

Racism in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye

Kadu Jalindar Dadabhau

Head and Assistant Professor, Karmveer Ramraoji Aher Arts, Science and Commerce College Deola, Nashik

Email: jalikadu03@gmail.com

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Head and Assistant Professor, Karmveer
Ramraoji Aher Arts, Science and
Commerce College Deola, Nashik
Email: jalikadu03@gmail.com

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Address for correspondence:

Kadu Jalindar Dadabhau
Head and Assistant Professor, Karmveer
Ramraoji Aher Arts, Science and
Commerce College Deola, Nashik
Email: jalikadu03@gmail.com

Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine racism and its effects on the mental health of African Americans, as portrayed in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Through this novel, Morrison illustrates how racism can harm individuals, particularly women and children. Despite greater awareness of equality in the modern era, instances of racism continue to exist throughout history. *The Bluest Eye* is Toni Morrison's debut novel, published in 1970 and set in her hometown of Lorain, Ohio. The story explores the impact of African American racism on black girls, leading them to lose self-esteem due to the treatment they receive from white people. Racism is defined as the belief that one race is inherently superior to another. In the novel, two young black girls, Frieda and Claudia, often compare their lives to those of white children, believing that white children have a better life. Another black girl, Pecola Breedlove, yearns for blue eyes, symbolizing her desire to be accepted. She loses her self-worth due to neglect from her family and rejection from others, which eventually drives her to madness. She becomes obsessed with the idea of having blue eyes and cannot stop admiring them. Racism is not solely about hatred or physical violence. It can manifest through mockery, bullying, or exclusion from activities and groups based on differences. Individuals who experience racism often face significant stress and a decline in self-confidence.

Keywords: African American, Black, White, Racism etc.

Introduction:

The American novelist Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* explores black society and looks at the themes of black victimization and racial oppression. This paper examines the impact of race, racial oppression, and how different groups are represented in *The Bluest Eye*. Racism also creates hate between Black and White people.

Research Methodology:

This research uses qualitative methods because the data comes from written information.

Data Collection:

The researchers gather data from two sources: Primary Source and Secondary Source. Primary Source is the novel itself, *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison. Secondary Source includes books, journals, articles, and internet resources that help the researchers complete their work.

Racism in *The Bluest Eye* shows the struggles Black people face against racism, which deeply affects their mental health. The racism shown in the story comes not only from white people but also from some Black individuals. This makes many Black people accept racist ideas and start to believe in white standards of beauty and value. White people show racism based on their belief that they are better than others. This belief in white supremacy puts white people at the top of society and makes them think they are better than other races.

This belief leads to white privilege, which means white people get more advantages in life. In the story, the character Pecola faces being rejected because of how people see her. She is not considered beautiful, which leads to her being insulted and treated badly by others. Toni Morrison shows that racism is not just between white and Black people but also happens within the Black community. Also, some Black people may see themselves as better than others because of class differences, especially those who want to be like white people. This can make them accept racism and feel that being like white people will make them more respected and less likely to face racism. Many Black people believe that if they act like white people, they might avoid racism and discrimination. An example of this is Geraldine, a light-skinned Black woman from the middle class. She has a comfortable life and looks down on poorer Black people. Her desire to be like white people makes her clean and polite, but it also makes her seem cold and unfriendly. The racism shown in *The Bluest Eye* includes rejection, insults, and even violence by white people.

Toni Morrison shows how society influences our values and beliefs. She wrote this book to highlight how racism affects the most vulnerable people, especially children and women. It also shows how racism can make people feel bad about themselves and hurt them deeply.

In the novel, black people are not only rejected by white people but also by other Black people. This rejection is based on differences in class or social status. Pecola Breedlove is the character who experiences the most rejection. She is Black and not considered beautiful, which makes people avoid her. The long history of racism in America makes Black people, especially Black women, feel insecure and unwanted. No one wants to talk to her, her teachers and friends ignore her, which makes her wonder why she is so ugly. Because of this, she doesn't have any friends at school. She sits alone at a double desk. "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". Pecola also feels rejected when she goes to buy Mary Jane candy. The shop owner, Mr. Yacobowski, is a light-skinned man who doesn't want to see Pecola. "He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see. How can a fifty-two-year-old white immigrant storekeeper... see a little black girl?" (Morrison, 48). Pecola looks at him with emptiness and curiosity. She doesn't know why he avoids her, but she realizes that people see her with interest, disgust, and even anger. She feels he doesn't want to see her because of her blackness. People avoid her because she is dark-skinned. She is always kind to others, but they do not return her kindness. They never show love for her. Pecola is not only rejected by white people, but also by some Black people. The person who rejects her is her own mother, Pauline Breedlove. When Pecola was born, Pauline liked to look at her, but then she realized Pecola was ugly. Pauline did not see her own baby as beautiful because she had accepted the white beauty standards she saw in movies. "I used to like to watch her. You know they make them sound greedy. Eyes are all soft and wet. A cross between a puppy and a dying man. But I knew she was ugly. Her head was full of pretty hair, but Lord, she was ugly" (Morrison, 126).

Toni Morrison writes back against the "male 'glamour of shame' rape is (or once was) routinely given." Pecola, an eleven-year-old girl, is raped by her father, Cholly. This abuse drives her mad, and her mother refuses to believe what happened. Morrison shows how, in the 1970s, people often blamed the victim for her trauma instead of trying to understand it. This is shown by how Pecola's community reacts. Adults say things like "Pecola carry some of the blame" and "How come she didn't fight him?" These reactions come right after the rape scene, where Pecola is left unconscious on the kitchen floor. Examples of rejection can also be found through Geraldine's character, which shows class differences among black people.

The less fortunate black people who belong to the lower-class group mostly live in poverty. Some of their jobs are hard, and they don't get good pay. Sometimes their income isn't enough to meet their daily needs. In fact, if black people get a proper education, they can keep up with white people. We can see these class differences through Geraldine. Geraldine is an example of black superiority. She and her family are black, but they have light skin. She considers herself and her family to be "colored people," not the same as the other black community, which she calls "niggers." She explains to her son that "White kids; his mother did not like him to play with niggers. She had explained to him the difference between colored people and niggers. They were easily identifiable. Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud" (Morrison, 87).

Geraldine is a middle-class black person. She has a nice house, keeps it tidy, and always wears clean, ironed clothes. She dresses her son to look neat, like a white person. Geraldine hates her race, which makes her not want to be recognized as part of the same black community. Her obsession makes her believe that poor dark-skinned black people are not equal to whites or even her family. Toni Morrison shows how black people internalize racism and become racist towards their own communities. Ideal beauty means having white skin, blonde hair, blue eyes, a perfect body shape, and anything that a white person looks like. Meanwhile, "blackness" means dark skin, dark eyes, wavy hair, and different face shapes from white people. If a black person's face doesn't meet this standard of beauty, it affects their self-confidence. Black people also face discrimination and are rejected in places like the city park. They are not allowed to visit Lake Shore Park, which is only for whites. The park is supposed to be for everyone, but black people are not allowed in, even if it's empty. "We reached Lake Shore Park, a city park laid out with rosebuds, fountains, bowling greens, picnic tables... Black people were not allowed in the park, so it filled our dreams" (Morrison, 105).

Racial insults are acts of insulting or offending groups or individuals of certain races, done on purpose or carelessly. (Byrne, 2). African-Americans are insulted because they are black and ugly, things they cannot control. Pecola was segregated at school, and her friends always made fun of her. They used her to mock other students. One day, while walking home from school, she was bullied by a group of boys. They circled around her and she was crying, unable to do anything. They screamed at her: "Black e mo. Black e mo. Yadadd sleeps nekked. Black e mo black e mo ya dadd sleeps nekked. Black e mo..." (Morrison, 65).

They insulted her by mocking her existence as a black person and her parents. It was something she had no control over, like her skin color and the sleeping habits of adults. Also, the children who harassed Pecola were black. By insulting Pecola, they let go of their fatigue about their thoughts on their existence as black people. Besides Pecola's experience, her mother was also insulted by white people. When she was about to give birth to Pecola, she went to the hospital and was treated unfairly. She was humiliated by the doctors. One doctor told his juniors that Pauline had no trouble giving birth and didn't even feel pain like a horse. "The old one was learning the young ones about babies. Showing them how to do. When he got to me he said now these here women you don't have any trouble with. They deliver right away and with no pain. Just like horses" (Morrison, 125). The doctor harshly belittles Pauline by comparing her to a horse, making the other doctors laugh at her. The doctors do not treat black people as equal to white people. Pauline's experience shows how African-Americans, especially black women, are treated in public healthcare.

In the novel 'The Bluest Eye', violence is not just physical but also verbal, especially from other black people. Pauline is always rude and mean to Pecola because she can't accept her own daughter. She often hits Pecola to express her anger. Once, when Pauline accidentally spilled blueberry juice by touching a hot pan, most of it splashed on Pecola's legs. The burn hurt badly, and Pecola cried out and started hopping around. When Mrs. Breedlove entered with a laundry bag, she quickly grabbed Pecola and hit her with her hand, then pulled her up by the arm and slapped her again, shouting at her in a very angry voice. Pauline didn't notice that Pecola's leg was burned and even called her a "crazy fool" in front of the white girl, who was her employer's daughter. She kept saying, "crazy fool... my floor, mess... look what you... work... get on out... now that... crazy... my floor, my floor... my floor." Regardless of Pecola, Pauline actually comforted the white girl. She showed care and love to her employer's childlike she was her own. This shows that Pauline treats white people better than her own daughter. Other characters also showed violence to Pecola. When Louis Jr., Geraldine's son, saw Pecola at the playground, he invited her to his house, saying he would show her kittens. But he threw Geraldine's cat at her. This act showed he hated black people, just like his mother. The cat hit Pecola in the face, got stuck in her mouth, and clawed her face and chest as it tried to get up. The cat then jumped off the floor. Racist behavior has a bad effect on people's mental and physical health.

Constant racism can lead to mental illness. Victims may hate others they see as different and even hate themselves, losing their confidence and becoming depressed. As Solomon said, "racial discrimination not only makes the relationship between whites and blacks worse, but non-white children become the product of a system that causes serious physical harm." Claudia MacTeer is a character who hates white people and everything related to white supremacy. She says, "We stare at her, wanting her bread, but more than that wanting to poke the arrogance out of her eyes and smash the pride of ownership that curls her chewing mouth. When she comes out of the car we will beat her up, make red marks on her white skin." This quote shows her anger towards the arrogance of white people. One effect of racism is the hatred toward white people. Claudia felt this when she saw a white girl eating bread and butter and showing it off to her. At that time, black people were seen as poor while whites were rich, so black children were often ridiculed by white children. Claudia also felt hatred when she saw Pecola and Frieda admiring Shirley Temple and receiving a Christmas present. She said, "I had not arrived at the turning point on the development of my psyche which would allow me to love her. What I felt that time was unsullied hatred." She also said, "I destroyed white baby dolls. But the dismembering of dolls was not the true horror. The truly horrifying thing was the transfer of the same impulses to little white girls."

Claudia didn't follow white standards because she didn't like being compared to white girls, and she thought adults didn't realize they were better. Claudia didn't like praising the beauty of Shirley Temple, and she felt angry because adults preferred white girls over black girls. Also, she got a white doll for Christmas, but she broke it because she didn't want adults to accept white beauty standards and give her something that didn't match what she wanted. This made her hate white people even more. Racism also makes people lose confidence and hate themselves. Pecola, a black girl, had to deal with all kinds of racism, which made her hate herself. She believed all her problems were because she was ugly, so she wanted to disappear. She whispered, "Please, God, please make me disappear," and closed her eyes, imagining parts of her body fading away, leaving only her eyes. She kept asking God for blue eyes, believing he would grant her wish even if it took a long time. She became obsessed with her desire, and her longing turned into hallucinations that made her lose her mind. The rejection from others and her father's actions destroyed her. She became crazy, walking alone at the edge of town talking to herself. Kids her age were scared of her, and everyone avoided her. The damage was complete. She spent her days walking back and forth, her head moving to a drumbeat only she could hear.

Based on the analysis, two main points can be concluded. First, racism is shown in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* because white people feel superior. This idea leads to different forms of racism, like rejection, insults, and violence. Racism in the novel comes from white people and black people who accept racism within their own

community. Second, the mental health effects of racism include hating others with anger and hatred, and also hating oneself because of losing confidence

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