

## Fractured Identities and the Tyranny of Beauty: The Impact of Internalized Racism in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*

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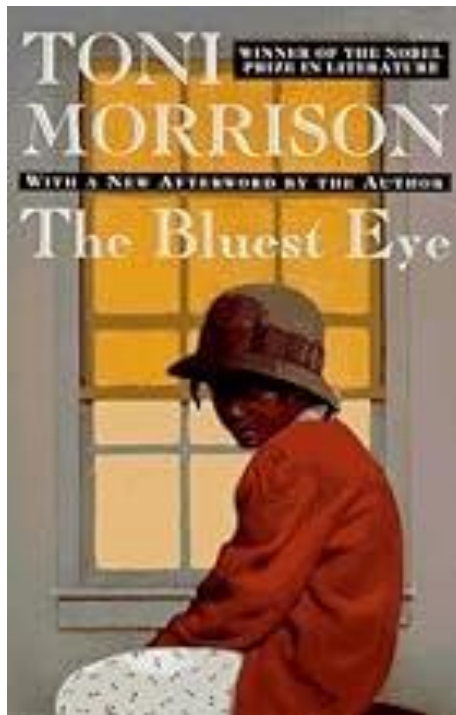
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### Abstract

This paper explores the intersection of fractured identities, beauty standards, and trauma within the framework of internalized racism in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Both novels depict Black female protagonists who navigate oppressive societal structures that impose Eurocentric ideals of beauty and self-worth. The study delves into how these characters internalize racial inferiority, leading to psychological and emotional fragmentation. Pecola Breedlove and Celie endure systemic racism, misogyny, and generational trauma, which shape their self-perception and interactions with the world. Morrison and Walker critique the tyranny of beauty through their protagonists' longing for validation, highlighting how racialized beauty standards perpetuate self-loathing and alienation. Furthermore, the paper examines the transformative power of sisterhood and self-acceptance as mechanisms for resistance and healing. By analyzing these themes, this research underscores the profound impact of internalized racism on identity formation and the struggle for self-definition in the face of racial and gendered oppression.

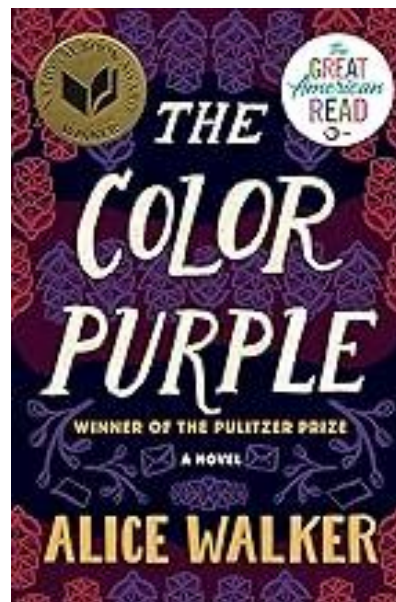
**Keywords:** Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*, Internalized Racism, Eurocentric Beauty Standards, Black Girlhood, Trauma, Narrative Structure

## **Introduction**

In African American literature, the quest for beauty and self-worth in a racially oppressive society is a major theme, especially in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970). The terrible effects of internalized racism are examined in both books, where a society that values whiteness shapes the prevailing ideals of beauty and self-perception. Morrison and Walker demonstrate through the lives of Pecola Breedlove and Celie how racism not only manifests itself externally through systemic oppression but also internally, resulting in identity fragmentation and self-loathing. A young Black girl's desire for blue eyes, which stand for acceptance and beauty, has tragic results in *The Bluest Eye*. In contrast, Celie regains her identity and self-worth through resistance and sisterhood in *The Color Purple*, which depicts a journey of self-liberation. Through an analysis of these texts from the perspective of internalized racism, this paper investigates how beauty standards are used as an instrument of oppression, affecting Black women's relationships and self-perception, and ultimately affecting their journeys toward empowerment and self-actualization.

## **Internalized Racism and Eurocentric Beauty Standards**

*The Bluest Eye*'s main axis of oppression is Eurocentric beauty standards, which associate whiteness with desirability. The detrimental effects of these values are highlighted by Pecola's conviction that having blue eyes will win her love and social acceptance. She is exposed to cultural messaging that diminishes Blackness from an early age, as seen by Shirley Temple's widespread appeal and the community's veneration of light-skinned beauty. Morrison's criticism of society as a whole, not only Pecola, shows how these norms are absorbed even in Black households. Pauline Breedlove, Pecola's mother, idolizes white Hollywood beauty and views herself as ugly, reinforcing these ideals in her daughter. Morrison writes, "She was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at her own face and not find it wanting" (Morrison 122). This generational self-loathing is a direct product of systemic racism, showing how white beauty ideals function as a mechanism of control and erasure.



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In *The Color Purple*, Celie embraces the idea that she is unattractive, which is supported by the males in her life. She is constantly told she is not deserving of love, which makes her poor self-esteem worse. With the help of Shug Avery, who represents sexual emancipation and self-assurance, Celie starts to redefine beauty on her own terms, which leads to her transformation. Walker writes, "I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it" (Walker 197).

Scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, outlined in *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color*, is particularly useful in analyzing the compounded oppression that Pecola faces as both Black and female. Morrison's depiction of beauty standards intersects with gender, illustrating how Black women are subjected to both racial and patriarchal subjugation. Crenshaw states, "The experience of Black women cannot be understood merely as a sum of racism and sexism but must be examined in its own right" (Crenshaw 1242).

### **Pecola's Psychological Deterioration and Trauma**

Internalized racism is most tragically exemplified by Pecola's spiral into madness. Her self-esteem declines as she internalizes society's devaluation of Blackness, leading to a psychotic episode in which she feels she has achieved the blue eyes she so desperately craves. Her father's rape, her community's exclusion, and her dysfunctional family are the main causes of this psychological breakdown. Morrison says Pecola's pain is a sign of a larger system that dehumanizes Black people rather than a singular incident. Chaos and dysfunction are embodied in the Breedlove household, which serves to further emphasize how cyclical racial trauma is. Morrison describes this cycle when she writes, "The Breedloves lived in a storefront because they were poor and black, and they stayed there because they believed they belonged there" (Morrison 38). Pecola's story highlights the terrible effects of internalized racism and shows how individual and collective identities are undermined by institutional oppression.

On the other hand, Celie's path in *The Color Purple* presents a different outcome from Pecola's. Celie experiences severe self-loathing and abuse at first, but through female solidarity and self-expression, she eventually comes to value herself. Celie finds strength in her own voice and interpersonal connections, in contrast to Pecola, who absorbs the racist and sexist messages surrounding her. Walker writes, "I'm poor, I'm Black, I may be ugly and can't cook, but I'm here" (Walker 207). This declaration marks Celie's assertion of agency, highlighting the novel's emphasis on self-acceptance as a path to empowerment.

The psychological impact of racial trauma has been extensively discussed by scholars such as Joy DeGruy in *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring*

*Injury and Healing*. DeGruy argues that the intergenerational transmission of racial trauma contributes to ongoing cycles of self-hate and societal dysfunction, which are clearly reflected in Pecola's tragic arc. She states, "The injuries of racism are not merely historical; they persist in the collective psyche of Black individuals and communities" (DeGruy 85).

### **Claudia MacTeer: Resistance and Alternative Narratives**

Pecola acquiesces to discriminatory beauty standards, but Claudia MacTeer offers a different perspective. Unlike Pecola, Claudia challenges the dominant narrative that associates beauty with whiteness. She symbolically rejects these oppressive ideals by destroying white toys. Morrison writes, "I destroyed white baby dolls. But the dismembering of dolls was not the true horror. The truly horrifying thing was the transference of the same impulses to little white girls" (Morrison 21). Claudia's ability to question societal norms suggests an alternative mode of resistance—one that fosters self-acceptance rather than self-loathing.

### **Conclusion**

Both Tony Morrison's *The Color Purple* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* provide an emotional examination of the psychological harm caused by internalized racism and Eurocentric beauty standards. The racialized ideas that influence Black self-perception are criticized by Morrison through Pecola's terrible demise, Claudia's resistance, and the novel's disjointed structure. The book promotes a re-examination of beauty as a construct and a reclamation of Black identity beyond the confines of whiteness by revealing the destructive repercussions of these repressive standards. Finally, highlighting the lasting effects of racialized aesthetics and the pressing need for cultural change, *The Bluest Eye* functions as a literary and social critique.

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