

Peaches over Dolls: A Divergent Psychological Formation of Claudia and Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*

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Abstract

Toni Morrison, in her debut novel *The Bluest Eye* highlights the enduring predicaments faced by all Blacks irrespective of sex in the 1940's. The novel however emphasizes the unique and different experiences of Black females from that of the males. A Black girl, Claudia is juxtaposed to another Black girl, Pecola. The generalized views of the Blacks and whites as well as the individualized angle of vision of Claudia and Pecola are posited in the novel. Unlike Pecola, Claudia had apathy to the mainstream conception. Claudia dislikes her Christmas gift, a white baby doll. Her reaction differed drastically from other girls of her age like Pecola. What Claudia actually wanted for Christmas was beyond an object- a living experience on Christmas. The paper attempts an empirical analysis of the experiential journey of Claudia and Pecola. Their Negroid features were reviled and taken for granted. Pecola wants a release from this curse hence desires for the bluest eyes. Pecola ends up schizophrenic, while Claudia becomes more perceptive of the contextual situation. The novel ends with Claudia condemning the unreceptive society for Pecola's tragedy. This paper makes an in-depth textual analysis of *The Bluest Eye* making a case study of the character of Claudia an abutting character to Pecola, both representing Black women's unique trials and hurdles.

Keywords: predicaments, individualized, conception, schizophrenic, contextual situation, abutting.

The novel *The Bluest Eye* in its broader scale delves into the collective sufferings and tragedy of the African-Americans via individualized accounts of Pecola, Claudia, Pauline, Frieda, Cholly and Sammy. The societal dynamics widespread in Lorain, Ohio i.e. Toni Morrison's hometown is the societal dynamics of the then American society in the United States. The novel depicts Black individuals, both male and female coursing a "black life".

This paper makes an empirical analysis of the lived experiences of the two Black girls Claudia and Pecola. Pecola is rendered through the lens of another Black girl, Claudia. Besides Pecola, the novel renders the experiential journey of Blacks especially Black females-Claudia, Frieda and Pauline. The contextual hurdles faced by each of the Black characters in the novel are the hurdles faced by all Black people. These are further accentuated by the individualized obstacles.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison projects the impact of racial discrimination on the lives of a few specific Black female characters. When Pecola goes to Mr. Yacobowski's store to buy candies, he suspended his glance on seeing Pecola, a Black girl. Pecola sees 'the vacuum' in the eyes of Mr. Yacobowski. She feels:

The total absence of human recognition-the glazed separateness
.....Yet this vacuum is not new to her. (Morrison 46-47)

In fact, this vacuum is not new either to Claudia, Frieda or Pauline. Little Pecola felt the distaste and unspoken antipathy of the shopkeeper.

The shopkeeper dashes three Mary Jane candies towards Pecola and hesitates taking the coins from her hand. He despised touching her hand. Ultimately, he takes the pennies from Pecola's hand. Such small instances in the life of a tiny Black girl unnoticeably injected the feeling of shame, worthlessness and embarrassment. Pecola's invisibility, shame and humiliation at Mr. Yacobowski's shop is a shared experience of every Black. The feeling of contempt and worthlessness became extreme when a Black man despises a Black woman in a Black family. Henry Washington, a nigger leaves his wife Miss Della Jones because:

...he couldn't take no more of that violet water Della Jones used. Said he wanted a woman to smell like a woman. (Morrison 11)

Black women like Miss Della Jones are oppressed at the deepest level. According to Crenshaw:

...the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism, and how these experiences tend not to be represented within the discourses of either feminism or antiracism. Because of their intersectional discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, women of color are marginalized within both. (*Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of color* 1244)

Neither the discourse of race nor sexism has fully considered the horrible consequence of its intersectionality that has subjected the Black women to.

Young Claudia understands that her race and class binds them in the periphery limiting them in every aspect. She accepts and learns how to deal with such assigned spot. Pecola and Claudia being Black girls were furthestmost marginalized among the 'others', Blacks. They are the others within the others. Little Pecola, little Claudia and little Frieda internalized what

they observed and experienced. Pecola is even discriminated by her own mother i.e. a Black child being discriminated by her own Black mother. Yet the Black mother displayed more love, concern and appraisal of a white child. This incident is very significant in the novel as a Black girl child is dismissed / rejected by her own Black mother. This incident etched an experiential truth in the minds of Pecola, Claudia and Frieda that they are not worthy of consideration, love and affection. Pauline treated Pecola, Claudia and Frieda as “rotten pieces of apple” (Morrison 107) while the pink-and-yellow girl was treated with “honey in her words” (Morrison 107). The worldview of the Blacks is highlighted in Mr. Yacobowski’s act of ignoring Pecola in his grocery store. Maureen Peal, a rich high-yellow child becomes the “disrupter of seasons”. To Claudia and Frieda:

There was a hint of spring in her sloe green eyes, something summery in her complexion, and a rich autumn ripeness in her walk. (Morrison 60)

A group of Black boys were almost on the brink of beating the three Black girls- Pecola, Claudia and Frieda when Maureen appeared. Instantly, the Black boys left as they were:

...reluctant to continue under her springtime eyes so wide with interest. (Morrison 64-65)

This disparity in people’s attitude and outlook towards them incited anger, scorn, hatred and like emotions to a small girl like Claudia.

Each of the Black female characters in the novel irrespective of their social class are exposed to variable dismissals from different agents. Spoken and unspoken language, actions, laws and images forged despondency on to the minds of the Blacks especially a Black female child like Pecola. Her youth becomes one major factor besides her race and gender. In fact, the Black women’s experience of mental and physical abuse and discrimination extends beyond the general categories that the established discrimination discussion renders. And Pecola’s experience in this novel is one such. She is victimized by multiple determinants of discrimination. Crenshaw rightfully puts:

Notions of what constitutes race and sex discrimination are, as a result, narrowly tailored to embrace only a small set of circumstances, none of which include discrimination against Black women. (*Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist theory and Antiracist Politics* 151)

In the prejudiced community of Lorain, Ohio Black females like Pecola, Claudia and Pauline are certainly not spared. Their race, gender multiplied by poverty and youth consequently intensified their miseries. For Black women like Pauline:

Everybody in the world was in a position to give them orders. White women said, “Do this.” White children said, “Give me that.” White men said, “Come here.” Black men said, “Lay down.” The only people

they would not take orders from were Black children and each other.
(Morrison 136)

Black women like Pauline is multiply disadvantaged as a result of her race, gender, social class supplemented by her deformity. All these factors compounded by her husband's irresponsibility shaped her the way she is. For the first time, she found solace and comfort in movies- mass media of the time after her expectations of "plateau of happiness" (Morrison 116) from her man shatters. The movies impinged so great a repercussion that she starts imitating hair styles of actresses like Jean Harlow to fake beauty and happiness. The mismatch of her bleak reality and the constructed truth shown in the movies, coupled by the loss of her front teeth sealed her undoing. She "didn't care no more after that" (Morrison 121). Her poverty made her comply and reciprocate to the ideals of servitude hence, an ideal servant of the Fisher family. She acquired respect, power, praise and luxury for the first time. On the reverse, she contributed to the dysfunctionality of her own family. Her immense desire of respectability imposed the feeling of fear in her children's mind. In due course, this fear compels her son, Sammy to run away from home. While her daughter, Pecola's life is enclosed in fear: fear of growing up, of other people and of life.

In this novel, Morrison deliberately introduces Claudia as a foil to Pecola as:

Morrison did not create *The Bluest Eye* as a vehicle for garnering pity for poor helpless Pecola, but rather as a means of educating audiences on the unfortunate side effects of internalized racism, lack of empathy for one another, and the power of looking at a situation from multiple viewpoints. (*Introspection and Self-Transformation: Empathy in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye* 101)

Claudia and Pecola represent alternative responses to oppression. Characters like Pauline and Pecola displays psychological subjugation by the racist social system of Ohio. While characters like Claudia and Frieda eludes psychological subjugation by the same racist social context. Claudia and Frieda felt themselves complete in their own selves however, Pecola feels herself lacking, missing, having limitations in her own self. The desire to make herself complete compels her to yearn for blue eyes.

Like every stereotypical Black girl, Pecola responded and attended to the doll with stereotypical emotional expectations. It brought them great pleasure. This is not so in the case of Claudia. The white doll invoked antithetical emotions, displeasure and Claudia experience a physical revolt- she was frightened of "round moronic eyes, the pancake face, and orangeworms hair"(Morrison 18).The exalted stature of white dolls is indicated when adults claimed:

...“this is beautiful, and if you are on this day ‘worthy’ you may have it.” (Morrison 19)

This meant one had to be deserving to possess a white doll. Meaning the Black girl children are required to put efforts, maybe good manners, obedience, kindness, honesty or should

possess some rewarding virtues. In several ways the white doll becomes a vehicle of implanting colorist culture in the mind of Black girl youngsters. The young Black girls who received the white dolls strived to resemble and come close to the ideal and worthy white doll.

When Claudia got a white doll as her Christmas gift, her singular desire was to destroy it. Her dislike of the white doll projected her disinterestedness in the dominant cultures and perceptions as it was instrumental in:

The disallowance of the specific cultures and histories of African-Americans and black women especially is figured in *The Bluest Eye* primarily as a consequence of or sideline to the more general annihilation of popular forms and images by an ever more all-pervasive and insidious mass culture industry. (*The Bluest Eye: Notes on History, Community, and Black Female Subjectivity* 421)

The doll culture, celebration of Christmas, media of the time for example-Shirley Temple, Shirley Temple cups, Mary Jane candy wrappers, billboard, Ginger Rogers and Greta Garbo all represent the dominant perceptions. And Claudia condemns this dominant white culture. She could not understand the beauty people saw in the blue-eyed doll with blonde hair she was gifted with for Christmas. Her desire to dismember the doll depicts that Claudia is also another Black girl who is exposed to racial discrimination, prejudices, humiliations, marginalization and exclusion like Pecola and Pauline. What makes Claudia different from them is her response quite unlike theirs. Even as a child, she could see through the discrepancy. A Black girl child gifted with a big blue-eyed white doll itself is an irony. The mistreatment of the much coveted gift provoked anger and outrage. The adults never cared to seek out what Claudia desired for Christmas. Her desire in her own words:

“I want to sit on the low stool in Big Mama’s kitchen with my lap full of lilacs and listen to Big Papa play his violin for me alone.” The lowness of the stool made for my body, the security and warmth of Big Mama’s kitchen, the smell of the lilacs, the sound of the music, and since it would be good to have all of my senses engaged, the taste of a peach, perhaps, afterwards. (Morrison 19-20)

The pleasure of possessing a white doll is a mass-produced presence. Hence, Claudia prefers a harmonious daily life with the taste of peach over a commodified life—a fraudulent pleasure of possessing a white doll. She defies the universal love of white dolls. Black people particularly Black girls like Pecola and Frieda idolizing white feminine beauty like Shirley Temple is irrational to Claudia. For Claudia, this act implied denial of their own selves, their own self-identity. Her desire to dismember the white doll is an act of rebellion. Her rebellion is directed towards the complex social construct that a big, blue-eyed baby doll was every girl child’s ‘fondest wish’. Her inquisitiveness made her destroy the white baby doll. She tore it up.

Claudia's act of dismembering a lifeless white doll can be interpreted as her attempt on taking vengeance on the loveable doll. This act is almost parallel to disparaging Maureen's reputation. The adults failed to understand her perception. Claudia is scolded when she dismembers the white doll. They failed to realize that she has positively embraced her Black identity. They failed to understand that she clearly understood and took pride in her true self. Her act of dismembering the doll was not solely driven by jealousy but was driven by her sense of pride. Claudia's act of dismembering the white doll, her desire for a unique Christmas gift and her treatment of Maureen can be internalized as her rebellion to the colorist culture.

Claudia exhibits antagonism to the popular culture. While Pecola's desire for blue eyes depict her adherence to the mass culture industry. Her adoration of Shirley Temple and Mary Jane candies reflects her adulation for popular culture, form and image. Each of the popular image or idol is white and each represented the mass culture industry. Pecola and her mother, Pauline are consumers of the 'insidious mass culture industry'. Compared to Pecola, whose life is directed and controlled by the constructed truth. Claudia does not allow fake standards to affect her existence. She is not swayed by mainstream perspectives. As for Pecola, the constructed truth brings her to insanity. Pecola and Pauline supported the authoritarian system prevalent in Lorain, Ohio. Meanwhile, Claudia's objection to the same authoritarian system of Ohio is depicted in her desire of a day's living experience with her parents instead of a white baby doll. While Pecola believes nothing pertaining to her life as good, Claudia even if her life as a Black is stifling, she is optimistic and still finds peace and solace in her racial existence. Nothing will be more pleasing to her than a happy peaceful living experience with her parents at home.

The devastating effect of the white popular culture is observed in Pecola and Pauline. Both exhibited double-consciousness. They looked at themselves through the eyes of others and gauged themselves by the standards of a notion that disgraced, shamed and discredited them. Both she and her mother developed self-hatred and self-contempt as they could not fit into the dominant culture. The society's psychosis had a detrimental effect on the Black youngsters like Pecola. Such youths are allowed and adopted dominant norms imposed on them. Very few like Claudia and Frieda could transcend the impositions through their resistance. But Pecola finds herself so lacking, wanting and immaterial that she desires for something unattainable and incompatible. Both Pecola and Pauline thrived in envy and insecurities, particularly for Pecola, she ended up disillusioned. Their convictions dismantled their minds. Pecola's suffering is compounded by the experiences of her traumatic rape by her father. Lack of affections, emotional relationships and emotional interventions finally ushered her into a state of insanity.

Soaphead Church acts as a catalyst to Pecola's self-destruction. After her rape by her father, Pecola who was pregnant approached Soaphead Church in her search of a miracle to make her life meaningful. Soaphead Church deceived her into poisoning the dog, taking advantage of her naivety. Too keen on acquiring blue eyes, she offered the dog with the poisoned meat and went away believing she will have blue eyes. After the delivery of a still

born baby, she slipped into hallucination. Postpartum, Pecola sank into insanity. Her fixation with blue eyes landed a helping hand to her insanity coupled with the emotional abandonment by her mother. Pecola's desire for the bluest eyes is her desire to be absorbed in the protected and secure mainstream. Her desire is an act of self-mockery, a mockery of her racial identity. Also Pauline's act of knocking her down while soothing and consoling the Fisher's child is synonymous to Pecola's desire of abandoning her self-identity and embracing an alien identity. Pauline's maltreatment of her daughter is a maltreatment of her own self. It's almost an act of abandoning one's self for attainment of a foreign identity.

Unlike Claudia, Pecola exhibits double consciousness. Herself an African descent living in an African-American society embodied two consciousnesses within her single self, a Black at the same time, an American. A dark body with Negroid features aspires for white American beauty features i.e. blue eyes. Within the single dark frame two incompatible beauty ideals clashes resulting in an inner conflict. This double consciousness of Pecola is inherited unconsciously by Pecola from her mother. Claudia exhibits no double consciousness. She refuses, rejects and subverts the dominant cultural narratives. She depicts the possibility of resistance although difficult. Her act of dismantling white dolls is an act of overt defiance against the hegemony of Eurocentric ideals:

While Pecola believes that acquiring blue eyes will grant her happiness and acceptance, Claudia inherently recognizes the violence behind this desire. For her, the cultural glorification of whiteness and the subsequent devaluation of blackness is not just an attack on her appearance, but an attack on her identity and humanity. (*Resistance and Beauty in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye* 44)

Claudia serves as a paragon of resistance. Her rejection of the white dolls can be interpreted as an act of reinforcing her self-worth and self-esteem. Claudia's resistance is directed towards the internalized messages of inferiority perpetuated by the dominant conceptions. She denies the dominant conceptions that categorize them as ugly. Instead, she embraces her identity with pride and confidence.

Claudia's unexpressed yearning to be asked what she wants for Christmas is an indication that Claudia wants her perspective to be counted, recognized and valued. In other words, a Black girl desires to be heard, visible and recognized plus desired to be treated affectionately. Claudia is an exemplar of self-acceptance, resilience and empowerment. She embodies Black people who do not struggle to conform to Western cultural norms. She serves as a spokesperson of the Black people who recognized the need to embrace their own self black identity. Her unique desire for Christmas projects her attempt to deconstruct the white dominant perceptions. Unlike Claudia, Pecola makes diverse efforts to immerse herself in the dominant culture. She drinks copious amounts of milk from Shirley Temple cup, consumes Mary Jane candies and even wishes to possess blue eyes. Pecola and Pauline desired for affirmation and validation from the outside world. Pecola considers judgement by others other than herself as more true. Claudia however seeks no affirmation and validation. Claudia

never craves for recognition and she is not willing to sacrifice/ give up her racial identity. She is complacent with who she is and is not willing to become someone who she is not.

Pecola is treated as insignificant and unworthy as all Blacks. Pecola's withdrawal and retreat at Mr. Yacobowski's attitude is slightly subsided by Mary Jane candies. The gratification of Pecola at eating Mary Jane Candy is compared to "nine lovely orgasms" (Morrison 48). Her naivety compelled Pecola to believe she was consuming the beauty of Mary Jane- her fair skin, her blonde hair and her blue eyes. The psychosis of the society-white centrism, popular culture, media culture etc left an indelible mark on an individual particularly, the most vulnerable like Pecola:

As a byproduct of "male gaze", she claims that the idea of physical beauty glamorises the female body and has racist connotations. This kind of thinking puts physical attractiveness ahead of morality and self-worth. Although it is portrayed as being extremely desired, African American women can never meet this standard of beauty set by white people, which consists of pale complexion, blue eyes, and blonde hair. This turns into the discrimination and difference parameter. (*Victimization Of Black Women In Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye* 1315)

And the racist town of Ohio was governed by the white centric perceptions distorting the town's sense of self.

Pecola was discriminated constantly and was the "butt of a joke" or "butt of an insult" at school. She regards her ugliness as the baseline of all the disadvantages she faces in her life. She is certain that if she had pretty eyes everyone would love her. Her longing of pretty blue eyes exhibits her desire to alter her life experience. She is certain that if she is beautiful, she would be received with more love by the world. The beauty she desires is multidimensional- a composite of physical beauty, affection and social inclusion. Her desire for blue eyes reveals the identity crisis she was going through. She desired to erase her black identity and cuts herself off from ground reality in quest of a fraudulent self and ends up unfulfilled. Her consequent desire for the bluest eye depicts the onset of her psychosis. Her insanity is an outcome of her escapade from the sneer and contempt of the world. She occasionally escaped to a world of illusion to escape from the pain and trauma of her real life. Eventually she withdraws from the external reality into an illusionary inner world. She shuts herself in the cocoon of this inner world. And ultimately she shuts herself from the real world.

Pecola's desire is an act of self-negation. On the other hand, Claudia's desire is an act of self-assertion. The severity of the experiences of Pecola and Claudia might differ. But Black girls, in general seemed to share the same vulnerability that Pecola suffered at some points of their lives. Pecola is a weaker persona compared to Claudia and Frieda. In fact she is weaker to Pauline. Claudia projects herself as a stronger persona, who is not willing to abandon her identity to merge into an acceptable alien structure. She is conscious of what she possesses and what she lacks. Pecola is caved in series of rejections. And eventually:

...collapse, silently, anonymously, with no voice to express or acknowledge it. (Morrison ix-x)

The lack of supportive domestic environment starting from family heightened the impact of psychological distress on her self-esteem. As for Claudia, her sense of self-worth and presence of support systems (supportive relationships with her mother and sister) mitigated the impact of psychological distress on her self-esteem. Claudia's yearning for a harmonious domestic environment indicates her sense of belongingness, peace and security with her family. Her desire for Christmas is a positive indication of Claudia anchoring herself in her true identity- her family and her race. Claudia is a truly empowered Black girl who can navigate her contextual barriers and obstacles.

Even as an under adolescent, she can design coping strategies to encounter challenges. This coping mechanism mitigated the effect of mental distress on her self-esteem. Hence, Claudia is not exposed to trauma as she had high self-esteem and the potential to cope with obstacles. In other words, she had developed adaptive strategies to overcome adverse conditions. In the novel, Claudia is emotionally and physically connected to her sister, Frieda. Thus, Claudia had a boost to overcome her agony through the psychological support of her sister and vice versa. As for Pecola, she is not emotionally as well as physically connected to anyone. She lacked psychological support. So she resorts to fantasizing a friend who is her own self. She relies on the imaginary self to overcome her anguishes which is futile. Claudia's sense of belongingness to her sister, family, race and society bestowed her with the psychological strength to overcome her personal and contextual hurdles. However, Pecola's lack of sense of belongingness to her mother, father, race and society yielded a catastrophe in her life with no room for recovery. Multiple layers of oppression consequently resulted in the ultimate downfall of Pecola. Being young and vulnerable she had not yet gained the strength to face the disheartening discriminations across multiple levels. She accepted rejections as legitimate. Claudia and Frieda displayed their ego in their defensiveness of Pecola and verbal contention with Maureen Peal. But Pecola had not yet acquired ego since her vulnerability is compounded by the indifference of her parents.

Being the only girl child in her family worsened Pecola's plight. She had no soulmate to share her pains and secrets. Hence, she hallucinates and talks to her own self. Her mother, Pauline disbelieved her of her father raping her. As for Claudia, she had Frieda and vice versa as Frieda needed the comfort Claudia provided when Mr. Henry molested her. The novel depicts Claudia always accompanied by her sister. Louis Junior would never have dared to bully and abuse Claudia just the way he did to Pecola. If Claudia stepped into Pecola's shoes, Louis Junior would have been chased, caught and beaten by Claudia and her sister. Just the way they relieved Pecola from the harassment of a group of abusive boys. To some degree, Claudia derived her courage to face racial discrimination through the presence of her sister. Louis Junior saw Pecola many times- standing alone, always lone. This lonesomeness observed by the outside gaze becomes a force that caused outsiders to victimize her. Her vulnerability is magnified by her lonesomeness.

Like all the racists, Maureen displays racist prejudice and consequently snubs Claudia and Frieda:

“I *am* cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I *am* cute!”
(Morrison 71)

Pecola, Claudia and Frieda received Maureen’s racial insults differently. The sisters are shocked and spontaneously retaliate with reciprocating insults. While Pecola “seemed to fold into herself like a pleated wing” (Morrison 71-72), this seemingly painful retract of Pecola observed by Claudia angered her. Claudia’s fury is directed not to Pecola but to her withdrawal, retreat, lack of confidence, insecurity and low self-esteem. She wanted Pecola to be confident, fearless and resilient. Maureen Peal’s racial insult struck Claudia and Frieda hard, both reflected on Maureen’s statement “I *am* cute!”. Wisdom descends on them- they realized that they will always be the secondary person. Claudia and Frieda realized they can destroy dolls but cannot destroy people’s mentality which is steeped in colorist culture. Maureen’s racial insult made Claudia and Frieda realize of their secondary status. But they love this core self, that was black and ugly as it was their true self.

Claudia’s preference of peach implies her desire for authenticity, integrity and acceptance of her core self. Both Claudia and Frieda are complacent with their being. They did not want to alter their identity, appearance nor attributes. The reflections on Maureen Peal’s racial insults finally infuse them the truth that:

...Maureen Peal was not the Enemy and not worthy of such intense hatred. The *Thing* to fear was the *Thing* that made *her* beautiful, and not us. (Morrison 72)

When in Christmas, adults made them bathe in galvanized zinc tub before wearing new dresses. Claudia despised doing it so. The bath is hateful as the preparation for Christmas Eve required an alteration for her self- a cleaner self in a new dress which she is not accustomed to. She despised this alteration of herself as she is devoted to her habitual untidy true self that was her comfort zone. Claudia experienced brief discomfort during Christmas Eve where she had to masquerade in a new dress.

Claudia presents an image of Black women who can survive, resist and who are culturally affirmed. She depicts a strong persona that will reshape her living experience. Claudia will be healed while Pecola will find it hard to heal. As for Pecola, she never recovered. She hardly reacted at abuses and harassment. She was more submissive and enduring while Claudia was more reactive, aggressive and defiant. The sole point where Pecola reacted and became dissentient is when she screamed and tried to stop Junior from swinging the cat by its hind legs. When the abusive boys harassed Pecola- she cried, dropped her notebook and covered her eyes with her hands. Claudia and Frieda on the other hand reacted spontaneously. Both the sisters risked themselves being beaten up by the boys. They are more empowered by supporting each other and represented collective empowerment which is desirable in the face of a systematic societal oppression. Claudia and Frieda loomed up above Pecola as more heroic characters. They accepted their racial identity and realized

the need to navigate a hard life with pride and confidence in their own racial selves. Hence, for Claudia she wins, even from her secondary position. And as for Pecola, she is completely defeated and destroyed. Unlike the sisters who are lively, Pecola is shown as helpless, fearsome, sad and depressed. She had no potential of coping or managing adversities.

Pecola's pregnancy was revulsive to the community. On the contrary, Claudia and Frieda experienced mixed emotions. When the whole Black community wanted Pecola's child to die, Claudia and Frieda were repelled by the hostility and resentment against the unborn Black baby. They longed for the baby to live. They did what they can to save her child, another unborn Black child like themselves. Pecola's pregnancy made her relation with her mother more strained as it stemmed from incest. Pecola's pregnancy became a significant trauma for herself. She was isolated, shamed, stigmatized and judged by the community. Her childbirth is not described in the text. However, the readers are informed that Pecola gave birth to a still born baby. Quite young, she had to endure physical labor including contractions and pain. Pecola is exposed to a different kind of a pain which becomes emotionally traumatic. Pauline remained indifferent to Pecola's psychological as well as physical health. She did not respond to her daughter's needs. Pecola got no emotional and physical support from her mother during her pre-delivery as well as post-delivery periods. Pauline even went to the degree of abusing Pecola physically during her pregnancy. Pauline who is supposed to be her daughter's support system lends stress and anxiety on Pecola.

Pauline failed to impart positive life lessons to her daughter. Hence, Pecola had weak adaptive skills. Unlike Pecola, Claudia's mother served as a source of strength to her as her mother often sang poignant songs of pain, and suffering. Her mother's song executed sentiments quite the reverse:

Misery colored by the greens and blues in my mother's voice took all of the grief out of the words and left me with a conviction that pain was not only endurable, it was sweet. (Morrison 23-24)

Her mother's sweet voice and eyes made Claudia long for her share of sorrow and sufferings. Her mother's song instilled her with the spirit of resilience:

As Morrison implies, the cultural heritage and values essential to the survival in black current situation, are orally transmitted to Claudia by her mother's song and have exerted an instructive impact on her in the process of maturity. (*A New Historicist Study of The Bluest Eye* 448)

Claudia's mother displayed parental attribute that was essential for empowerment in Claudia. While, this maternal support was missing in Pecola. Claudia internalized positive self-perceptions from her family while Pecola internalized negative perception. She is demeaned in her own family. Her own mother casted negative influences on Pecola's mental growth as well as physical growth. Pauline's sense of inadequacy brought her to reject her own daughter. Pecola grew up in fear, unloved and uncared. Every component that might have induced a sense of empowerment on Pecola is depleted.

Pecola had to withstand all her predicaments by herself which she could not, unfortunately. For Claudia, even if she had no overt support from family and friends, she had her sister at her side who gave her the required emotional strength. Claudia learned to navigate a hard life full of misfortune and hardships. Hence, Claudia took all the rejections and hatred as minor stress in her life. But for someone like Pecola who existed with the complete absence of support compounded by her passivity had no emotional strength to resist the contempt and rejections of the world and hence succumbs. Her madness is the net result of all the dislike, rejections and hatred she was exposed to.

The concluding part indicates Pecola's tragedy as a sort of 'psychological murder'. She herself becomes a waste, unwanted and thrown out. Claudia who have witnessed Pecola's gradual decline accuses the racist and sexist community in a sarcastic tone. Through Claudia's reflection, Toni Morrison sensitizes readers of the community's collective responsibility in supporting and affirming Pecola's tragedy. For Claudia "it was the fault of the earth, the land, of our town" (204).

Pecola's plight is rendered as distinct from other character's plights. However, her experiences are in fact, one of the varied shared experience lived through by the black people. She lived in an unreceptive society which was unreceptive of all Blacks including Claudia. Claudia condemns the society for Pecola's tragedy as well as for every Black people's fate. She considers the community as one of the agents that destroyed Pecola. Even at her young age, Claudia questions on the devaluation of Blackness and maintains her sense of self. She is a strong and empowered Black female who exhibits resistance in her own ways. She copes with discrimination in her own ways. She reflects her critical consciousness in her reflections in the novel. Claudia possesses the necessary positive attributes that is essential to counterforce all sorts of systemic oppressions. It is the community's collective mentality that aggravates devaluation of Blackness. The community itself reinforces the dominant perceptions.

The Black community's lack of empathy for their member becomes a major cause of Pecola's downfall. The same community stigmatized Pecola on her incestuous rape and pregnancy. She was exposed to social exclusion by the same Black community. Her own community betrays her and proves treacherous. The Black women from the same community blamed her and shunned her out of the community. They forgot to humanize her when discussing about her tragic life. So, it is her own community who acted as a catalyst to her downfall. Pecola could have been saved if she was sustained and supported by her community. None in her community, even her mother had empathy for her. The only two individuals that exhibited empathy for Pecola were Claudia and Frieda, who themselves were helpless. The society failed to take up defensive action for Pecola. Rather she was rejected and disdained through community gossip. The Lorain society only ridiculed Pecola instead of aiding her. She was ostracized and mocked by them. Her violation by her own father within her family is taken as a private matter hence, no interventions from the community. Consequently, Pauline remained silent so also Pecola. Pecola retreats psychologically. And if her unborn child survived, the generational trauma she inherited from her parents would have

been extended to the child, leading to a worse fate than hers. Claudia and Frieda wanted to save Pecola's unborn child. Because of their youth, they are ignorant of the fact that if the child survived, they would have felt more apologetic for the deplorable life the child would have been subjected to. Pecola's child life would have been more terrible and execrable than hers.

Morrison exemplifies positive images of Black Americans through Claudia, a resilient Black girl while Morrison exemplifies Pecola with the negative images of Black Americans. Morrison renders the disparity of Claudia's perspective with that of Pecola's. Different aspects of Black female subjectivity are projected through the experiences of Pecola and Claudia. Each distinct experiences of Pecola are different truths of a complex reality of African-American experiences. Both the characters encountered the oppressiveness of their context even if it is heightened in the case of Pecola. Claudia exhibited the potential to counteract the oppressiveness while Pecola is depicted as unable to cope with the oppressiveness. While Pecola ends up schizophrenic, Claudia is depicted to have become more perceptive of the contextual situation. Pecola's descend into insanity made Claudia discern her complex contextual reality in fact every Black's complex reality which was stern. When Pecola sank into insanity, simultaneously Claudia attains a new level of maturity before due time. Claudia displayed premature maturity when in her reflections she blames not only the community but also the individuals for their stern reality. As an individual, she resisted and did not allow herself to be influenced while Pecola allowed herself to be influenced, hence her succumbence. Claudia realizes the Blacks as individuals should resist and avert the detrimental effects of internalizing the dominant norms. Claudia dismembered the doll with blue eyes but harbored a desire to make Pecola's baby survive.

Perhaps, Toni Morrison's purpose of writing the novel *The Bluest Eye* is to depict the harsh realities of African-Americans so as to rouse a moral abhorrence with the purpose of bringing forth curative measures to the society. The traumas that are experienced by the Black characters in the novel are the collective experience of African-Americans and it is the community that perpetuates the trauma. After Pecola's pregnancy, her peers and neighbor disgraced, stigmatized and ostracized her. The community shows no accountability for its members within the community and this highlights the need for community accountability to advert systematic oppression. Claudia exhibited the potential of claiming her true racial identity. She recognized the collective trauma of the African-Americans. Even as a young child, she understood the need of accountability within the community. Reclaiming Black identity can never be achieved solely by an individual's endeavour but can be achieved only through community endeavour.

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