to central and south America in the 16th century rested control of silver and gold mines that had been controlled by Inca and Aztec empires. By forcing native groups to extract silver and gold from the mines they had already established, colonists were able to meet their desires for high profits with low labour costs, because they weren't exactly intent to pay anyone. The colonists were brutal by working native people to death; cutting off limbs if they didn't extract enough materials quickly or threatening them with murder, the Spanish were able to meet their specific demand for increased wealth throughout the 16th century.

Despite European expectations in other regions like North America or the Caribbean, there weren't huge repositories of gold and silver to send back to Europe. Even though there was little pressures metal to be found, the monarchies and the early colonists who arrived in these areas were equally intent on yielding high profits. So, they turned to corps that yielded high profits, like sugar, tobacco, rice, and later cotton. In order to share the highest gain, they began to look to slavery since European labours and indentured servants required payment or other forms of protection. So, the colonists in the Americas turned to the African continent as a site for extracting slaves.

The first enslaved Africans arrived in the North American colonies under controlled by the British, the areas that would later become part of the US in 1619, when 20 were forcibly transported to Jamestown, Virginia, by the Dutch. But the first enslaved Africans had arrived in the Caribbean in Latin America prior to that, starting as early as the first decade of the 16th century. Because, the colonies were established in the Americas, (cover South, north, and Central America, plus the Caribbean), and not just the present-day USA, but the transportation of African and people into slavery began before the colonization of the Americas. The Portuguese began enslaving Africans in the 15th century when they arrived on the African continent for the purposes of trade. Around that time, they were enslaved Africans, among other enslaved and free populations in Portugal. So even though it wasn't the only or necessarily most widespread form of slavery at the time, this 15th century precedent would set the stage for later decisions surrounding slavery that were to come in during colonization in the America. But at that point in time, captivity wasn't extended exclusively to black people or people from the African continent and was often the result of raids, warfare, or slave trading that included Islamic traders, West African groups, and Europeans, among others which lead to the explosion of the West African slave trade, and thus European colonists start to look exclusively at West Africans as a source of slave labour.

The colonies were established to make money for Royal families and wealthy colonists, and a small class of wealthy colonists who owned large plantations looked to increase their margins through not paying for the labour that generated their cash crops. So, it wasn't that slavery was needed to develop the colonies, but rather that it was decided that this was the quickest way to enrich the people invested in getting rich. Black slaves continued to arrive in the Caribbean, North America, and South America through the 16th, 17th, and 18th century, and it wasn't until the 19th century that slavery began to be eradicated. However, by this point there was a large slave population in the Americas, and the condition of slavery was considered legally hereditary, with children taking the status of their mothers in perpetuity.

When Europeans arrived in the Americas, colonists found that the previously established system that relied on enslaving conquered enemies was not functioning for several key reasons. Namely, early attempts in the Americas to enslave Native Americans proved difficult because they had familiarity with the terrain of their own nations and land. As a result, the potential for escape or revolt was high. This made using a system of leading raids and then enslaving whoever lost a battle less achievable, since colonists had little to no idea how to survive in these new regions and often fell prey to diseases which Europeans had no immunity to, namely malaria. The subsequent rampant genocide of Native American people and the introduction of new diseases that decimated their population, namely smallpox from Europe, made widespread enslavement less possible. But by transporting people from West Africa to the Americas, European colonists wanted greater ability to control enslaved populations by making escape more challenging and reducing the risk of those who did flee, blending into neighbouring native nations. Although the fact that there continued to be slave revolt amongst enslaved Africans and their descendants proves that this calculation was often mistaken.

West Africa was often the source of forced and kidnapped laborers because of its proximity to seaports, which made contact between these three locations more possible (Europe, Americas, Africa). Also, laborers from West African countries were more familiar with the agricultural methods needed for mass cultivation of these kinds of crops in the New World. Even though the slave trade broadens, estimated 9 to 12 million people from Africa as cargo, colonists eventually resorted to reproduction within the colonies as a method for sustaining slavery. This meant that slavery could be passed down as an inherited status from mother to child. And to justify this never-ending enslavement, the racialization was used as justification for why one group of people, specifically people of African descent, were the only ones who could be enslaved. But this shift erased the reality that prior to turning to West Africa as a labour source, slavery existed across racial lines and was dictated more by battles and military capture than by skin tone.

4 Race

4.1 Race and Racism

Society categorizes people based on race and ethnicity and this ultimately creates a system that leads to inequality. Race is defined by a local or global geographic human population distinguished as a more or less distinct group by genetically transmitted physical characteristics or a group of people united or categorized together on the basis of sharing a common history, nationality, or geographic distribution. However, now we possess advanced scientific tools to examine race in a more sophisticated way which highlights that there's no such thing as a pure race, with the lines between races being blurred; for a white individual will have biological materials from other races as someone who is black; therefore, from a social science point of view, we look at race as a social category based on what we perceive as a biological difference. This is categorically different from ethnicity which is a term

applied to a group of people with a common religion, language, nationality, history, or other cultural factors.

Members of a minority group are systematically denied the same access to power and resources available to society's dominant groups but who are not necessarily fewer in number than the dominant groups. An infamous example of this took place in South Africa where blacks outnumber whites, yet before the end of apartheid (Apartheid, in South Africa, is a policy or system of segregation or discrimination on grounds of race. i.e., Segregation on grounds other than race), whites controlled the country while blacks occupied the lowest status in that society.

Racism is a set of beliefs about the superiority of a racial or ethnic group. It is used to justify inequality and is often deep-seated in the assumption that differences between groups are genetic. Prejudice; however, as the name suggests, is a free judgment. It is an idea, commonly a negative one, about a particular group based on generalizations and stereotypes. Prejudice is often unlikely to change regardless of the evidence against it. It generally catalyses and motivates discrimination which is the unequal treatment of individuals based on their membership of a social group such as an ethnic minority, yet a person can be prejudiced and still not discriminated against.

Discrimination can take on different forms

- Individual discrimination; when a person treats others unfairly due to their race or ethnicity (e.g., A senior executive may discriminate against new interns by giving them lower scores than they deserve simply on the basis of their ethnicity.)
- Institutional discrimination: practicing policies that discriminate and affect whole groups of individuals (e.g., Separation of black and white people on public transports in certain areas of the United States during the 20th century. The infamous North

Carolina sterilization program, where thousands were forcibly sterilized in particular women and members of the minority groups.)

“The very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being.” – Toni Morrison.

Racism is a social construct, said Toni Morrison. There is only one human race, and discrimination against any individual from the same race shall eventually lead to social dissociation; for someone who is examining his consciousness will not hold any prejudice against a fellow member of society based on how dark the colour of their skin is. It is necessary to acknowledge that someone who can feel his tallness only when someone is kneeling before him is the one who has serious problems. It is commonly known that if you are going to chain someone, you're bound by your repression for you will have to hold on to the other end of the chain.

The Bluest Eye is a novel about racism, yet there are few instances of the direct oppression. It represents a more complicated portrait of racism where the characters are subject to an internalized set of values which create its own cycle of victimization. In a society governed by stereotypical standards of white supremacy, Pecola found herself acknowledging the values of white superiority and idolizing them. She consequently lived a life of self-hatred, and inevitable destruction. Instead to fight the oppression and mistreatment she suffered, she chose the path which was led her to lose her sanity. The discrimination she went through throughout her life was nothing but a process that made her want to assimilate to the standardized beauty and choose the conformity of having blue eyes so she would escape the hell like life she lived and gain acceptance of those who loathed and ignored her. It was unfair in her eyes, and since it was a dream, she could never achieve, she lost herself in the pursue of her own path.

4.2 Racialized Beauty

The concern of black race in the light of *The Bluest Eye* is related to racialized beauty which is a culturally constructed notion. The white dominant culture creates beauty standards and do not allow African Americans to consider themselves or even regarded as beautiful due to their dark skin; this is why the characters of the novel yearn for whiteness because it stands for beauty, purity, and cleanliness.

The characteristics of beauty are mobile, in the sense that they change with time and place. Beauty is commonly known as one of the traits that make people proud of themselves, it promotes satisfaction, yet not in the case of *Toni Morrison's* novel; a hindrance like race stands as a barrier between the characters and perceiving themselves as beautiful. Pecola as much as everyone else in the novel agree on the fact that beauty means blue eyes, and due to that, the protagonist had to confront the dominant culture's oppressive standards of beauty. Therefore, Pecola Breedlove prays for blue eyes every night for a whole year.

"Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes, fervently, for a year she prayed."
(*The Bluest Eye*, p46).

Pecola believed that having blue eyes will gain her beauty, power, and love so she would feel no more abominable hatred towards herself, nor mistreatment and violence inside and outside of her house.

Pecola's blackness and ugliness make her invisible in the eyes of the beholder, her teachers and classmates ignore her existence because she doesn't possess the dominant culture's standards of beauty:

"Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike. She was the only member of her class who sat alone at a double desk." (*The Bluest Eye*, p45).

Another example of her invisibility is her confrontation with a shopkeeper Mr. Yacobowski:

“At some fixed point in time and space, he senses that he need not waste the effort of a glance.” (The Bluest Eye, p48).

this absence of recognition exemplifies how unworthy of a glance Pecola is,

At any rate, Pecola wasn't the only one who was regarded as ugly and undergoes the unfair standards of beauty. Pauline Breedlove, Pecola's mother, suffers from the racialization of beauty as well. She stepped on a rusty nail at the age of two that deformed her foot and to which she attributes her invisibility. She remained pitiable and invisible until she married Cholly, yet the pleasure of marriage didn't last long. When she moved from Kentucky to Ohio, she was again despised after confronting the northern standards of physical beauty. Soon after the relocation to Ohio, she was alienated due to how different things are, and felt uncomfortable with the few black women she met; for they were amused by how she didn't even straighten her hair, and when she tried to make up her face like they did, it turned out rather badly. Pauline then sought consolation in the beauty of the Fisher's house as a servant and gave up completely on her own family so she can stay away from her husband in particular. She surrendered to the standards of beauty right afterwards, as money and clothes became the centre of interest as she tried to draw attention to herself.

Claudia was the symbol of rejection; she rises against the racialized beauty on behalf of the African American women. She stands in a distinct contrast to Pauline and Pecola and refuses to obey the standards of beauty while others rejoice them. She hates the baby doll she receives in Christmas; she finds it ugly and wonder why others regard it as charming:

“I did not know why I destroyed those dolls. But I did know that nobody ever asked me what I wanted for Christmas.” (The Bluest Eye, p21).

Claudia refuses the distorted stereotypical beauty image that the dominant white culture draws. She compares herself with how sad Pecola's life ended, she finds herself less ugly than Pecola, and she does not end up losing her mind because of the racialized beauty:

“And all of our beauty, which was hers first and which she gave to us. All of us, all who knew her, felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness.” (The Bluest Eye, p205).

Claudia finds beauty in Pecola's ugliness, and thus, the beauty standards no longer enslave her. She liberates herself from the racialized beauty and exemplifies the celebration of the black body.

4.3 Whiteness

The obsession with whiteness is showing throughout the novel, numerous characters, including Pecola Breedlove, Geraldine, as well as Pauline, have a predilection for whiteness for it stands for cleanliness, purity and, overall, for beauty, and *Morrison* exposes this tendency for whiteness from the very beginning of the novel *The Bluest Eye*.

At the very beginning of the novel, we encounter the following text which is taken from Dick and Jane's children book story:

“Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane live in the green-and-white house. They are very happy. See Jane. She has a red dress. She wants to play. Who will play with Jane? See the cat. It goes meow-meow. Come and play. Come play with Jane. The kitten will not play. See Mother. Mother is very nice. Mother, will you play with Jane? Mother laughs. Laugh, Mother, laugh. See Father. He is big and strong. Father, will you play with Jane? Father is smiling. Smile, Father, smile. See the dog. Bow-wow goes the dog. Do you want to play with Jane? See the dog run. Run, dog, run. Look, look. Here comes a friend. The friend will play with Jane. They will play a good game. Play, Jane, play.” (The Bluest Eye).

This is based on a primer created by William Elson and William Grey in the 1930s, and widely used for teaching children to read in American public schools.

The family members of Dick and Jane have fair complexion; they represent the self-fabricated American image that embraced the dominant society values and fits directly the portrait they wished to promote to its citizens, as noted by *Morrison*, every cultural notion in the United States is interested in forming a uniform identity and American means white.

The reader of the novel anticipates as he goes through the epigraph to see the novel unfolding through the lenses of whiteness, clean, and happy. Moreover, the epigraph shows the reader an ideal white family which live in a clean white pretty house. *Morrison* starts each section of the novel with a section from the epigraph to tell the story of a particular character as a juxtaposition to show the comparison between whiteness and blackness; this outlines the impact of white ideologies on the black community and the nature of whiteness and its inappropriateness to determine standards of ideals on the African American world. The ideologies of the white world are not able to represent the contours of the black world, the epigraph is a testimony of the idealized whiteness, and blackness has been marginalized compared to the representation of the white family at the beginning of the novel.

The Breedloves are different from Dick and Jane as *Morrison* showed throughout the story, they are not an ideal African American family, their exemplified situation is unique due to poverty and lack of affection. Their life is troubles, and they feel like they, as people, have no meaning or value. The desirable qualities shown in Dick and Jane primers were damaging in so many ways; so, if the black children were not represented in the texts, they will not see themselves are desirable; for if Dick and Jane are the model, African American kids will not be able to imitate and act like them. That assimilation to whiteness can be fatal to the psych of a child as the novel portrays.

5 Identity

5.1 Identity Formation

The internalized psychic system that integrates an individual inner self and the outer world into a congruent whole is what defines identity. Even though it has been viewed as a process of development that synthesizes fragments of childhood identification into a single structure during late adolescence and early adulthood, it may no longer be an adequate model to understand the development of identity formation.

Traditional theories of identity development do not fully explain the individual's group or social identity development such as gender, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation. It is at this point that psychologists began looking at elements of personal identity and the socio-political and cultural forces that affect identity.

Several are the factors that significantly contribute in the development of one's inner self and social outer world such as the individual's unique traits and characteristics, family dynamics, cultural and ethnic norms, beliefs and attitudes, and experiences of oppression. These factors may either inhibit or facilitate the development process of exploration, resolution, and commitment needed for the expression and saliency of one's identity. Individuals are cultural beings and are affected by various dimensions of personal identity and contextual factors.

The relationship between psychological and socio-cultural forces in individuals' lives has expanded conceptualizations of the manner in which individuals develop awareness and acceptance of themselves in relation to self, others, their place and definition in society, and membership in social groups.

Morrison uses the psychological ramifications of the physical, emotional, and spiritual desolation produced by slavery to mold her characters' sense of self through direct

experience with white oppression. The inability of characters to form a sense of identity in *The Bluest Eye* is related to the cultural trauma they experience which makes it impossible for them to form a sense of self. The novel exposes the aftermath of white presence on African Americans in society, and how this presence imposes hardships on the individuals in terms of identity formation. The alienation the characters experience is due to psychological obstacles which echo into future generations by disabling any hope of forming relationships.

Throughout the story, *Morrison* highlights the importance of identity, the formation of self, and the influence of the environment and society on that development. Trauma related to culture refers to the dynamic loss of identity and deep sense of meaning affecting a group of individuals within a society that has reached some degree of cohesion. Either that group stands unified against environmental oppression or gets scattered and have identity crisis like what happened to the characters in *The Bluest Eye*.

5.2 Identity Crisis

The developmental event that involves individuals questioning their sense of self or place in the world is known as the identity crisis. The concept originates in the work of a developmental psychologist *Erik Erikson*, who noted that the formation of identity is one of the most important conflicts that people face. It is a time of intensive analysis and exploration of different ways of looking at oneself: for it shifts and changes according to the challenges that people confront and the different experiences they tackle throughout their lives. It forms in early stages of life in response to traumatic events or emerges in early teenage years in which people struggle with feelings of identity versus role confusion. In *Erikson's "Stages of Psychological Development,"* experiencing a traumatic event, and relocation are one of the major points that lead to the identity crisis, which can be extrapolated and applied directly to the characters of *The Bluest Eye*, *Pecola* and *Pauline*.

Pecola was hated due to her ugliness and dark skin, first by her own mother, then by everyone else who constantly mistreated her; the traumatizing rape, and the influence by the white beauty standards, these were major factors that made Pecola desperately wish for blue eyes for she thinks that it is the only way she can be accepted in the society. When this desire to have blue eyes wasn't fulfilled by anyone she asked or anything she did, marking that the influence by the environment was harsh which developed an identity crisis, she then dissociated from reality and lost her sanity in the end.

As Pecola went through menstruation, she learned from Frieda that she can have a baby if she got a person to love her as cited in the novel:

After a long while she spoke very softly, "Is it true that I can have a baby now?"

"Sure," said Frieda drowsily, "Sure you can."

"But, how?" her voice was hollow with wonder.

"Oh," said Frieda, "Somebody has to love you."

"Oh." (The Bluest Eye, p32)

Pecola kept wondering how she can get somebody to love her, and she asked Frieda, but she was asleep, and resorted to finding answers herself. She later found out that she can be loved only if she was beautiful which led to the beginning of Pecola's awareness of her physical appearance and the pursue of having blue eyes. This physiological change of puberty is a step that majorly led Pecola to experiencing the identity crisis and role confusion.

Self-loath was is the first characteristic that shows Pecola's identity crisis. Dimmed unworthy of love or even a glance, feeling uncomfortable with how she looks, and not being accepted by anyone around her made her unable to accept herself. She yearned and longed for being accepted by somebody else, yet she knew that she was powerless to change the reality that said otherwise. She was confused and that's where the crisis occurred. She felt only hatred towards herself as the manifestation of inadequate feeling to the society's demand that is, in Pecola's perspective, to be blue eyed or light skinned.

Pecola's later misfortunate events made her lose any sort of self-worth, she felt that she doesn't deserve the respect and love of people around her due to her ugliness, she couldn't regard herself in a positive light, and what she experienced led her to a profound sense of futility, personal disorganization, and aimlessness. She already was drowning deep in her identity crisis and there was no way out.

Pecola has other characteristics that were an outcome of her identity crisis such as white people admiration, the feeling of doubt. Erikson says that the crisis can result in conflict and doubt about choice of identity. Pecola was confused about her identity as Black, and she found the expression in negative identity by adoring and admiring something which is not appropriate for her. Pecola has no sense of ego identity, she cannot see herself as a distinctive individual and represent her real self in the society, therefore she longed for the characteristics that would make her stand out and blend with the racialized beauty standards, the blue eyes, the symbol of whiteness and her identity crisis as well.

6 Gender

6.1 Gender Role

Gender, in common usage, most typically refers to the perceived and natural differences between men and women. In literature studies, the term more specifically refers to how individuals identify and define themselves and how they are evaluated in the eyes of their society on the basis of their gender. Gender oftentimes is associated with feminism (women's activism against oppression), and the study of power relationships of how one's gender, typically the men's gender, gives one a power advantage over the other gender.

Men are not necessarily more naturally aggressive against women for the sole purpose of oppressing them. Instead, a critic applying gender theory would argue that if the majority of men in a particular group are aggressive, this aggression is learned as part of their gender identity as men. Gender roles, in return, are the codes of behaviour that a society expects for

one gender or another. These codes are automatically learned during childhood and applied throughout individuals' lives. Adopting and practicing gender role is what helps an individual construct their gender identity of who they are.

Gender can be regarded as a socially constructed dimension of being either male or female, distinctively different roles, representations, beliefs and values are associated with man and women, yet *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature* points out the inferiority of woman in general. Hence, the black women are placed at the very bottom of the chain of being, but overall negative stereotypes of African American women, black feminist literature emerged. Their works particularly explore the intersection of gender and race by focusing on its impact on the black women's effort to gain acceptance and respect in society.

Toni Morrison has established herself in the literary canon through her multi-faceted work as a lecturer, novelist, editor, and essayist. However, she felt initially constrained to enter the racist male dominated literary domain, *Morrison* persisted on writing her first novel *The Bluest Eye* repeatedly till it was published in 1970. In order to keep from her employer that she was publishing with another press, she changed her original name from *Chloe Anthony Morrison*, to *Toni Morrison*. Her literary debut addressed the issue of African American identity, a theme that was unexamined heretofore. She used her art to draw attention to the historical and continuing plight of African Americans, and examines concepts such as race, identity, gender, community, individuality, and moral responsibility. *Morrison's* parents and their attitude towards the racialized world are said to be the basis of her literary orientations. Thus, her novels reflect both pessimism that racism produces and optimism that has empowered African Americans to survive the thrive despite of prejudice and discrimination, and being an editor paved the way for a good many other African Americans and feminist writers by promoting them. *Morrison* makes it clear that the concept of black women's inferiority not only affected the black community, but also affected white people

and the way they perceive their role in society. To *Morrison*, the plight of non-white American women continues; she labels racism as irrelevant and premature fantasy that should be confined in the past, while race generally remains a virtually unspeakable thing. *Morrison* ventures into speaking the unspeakable in *The Bluest Eye*.

As far as *The Bluest Eye* is concerned, gender is not transmitted exclusively through the plot and characters. Formal devices such as structure and narrative voice are also very relevant to understand the meaning discussed in the novel. Majorly, the novel is told by female voice diving into a story of a black little girls which basically shifts the focus from the male strength that dominated the era of the release of the novel to the opposite gender and exactly to the black minority. It is important to the story that most of the characters and especially the narrator are African American women. As *Morrison* herself says in most of her interviews. The author seeks to create a voice that is both female and black as if she is portraying herself throughout the stories, she writes, as well as the characters.

6.2 Gender as Manifested in “The Bluest Eye”

Morrison made sure that gender is the dominant theme of *The Bluest Eye*, and the factor that shapes the characters’ conflicts. The unequal balance of power between male and female in terms of social environment is predominant in all of her works, and since *Morrison* makes it internalized, it becomes the centre of psychological disputes and conflicts the characters’ experiences.

Declined and rejected by all the community that is plagued by self-loathing, Pecola was forced to the marginality and the edge of society, both literally and figuratively. Chased by the only thought of getting accepted through the badge of whiteness, her fate was madness where she could find no saviour. She was violated by a society that denies blacks, as well as her own family who despised her for being ugly and not appealing. Being a female made it

worse for she didn't have neither the strength to fight back, nor the courage to speak for herself. Wealth was far from her reach and thus, she didn't have any status. She developed a negative conception of herself and was lost in her own madness eventually.

The novel concerned with gender struggle for white ideals of beauty where Pecola suffered as everyone ignored her, she was the subject of victimization and she represented the callous treatment of black children and their internalizations of their oppression. Pecola was disempowered by everyone in her community and later by her own self. In order to redefine herself to fit a standard of beauty that so adamantly excludes her, she falsely adopts blue eyes and was driven to a state of madness after she believed she has magically acquired them.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison explored the black females' exposure to the standardized beauty within which they cannot identify. Their interactions with a society so deeply resentful to blackness, and the sense of inferiority and hatred that threatened their perception. Pecola's interaction with a white shopkeeper showcases her cognizance of the rejection and invisibility her blackness grants her in society.

Morrison was against the pervasiveness of whiteness as the only form of beauty promoted throughout the American territory. Each and every African American felt invisibility, worthlessness, objection, and ugliness; females were the ones that suffered the most, so Morrison initiated the incentive for actions against the manipulative construct controlled by white superiority that creates and catalyses self-hatred and self-destruction for the black community.

7 Critical Review

Morrison had written a piece called "*The Bluest Eye*", because she wanted to read it. She started the book when she was just thirty-four years of age. After majoring in English at Howard University, she went for a postgraduate degree in literature at Cornell. Her thesis was

described as “shaky” and was about suicide as a theme in a work by Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner. *Morrison* went on to teach at Texas Southern University and then at Howard, in D.C., where she worked on a short story about a little black girl who wanted blue eyes. The character was based on a girl from Ohio who wanted those eyes but stopped believing in God when she didn’t get what she wished for. *Morrison* put the draft in a drawer and pursued the business of living. In 1958, she married the Jamaican architect Harold Morrison and seven years later the couple was divorced. She was by herself by then, supporting two young boys, Morrison was called a “tramp” by a neighbour during an argument in front of her children. *Morrison* later dropped the two hundred-thousand-dollar lawsuit against the neighbour. She fought to protect herself, but how do you protect yourself from loneliness?

Morrison put her first tools to work by remembering and writing about the world she had come from, as well as the flowers, the ghost stories of her father, a welder and a Jack-of-all. The years when Morrison was preparing to become an artist are honoured in “The Bluest Eye”. The book is narrated by a feisty child, but the tone is elegiac since a lot of the novel is driven by memory and the stories that shape it. Morrison gives us the crux of the tale before the narrative begins:

“Quiet as it’s kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941. We thought, at the time, that it was because Pecola was having her father’s baby that the marigolds did not grow. . . . It was a long time before my sister and I admitted to ourselves that no green was going to spring from our seeds. Once we knew, our guilt was relieved only by fights and mutual accusations about who was to blame. . . . It never occurred to either of us that the earth itself might have been unyielding. We had dropped our seeds in our own little plot of black dirt just as Pecola’s father had dropped his seeds in his own plot of black dirt. Our innocence and faith were no more productive than his lust or despair. What is clear now is that of all of that hope, fear, lust, love, and grief, nothing remains but Pecola and the unyielding earth. . . . The seeds shrivelled

and died; her baby too. There is really nothing more to say—except why. But since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how.”

Morrison focused her attention on character. We first meet Frieda and Claudia; we are shown that whiteness has no erotic pull for them; she has no interest in being defiled or overtaken by it. She destroyed the white dolls given to her for Christmas. “The dismemberment of the dolls was not the true horror. The truly horrifying thing was the transference of the same impulses to little white girls. The indifference with which I could have axed them was shaken only by my desire to do so.” She knows that the world doesn’t like her the way it likes white girls, and she compensates for her vulnerability by fighting for attention and respect.

There is no fight in Pecola. To see her name and read her story is to be reminded of Pecola, a girl of colour who is tortured by the reality of race. The county places her there because she and the other Breedloves, including her father, who works at the local plant, and her mother, who works as a domestic, are poor. In addition to burning his house down, he went upside his wife's head and everyone was outdoors. *Morrison* writes in one of the book's clarifying paragraphs “If you are put out, you go somewhere else; if you are outdoors, there is no place to go. . . . Outdoors was the end of something, an irrevocable, physical fact, defining and complementing our metaphysical condition.”

The Breedloves are reunited in a storefront, but if you have never really been together, how can you be reconciled? Three prostitutes named China, Poland and Miss Marie have formed a kind of family above the Breedloves. Unlike the rest of town, the prostitutes don't despise Pecola, so she often visits with them, and *Morrison's* fantastic ear for dialogue is given free rein.

“Hi, dumplin’. Where your socks?” Marie seldom called Pecola the same thing twice, but invariably her epithets were fond ones chosen from menus and dishes that were forever uppermost in her mind.

“Hello, Miss Marie. Hello, Miss China. Hello, Miss Poland.”

“You heard me. Where your socks? You as barelegged as a yard dog.”

“I couldn’t find any.”

“Couldn’t find any? Must be somethin’ in your house that loves socks.”

China chuckled. Whenever something was missing, Marie attributed its disappearance to “something in the house that loved it.” “There is somethin’ in this house that loves brassieres,” she would say with alarm. . . .

“How come you got so many boyfriends, Miss Marie?”

“Boyfriends? Boyfriends? Chittlin’, I ain’t seen a boy since nineteen and twenty-seven.” . . .

Pecola fingered the fringe of a scarf that lay on the back of a sofa. “I never seen nobody with as many boyfriends as you got, Miss Marie. How come they all love you?”

Marie opened a bottle of root beer. “What else they gone do? They know I’m rich and good-lookin’. They want to put their toes in my curly hair, and get at my money.”

If Morrison's dialogue is accurate, you can eavesdrop on those thrilling ladies, whose talk feels like a delicious tease, a promise of warmth and attention. The five minutes of innocence and comfort that a black girl of her class is allowed in Lorain will be given to her by these women. With a steadfastness that breaks the heart, Pecola holds on to the scraps of her dreams despite being robbed of her innocence. Her upstairs neighbours are part of her hope. Despite the demands of their work, these women are free to love whoever and spend their money as they please. Morrison talked about how life can break you down. Marie answered "Yes" when asked if she had children with the man she loved. Yeah. We had some.

Morrison continued, "Marie was restless." She picked her teeth after pulling a pin from her hair. She didn't want to talk anymore.

Most of the time you don't think about how racism will ruin your day when you're a kid. What surprises will bring you that day is what you want to know. It's the world that makes you hate, and it's the world that makes you hide who you are. For a number of reasons, starting with the book jacket of "*The Bluest Eye*," Morrison, in the photograph on the back cover, looked like the kind of person any African American might have known, and if she was one of them, that meant that one of those people could have written a book about what they have went through by now.

Morrison was thirty-nine years old when she published her first book. Although she claimed in a 1981 interview with Charles Ruas that she never wanted to grow up to be a writer, it is the work of a mature artist who was tired of waiting for someone else to express her views. *Morrison*, the editor, was gaining in strength. She was an editor of poetry, fiction, and non-fiction at Random House for nearly three years before she wrote "*The Bluest Eye*." She didn't tell her colleagues that she was a novelist. She once said that they weren't paying her for that. *Morrison's* novels were published by Knopf, a Random House imprint, after a co-worker spotted a copy of "*The Bluest Eye*."

The goal of her editing was to give readers stories about blacks, women, and other marginalized characters which hadn't been told before. When *Morrison* was a student at Howard. she wanted to write about the black characters in Shakespeare's plays, but her professor was "outraged" at the idea. Years after, she brought those black stories to the fore as an editor; to counteract the jingoism of the time, and to show real black lives from the ghastly slave ships of the sixteen-hundreds to the twentieth century. Morrison got to work with a designer, Jack Ribik, to put together a kind of scrapbook of black American history

and life after she met Middleton Harris. She didn't want text to dominate the collection for fear that it would be too ideological.

In an interview with the Times in 1974, *Morrison* said that nothing could have interfered with his putting the book together. She was worried that young people would think that black history began in 1964 or that there was a gap till 1964. *Morrison* wanted to provide visible evidence of where blackness had been and where it was going in her book, "*The Black Book*." There were documents showing that William B. Purvis had invented the fountain pen and photographs of one of the black cowboy Nat Love. There was a full-colour ad showing a black baby in a white cap and gown, Sunlight Soap, pictures of clothes made by slaves, and a patent for an improvement in sugar-making. She considered Henry Dumas to be one of the most talented of her authors and there were lines of poetry by him. There were images of black men being burned or lynched, and a clipping about Margaret Garner, a runaway slave who killed one of her children so that she would not grow up in slavery, which haunted *Morrison* and inspired her 1987 novel, "*Beloved*." Other sources of inspiration for *Morrison* can be found in the book. There is an excerpt from the poem, "*The Mother*," which is about abortion. The editor was feeding the creator with the nomination of "*The Black Book*" for a National Book Award. One wants "*The Black Book*" to be all things for all people. *Morrison* was afraid that young people might think black history jumped from slavery to the civil-rights era, and she worked to restore the history of struggles and fight to get those rights to fore.

Chapter two

Feminism and Conformity

Introduction

The American 1960s, a long and chaotic decade of war, social change, and second wave feminism, extends thematically into the early 1970s. To be broadly concerned with presenting decentring genealogies of the period, or narratives that bring the hidden, marginalized voices of the decade. The portrayal of gender through a somewhat experimental literary form is able to present a genealogy. *Morrison's* novel questions how and why a silenced character like that of Pecola Breedlove might hide behind the notion of white beauty and what the consequences of such an action would be for the community in which she lives.

While male writers like John Updike, Kurt Vonnegut, Neil Simon and others dominated the American literary imaginary of the decade, exploring loneliness or the search for meaning in contemporary society, *The Bluest Eye*, published at the turn of the new decade in 1970, explores the reclamation of racial beauty which, at that time, forced *Morrison* to question how the damaging internalization of racialized notions of beauty is able to consume and even break young women. *Morrison* explicitly links this historical moment with the one in which she is writing, calling attention to the themes of hunger, wanting, and repressive during the Depression as they did during the Civil Rights Era.

The year 1940 allowed *Morrison* to highlight several important historical moments, including the obvious Depression era in the United States, which caused Americans to look past domestic concerns to what their role might be in a growing international debacle. Ethnic and class issues were central to American politics from 1870 to the late 1930s, but with World War II they became more frustrated and gave the occasion for the emergence of the national-security apparatus. The novel easily ties to other works produced by women writers across the Americas responding to the 1960s because these issues framing Pecola's story and the tale of this small community in Ohio in which she lives. The story is concerned with a poverty setting and its relationship to gender roles, anger, and madness. It is about the effects

of national politics on women's experiences. *Morrison* makes a connection between the two periods by writing about the 1940s and publishing the work in 1970. The themes within the historical frame of the novel and their current moment are relevant to the readers of the novel. The 1970s were a time when America had already begun to assemble nostalgic myths about suburban life during and after WWII, according to *Morrison*. She chose to focus on the American myth of childhood innocence as means of exposing the white nationalist hegemony that had helped to perpetuate it through several decades.

Morrison is grappling with the sexual violence committed against the main character in the novel by her father, and how this serves to constitute her subjectivity as a female. *Morrison* proposes that readers look at the experience of a young girl who does not choose to participate in a sexual act, but is still ostracized from the community. Because this small community that surrounds Pecola in the novel acts as a microcosm for the nation. While *Sylvia Plath's* novel questioned the role of women as producers for their nation in their roles as wives and mothers with "*The Bell Jar*", *Morrison* closes the American decade by questioning why childhood innocence represents national innocence in American culture. What is it that makes Pecola the face of innocence? A child who lacks innocence, who is denied a childhood at all, might look like Pecola Breedlove. Other children in the novel also serve to deconstruct the myth of childhood innocence by their experiences of racial and gender discrimination, the best example being a young girl who feels the need to physically destroy white dolls she was given. The relationship between childhood innocence and national innocence is a construction of American culture that needs to be questioned.

The rape committed by Cholly of his own daughter is the most significant event in the novel, it speaks to the exclusion of women from the national narrative by the refusal of the state or community to address the violation immediately and seriously. The Civil Rights and feminist movements of the 1960s fail to convey the horrible experiences of many African

American women, whose contributions were often downplayed by African American men, who felt emasculated by white society as a whole.

African American women have a long-standing feminist tradition that is often overlooked by the feminist movement. The movement was started by activists like Maria W. Stewart. The National Association of Coloured Women's Clubs was established in 1896 and the National Council of Negro Women in 1935. There were many committees and organizations founded in the 1960s. The Black Women's Liberation Committee of 1968 was founded by Francis Beal. The Black Woman anthology contained an essay by Beal called "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female." She states that those African American men and woman have been emasculated, lynched, and brutalized. The world has known cruellest assaults on mankind; black women have been oppressed by men, the blaming of women for the oppression and injustice experienced by men, socially and economically. It was a persistent problem in the African American community at this time. This goes a long way in explaining the behaviour of Cholly towards both Pecola and Pauline, who he is often physically abusive to, seemingly for no reason at all.

As mentioned above, this chapter will explore mainly the feminist concept within Morrison's "*The Bluest Eye*," fluctuating between several major aspects like the subjugation and subduction of females and imposing male dominance upon them, their suffering of sexual, physical, and psychological violence, and the feminism from Morrison's point of view. It shall point out the strong point of conformity and the disadvantages of assimilating to the white supremacy, and how both imaginary and real conformity made the African American lives worse than how it already was. It will confirm the fact that any change of ideas, physical appearance, or perspective only to fit in a different society will cause a permanent loss of identity and will eventually annihilate any form of self.

2 Feminism

2.1 General Overview

The past two centuries have seen a revolution in women's lives. Unlike national revolutions, this social upheaval is global. In place of armed struggle, it gradually sows seeds of change, infiltrating our consciousness with the simple premise that women are as capable and valuable as men. To measure the breadth of this on-going upheaval of old patterns, consider the way feminist movements have transformed law and politics, from divorce reforms in Egypt and sexual harassment cases in Japan and the United States to the nomination of equal numbers of male and female candidates by French political parties. In the 1990s, 90 per cent of the world's nations elected women to national office, and women served as heads of state in more than twenty countries. Consider the thousands of grassroots organizations such as Women in Law and Development in Africa, the National Black Women's Health Project in the United States, and the Self-Employed Women's Association in India. Women's movements have never been this widespread.

“I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is”, “I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a door-mate or a prostitute.” -Rebecca West

Feminism is a movement seeking the reorganization of the world upon the basis of sex equality, rejecting all forms of discrimination against individuals upon grounds of sex. It urges people to reject male-created ideologies. It is also committed to freeing all women of gender-based oppressions. Regardless of gender, anyone who supports such an ideology can be a feminist.

The word Feminism spread through Europe in the 1890s and to North and South America in the 1910s. A social movement or political ideology is what the French word for

woman, “femme”, and “-ism” refers to. Feminism said that women's issues belonged to the forefront of change. The term was controversial because of its association with radicalism and because proponents disagreed about the label. Although self-defined socialist feminists appeared in Europe as early as 1900, many socialists who supported women's emancipation rejected the label feminist. They believed that middle-class demands for property rights did not correspond to the needs of working women. Middle-class women hesitated to call themselves feminists because the term implied a claim to universal rights as citizens rather than specific rights as mothers.

2.2 Historical Overview

The women's movement in the United States was split over the political meaning of feminism. The woman movement was the usual label for first-wave activism in the 1800s. Many participants linked authority for women to motherhood with educational and property rights. After 1910, a younger generation consciously rejected the maternal argument in favor of women's common human identity with men as a basis for equal rights. They staged dramatic public protests during the suffragist movement. After U.S. women won the vote in 1920, the feminists pushed for an equal-rights amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The amendment was opposed by most women social reformers.

Feminism remained a negative term among most progressive reformers, suffragists, and socialists around the world. In countries such as France, Japan, Mexico, and China by the late 1940s, few politically engaged women called themselves feminists. The participants of the international women's movement debated whether the term "humanist" or "feminist" best applied to them. Nations ruled by communist parties, such as China and later Cuba, officially pronounced the emancipation of women as workers, but their state-sanctioned women's organizations rejected the feminist label and their suppression of oppositional political discourse precluded feminist politics.

During the politically tumultuous 1960s, there was a turning point in the history of feminism. The West revived women's politics under the banner of "women's liberation." The press quickly derided them as women's libbers, but this second wave proved quite tenacious. By this time, both capitalist and socialist economies had drawn millions of women into the paid labour force, and civil rights and anticolonial movements had revived the politics of democratization. Millions of women are expected to earn wages in Europe and the United States. The old feminist called for economic and political equality and a new emphasis on control over reproduction.

The agendas of Western women's movements expanded after the 1960s. Along with demands for economic and political rights, women's liberation revived a politics of difference through its critique. Both women's equality with men in work and politics and women's difference from men in the arenas of reproduction and sexuality were championed by Women's liberation. The two competing strains of equality began to converge. Within a decade, the older term feminist began to be used to refer to the politics of this new movement, which could potentially widen its appeal. The introduction of the term gender, rather than sex, signalled to feminists that social practices, and not only biology, have constructed our notions of male and female.

Feminism took hold in Western cultures by 1980. Whether or not they lived long before the coining of the term feminism, anyone who challenged prevailing gender relations might now be called a feminist. Feminism influenced a generation of Western women to expect equal opportunities. Even as they insisted on equal pay, sexual and reproductive choice, parental leave, and political representation, the majority of this generation proclaimed that they were not a feminist. The children they raised were influenced by feminist expectations but not comfortable with the term. Feminism can still evoke a narrow focus on equal rights outside of the West. Western concerns about women's rights were contrasted

with broader human rights and social justice campaigns that address the needs of both men and women in developing countries in a 1991 essay in the influential Indian women's journal "Manushi".

"Feminism has never been popular. Feminism has continually redefined itself, which has helped the political goals of feminism."

Over the past twenty-five years, activists have amended the term to make it more compatible with their unique perspectives. Self-naming by black feminists, Asian American feminists, Third World feminists, lesbian feminists, male feminists, Eco feminists, Christian feminists, Jewish feminists, and others attests to the malleability of the label. In order to make the movement more racially inclusive, the African American writer Alice Walker once used the term womanist. Walker's daughter promised to go beyond the second wave of feminism by forging a more racially and sexually diverse movement that emphasized female empowerment rather than male oppression. Rebecca Walker said in 1992 that she was not post-feminist. This generation does not reject the term feminist. The Feminist League in Central Asia, the Centre for Feminist Legal Research in New Delhi, and the Working Group Toward a Feminist Europe all incorporate the word.

By the 1990s, the cumulative contributions of working-class women, lesbians, women of colour, and activists from the developing world had transformed an initially white, European, middle-class politics into a more diverse and mature feminist movement. Taking into account the range of women's experiences, feminists have become more aware of the validity of their arguments. Most feminists now know that women are similar to or different from men, most feminists now acknowledge the indivisibility and interaction of these social categories, instead of asking which is more important, gender or race. Feminism has redefined work to include caring as well as earning. Feminism has recognized the

interdependence of all people, as well as the connection of gender equality with broader social justice movements.

2.2.1 Feminism Today

Is there any correlation between feminism and historical meanings? Is it possible to define it in a way that will encompass its variety of followers and ideas? A four-part definition contains critical elements of feminism, including views that may be shared by those who claim the label as well as those who reject it.

Feminism believes that women and men are equally valued. Because most societies privilege men as a group, social movements are necessary to achieve equality between women and men, with the understanding that gender always intersects with other social hierarchies. Equal worth, male privilege, social movements, and intersecting hierarchies require some clarification. Equal worth is used instead of equality because it assumes that men's historical experience is the standard to which women should aspire. The concept of equal worth values traditional female tasks, such as childbearing and child care, as highly as other kinds of work historically performed by men. It allows us to recognize that women's different experiences can transform, and not just integrate, political life.

Privilege can refer to formal political rights such as the right to hold office, but can also include more personal entitlements, such as the greater social value placed on male children as expressed by strong parental preference for boys across cultures. Women are punished but not men who seek non-marital sexual expression when societies have a sexual double standard.

To refer to feminism in terms of social movements may conjure images of people marching in the streets or campaigning for political candidates, but it may also mean individual participation, such as Enrolling in a women's studies class or engaging in artistic or

literary creativity that fosters social change. Civil rights, ecology, socialism, even fundamentalism cannot be feminist unless they explicitly address justice for women as a primary concern. Human rights or nationalist movements that insist on women's human rights and women's full citizenship may be feminist, while those that overlook or affirm patriarchal authority cannot.

Feminism must recognize the relationship of gender to other forms of social hierarchy, especially those based on class, race, sexuality, and culture. In every culture there are some women who enjoy greater opportunities than others. Women have higher status than men. If we ignore these intersecting hierarchies and create a feminism that serves only the interests of women who have more privilege, we will reinforce other social inequalities that disadvantage both women and men in the name of improving women's opportunities.

Questions about the usefulness of the category woman itself are raised by the overlap of identities of women as members of classes, races, and nations. There is no single, universal female identity for gender and it has been constructed differently across time and place. Even though we can find common ground on certain issues, women cannot assume a sisterhood because of historical, social, national, and personal differences. Feminism can't deny the significance of gender in a world in which 70 per cent of those living in poverty are women.

There are two types of false universals. What difference does gender make, and what difference do ideas about race, class, or nationality make, must always be asked. There is a dual revisioning at the heart of this book. The assumption that the term man includes woman and the assumption that the term woman represents the diversity of female experience must be questioned.

The power of feminist vision can be blurred if all women experience the world the same way. This point was brought home by a South Asian woman who attended the Fourth

World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. There are signs outside of the city that proclaim "Look at the World Through Women's Eyes." The question "Which women's eyes?" reminds us that we cannot universalize the female. Feminism has embraced both of these critical positions, asking "What about women?" and "Which women?" It has become more powerful in the process.

2.3 Black Feminism

The Black Feminist movement grew out of the Black Liberation movement and the Women's movement. The Black Feminist movement was formed to meet the needs of black women who felt they were being discriminated against in the Women's movement and sexually discriminated against in the Black Liberation movement. Black was often compared to black men and woman was often compared to white women. Black women were invisible because their needs were ignored. To stop racist, sexist, and classist discrimination, the purpose of the movement was to develop theory which could adequately address the way race, gender, and class were interwoven in their lives.

Black women who participated in the Black Liberation movement were often discriminated against. The lives of the black women in these groups were almost unbearable because of the power of those with powerful influence. Due to the inability of black men and white women to acknowledge their oppression of black women, the movements were unable to meet the needs of black women and prompted the formation of the Black Feminist movement.

There was sexism in the Black Liberation Movement. The Civil Rights movement, Black Nationalism, the Black Panther, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and others are all considered to be part of the Black Liberation movement. The movement was for the liberation of the black male. Race was sexualized in the movement's rhetoric. Blacks had the freedom of blacks with the redemption of black masculinity. It is assumed that racism is more harmful to black men than it is to black women because the real tragedy of racism is the loss of manhood.

Black men were interested in controlling black women's sexuality. Bell hooks comments that during the Black Liberation Movement of the 1960s, black men over emphasized white male sexual

exploitation of black womanhood as a way to explain their disapproval of inter-racial relationships. Their political views did not preclude them from having inter-racial relationships of their own. Part of freedom and manhood was the right of men to have control over a woman's body. There was a lack of respect for the equality of black women. Black men in the Black Liberation movement often made sexist statements. Those were two statements, the first by Amiri Baraka and the second by Eldridge Cleaver.

Our need for self-consciousness is caused by the separation of black men and women. We need to provide ourselves with healthy African identities to erase the separateness. By embracing a value system that knows of no separation but only of the divine complement the black woman is for her man. We don't believe in the equality of men and women. We don't understand what the devils mean when they say equality for women. We could never be compared to each other. Nature has not provided thus.

Men and women are not equal. Baraka considers this attitude to be healthy and worthy of promotion to other black men and women. He says that a black man is not for his woman as a black woman is for her man. The woman submits to her black man only.

"I became a rapist. I started out by practicing on black girls in the ghetto, those where vicious and dark actions appear not as deviations from the norm, but as part of the sufficiency of the Evil of a day."

Cleaver expresses his remorse but still has misogynist attitudes. He considers the violence against black girls to be less serious than the violence against white girls in this citation. The gravity of a crime against a black woman is not lessened when it is committed against a white woman.

Sexual discrimination against women was a part of daily life in the Black Liberation movement. Elaine Brown recalls that at an organizational meeting of the Black Congress, she and the other women were forced to wait until the men were served food for which they had all contributed money. The rules were explained to her by her friend. Sisters supported their black men and respected them. It was sacrilege for us to want to eat with our brothers. The Civil Rights movement had similar discrimination. I refused to leave the discussion at the regional black student society meeting because

I wanted to help out in the kitchen. The process of disliking those men began for me. Many of the men and women in the Black Liberation Movements enforced strict gender roles on black women. Black women fell prey to patriarchy in the same way that women in dominant society do not resist but encourage sexism.

2.3.1 Black Women in the Feminist Movement

Black women who were involved in the feminist movement were often met with racism. Black women were not invited to participate on conference panels which were not specifically about black or Third World women. Black women's history was not studied in any of the classes on the faculty of Women's Studies Departments. In women's movement writings, the experiences of white, middle-class women were described as universal, ignoring the differences of black and white women's experiences due to race and class. Well-known black women were often treated as token and their work was accepted as representing the black experience and was rarely criticized or challenged.

White feminists' reluctance to admit to their racism was a part of the overwhelming frustration black women felt within the Women's Movement. The sentiment is that those who are oppressing can't oppress others. White women believed that they were unable to assume the dominant role in the perpetuation of white racism because of their sexual oppression by white men, however, they have absorbed, supported and advocated racist ideology and have acted individually as racist oppressors. In 1963, there were seven times as many women of colour as there were white women employed as private household workers. White feminists tend to see men as the enemy, rather than themselves, as part of the patriarchal, racist, and classist society in which we all live.

2.3.2 Toward a Black Feminist Movement

Some white feminists refused to acknowledge their ability to oppress women of colour, while others claimed that white women had always been anti-racist. White fore-sisters

have offended patriarchy for the sake of black men, women, and children. There is little historical evidence to support Adrienne Rich's assertion that white women are part of an anti-racist tradition. Women's movements in the United States have been built on racist foundations, such as the abolition of slavery for white women, and the temperance movement for moral uplifting of white society. They sprang from a desire to strengthen white society's morals or to improve the place of white women in that society, not for black liberation or racial equality.

Faced with the sexism of black men and the racism of white women, black women in their respective movements had two choices: they could remain in the movements and try to educate non-black or non-female comrades about their needs, or they could form a movement of their own. The first alternative was not a viable option. It is true that black men need to be educated about the effects of sexism and white women about the effects of racism on black women's lives, but it is not the responsibility of black women to educate them. Audre Lorde said that women are still being called upon to educate men as to our existence and needs. This is an old and primary tool of the oppressor to keep the oppressed occupied with their master's concerns. The task of educating white women in the face of tremendous resistance is being done by women of colour. This is a diversion of energy and a repetition of patriarchal thought. The Black Feminist movement was formed in light of these facts.

It was not easy to build a black feminist movement. There were few black women who were willing to identify themselves as feminists in the early 1970s. Many black women have reservations about the black feminist movement as Barbara Smith articulates:

1. The Black woman is already liberated.
2. Racism is the primary (or only) oppression Black women have to confront.
3. Feminism is nothing but man-hating.

4. Women's issues are narrow, apolitical concerns. People of colour need to deal with the larger struggle.
5. Those feminists are nothing but Lesbians.

The belief that “Black” women have shown strength in the face of oppression is one of the myths shown. Freedom-working outside the home, supporting the family economically as well as emotionally, and heading the household has been thrust upon black women. Black women are no exception to the sexual oppression of women of all races, classes, nationalities, religions, and ethnicities. The other myths are false. To wait for one to end before working on the other shows an incomplete understanding of how racism and sexism perpetuate each other. Black feminism fights against systematic oppression rather than against a group of people, be they white men or men of colour. Feminism's goal is the end of sexism, and it often requires no imagination to infer man-hating in early feminist writings. There is only a sane response to the oppression of the people. The assumption that feminists are nothing but lesbians reveal the homophobia which persists in many black communities as well as a misunderstanding of both lesbians and motives for joining the feminist movement.

2.3.3 A Focus on the Black Feminist Movement

The goals of the Black Feminist movement need to be defined by the black women who decided to form a movement of their own. The Black Feminist movement has been defined by several authors. Alice Walker's definition is one of the most notable. The Black Feminist movement was described by Alice Walker as Womanist. She writes:

A black feminist or feminist of colour. Referred to as outrageous, audacious, courageous or wilful behaviour. It's good for one to want to know more and in more depth. Responsible. In charge. It is serious. A woman who loves other women. I like women's

culture, women's emotional flexibility, and women's strength. Entire people, male and female, are committed to survival. Not separatist, except periodically, for health.

She added that womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender. The emphases on self-determination, appreciation for all aspects of womanhood, and the commitment to the survival of both men and women are noteworthy. This definition commends a woman's stretching of her personal boundaries while at the same time calls on women to maintain their connections to the rest of humanity. Womanism values the entire self, which is connected to others in the community.

As The Combahee River Collective Statement states, the most general statement of our politics at the moment would be that we are committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis. The conditions of our lives are created by the synthesis of oppressions. Black feminism is the logical political movement to combat the oppression that all women of colour face.

A broad statement is what it is. Black and Third World women needed multi-focused, strategic action to deal with all of the issues listed. It was important for black feminism to address how racism, sexism, classism and Hetero-sexism perpetuate each other. One can see the relationship between one's political life and one's personal life in the two definitions of black feminism/womanism. The struggle against those forces that render individuals and communities un-whole comes from the personal, as well as the political. The personal is political for black women. The goal of the black feminist writings was to address the effects of racism, sexism, and classism in their lives. The audience of these writings was to be black women, not white feminists or black male activists. To address the oppressor's needs would be a waste of energy. Black women needed to develop a feminist consciousness and begin a

dialogue which directly addressed their experiences and connected them to a larger political system.

2.3.4 Black Feminism in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

Discrimination or prejudice against a person or group based on their race is called racism. In Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola Breedlove is pressed and victimized by different types of racism. She is pressed by the white community due to her race. The total absence of human recognition, the glazed separateness, is what Pecola encounters when she walks to the grocery store to buy Mary Janes candy. Mr. Yacobowski can't see how a fifty-two-year-old white immigrant storekeeper could see a little black girl. Internalized racism results from the psychological programming that a racist society puts on people of colour to believe in white superiority. In Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, a young black girl who can't see her own beauty while trapped in this kind of racism. She thinks she would be pretty, happy, and loved if she only had blue eyes.

She prayed for blue eyes every night when she failed. She had prayed for a year. She was not without hope despite being somewhat discouraged. It would take a long time to have something like that happen. She would never know her beauty because of the biding conviction that only a miracle could relieve her. She only saw the eyes of other people. Morrison points out in *The Bluest Eye* that self-contempt and self-hatred can't end until African-Americans see themselves differently. She will feel like she is not worthy if she doesn't achieve her value through others. *The Bluest Eye* attempts to tackle the complex symbolism behind this ritualized valuing of blue eyes and blond hair. Morrison explores damaging assumptions of inferiority imposed upon the Black female body through the tragic narrative of Pecola Breedlove and her quest for blue eyes.

Alice Walker is an acclaimed Black feminist and poet who is against idealizing and valuing white beauty standards such as blond hair, blue eyes and straight hair. I don't think I could have written *The Temple of My Familiar* with straight hair. Prior to the popularization of the afro, black women were expected to keep their hair straight in order to be seen as clean and sanitary. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola begins a process of enchantment with white beauty when she spends a short time in the family. Her father set fire to their house. Pecola's association with white supremacist aesthetic values and capitalist society's ideals begins with her admiration of young white artist Shirley Temple, whose beauty and blue eyes become extremely appealing to her. She took every opportunity to drink milk out of the cup because she was fond of it. If she had blue eyes her life and her family would be different, that is, beautiful and love deserving, because she and her family are ugly. She will have to find a way to have blue eyes in order to stop being so miserable. If her eyes were different, she herself would be different, her father would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove would be different. They might say, why look at Pecola. She takes solace in eating the candy, but also in seeing the smiling picture of the little girl on the wrapper. To eat the candy is to eat Mary Jane. I love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane. Pecola chooses and internalizes the values of white superiority. The beauty of blue eyes, blond hair and white skin is what leads to happiness. She lives a life of self-hatred and inevitable destruction. A young girl is to blame for this misinterpretation. Morrison presents the community as having taken the white criteria of beauty for their own in *The Bluest Eye*. All the world agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child cherished. The internalization of the white-defined standard of female beauty is not exclusive to Pecola. There is a correlation between this phenomenon and the fact that the little white girl she cares for is her own daughter. The soft beauty surrounding the Fishers' home is where Pauline takes refuge after giving up on

her own family. Her voice is like rotten pieces of apple, but when she speaks to the white girl, her voice is like honey.

Pecola, the main character in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, associates her search for identity, self and humanity with the aesthetic values of Anglo-American culture. She gives up her black body and life because of a strong desire to have blue eyes. The result of her wrong aesthetic investment are the devastating consequences of her dream, which make her succumb to the damaging effects of the white values, which systematically deny black identity, self and humanity. The stances of the MacTeer sisters in their quest for self-realization differed from those of Alice Walker. There are impulsive characters in the MacTeer family. They assert their beliefs rather than being influenced by others. They are able to cope with problems and eventually survive.

2.4 The Oppressions of Black Women in *The Bluest Eye*

The Bluest Eye is a novel about Black women oppressions in the North, Ohio, America. Most of the women in the novel are oppressed socially, physiologically, culturally, and psychologically, and only caused by their gender but also by their race and class.

2.4.1 *Pauline's Oppression*

In *The Bluest Eye*, there is Pauline who faces double oppressions. She is a black woman who is not treated fairly due to her race and gender. There are many types of women's oppressions such as social deprivation, physiological oppression, cultural oppression, and psychological oppression. The master is oppressing the family, i.e., Cholly Breedlove, Sammy Breedlove, and Pecola Breedlove. The White man is the master. The Breedlove family is treated as the ugly people who are expected to wear that image. She and her family are considered ugly because they have black skin, curly hair, heavy eyebrows, and a crooked nose.

There is a ridge of red Alabama clay that is seven miles from the nearest road. Since Pauline was two years old when her foot was injured by a nail at the road, she was treated differently than other children. Her foot was hurting. She didn't have a nick name like others. No one made her feel welcome or had a family. Since teenager, the cultural oppression has happened to Pauline. At fifteen years old, she still does house work in her home, but she doesn't like it anymore. In her teenage years, she starts to be interested in a man. She fantasizes about a man who would love her and touch her. She fantasizes of a simple man with strength and a promise of rest who becomes her shelter. A man is thought to be the strength, gentle, and peaceful. The society surrounds her believes that man is important for the women. When she is next to a man, she will feel comfortable. In this case, the images of a man who is considered to be an important creature and believed to make women's feel comfort are oppressing Pauline.

While Pauline fantasizes about a man, she meets Cholly who is believed to make her comfortable and peaceful. She received Cholly's purposes to marry with him. He becomes her husband later. The couple decided to go to the North, Ohio town, looking for a better job. When they have a place and job at there, they are culturally oppressed by sex roles between husband and wife. While Cholly works out side, Pauline has to keep the house.

In Pauline's new society, she faces cultural oppression, which makes her desperate. The White people look strange for her. There is discrimination between Black and White people. White culture dominates her new community. Everything that is different with White culture would be viewed differently by other people. White culture is accepted more than other cultures. There are few black women there. She is amused by other black women because she does not have a straight hair. Even though they are all black, they are all oppressing because of their different way of life style such as dressing and hair arrangement.

When Pauline faces much oppression, Cholly oppress her culturally too. He doesn't care about her. He won't give her money to buy new clothes or fix her hair. She decided to get a job in order to fulfil her needs. Here, Cholly does not like Pauline's decision to get a job. Money becomes the main thing to discuss, money for Pauline's clothes, and Cholly's drink. Their marriage is destroyed in a letter when Cholly shows his bad behaviour in front of his wife. Men control women like what is done by Cholly. It could be said that a husband controls his wife and she has to obey him.

The behaviour of Cholly makes her decide to work. In the house of a White rich family, she faces social oppression as a house worker. It was caused by her mistress, who often comes to her house drunk and wants money to Pauline. Knowing Cholly's attitudes, Pauline is forced by the mistress' choices between leaving her husband or getting her salary. The mistress will let her stay if she leaves her husband. She won't be allowed to stay longer to get her salary if she doesn't leave her husband.

The mistress tried to get Pauline to leave. But Pauline rejects the mistress, she goes back to her house as a house wife. She discovers that she is pregnant. After returning home, the relationship between the two is getting better, and then Cholly becomes more attentive to her. Meanwhile, in her home, Pauline faces psychological, cultural, and biological oppression again. Pauline is oppressed again due to her choice to be an affectionate wife who stays at home lonely. She is not free from oppression because she returns to her own housekeeping. But she has a duty to take care of her unborn child.

Pauline tries to make herself comfortable by watching movies. She is oppressed by the physical beauty of The White woman in the movies she watches. disturbed by the beauty image of the White because Pauline is a black woman. The White man's kindness to the

beautiful White women is seen as oppression by the cultural community. She is culturally oppressed because she compares with her man who doesn't like her.

After several months, Pauline bears a boy baby at home. She doesn't have a special feeling for her baby. She looks happy with her second pregnancy because she really wants it and she has a hard time with the baby. When she gave birth to her second child, she was sad. The oppression of Pauline is due to her physical nature. White and Black patients are treated differently in the hospital. The oppression can be seen when the doctors don't care much. They give more attention to the White women next to her. When she is pained by carrying a baby naturally, she is physically powerless.

When Sammy and Pecola are young, Cholly becomes fierce again. He doesn't give Pauline much of a life. It makes her want to go back to work in order to fulfil her needs. Cholly turns to drink a lot. He tried to burn his family's house. In this case, the oppression is psychological.

2.4.2 Pecola's Oppression

In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola is the second child. She is the second woman to face double oppressions. She faces three different types of women oppressions, that are physiological, cultural, and psychological oppression.

Like her family, Pecola faces psychological oppression. The masters of the house are the White people. The master has made an image of the Breedlove family as ugly people who are expected to wear that image. Pecola and her family are considered ugly because of their physical nature. Their skin is black, their hair is curly, they have heavy eye brows, and their nose is crooked. All of those physical natures contradict the physical characteristics of the White people who have white skin, straight hair, a sharp well-formed nose.

The image of White people's beauty is supported by the media, such as a candy wrapper, cup of milk, magazine, etc. Pecola is not a White person. Pecola is oppressed by the standard of beauty which is dominated by the White beauty as the real beauty. From that, we can also see that Pecola faces physical oppression.

Pecola is included into a low class because she comes from a poor family. Pecola is facing cultural oppression in school. She is discriminated against by other students and the teachers who settle her in the back double desk. The teacher tried not to see her. She is made fun of by other girls who want to insult others for fun.

When Pecola returns home, she is not treated fairly because of her gender. A group of boys are threatening her. The boys think they have the power to hurt her. And then, Pecola becomes their victim.

Pecola is faced with physical oppression because of her gender. She goes home from school. She is trapped by a boy named Junior. He convinces Pecola to come to his house because he has a kitten. Junior hates the cat in his home and his mother always tries to make him like it. He wants the cat to die. He traps Pecola to become his prisoner and suspicion of the cat death in front of his mother. He succeeds after that.

The novel ends with physical and psychological oppression. Her father raped her. Pecola is pregnant because of the sexual intercourse she had with her father. The effect of rape is worse than the physical pain of the rape itself. It makes Pecola feel uncomfortable. She is destroyed by the feelings of guilt, shame, and humiliation. Pecola blames herself by blaming her ugliness as the cause of the rape which makes her insane in the end.

2.4.3 Claudia's Oppression

The third Black woman character who faces oppression is Claudia. She faces psychological and cultural oppressions in this novel. her psychological oppression is on

Christmas day. when She gets a doll from her family that they think it is the fondest thing she wants. Here, she is psychologically oppressed because she has to pretend to be a mother because she is not interested in babies or the figure of motherhood.

Claudia is a person who is not accepted in some parts of the world. The image of beauty dominated by White culture is supported by the media, such as magazines, newspapers, window signs, and most people agree that the blue eyed, yellow haired, pink skinned doll is wanted by every girl.

2.4.4 Frieda's Oppression

Frieda is the fourth black women character analysed. Frieda faces physical and psychological oppression. The standard of beauty supported by the media is the first physical Frieda's oppression. White beauty is the well skinned image of beauty which is blue eyed, yellow haired, and pink skinned which are the things that make women look beautiful.

Frieda faces physical and psychological oppressions when she meets Mr. Henry. She is sexually harassed by Mr. Henry while her parents and sister are away. Mr. Henry touches Frieda in a physical way such as patting, brushing, or pinching her. Frieda is made depressed by it. She cried because she felt uncomfortable with Mr. Henry's way of treating her.

2.5 Black Women's Empowerment in The Bluest Eye

Unlike Pecola and Pauline, Claudia and Frieda have parents whom they rely on and they maintain their self-esteem. Frieda's parents know how to nurture their children in a society that punishes family ties due to racist ideas. While Claudia's family is challenged by the post realities of African American life, they manage to convey to their daughter the knowledge that her intact survival to adulthood is one of their central concerns. The Bluest Eye is a novel that shows the impact of White beauty standards on the identity formation of a child.

Frieda is a big fan of Shirley Temple, but she is not obsessed with her. The other person hates Pecola's obsession with milk. She wants to find out what made the society so interested in its beauty. Her parents like the white dolls and scold her for dismembering them. They confirm the standards. If she accepts the society's beliefs, she admits her ugliness. She accepts the dolls but doesn't like the standards of her society. According to Inger-Anne Softing, Claudia is the only character in the novel who attempts to deconstruct the ideology of the society.

Frieda and Claudia became aware of their position in society when Maureen Peel arrived at school. They nickname her the six-finger-dog-tooth-méringue-pie. She imagined slamming the locker door and kicking her. The sisters were aware that their friendship with her would be dangerous due to the fact that everyone admired her for her physical beauty. Fortunately, they stayed happy with what they had and felt comfortable on their skins, even though they could not comprehend their unworthiness.

The Macteer sisters have self-confidence and self-worth that can be seen in their physical and verbal reactions towards other people. The two sisters stood up for themselves, unlike Pecola who stayed silent. The two girls were strengthened by the incidents and were afraid of the thing that made Maureen beautiful. They recognized the devastating effects of the enforced ideals of white culture on the African American society.

First, Claudia and Frieda's self-confidence resulted first from their mother's love and their father's protective side, and second, they witnessed the brainwashing of main stream America which resulted in their pride.

Morrison highlights the empowerment of black women in other characters such as the Great Aunt Jimmy, Mrs. MacTeer and M'Dear, as well as the depiction of the female

resistance in the book. In her poem "To those of my sisters who kept their naturals", she referred to these three women as the symbol of black females who kept their naturals.

Aunt Jimmy was able to deal with the society's treatment since the days of slavery. Unlike Pauline and Pecola, she was mistreated by the white masters, but they did not affect her self-esteem. She was a stalwart in her community. Aunt Jimmy was happy in her life even though she was not rich, white and beautiful, and her laughter had been more touch than sound. She was aware of the racist behaviour of the patriarchal society. White children asked, Give me that. White men said to come here. She took all of that and re-created it in her own image. When white men beat their men, they cleaned up the blood and went home to receive the abuse from the victim, Aunt Jimmy did not lose herself nor did she neglect her duty as a black female, a wife and a mother.

Contrary to Pauline, Mrs. MacTeer works hard to keep her family healthy and she is a responsible mother with a strong will. Claudia learns from her mother valuable information about becoming an adult woman when she listens to her songs. She has a strong identity because of her relationship with her mother. By hearing her stories, the little girl rejects the white female beauty and embraces herself as a black female. She learned how to take responsibility and endure tough times by listening to her mother.

3 Critical Review

A Pulitzer Prize winning American novelist, editor, and professor Toni Morrison. Morrison explores the African-American experience in many ways. Morrison's family migrated north to escape racial prejudice at a young age. Morrison was heavily influenced by her family's appreciation of black culture. Her childhood was filled with stories about black identity and culture. The lives of the MacTeer family are the subject of her novel. The novel shows the struggle of black girls to achieve white ideals of beauty in the 1940s. The callous

treatment of black children and their internalizations of their oppression is represented by Pecola. Everyone around her makes her feel worthless. Pecola adopted blue eyes to fit a standard of beauty that excludes her. Pecola Breedlove is in a state of madness because she believes she has blue eyes. Black females are exposed to a standard of beauty that they cannot identify in *The Bluest Eye*. Black female perception is threatened by interactions with a society that is deeply rejecting blackness.

In her interaction with a white shopkeeper, Pecola Breedlove shows her cognizance of the rejection and invisibility of her blackness. The total absence of human recognition is what Pecola notes in the white shopkeeper. She is aware of the interest, disgust, even anger that the people around her see in her. Pecola is aware that the dislike must be for her blackness. Everything in her mind. Her blackness is static. The vacuum is created by the blackness and the distaste in white eyes. According to Pecola, the white man, Mr. Yacobowski is not interested in interacting with her because of her colour. He is impatient with the silence of Pecola. The shopkeeper was angry when Pecola tried to pay for the candy with her hand and he cut her palm with his nails. Nothing can convince these little girls of their otherness more than this lack of recognition of their humanity in the eyes of the other, mostly white, people. The involvement of a white-skinned, blond-haired, blue-eyed beauty ideal in Pecola's society serves as the destructive power that causes her to believe in her own worthlessness. The experience in the store supports the idea of white superiority. The interaction causes Pecola to change her perception of herself, and instils in her a sense of shame.

Pecola Breedlove has an understanding of the appearance she lacks and the implication of the appearance she has. After Maureen buys Pecola ice cream following an ugly encounter with some boys from school, Maureen begins to taunt her about seeing her father naked. As Frieda and Claudia came to Pecola's defence, she screamed "I am cute! You are ugly! Black and ugly. I'm cute! Pecola seems to fold into herself, like a pleat. Frieda and

Pecola would always be lesser. Nicer, brighter, but still less. We could destroy dolls, but we couldn't destroy the voices of parents and aunts, the eyes of our peers, and the light in the eyes of our teachers. The question of prejudice based on skin colour is associated with the appearance of Maureen Peal in *The Bluest Eye*. She sees herself as superior because she looks like her oppressors. The boys at school used to call the girls dehumanizing names. Pecola is vulnerable to the boys. She believes her and accepts her insignificance. Although Frieda does not have a sense of self-hatred, she is aware that her appearance is what makes her beautiful. The standards that make girls like Maureen be seen as beautiful are the thing that scares Claudia the most.

The idea that Pecola is black is reinforced by her encounter with a light-skinned woman who encourages her son to play with white children only. Junior traps Pecola in a room and torments her after he lured her into his home. Junior violently grabbed the black cat that Geraldine loves and shows more affection towards than her own son, when Pecola tried to pet it. He throws the cat against a window and it falls onto a radiator. Junior blamed Pecola for the death of the cat after Geraldine asked for an explanation. The dirty torn dress, the plaits sticking out on her head, hair matted where the plaits had come undone, muddy shoes with a lot of gum peeping out were all examined by Geraldine. Pecola was called a "nasty little black bitch" by Geraldine. The internalizing of whiteness as the standard of beauty is demonstrated by the ferociousness with which she insulted Pecola. She is reminded of everything she has sought to escape when she sees Pecola. It is with an effort to separate herself from her own identity, one that she disregards but essentially shares with Pecola, that she lashes out at Pecola.

Pecola's experience with violence at the Breedlove household contributes to her self-hatred. Morrison says that Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove fought each other with a darkly brutal formalism that was paralleled only by their lovemaking. Pecola believes that if her eyes were

different, she herself would be different. If she looked better, Mrs. Breedlove and her husband would act better. They might say, "Why, look at the pretty-eyed Pecola." We have to not do bad things in front of those pretty eyes. The violence she is exposed to at home is caused by her ugliness. She thinks that the poor treatment and abuse she witnesses is due to her ugliness. She prays for blue eyes because she believes that they will change her situation at home. In a society where blacks are constantly dehumanized by the dominant culture, the Breedloves have less claim to stability. There is a desperation for the blue eyes that will alter what she sees and how others see her because of the absence of care and constant exposure to domestic conflict.

The 1940's prejudiced society that repudiates those that don't identify with the standard of beauty resulted in Pecola Breedlove's false perception in which she acquires bright blue eyes. After meeting with Soaphead Church, a reader, adviser, and interpreter of dreams who takes advantage of young girls, Pecola changed her mind. He tricked her by telling her to feed the poisoned meat to the dog near the porch when she paid him a visit. He admits that if the dog reacts unnaturally, she has been granted her wish of blue eyes. Even if my eyes are bluer than yours, I worry that there is someone else with bluer eyes. Mrs. Breedlove and her imaginary friend are jealous of Pecola's blue eyes. In order to be accepted, she too makes an adjustment, because she internalizes white standards. Her adjustment has negative effects that lead to her doom. The adjustment involves an impossible transformation from a black girl to a white girl with blue eyes. Pecola is more isolated from both black and white society. As she descends into a state of insanity, she exists in the image created by the racist society. White and black obsession with whiteness is what caused Pecola Breedlove to descend to insanity.

The *Bluest Eye* explores young black girls' interactions and exposure to cultural backlash of the black female appearance in the 1940's. Morrison shows the influence of white

culture on the female characters in the novel. Young black girl perception and self-perception is destroyed from a young age. Negative conceptions of the black girl are created by the pervasiveness of whiteness as the only form of beauty promoted through billboards, movies, and dolls. The society that upholds racist and sexist ideology is revealed by Morrison's focus on their continual destruction. Morrison initiated an incentive for action against the construct that creates a self-destructive black community controlled by white superiority.

4 Conformity

4.1 Definition and Concept

Conformity is matching attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours to others. Norms are rules shared by a group of people that guide their interactions. People choose to conform to society because it is easier to follow the path others have already taken, rather than forging a new one. This tendency to conform occurs in small groups and in society as a whole, and may result from subtle unconscious influences (predisposed state of mind), or from direct and overt social pressure. Conformity can happen in the presence of others or alone. Even if alone, people tend to follow social norms when eating and watching television.

A group of similar age, culture, religion or educational status is known as a group of similar influence. Groupthink is a pattern of thought characterized by self-deception, forced manufacture of consent, and conformity to group values and ethics, which ignores realistic appraisal of other courses of action. Social rejection can be caused by unwillingness to conform. Conformity is associated with adolescence and youth culture, but affects humans of all ages.

Conformity can be seen as either good or bad. Driving on the side of the road that is approved may be seen as beneficial. With the appropriate environmental influence, conforming, in early childhood years, allows one to learn and thus, adopt the appropriate

behaviours necessary to interact and develop "correctly" within one's society. Conformity helps societies function smoothly and predictably through the self-elimination of behaviours seen as contrary to rules. Group size, unanimity, cohesion, status, prior commitment and public opinion are some of the factors that help determine the level of conformity an individual displays.

4.2 Types of Conformity

Conformity is a type of social influence that describes how a person changes their attitude or behaviour in response to group pressure. There are many different situations where people conform and psychologists have categorised three main types of conformity, including: compliance, identification and internalisation.

- 1- Compliance: It is the shallowest level of conformity. Here a person changes their public behaviour, the way they act, but not their private beliefs. This is usually a short-term change and is often the result of normative social influence (NSI). For example, you might say that you like dub-step music because many other people in your class like dub-step music, however privately you can't stand it.
- 2- Identification: It is the middle level of conformity. Here a person changes their public behaviour and their private beliefs, but only while they are in the presence of the group. This is usually a short-term change and normally the result of normative social influence (NSI). For example, a person may decide to become a vegetarian because all of their new flat mates are vegetarian. However, whenever they walk past a McDonald's they can't resist a Big Mac and when they are away from their flat mates, they still eat meat. Identification takes place when we are surrounded by a particular group; we change our private beliefs while in the presence of the majority but not permanently.

- 3- Internalisation: It is the deepest level of conformity. Here a person changes their public behaviour and their private beliefs. This is usually a long-term change and often the result of informational social influence (ISI). For example, if an individual is influenced by a group of Buddhists and converts to this faith, then their new religious way of life will continue without the presence of the group as they have internalised this belief as true and this religious way of life as the correct way to behave.

In addition to the three types of conformity (compliance, identification and internalisation) which describe how people conform, there are also two explanations of why people conform, including: normative social influence (NSI) and informational social influence (ISI).

Normative social influence (NSI) is when a person conforms to be accepted and to feel that they belong to the group. Here a person conforms because it is socially rewarding, or to avoid social rejection; for example, to avoid feeling that they don't 'fit in'. Normative Social influence is usually associated with compliance and identification. With compliance, people change their public behaviour but not their private beliefs; with identification people change their public behaviour and their private beliefs, but only in the presence of the group. Therefore, this explanation of social influence leads to a short-term type of conformity, which is motivated by the desire to fit in with the majority.

Informational social influence (ISI) is when a person conforms to gain knowledge, or because they believe that someone else is 'right'. Informational social influence is usually associated with internalisation, where a person changes both their public behaviour and their private beliefs, on a long-term basis. This semi-permanent change in behaviour and belief is the result of a person adopting a new belief system, because they genuinely believe that their new beliefs are 'right' or that the majority are 'experts'. For example, if a person changes

their political ideology from Conservative to Liberal, then they have internalised these new beliefs on a semi-permanent basis and believe that voting Liberal is 'right' for them.

4.3 Impact of Conformity on Society

The truth is, most people will remain in their comfort zone and they will keep following the norms set up by society. This is crucial for the balance in this world.

- 1- Upside: Conformity is a type of social influence that involves a change in belief or behaviour in order to fit in with a group. People evolve and progress at a fast rate because we have always formed societies in which we were dependent on the other members. One of the things that helped us survive and thrive back in the past was being a lone wolf. Despite living differently, this is still true. There are a lot of positives to being conformed. We can name a few important things, from creating a safety net to making it easier for everyone. Staying in the comfort zone that society sets for us is definitely the perk of being included. People's lives are all about being included in a group. Friends in school start this from the youngest age. Conformity can be seen in a lot of things, from our work to our daily habits. We can be accepted if we are conforming to society's rules. Acceptance makes our lives simpler. Everything seems better when you fit in.
- 2- downside: Conformity makes people in a group behave in the same way. This is a good thing and also a bad thing. Many people in this world do not feel like others, yet they are obliged to follow society's rules. Sometimes we are pressured to do this even when we don't want to. Some people can't say they live their life the way they want to. Despite not being happy with how they are, they are conforming to the norm. In a conformist society, people lose their individuality in order to be accepted. Negative consequences can come from the burden they feel to be something they are not. That is not the worst thing. Our society and the groups we

find ourselves in are pressured to fit the perfect image. We are met with criticism when we fail to do it. Group pressures can take many forms, but the end result is always the same negative consequences on a person's wellbeing. Conformity can be a bad thing for individuals, even if they are good for keeping the balance in the world. Those who don't feel like obeying the rules.

4.4 Conformity in *The Bluest Eye*

The Bluest Eye is a novel about African Americans conforming to white standards. Morrison looks at the influence of white culture on class levels in the novel. Morrison tries to make African Americans aware that they don't have to conform to white standards when it comes to beauty in the novel. By comparing the way specific characters are shaped by the proliferation of white aesthetic norms with the beauty standards in place today, it is evident that women of colour still tend to conform to the whitewashing of beauty in America.

Morrison wrote this novel during the "Black Is Beautiful" era, when African Americans were being conditioned to believe that their looks are synonymous with beauty. Morrison's main character, Pecola Breedlove, accepts the ideology that white features correlate with beauty. She desires having blue eyes and "internalizes" the "white ideal" she sees reinforced by society in general and by her own mother's treatment of her. All the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured. Seeing that these traits are valued and that she does not possess any of them, identifies as being ugly and unlovable. Thus, the only way to gain respect and assimilate to those white ideals is to conform to the standardized beauty and gain at least one of those traits, i.e., the bluest eye. The pressure of conformity and the inability to do so is what drove Pecola to madness.

a culture that is on the chase for self-righteousness and conformity, African American has suffered throughout history trying to find its place in American culture. Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* describe the hardships the characters undergo to assimilate and conform. Although a theme of self-loathing is seen throughout the story, the road to assimilation and being accepted is extraordinarily different. Morrison 's fictional lead, Pecola is the scapegoat of the community. She struggles with finding her true identity due to the colour of her skin. She ends up losing herself by going crazy believing she was granted the bluest eye.

Being the scapegoat of her society, Pecola is unable to conform due to her physical characteristics. No matter how hard she's unable to assimilate in the way she and society favours. A prominent theme of the novel is the conception of race and beauty. All of the white characters in the novel are glorified and viewed as pure and beautiful, whereas the blacks are seen as dirty and associated with ugliness. People in her society never let her forget when she is taunted and picked on at school, "And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I am cute!" (Morrison 75). Pecola's battle with society led to her downfall with racial assimilation in addition to her lack of confidence. Morrison says, "It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes...were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different."(Morrison --). This suggests that Pecola not only would find success in assimilating but also her psychological state of being would be well off. Moreover, this outlines the differences between the assimilation that Pecola seek to lead the contrast of her outcome.

5 General Conclusion

One of the major factors that increase conformity is the pressure presented by a larger group over a minor one, which is the case for African Americans. The need to assimilate to the white ideals is portrayed perfectly throughout the novel, and from the perspective of Pecola, the duelling forces from everyone around her including her family compelled her to embrace the deepest level of conformity. It was hard task going on with her life facing all that

pressure; for the beauty standards were set by a larger white group with higher status, and she had to subdue in order to fit in and get accepted and somehow gain respect. It was unlikely for her to earn any of the white beauty features except for wishing she had blue eyes for which she prayed, and her internalized conformity lead her to losing her mind eventually.

Feminism was a pillar that urged the novelist to stand up against any form of racism or standardized beauty, she aimed to regain her identity through literature and sought to portray the misery that the “Black” community suffered throughout the novel. Emphasizing on the fact that black women were the most to agonize. That victimization would lead to empathy which may lead to a rebellion against the beauty standards and show that “Black is beautiful” as well.

Morrison showed that conforming is not the best solution for African American to end racism, and the only way to gain respect is to stand out as “Black.” Pecola as well as most of the characters were a solid proof of the concept of conformity, even though each character had a certain degree of assimilation to the standardized beauty ideals, it didn’t benefit any of them; and for Pecola who had “internalized” conformity, she ended up embracing madness rather than respect or acceptance.

While conformity assures the unity of society and the unification of its people, aid in rule enforcement and abandons bad habits, it often hampers personal progress and downgrades the feeling of self and causes the loss of identity. Conformity doesn’t encourage change in the world and it leads to dependence and depression. It often leads to apathy and encourages the lack of diversity. The pros and cons of conformity in society show us that we need people who “go along to get along” just like we require some individuals to have the courage to step out on their own. When we have both groups active at any relationship level,

then there is balance to the group. Conformists cannot exist without others who are unwilling to make changes. There must be rules – and we must have rule breakers.

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