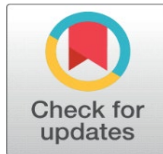
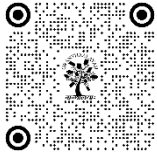


RACIAL TRAUMA AND SELF-DESTRUCTION: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF DISCRIMINATION IN THE BLUEST EYE

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the psychological consequences of racial discrimination in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), with a focus on racial trauma and self-destruction. This study explores how systemic oppression and internalised racism result in catastrophic mental and emotional collapse through an examination of important people, especially Pecola Breedlove. This paper uses literary and psychological frameworks to show how Morrison challenges systematic racism and how it affects African Americans' self-perception and mental health.

Keywords: Racial Trauma, Self-Destruction, Psychological Consequences, Discrimination, *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison, Internalized Racism, Oppression

1. INTRODUCTION

The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison delves deeply into the psychological impact of racial discrimination on African Americans. The story, which is set in the 1940s, explores how internalised racism affects Black communities and causes mental illness and self-loathing. This essay explores the ways in which racial trauma appears in the book and drives characters—especially Pecola Breedlove—to commit suicide. Through an analysis of Morrison's criticism of racial oppression and beauty standards, this study illuminates the profound psychological scars brought on by systemic racism.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach, using literary analysis and psychological theories to interpret *The Bluest Eye*. Primary sources include Morrison's text, while secondary sources consist of scholarly articles on racial trauma, internalized racism, and psychological consequences. The study employs psychoanalytic and postcolonial frameworks to understand the characters' behaviours and mental states.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars have extensively analysed *The Bluest Eye* in relation to race, gender, and psychological trauma. Morrison's work has been examined through the lens of internalized racism, with critics noting how white beauty standards impact Black self-perception (Hooks, 1992). Psychological studies on racial trauma highlight how systemic discrimination fosters self-hatred and mental instability (Williams & Mohammed, 2013). This paper builds on these discussions by linking racial oppression directly to self-destructive tendencies in the novel's characters.

4. RACIAL TRAUMA

In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola Breedlove's, the protagonist embedded belief that her Blackness makes her ugly is a clear example of racial trauma. She picks up on society's preference for whiteness at a young age, which is supported by sentiments in the community, family, and media. Because they opening their anger on her, her parents' experiences with racial prejudice also add to her misery. The novel demonstrates how racial trauma is inherited and can take many various forms, such as psychological disengagement or physical abuse. "We were lesser. Nicer, brighter, but still lesser." (Morrison, 2007, p. 74) This quote highlights how Black children internalize the idea that they are inferior in a society that privileges whiteness.

Pecola's mother, Pauline Breedlove, is another example of the generational effects of racial trauma. According to Morrison, she found comfort in suffering because "she learnt that pain was not only endurable, it was sweet." (Page 126, Morrison, 2007). In Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), he examines how colonised people internalise their own oppression. This paragraph illustrates how racial oppression leads Black people to accept suffering as an unavoidable aspect of their lives.

The psychological impact of racial trauma is further elaborated in the works of Frantz Fanon, who argues in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) that racialized individuals experience an existential crisis as they internalize oppressive societal narratives. Pecola's desire for blue eyes mirrors Fanon's concept of the "epidermalization of inferiority," where the oppressed accept and reinforce the dominant racial ideology. Bell Hooks (1992) also explores this in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, emphasizing how media and cultural representations shape self-worth. Morrison's portrayal of Pecola's suffering aligns with these theories, showing how systemic racism distorts self-perception and leads to psychological fragmentation.

Additionally, the intergenerational nature of racial trauma is evident in the struggles of Pauline and Cholly Breedlove. Drawing from Joy DeGruy's (2005) concept of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, one can see how the unresolved pain of historical oppression influences contemporary Black experiences. Pauline's self-loathing and Cholly's destructive behaviours are the result of inherited racial trauma, which further entrenches their daughter in cycles of hatred and estrangement. These theoretical approaches provide light on the depths of Pecola's psychological anguish, situating her tragedy within a larger context of racialised oppression and mental health implications.

5. SELF-DESTRUCTION

The most obvious example of self-destruction in *The Bluest Eye* is Pecola's mental breakdown. As she internalises racial hatred, she gets isolated from her community and loses touch with reality. Her longing for blue eyes represents her ultimate capitulation to white supremacy, as she feels that changing her appearance will result in acceptance and love. Morrison writes, "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, 2007, p. 46). This excerpt highlights Pecola's assumption that conforming to white beauty standards would improve her situation and allow her to be appreciated. Similarly, her parents, Pauline and

Cholly Breedlove, suffer from self-destructive tendencies as a result of their racial trauma—Pauline through self-neglect and Cholly through violence and alcohol addiction. The community, instead of supporting Pecola, banishes her, as highlighted in the novel: "All of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed. And all of our beauty, which was hers first and which she gave to us." (Morrison, 2007, p. 205). This line reveals how the Black community projects its insecurities and racial trauma onto Pecola, ultimately making her the scapegoat for their collective suffering.

Frantz Fanon's concept of "epidermalization of inferiority" in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) is relevant here, as Pecola embodies the internalization of racial self-hatred to the point of psychological destruction. Pauline's absorption of white beauty ideals and her preference for the Fisher family over her own mirrors Fanon's idea of the colonized subject admiring the colonizer's world while rejecting their own. bell hooks (1992) further support this analysis, asserting that "representations of blackness in media and culture shape self-perception." Pecola's obsession with Shirley Temple and white dolls exemplifies this concept, highlighting the catastrophic influence of systematic racism on Black identity construction.

Furthermore, Joy DeGruy's (2005) idea of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome emphasises how intergenerational racial trauma leads to self-destructive behaviours, as seen by Cholly's drunkenness and violence. His inability to understand his own experiences with racism causes harm to those closest to him, repeating cycles of suffering and injustice. Morrison's portrayal of these folks emphasises the long-term psychological scars left by racial prejudice, underscoring the necessity to investigate the mental health repercussions of institutional oppression.

6. PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF DISCRIMINATION

The novel depicts how racial discrimination causes significant psychological consequences, such as low self-esteem, identity crises, and delusions. Pecola's journey into lunacy exemplifies the psychological toll that racism exacts on people. Morrison writes, "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, 2007, p. 46). This sentence emphasises her idea that conforming to white beauty standards will ensure her acceptance, revealing the profound psychological trauma caused by racial injustice. "She stepped over into madness, a madness which protected her from us simply because it bored us in the end." (Morrison, 2007, p. 204) powerfully encapsulates the tragic culmination of Pecola Breedlove's psychological descent. It signifies how her community, after subjecting her to years of neglect, ridicule, and racial discrimination, ultimately disregards her suffering when she loses her grip on reality. Claudia and Frieda MacTeer oppose Pecola, demonstrating tenacity in the face of injustice. Claudia, unlike Pecola, rejects white beauty norms, saying that she felt wrath rather than affection for white dolls: "I had only one desire: to dismember it" (Morrison, 2007, p. 21). This event exemplifies a rejection of racialised beauty norms, as opposed to Pecola's internalisation of them. However, Claudia's awareness of societal injustice does not reduce the psychological cost of racism, as Frantz Fanon (1952) writes in *Black Skin, White Masks*: "The black man's identity is constantly being shaped and deformed by the white gaze." Fanon's theory backs up Morrison's account of how racial discrimination affects Black identity formation.

Additionally, Bell Hooks (1992) argues that "representations of blackness in media and culture shape self-perception." Pecola's obsession with Shirley Temple and white dolls supports Hooks' claim that systemic racism distorts Black self-image. Ultimately, Pecola's craziness exemplifies what Joy DeGruy (2005) refers to as Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, in which historical and institutional racial oppression causes long-lasting psychological wounds.

7. CONCLUSION

Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is a disastrous examination of the psychological damage caused by racial discrimination. The novel uses Pecola's terrible fate to highlight the perils of internalised racism and the catastrophic effects of systemic oppression. Morrison advocates for a re-evaluation of cultural norms and the destruction of beauty standards that perpetuate racial self-loathing by revealing the deep psychological wounds created by racial trauma.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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