The Concept Of Struggle In The Bluest Eye

The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison highlights the parallels between two worlds. It depicted the struggles women of color encountered and that young, black adolescent girls faced in pursuit of their identity. The implications and far-reaching effects racism had on African Americans during 1940's and the humiliation, isolation and self-hatred it trusted upon those at the forefront of the magnitude of it. It was set in the fall of 1941, just after the Great Depression, and focused on Pecola Breedlove a young girl whose life was a depiction of what Morrison a nine-year-old at the time living in Lorain, Ohio and her experiences growing up. Toni Morrison is an American writer noted for her insight of the black experience living in a racially divided society. She came from a family of intense love that immersed themselves deeply into things representing and including black culture, Morrison graduated from Howard University with a B.A. in 1953, M.A. from Cornell University in 1955 and she went on to join other universities to teach and among other things. Her first novel "The Bluest Eye" published in 1970, that detailed the life of an adolescent young black girl obsessed with white standards and longs to have the bluest eyes, it was not the most popular at first but it picked up as time went by. Toni Morrison went onto win awards such as Nobel Prize for Literature, Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, NAACP Image Award, Presidential Medal of Freedom, and a Grammy for a spoken word and much more recognized awards. The Bluest Eye gives insight to the struggle's inferiority placed on both men and women, rejection, not being good enough and how each experience shaped the characters fate and what those experiences thought them as they navigated through it all, whether coming out victorious or succumbing to them.

The struggles of living with an identity crisis can shift the course of a person's life, they can go from being happy, sociable, loving who they are to utter confusion and uncertainty about their life, who they are and how they fit into a society that has different representations of identity which sometimes are falsified to fit a status quo. Cholly was abandoned by his mother when he was four days old and it changed the trajectory of his life for good, it shaped who he became as a man, husband and later father. Although he was raised by his aunt, who was supposed to show him, unconditional love, he was constantly reminded of the failures of his parents to take care of him and the fact that he was abandoned by someone who was supposed to take care of him until he reached a certain age. Aunt Jimmy did not prepare Cholly for the world, he was instead a shell of a person, broken by the ills of the past and forced to live a life he did not know how to. He did not evolve into his full self, because he did not have the freedom to do so. The world he was trusted into was a racist world, one filled with inferiority, ugliness related to being black and being marginalized because it was the norm. "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 need not take orders from were black children and each other." (The Bluest Eye 138) Cholly was living in a white man's world and his experiences were not pleasant, he interacted once with a young girl about his age named Darlene. Cholly and Darlene ended up having sex, but during the interaction, Darlene had a terrified look on her face and Cholly though it was because of him. When he realized what terrified her, they tried to gather themselves and go back home but had to stay where they were up to when the two white men approached them forcing them to have sex with each other. The men stood there and watched, shining flashlights at them, they had no choice but to comply because they had no defense and they had to be obedient given that the

men had weapons and they were not prepared for what they encountered. Cholly was embarrassed by the whole encounter and became so angry that he developed a strong hatred for Darlene, he did not hate the hunters even though they were the ones that made the experience painful, he could not bear the burden of hating them for fear it would have destroyed him, so instead he had misplaced hatred and anger towards the wrong person.

Pecola's fate was so wronged that it sent her over the edge. She was marginalized from childhood labeled, treated as insignificant, called ugly not only by her family but by her community and school. Pecola’s character is relatable in so many ways, it is impossible to put her in a box and expect to forget about her. Pecola was born into a society that did not see her as equal, where black people were labeled as ugly, forced into slavery and treated as though they did not exist and had been downtrodden for years and her experiences though she was so young, shattered any hope she had of recovering unless she had “The Bluest Eye”. Delgado, Richard Critical Race Theory. “Observes that people of discriminated communities accept the ugliness trusted upon them by the powerful masters. Owning to their long subjection the Afro-American blacks seek no justification in contradicting such marginalizing judgments, thus wearing the mantle of ugliness for the rest of their lives.” What does it mean to wear the mantle of ugliness? Perhaps its believing that ugliness is ultimately a part of life, that it is something that must be accepted because of societies standards of beauty. In Pecola’s case it means choosing a false identity about her existence and accepting destruction as a norm. Nothing about Pecola’s life was normal, nothing at all, the name Pecola means beauty happiness, it represents arts, music, nature and the mysteries that come with it, yet her life was on the other side of all the beauty and glory that should have been attached to her as person. She was born with a deficit for parents, her mother saw her as ugly and hardly paid attention to her, her father Cholly who was a drunk did not act as though she existed, he forced himself upon her and was embarrassed by what he did to her, sent his mind back to his experience with Darlene and the way he felt and how he channeled those feelings into hatred although he was not the victim when it came to Pecola being raped. “Pecola Breedlove accepts her subordination and the power of the capitalist white society.” (Ismail, Bhatti, Ayub 2017) it means she has succumbed to the ideology, imagery, racism, violence, madness, and incest that has been inflicted upon her causing her to see herself as not belonging, thus being marginalized.

Claudia is the heroine of the story she narrates the story from her point of view and shows the innocence in what she sees and experiences as she navigates life. Claudia is aware of and faces racism as any other black she is surrounded by. She is seen as a protector not only of Pecola and her sister Frieda but of her identity and being wholly aware of the negative beauty standards placed on her by society’s standards. Claudia often wished that the adults would ask her what she wanted instead of giving her what they believed brought her true happiness. She was given a baby doll and as she sat examining it, she was aware that it looked nothing like her. “I had only one desire: to dismember it. To see what it was made, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped me, but apparently only me.” (Morrison 20) Maybe beauty did evade Claudia, but she did not let it stop her from dissecting and discovering her own truth. Claudia did not desire materials things she wanted to be seen heard, to know that she was valued and loved. Claudia loved helping others especially Pecola and often experienced jealously being that her sister had an edge over her, she often wondered how Frieda knew things before her and why was she always the last to find out. After finding out that Pecola was having her period, and understanding why her mother stepped in Pecola asked an important question Claudia had no answer for “How do you do that? I mean, how do you get somebody to love you” (32) The Bluest eye. The question is loaded and love to these

characters was different, Pecola did not know what pure love was, and neither did Claudia. “Claudia’ narrative starts gaining a greater sense of personal affirmation and liberation that renders any attempt at identification with monologic narratives, such as Dick-and-Jane primer, pointless.”(G, Ortega 2018) Claudia saw beauty as it was and just that she did not succumb to the ideals that beauty means blue eyes and nice smooth hair, this is what propels her to be a heroin and saves her from herself and taking herself to a place that she knew she would not be able to return from.

Marigolds are known as the sun herb or herb of the sun, representing passion and creativity but like every beautiful part of life there is always a downside amidst all the glory beauty brings. Marigolds are pretty by nature and represent fluidity, fruitfulness, summer, life and birth. Pecola was pregnant after being raped by her father, she was taken from her house and sent to live with people she did not know but she welcomed it. Claudia and Frieda planted marigolds hoping that when they grow Pecola’s baby would be born and that all will be well. It was a good gesture but not well executed. Marigolds also represent death, jealously and loss, most of which happened throughout the novel “The Bluest Eye.” the marigolds dying signified the end of some things and the beginning of others. “It was the fault of the earth, the land, of our town. I even think now that the land the entire country was hostile to the marigolds that year. The soil is bad for certain kinds of flowers. Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear, and when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say the victim had no right to live.” (Morrison 11), it is saying that blacks were not wanted and could not fit into society; they were being held back for various reasons and had no voice to speak out against the injustices they were subjected to daily.

Accepting something that can take away from who a person is meant to be should never even cross their minds, but it happens quite often. Pecola is a victim of this kind of thought pattern and acceptance that took away from her. She did not know any better and to escape the misery she faced at a young age had her wishing for blue eyes. Eternal youth, happiness, belonging, feeling loved and cherished can be things people see when they see blue eyes, but it does not mean it is fulfilling or true. Having blue eyes does not make a person superior to anyone at any given time but in the 1940’s in Loraine, Ohio it was a custom and it had many African Americans wishing they were something they are not. “As Pecola grows up, she longs for blue eyes, a yearning for whiteness, which symbolizes beauty and worth. Blue eyes signify universal beauty. To possess blue eyes is to possess whiteness.” (September, 2018 Critical Ethnic Studies) Pecola believed for her to ultimately win at life she needed to have the bluest eyes she longed for, for years. Pecola died believing she had blue eyes, she believed she finally became perfect because of it.

“Why she wonders, do people call them weeds? She thought they were pretty.” (Morrison 47). Dandelions symbolize uselessness, it represents the African American community and the constant discrimination they face because people have formulated, ideals, ideas, perceptions, thoughts of who African Americans are and where they fit in a society dominated by whites. Why did people overlook them? Aside from the color of their skin, the whites saw them at that time as inferior, less than, not belonging and a lot of them lived in poverty and had to do various things that were not always pleasant make sure they had something to themselves. Pecola sees the Dandelions as beautiful and wonders why the world often sees them as a pest and weed, but it represents happiness and faithfulness. Maybe for Pecola there was a little hope in seeing the beauty in something seen as useless and ugly to others.

“She regarded love as possessive mating and romance as the goal of the spirit. It would be for her a well-spring from which she would draw the most destructive emotions, deceiving the lover and seeking to imprison the beloved, curtailing freedom in every way” (Morrison 122). Pauline’s lack of love for herself was projected unto her children, husband and overall view of the world she lived in. Love for her was destructive and she could not draw any positivity because she used it as if it had no value. Pauline’s low self-esteem blinded her from finding pure love and giving of her best self to receive love in return. She was capable of loving those around her but choose to love who she wanted and she did not see that her own child was being abused, she realized when it was too late and at this point the damage was already done. Pauline saw herself as ugly and that ugliness caused her to fail her children especially Pecola and the ugliness that she thought she exhibited was now how the community saw her daughter. The ills of racism made dysfunction, violence and ugliness a part of her character. She reserved beauty for those she saw and beautiful in society “Her dysfunction and violent relationship with her husband Cholly reaffirm her belief that she is ugly and that romantic love is reserved for those who are beautiful and valued in society” (Critical Ethnic Studies 2018)

Breeding love means letting in all the good things life has to offer, it means feeling loved and wanted and giving love in return. The Breedlove family possessed everything but love, their lives were filled with violence, abuse both physically and verbally and a sense of not belonging. The Breedlove’s were not a loving family Cholly expresses love through sex, Pecola is constantly looking for love, Mrs. Breedlove does not love herself and choose to love someone else’s child over her and Pecola’s brother Sammy is always running away from home. The lack of love in the home drove Pecola over the edge of insanity.

The seasons in the Novel The Bluest Eye create a cycle of unnatural events in something that is supposed to be normal. Summer represents maturity and knowledge but Pecola loses her mind in the summer. Fall is harvest but Pecola loses her baby then and the marigolds refuse to blossom. Winter is a time when things are dying out, trees lose their leaves and become bare and the cold long days are hard to come by, this is when Pecola is rejected by Maureen and is regarded as ugly. Spring is when Pecola is raped, and gets pregnant by her father but the baby was destined to die.

The struggle to find oneself, the pursuit to discovering identity is all tied into each other. Pecola faced a lot of hardships at a very young age and it ultimately led to her ultimate demise. Her fate was carved out from a very young age and she tried her best to navigate through it all though her mind could not deal with it because she was a preteen having adult experiences. She was navigating the world on her own while trying to find love and some glimpse of hope even in a flower she regarded and beautiful that the world saw as ugly. Pecola was failed by her parents, community and school, and this was because the cycle of abuse though not always literally repeated itself. Her father was abandoned when he was a baby and he grew up with no love in his home. Her mother hated herself and thought she was ugly because she was black and the dysfunction continued on and thus Pecola was living out what her parents experienced, except that it destroyed her.