

A Comparative Analysis of the Mental Consequences in Toni Morrison's *Bluest Eyes and Beloved*

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1. Introduction

Mental health is the wellness of our emotional, psychological, and social states. It is an umbrella term for how one thinks, feels, and acts, and it influences how to handle stress, relate to others, and make choices

As there is a rise in the disturbances impacting psychological health in people of the 21st century, there is a need to study and raise awareness of mental health. The text being compared are *Bluest Eyes* and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison. The research analyses the area of mental health basing the foundation on the two novels which present the lives of black people and their suffering in the world. For a change to happen in a positive direction, there is a requirement to first acknowledge the problem, then listen to the voices of the people who are in pain or agony, and then the solutions can be found to help heal the wounds of life.

Keywords: Mental health, the black female, rape, trauma

1.1 Knowing the novelist

Toni Morrison, an American novelist known for her works that delve into the experiences of black women. She has been praised for her ability to expand articulation and keep the endings of her books open for reinterpretation. Morrison's parents instilled in her a sense of heritage and language through telling traditional African-American folktales, ghost stories, and singing songs. She also spoke about her patriotism and the need for conversations about race in America.

Morrison started fiction writing with a group of writers at Howard University. One day she met a girl who longed for blue eyes, where she drew the inspiration to develop the novel. Morrison felt she belonged to her country when she was given the freedom to speak about the deaths of black men by white men. Her circumstances provoked her to write about race discrimination and the mental disturbances as a result of it. Most of Morrison's novels revolve around black females and yet she refuses to call herself a feminist because she rejects the idea of patriarchy and matriarchy urging the world to have equal space for both men and women to live in harmony and resolve conflicts justly. She believes in leaving space for all

much more advanced ideas where mental stability and peace can be achieved without the influence of gender ideologies.

1.2 About the area selected

The research work analyses the area of mental health in people. As there is a rise in the disturbances impacting psychological health in people of the 21st century, there is a need to study and raise awareness of mental health. *Bluest Eyes* and *Beloved* the two novels present the lives of black people and their suffering in the world. For a change to happen in a positive direction, there is a requirement to first acknowledge the problem, then listen to the voices of the people who are in pain or agony, and then the solutions can be found to help heal the wounds of life.

The relevance of the research is to identify and express the pain and suffering of individuals and to solve the root causes of their mental health disturbance. Authors like Toni Morrison have used their pen to raise concern and awareness for mental and psychological health. "There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity, no need for silence, no room for fear. We speak, we write, we do language. That is how civilizations heal."

Toni Morrison trusts one needs to have courage to face the world and rise. Women need to develop independence and have agency of their own. The author is determined to write about the inner journey of the mind, in support of raising awareness on mental health, which is the reason to choose these books. The style used by Toni Morrison involves the use of human-like characters to express their voices, emotions and thoughts. Morrison portrays a realistic method of storytelling in a fictional novel, this makes her characters relatable to many going through pain and suffering.

2. An analysis of *Bluest Eyes*

Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, published in 1970 and she went on to write many more critically acclaimed novels. Toni Morrison serves as the representative person American black women in literature, her novel the *Bluest Eyes* talks about a little black girl who desires the bluest eyes.

As a black child, she goes through a series of traumas such as racial and gender prejudice making her feel self-conscious and cornered in the world of white-dominated people. Though she belongs to a black heritage she longs to be part of the white culture. Her pursuit of the bluest eyes begins because society influences her to think that blue eyes equal beauty which equals respect and dignity. This desire for unreal beauty standards leads to a series of unfortunate incidents such as body-shaming, racial discrimination and rape, her little mind could not tolerate the trauma and hence she succumbs to madness. Morrison draws from her own childhood experiences to talk about this little black girl trying to survive the world.

Mental illness is a huge crisis in today's world, while, silent chaos that forms in the mind goes unnoticed by most eyes, and it requires a specialist to diagnose and treat mental issues for all ages and genders, Mental illness is not tangible and is always invisible in the beginning, the untrained minds of regular people may fail to recognise mental instability even in their close circles, peers and family. Though mental health requires a trained specialist to manage the mind, many across the world are not financially equipped to access quality treatment, which is an unfortunate situation that needs to change.

In some countries like India, mental health is considered taboo where people associate trained psychiatric doctors with a shameful notion. Having mental issues is considered an act

of shame in some cultures across the world, the pride and reputation of people are at risk, and people refuse to acknowledge that something is wrong and push a person going through mental issues beyond their capacity to sustain themselves. While going through depression or phases of anxiety is brushed off as excess imagination psychological treatment is a luxury far beyond a common man's reach.

As seen in the novel, some people descend into madness some others contemplate suicide as their only solution. For the younger generations to not repeat the mistakes of the older generation, there is a need to discuss the mental health issues faced by people across the world according to their age categories. The consequences of this ignorant tendency towards mental health are sometimes severe.

To further understand mental health, the inner processing of the mind and the actions that lead to trauma, the book *Bluest Eyes* has been taken into consideration. Through the book, the problems of mental health are analysed through the lens of racism, oppression and ignorance in society. One can understand the psychological effects of racism, rape and financial insecurity on the Breedlove family, by studying the characters closely. Through trauma narratives, one can reach the world to inform them about guarding their mental health, and to speak for or against a cause.

Toni Morrison brilliantly captures the trauma associated with each of the Breedlove individuals which makes them go through cycles of pain and mental health issues. When these issues are discussed, the world can have a better perspective on the repercussions of mental health on a family, especially a black immigrant family living in the United States during the 1970's. By analysing the mental chaos in each character, the origin of trauma narratives can be discussed which leaves the next generation of people better equipped with knowledge as to what causes mental health and how one can avoid engaging in activities like racism, oppression and abuse to create a safer and better society for everyone.

The gruesome consequences that are faced by the characters in *Bluest Eyes*. The characters surrounding Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* are all entangled in their heartbreaking conflicts. Each character carries their personal history, making them incapable of truly understanding, loving, or supporting young Pecola. Similarly, they are painfully aware that society deems beauty and attention to be given to those with "blue eyes, yellow hair, white skin".

This understanding, deeply embedded in their perception of personal worth, forces the movement of the conflicts that happen within the lives of the novel's central characters. Due to their racial and social position, they are made to feel "ugly," which results in self-hatred, self-rejection, and even abuse leading to trauma. Pecola's realization of this harsh reality of the outside world begins at a tender age.

A seemingly trivial incident at the store, where she goes to buy candy. The owner, who is a respected white member of the community, treats her as if she is both invisible and untouchable, not validating her existence as a human. This encounter confirms Pecola's initial understanding: the societal construct of beauty not only shapes personal value but also deems girls with blond hair, blue eyes, and white skin as pretty and worthy, while girls like Pecola, with dark skin, are deemed ugly and not considered worthy.

This is the truth of the brutal world, discrimination based on colour and beauty. Pecola too like anyone else longs for dignity and respect, but when her needs are not met, she loses her mental stability to false delusions and constructed ideas of beauty in the society. Pecola is too

innocent and gets carried away by the negative impact of society. She and her friends seek out prayers to help her get blue eyes so she can be treated fairly in the community.

As the narrative progresses toward its end, Pecola's feelings of rejection and isolation become intense. Her disappearing sense of self-worth becomes entrenched as events continuously reinforce her misguided belief that her appearance defines her value. Pecola understands that Maureen, a lighter-skinned Black girl from a wealthy family, receives love and adoration mainly due to her appearance.

Pecola observes that the boys in the neighbourhood have a collective crush on Maureen, and even the girls consider her beautiful. Pecola's mother unintentionally instils this message. Her mother was not happy when Pecola was born as a black child. When Pecola burns herself on a cobbler, her mother prioritizes comforting the little white girl, the child of her employer, rather than tending to Pecola herself.

Each of these experiences further confirms Pecola's conviction that she is unworthy of affection. This further deepens the sorrow in her making her feel unworthy because she feels unattended to by her own family. The due care and love she desired from her family were not met. So, she longs for blue eyes which she believes will help her regain her unmet needs of herself. The conflict is seen when she deeply starts desiring something that is glorified in society.

In a devastating turn of events, Pecola's father, Cholly, a victim of his painful past, rapes and impregnates her. He was unhappy in his marriage, feeling trapped and insecure. When he meets his biological father, his parent refuses to recognise him. Furthermore, his painful past of being shamed for having sex with his then-girlfriend is continually lingering in his mind. A part of his past where two policemen shame them for getting intimate in the bushes.

His actions, driven by his own self-loathing and echoes of Pecola's feelings about herself, serve as an expression of his deep-seated self-hatred stemming from his mother's abandonment and his humiliation at the hands of white men. While raping her he repeats this cycle of shame he had undergone. While Cholly may have a tinge of love for his wife and daughter, his behaviour only reinforces Pecola's distorted self-perception.

Happiness becomes an unattainable concept for her, further deepening her belief that she is undeserving of it, this becomes a climactic tragedy in the child's life.

Following Pecola's rape, the events that follow continue to drive her deeper into isolation and a profound sense of loneliness. When Pecola's mother discovers what Cholly has done, she resorts to physical violence and beats Pecola saying that it is rather her fault. This further deepens the trauma faced by a young Pecola. The child cannot tolerate the pain and she begins spiralling into isolation and madness.

Desperate to become "beautiful" and worthy of affection, Pecola embarks on a path of delusion, which foreshadows the conclusion. She meets Soaphead Church, a false preacher, begging him to grant her blue eyes. Pecola who is now pregnant and burdened by the community's condemnation, is now left even more isolated and alone. The pain and suffering only prolong young Pecola's life. Here Pecola's ego is in action where she does her best to gain the superficiality of beauty to gain attention from people.

In a deeply disturbing situation, Pecola's trauma becomes too heavy for her to bear and she descends into insanity. Her perception becomes blurry, rendering her unable to see the reality that led to her downfall. But she finds solace in her new imaginary friend, she believes that others envy her blue eyes, which is why they reject her. Pecola's superego is seen active here, where she finds comfort in her new friend and feels a tiny amount of comfort.

The narrator, Claudia, concludes that society's perception of beauty is rooted in racial and social prejudice. Pecola's "ugliness" merely serves as a contrast to make others feel better, intensifying the destructive belief that beauty is the ultimate determinant of one's worth. Pecola's story talks about the destructive effects of society on the minds of innocent children. The world remains unaltered from its initial state, while Pecola, tragically, finds a twisted form of liberation.

The novel and its characters raise a need for society to change the unhealthy belief systems about beauty. A lack of care towards young minds and adults leads to tragic consequences, human beings are gentle with fragile minds, and through the history of people losing their mental balance, due to trauma, mankind can learn to be better at enforcing human values. The tragic ending of Pecola's life can be averted if changes can be made towards the attitude and perception of mental health around the world.

3. An analysis of *Beloved*

Beloved is written on the true story of a person called Margaret Garner, a black female slave who ran away from a Kentucky farm along with her family. The family escaped to Ohio, but soon they were caught by their owner and the police. Margaret killed her little daughter to avoid being taken back into slavery before they were recaptured. In similar circumstances in the book, Sethe the protagonist is a fiercely loving mother who escapes with her kids from an abusive owner called "schoolteacher".

The family doesn't reach far when they are apprehended, the mother Sethe kills the baby out of kindness and sacrifice as a way to free her from living the life of a slave. The two-year-old baby daughter dies, and the schoolteacher, who considers Sethe to be insane, refuses to accept her back.

Years pass and Sethe has written "Beloved" on her daughter's gravestone after the traumatic event. Although she had planned for it to say "Dearly Beloved," she lacked the stamina to "pay" for double words because each word cost her 10 minutes of intercourse with the engraver. The story starts in the year 1873, with Sethe and her daughter Denver living in Ohio. Their house at 124 Bluestone Road is haunted by the vengeful spirit of the child Sethe killed, and these events are repeated in flashbacks.

The entrance of Paul D, a man so damaged by his history as a slave that he puts his emotions in the "tobacco bin" of his heart, helps to lessen the hauntings. He'd been working on the same plantation with Sethe, and soon they'd begun to date. A brief moment of quietness is broken by the presence of a young woman who introduces herself as Beloved. She has knowledge that leads her to believe she is the reincarnation of Sethe's dead and lost daughter.

Sethe strives to appease the progressively controlling and demanding Beloved because she is fixated on relieving her guilt. Paul D.'s been seduced by Beloved before. He departs upon discovering that Sethe murdered her daughter. When Sethe loses her job and starts to obsess over Beloved, who is going to be having a baby shortly after, it gets even messier at 124 Bluestone. Even when Denver, who's mainly in her home and lonely, befriends Beloved at first she begins to worry.

After that she ventures outside to seek help from her community, which gives her food and a security of a job. The local women attempt an exorcism, Denver's employer arrives to take her to work, and Sethe misidentifies him as a "schoolteacher" and attacks him with an ice pick. The other women are preventing her from getting loose, and Beloved disappears during the commotion. Then Paul D comes home to the dead Sethe, swears that he will look after her, and Denver's thriving in outer space.

“Toni Morrison in her novel *Beloved*, talks about the character Beloved who is the representation of history, memory, and a space that embodies both. Beloved can be interpreted to say she is the haunting of incidents such as rape which left scars of trauma. The author boldly sketches the different kinds of torture and abuse such as beatings, abuse and rape. All of the trauma borne by Sethe triggers her to kill her child, though it may appear brutal, Sethe does it out of kindness. “The depictions of and allusions to rape are of primary importance; each in some way helps explain the infanticide that marks the beginnings of Sethe's story as a free woman” (Barnett).

The act of sex focuses on the flesh and physical body. There is sadness in knowing that there exists torture of a woman's body in the fields where slavery was being practised. The physical violence left permanent damage to their skin. The slaves were also made to wear an iron circle around their necks which almost suffocated and choked them. The violence and torture on the delicate bodies had such a huge impact, that their trauma became hard and ingrained into their life.

The aspect of motherhood, being a slave deprived them of feeling any emotions at all, the trauma numbs them, but in a twist of fate, it is seen that mothers moan and grieve for their children when they see their children being sold to other farms. The motherly love forces Sethe to kill her tiny baby as she feels death is a better place than slavery on a farm. For Sethe, the freedom she longed for is transferred to her tiny daughter through the act of death, if not in a living body, the baby will be free in the afterlife.

The theme of freedom is what echoes throughout the novel, though Sethe and her family escape the bonds of slavery. They are constantly being caged in the cycle and aftereffects of trauma. The people leave the slave farm, but they still live under the burden of pain, suffering and mental trauma. The slave's memory is a threat to them, where the past blows into the present yelling at them to be in pain. Contrastingly, the same reservoir of memory becomes an access point to healing, where storytelling and sharing the stories to channel the pain and pour the heart out eases a person's existence.

The theme of identity also examines the identity crisis of the character Sethe and Paul D, Toni Morrison lays the raw emotions of physical, emotional and physical violence that is caused by slavery. The horrible impact of slave owners on their slaves makes them to lose their sense of self. They are not given the freedom to make choices that enable them to develop their own thoughts, feelings and personality. Their life is chained to the whims of their owner hence they are bound to carry their identity as slaves until they escape or find freedom.

In conclusion, Sethe and Paul D store a heavy trauma with them, the life of slavery broke their mental stability apart. They are looking forward to a new future when suddenly, the character Beloved comes into their life and forces them to face and past. This process in turn deepens their trauma. Beloved is the ghost that haunts them keeping their wounds alive and trapping them in a continuous cycle of trauma.

4. Relevance of Mental Health in present times

The significance of mental health in the twenty-first century needs to be addressed to avoid the mistakes committed by the previous eras which lead to the failure of understanding of humanity's mental needs. Ample research and consideration of books like *Bluest Eyes* and *Beloved* help us to human condition better. Through the novels, we can understand mental issues a little better and provide a safe space to address mental health and heal trauma-related issues in the world. The continual pressure to succeed, the flow of information, and the diminishing of digital and real-life boundaries all lead to stress, anxiety, and burnout. Considering mental health becomes critical while exploring the technological world.

Some of the risks faced by the different generations of current times include greater social isolation, ironically despite being super-connected online, many people experience loneliness and a lack of healthy interactions. This issue has the risk of causing mental health difficulties, to combat this negativity, giving importance to therapy forming supportive groups and prioritizing real-world interactions can help the current world problems. The problems of the current generation are as follows, Depression, anxiety, ragging and bullying which all cause trauma. Removing shame around trauma-related mental illness and getting access to care is critical to ensuring overall health.

Additionally, increasing knowledge and understanding, and promoting discussions regarding mental health should become more open and educating. This would promote empathy, reduce stigma, and encourage people to consider help when it is required. With the rise of technological advancements, the emergence of mental health applications, online treatment platforms, and telemedicine can make care more comfortable and accessible, particularly for people who face geographic or financial constraints. There is a requirement to survey workplace happiness around the world because when we understand the significance of employee mental wellness, the world will be a better place to live. They may help balance and encourage a happier and more productive staff by providing mental health benefits by building supportive work environments.

Furthermore, to find effective solutions to trauma-related mental issues around the world, there can be a theoretical approach to solving mental health problems. For example, one way could be, to take advantage of **Global interconnectedness**. Mental health challenges are not bound by borders. With increased awareness and collaboration, international efforts can improve mental health resources and support around the world. The 21st century presents both challenges and opportunities for mental health. By recognizing its importance, fostering open conversations, and making resources accessible, we can create a world where everyone can thrive emotionally and mentally. The references made to Toni Morrison's works can be a valve that opens up global conversations to address trauma-related issues and solutions.

Looking at traumas across the world, it can be claimed that three forms of childhood victimization--sexual abuse, physical abuse, and neglect--have a lasting influence on mental health among people of all ages. The data taken is from the article published by PubMed, named "The Impact of Childhood Abuse and Neglect on Adult Mental Health: A Prospective Study". The study talks about the different problems that arise from trauma that is undergone by children of male and female genders.

According to the findings, males who were mistreated or neglected as children had higher dysthymia and antisocial personality disorder as adults, but not more drinking issues.

Abused and neglected women, on the other hand, have higher rates of dysthymia, antisocial personality disorder, and alcoholism. Victimization in childhood had minimal direct influence on any long-term mental health results after all the stressful life experiences. This study emphasizes the need to adopt a strategy that considers childhood victimization in the context of other life pressures (Horwitz)

Discussing the significance of collaboration among mental health experts, social workers, and legal systems helps in meeting the complex needs of people with chronic disease and trauma histories. For a more comprehensive and trauma-informed approach to mental health care research and studies can be expanded on these ideas by supporting them with relevant research and clinical examples. Effectively treating trauma necessitates an awareness of its social, ethical, and therapeutic intricacies, as well as advocating for both individual recovery and greater societal change in the world.

5. Conclusion

The readers of Toni Morrison, understand characters slowly, by taking a closer look at their thoughts, actions and reactions which further reveals their personalities and motivations. This personal approach to understanding the character's unique perspectives and subjective experiences helps the readers to understand nuances that bring out the inner world of the character's inner world. The sufferings of the characters which echo the reality of many traumatised individuals across the world make the readers empathetically connect with her novels.

In the article titled "Toni Morrison's Powerful Style of Writing" published on the website *The Odyssey Online*, Ashwath Narayanan says "She uses the technique of dialogism, ensuring that her characters transmit their voices and opinions ensuring that the narrator isn't omnipresent and telling the readers what they need to know. This ensures that we learn about the characters on our own and understand them and their actions at our own pace".

The author comments on Toni Morrison's writing style and her ability to bring out raw emotions in her characters, Toni's stories are poignant, and her narration consists of lots of wisdom and brings the characters to life which makes the readers personally connect with the author's thoughts. Her characters struggle to move past their trauma and the cyclical effects of pain and trauma. However, her novels are inspiring gauges for society to ponder upon its lack of empathy and disorganisation and grant an insight to learn from past mistakes.

In conclusion, humankind needs to learn from the past to not repeat its mistakes. Often it is the women who are subject to trauma and violence, society has standardised women to be submissive, and this seemingly unassuming conditioning has opened up space for discrimination, violence and trauma to seep into women's lives giving rise to gender-based violence and increased cases of trauma. To change the impact of trauma and bring matters of women's mental health to an equal opportunity on the platform of storytelling, one needs to begin by raising an argument to advocate actively for trauma-related cases.

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