

**Being Homeless at Home: The Role of the Society
and Family in the Growth and Development of the
child in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye***

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Abstract

The focus of this research is the family influences on children in the way they think about themselves as adults. This effect shapes children's personalities and as a result influences their identities. In Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* the Society and Pecola's family seem to tell her that beauty brings love and since she is ugly she remains unloved and unworthy. The research answers questions like, what are the effects of the society on the psychology of a child. What are the effects of the family, what breakdowns occur in the children's lives when they live in a loveless family? What are the effects of being homeless in your own home and among your own family and people?

الخلاصة

يركز هذا البحث على تأثيرات العائلة على الابناء وعلى الطريقة التي يفكرون بها عن أنفسهم كبالغين. يشكل هذا التأثير شخصيات الأطفال ونتيجة لذلك يؤثر على هوياتهم. في رواية توني موريسون (العيون الأكثر زرقة) يبدو أن المجتمع وعائلة بيكولا تخبرها أن الجمال يجلب الحب ، ولأنها قبيحة ستبقى غير محبوبة وليست لها اي قيمة. يجب البحث عن أسئلة مثل: ما هي تأثيرات المجتمع على نفسية الطفل؟ ما هي آثار الأسرة ، وما هي المشاكل التي تحدث في حياة الأطفال عندما يعيشون في أسرة بلا حب؟ ما هي آثار التشرد في منزلك وبين أسرتك وشعبك؟

Introduction

Studies proved over the years the importance of the environment on the physical and psychological growth and development of a person. Home, school, and community influence the way humans think, feel, and behave. Healthy environment nurtures healthy growth and development. Normal families offer love, protection and support to promote healthy growth and development. While an unhealthy environment poses a development risk on child's psychological and physical development. The manner in which parents treat their children affects children's self-esteem and the way they treats others. (Komro&Flay, 134)

A loving supportive environment helps children focus on learning instead of being concerned about the way others think about them and they do not worry about being accepted by others. Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is one of many novels concerned with child's abuse and the effect of the environment and family on child's growth.

The novel explores the environment in which the main characters, Claudia and Pecola, are raised. Their environment include their families, their communities and their culture. "Both Claudia and Pecola have to battle against racism, sexism, poverty, and cultural mythologies in order to protect their psychological health." (Gillespie, 54)

The Effect of the Society on Pecola as a Child

Pecola's family is affected by their ugliness and unworthiness to an extent that they pass it to their daughter. They seem to tell her that beauty guarantees love, respect, and those who do not possess beauty, like Pecola, remain unloved and unworthy. The adults transfer their failure to their children and the society continues to fail on bases of beauty. (Gillespie, 54)

Pecola is a homeless girl. A girl who has no place to go because of her father who burned their house and led his family outdoors. She had to stay with the MacTeers. Claudia describes the misery of being homeless:

Outdoors, we knew, was the real terror of life. The threat being outdoors surfaced frequently in those days. Every possibility of excess was curtailed with it. If somebody used so much coal, he could end up outdoors. Sometimes others put their sons outdoors, and when that happened, regardless of what the son had done, all sympathy was with him. He was outdoors, and his own flesh had done it. To be put outdoors by a landlord was one thing-unfortunate, but an aspect of life over which you had no control, since you could not control your income. But to be slack enough to put oneself outdoors, or heartless enough to put one's kin outdoors-that was criminal. There is a difference between being put out and being put outdoors. If you are put out, you go somewhere else; if you are outdoors, there is no place to go. (Bluest,17)

Morrison in this quotation clearly indicts those who deprive any one from the right of having a place in society. Being without a home means losing your memories, your identity, the unity of your family, and finally losing your self-confidence. Pecola is outside her house in the beginning of the novel and everything around her reminds her that she is an outsider; she does not belong to anything or anyone. Morrison wrote *The Bluest Eye* in the 40's and she could not skip the effect of racism on Pecola as a child. The white storekeeper is one of the many examples of racism that Pecola deals with during her childhood. He does not look at her when she enters the store and acts as if she is invisible, then when he finally looks at her, his look is full of hate and contempt as she senses when he speaks to her. His behavior reinforces her feeling that she is ugly and thus she does not belong to her society. The society always remind her of her ugliness. (Bloom, 123)

Morrison mentions the American idea of the ideal family, which is presented in the primer about Dick and Jane to contrast it with the MacTeers and the Breedloves to show the consequences of such programs on the psych of young black children. Barbra Christian states:

Young children are led to believe that others are happy because they are pretty, are not too noisy, or are living an orderly life, whatever line of demarcation or difference they can perceive as marking their own existence. The more confusing, different, poverty-ridden or depressed that a child's life is, the more she will yearn for the norm the dominant society says provides beauty and happiness. (Christian, 230)

Pecola here represents the homeless black child who yearns for the norm, which to her is blue eyes. Blue eyes represent the reality that she wants because of the primer. She is led to believe that the world of the primer is the perfect place for which she must escape from her miserable life in a loveless home. The society assured Pecola that she is ugly and unacceptable among them. They look with hate and their looks led her to believe that the world of the primer is real.

The property owner whom Claudia mentioned in her speech about being homeless presents the larger society and outdoors, she says:

To have been put outdoors-rejected- by the white society in general was one thing unfortunate, but an aspect of life over which [blacks] had no control, since [they] could not change the cold, prejudiced hearts of the bigots who sought to make their [blacks] lives uncomfortable, but to be slack enough to put one's own kin outdoors –that was criminal. (Bluest, 17)

When Pecola is outside her house everything around her reminds her that she is an outcast, she does not belong or rather does not exist. The white storekeeper does not look at her when she enters the store and he acts as

if she is invisible. When he finally looks at her, he looks with hate as she senses from his tone.

His behavior strengthens her feeling that she is ugly and thus has no place in her society. Pecola becomes completely possessed with the idea of beauty and blue eyes because of the primer and because of the society. She believes that beauty and self-worth are associated with being white and with having blue eyes. Like the rest of her family, Pecola thinks she is ugly, an ugliness that was thrown at her, "It came from conviction [...] they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it". (Bluest, 28) The more acceptance one gets from his race, the closer one comes to be whole.

Teenagers are especially vulnerable to the society and family opinion about them. Pecola can only view herself through the eyes of her society and family. As Morrison says, "She is

not seen by herself until she hallucinates a self". (Miner, 85) Pecola stays invisible to herself until she can see the ego that fits her idea about beauty.

The black community of school also rejects Pecola. The teacher fails to assign anyone to sit next to Pecola while all the other students had seat partners. Little black boys bully her by referring to her skin color, they humiliate her because of her parents, encircling her and chanting: "Black e mo Black e mo Ya daddy sleeps naked." (Bluest, 65) This is the only time for Pecola to be surrounded by others only to be neglected again physically and emotionally.

According to Gurleen Grewal, "The Bluest Eye is an anti-bildungsroman". Pecola is the ultimate example of the negative effects of racial prejudice on black people but her condition is even worse because even Blacks like herself are prejudiced against her. She feels inferior because she believes that beauty and worthiness are two sides for the same coin. Both Black and White society reject Pecola and therefore she becomes their victim. The hardest attack on Pecola from society comes when she meets Geraldine, a black, educated woman who did not allow her son playing with [niggers]. Geraldine attacks Pecola and kicks her out of her house. Morrison mocks such people whom she considers just as naive as Pecola because they accept the beauty standards assigned by the white racist society.

Morrison mentions the American idea of the ideal family presented in the primer to contrast it with the MacTeer and Breedlove families. She aims to show the bad effects of the primer on the psych of black children, Barbara Christian states:

Young children are led to believe that others are happy because they are pretty, are not too noisy, or are living an orderly life,

whatever line of demarcation or difference they can perceive as marking their own existence. The more confusing, different, poverty ridden or depressed that a child's life is, the more she will yearn for the norm the dominant society says provides beauty and happiness. (Thomas, 230)

The primer affects Pecola and she is led to believe that the world of the primer is the place she wants to inhabit and escape her miserable loveless family who live in a storefront home. She sees the blond Jane in the primer and she yearns to be like her, she yearns for the norm, which to her is blue eyes.

Morrison uses the Dick and Jane primer to deconstruct the traditional American family norm. Morrison writes her novel about the poor black families whereas the primer is concerned with the ideal white middle class family. Morrison wants to reveal the chaos beneath the pleasant shell of Dick and Jane. Jane has a nice red dress; Pecola does not.

Jane's father and mother laugh and play; Pecola's parents do not ever laugh or play. Pecola wants everything in the primer but mostly she wants Jane's blue eyes. Pecola is "...so hypnotized by the blue and white Shirley Temple mug, so mesmerized, in fact, that she drinks every ounce of milk in the MacTeer house in an effort to consume this hallmark of American beauty." (James & Nye, 21) Black children are given white dolls to play with; they drink in mugs with white little girls printed on them, they watch white children on TV shows and then they are asked to be normal and love themselves. Still there are differences among children, as Morrison states that the effect of the primer, the dolls, and the Shirley Temple mug on Pecola is not the same on Claudia and Frieda. When they have to stand up for themselves against the taunts of Maureen Peal, they can do so. Pecola cannot do the same, she has been called ugly many times- even by her own family-, and she does not have the ability to defend herself like the MacTeer girls who grew up in a loving family unlike her. Pecola lacks self-confidence because of her unloving home life; she is an easy target for anyone to mock. The society rejects Pecola and she is lost in an absence of human recognition, she becomes vulnerable to the violent traumas of being rejected and beaten by her mother and raped by her father then losing the baby.

Mrs. Breedlove's love for her daughter begins and ends in her womb, she confesses:

I used to talk to it whilst it can be still in the womb. Like good friends we was. You know. I be hanging was and I knowed lifting weren't good for it. I'd say to it holt on now I gone

hang up these few rags, don't get froggy; it be over soon. It wouldn't leap or nothing... On up till the end I felted good about that baby. (Bluest, 124)

The mother-child friendship started in the womb and ended upon Pecola's birth when her mother saw that she is ugly. She was ugly like the rest of her family and her mother hated their ugliness, their marriage, and their poverty. Mrs. Breedlove longed for beauty and acceptance, which she did not find inside her society. She found what she longed for in her work as a maid for a white family who represent all her missing desires and this led her to neglect her children. When Pecola was in pain, her mother ill-used her and treated her violently while she offered the kindest words for the pink-and-yellow girl. Leester Thomas argues that Mrs. Breedlove planted in her son a desire to escape and in her daughter a fear of others, a fear of growing up, a fear of life:

Mrs. Breedlove violates one of the more sacred and primal mores: She, in neglecting her own flesh and in breeding fear and uncertainty, pushes her children aside outdoors. And the father's hatred and vile treatment assures that outdoors is where they will remain. (Thomas, 233,234)

Pecola is a powerless child who faced the world alone with no guidance, even when she menstruate for the first time, she doesn't know what is it and thinks she is dying. Mrs. MacTeer cleans her up while her own mother is busy mothering the Fisher's child as Claudia recalls, "the familiar violence rose in me, her calling Mrs. Breedlove Polly, when even Pecola called her mother Mrs. Breedlove"(Bluest,108)

Pauline gets the power, praise and luxury with the Fishers and when Pecola finds herself in their kitchen, responsible for the spilled remains of a pie, Pauline is incapable of motherly love and forgiveness. Her response is knocking Pecola to the floor and running to mother the crying Fisher's child.

In one gallop [Mrs. Breedlove] was on Pecola, and with back of

her hand knocked her to the floor. Pecola slid in the pie juice. one leg folding under her. Mrs. Breedlove yanked her up by the arm, and slapped her again, and in a voice thin with anger abused Pecola directly,... (Bluest, 109)

Ironically, in contrast to this, she comforts the little Fisher's girl and says, "Hush, baby, Hush. Don't cry. Look at your dress. Polly will change it" (Bluest, 109).

Pauline's hatred for her daughter is the result of the negligence with which she spends her childhood days. She grows up living in her own world and longing for valuable moments with her family. (Collins, 266) Pauline is weak as a woman, a wife, and a mother. Her weak and frustrated character has a devastating effect on her daughter because to her motherhood fail to give her power, instead it becomes a source of oppression. Because of this failure mother-daughter relationship, the little innocent girl longs for the bluest eyes to gain the love and appreciation of others. She believes her ugliness prevents her mother from loving her. According to Bernard Thurer, mothers are seen as principal factors in their children's development, as well as their principal obstacles. (Thurer, 65) Pauline becomes the major obstacle in Pecola's trauma and she fails to build a secure home for her two children. Her memories of unworthiness and ignorance as a child prevent her from nurturing a healthy environment for her children and she cannot foster a healthy relationship with them. She usually clashes with her husband, Cholly and their violent routines always happen in the presence of the children. Pecola cannot escape this environment, she only wishes to disappear with her hands on her eyes, but it is not useful. Her eyes contain all the memories, all the ugliness of her world and she wants to get rid them, "They were everything. Everything was there, in them. All of those pictures. All of those faces" (Bluest, 43). She tries to understand those people who hate her and ignore her. Her family, teachers and schoolmates despise her and the best solution she finds is to get blue eyes.

It had occurred to Pecola that if her eyes were beautiful, those eyes that held those pictures, and knew the sights- if those eyes of hers were different, beautiful,....maybe Colly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they'd say, "Why look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes.

(Bluest, 44)

Pecola cannot run away like her brother since she is a girl and she is still young and she is forced to find another way to endure the daily fights. She is lost in a world dominated by white culture and a shattered family. Psychoanalysts agree that good mothering is crucial for children's healthy development. This healthy relationship demands selfless love from the mother no matter how the child looks, no matter what lack, disorder, or weakness he suffers. Pauline's childhood is deprived of such strong bonding and thus she cannot offer the same to her children. Pauline's labour experience in the hospital with the white doctors around her is humiliating as she is dehumanized during the delivery when one of the doctors remarks that black women give birth effortlessly just like horses. When Pecola is born she hates her and sees her as an ugly thing. (Bluest, 123)

Pauline fosters in Pecola a fear of people, a fear of facing the world, a fear of being homeless, a fear of life and a fear of growing up. Karen Horney remarks that Pecola has a damaged personality because of her parents' anxiety as Horney defines it as:

...the feeling of a child of being isolated and helpless in a potentially hostile world. A wide range of adverse factors in the environment can

produce this insecurity in a child: direct or indirect domination, indifference,

erratic behavior, lack of real guidance, disparaging attitudes, too much admiration or lack of it, lack of reliable warmth,.....injustice, discrimination...and so on. (176-7)

Pecola is the victim of all these situations of an insecure child who defend herself either by being submissive or aggressive. In Pecola's situation, she tries to find an identity based on beauty standards devised by her mother. Forced to follow unrealistic ideals of beauty and thus she is desperately in need for blue eyes. The situation of the traumatized child is tragically heightened when Pecola is raped by her father and thus loses her innocence.

Pecola is lying on the floor destroyed and defeated. Pauline refuses to hear her daughter's account of the incident and she is left unsupported by her own family. Pecola is raped twice and her soul is dead. She becomes pregnant and no one in her community wants her baby to live. The baby is born premature and dies. She is socially neglected as the elders in her community turn away their eyes in disgust and the children laugh at her insanity and they run away in fright.

The community laughs at Pecola as she is seen moving her hands in an attempt to fly- as if she concurred her dream of freedom by having blue eyes. She wanted the love and acceptance of her parents but she failed to live up to their expectations. (Deidre J & Butler, 48)

Pauline is the bad mother whose dislike of her own daughter caused Pecola's bad self. Her own family who were unsupportive of their own child causes Pecola's plight. The major responsibility falls on the mother who fails to love her daughter because of a dream image about a daughter she longs to have. (Wane, 105-16)

During her transition from girlhood to womanhood, Pecola lacks the image of the mother and the role model in her life. She misses the moral guidance, and the moral support. She knows about the biological changes in her body not from her mother but from the MacTeer girls. She also learns that she can be a mother on a condition that someone loves her. Pecola does not know the meaning of love since she was never loved

before not by her parents and not by people in her community. She keeps thinking that beauty is the condition of love and it is the reason why nobody loves her. Such a rejection and neglecting of the girl child led her into madness and enters an illusionary world where she can have love.

African-American mothers usually empower their daughters as they are depicted in many works of literature. Andrea O. Reilly argues this procedure of empowering young daughters is achieved by allowing daughters to become self-actualized through maternal identification. (147) Pauline fails to empower Pecola and fails to teach her self-development and therefore she is a failure in maternal identification. She fails to provide a safe home for her daughter, where can protect herself against white hegemony and the effects of a racist world in order to have a healthy development of self-esteem.

Maternal role is highly appreciated and is fundamental to black culture. According to O' Reilly "black community and the greater black population considers motherhood as the prime source of women's welfare and empowerment. The heart of black motherhood, in both practice and thought, is how to preserve, protect and more generally empower black children so that they may resist racist practices that seek to harm them and grow into adulthood whole and complete" (4). Pecola never felt herself whole nor complete and she is not a healthy being. There is an absence of any positive bond of relationship and an absence of mothering from the beginning of Pecola's life until the end. She craves for an acceptance within such communal bonds.

Contrasted to Pauline is the character of Mrs. MacTeer who is a major character in the novel. She is a serious and honest mother who follows the traditions of mothering which are respected in her community. She supports her daughters and she is an "other mother" to Pecola. She sings to her daughters and her songs form cherished memories to them as they love her songs. Claudia inherits her mother's values of communal help and extends them to help Pecola in a bond of sisterhood. Claudia possess the quality of resilience which is passed from her mother and it can be noticed that she digs deep to find peace and beauty amidst poverty as she tries to be content after observing Pecola's insanity which results from her discontent from her own life.

Mrs. MacTeer is a good storyteller to her daughters and through her stories; she confirms that the process of storytelling can teach individuals how to heal themselves by enabling them to share their pain. O' Reilly also notices that Mrs. MacTeer teaches her children "how to survive and endure" (125). Claudia, unlike Pecola, is fascinated with her body, which shows the effect of her mother in teaching her how to appreciate her own beauty and it also an effect of the mother's strong personality. The mother sets a good example for the daughter that result in a strong

mother-daughter relationship. A mother who values her own maternal powers empowers her young daughters to have confident childhood. (Kuenz, 423)

The MacTeer girls have a confident childhood that is filled with the love of their mother who wants them to be resilient enough to face all the external forces and pressures in a white society. Claudia is the sharp opposite of Pecola whose mother never offer support for any moral or emotional strength leaving her daughter in a life of total darkness. She is never taught how to fight or how to be alive. The MacTeers receive and welcome Pecola when she is homeless and thus taught their daughters how to be generous and offer the hand of love and help to others. They witnessed their mother's self-respect through her participation in her community and Morrison shows how Claudia and her mother share memories together,

Mrs. MacTeer speaks her grievances, she is not silenced by them,
as is Mrs. Breedlove. Frieda and Claudia learn from their
mother's
songs, soliloquies, and conversations that women have a
voice
and that through the speaking, singing and sharing of
experiences
women can claim and take control of their lives. (O'Reilley,
126)

Nancy Chodorow states "women, as mothers, produce daughters with mothering capacities and with the desire to mother" (7). This ability and desire comes from the maternal love they receive from their mothers. Mother-daughter relationship is fundamental in building this capacity. Frieda and Claudia's mother cannot afford the luxury of enjoying her motherhood because of their poverty and therefore expressions of love are missing in her relationship with her daughters. Claudia does not want to be a mother to her toys, which shows her refusal to be a mother in her real life. This refusal indicate her frustration about mother roles in her life. Claudia and Frieda inherit the basic tools to survive such as self-expression, and communal involvement and liberating themselves from liking maternal roles.

Conclusions

Child abuse is a global problem. This abuse is not necessarily physical it can take many forms: emotional, psychological, physical or sexual, or experiencing domestic violence. The type of abuse and its duration determine the effect of it into adulthood. In Pecola's case, she is emotionally, psychologically, and sexually abused. Could she help herself? In a world where she is loved and appreciated for her inner beauty and within a family who offer love and support maybe she could. She could not escape the criticism of a falsely idealized society that deprived her from living a better life nor the judgment of her own black community that neglect her. Neglected and abused by her mother and raped by her father Pecola becomes the victim of her parents. She would not have the problem of self-esteem in the first place if her parents, especially her mother, loved her. Perhaps if she was shown some love, she would have faced those who made her feel like an outsider and invisible. Despised by teachers and schoolmates alike, she wanted love desperately and asked her question many times: how do you get somebody to love you? The world around her including school, neighborhood, and family seem to shout at her in one voice: with blue eyes.

Pecola failed to have love, power, and self-esteem inside her home and therefore she starts looking outside to find a self that she could live with but again she could not find it. Unable to find peace within herself and around her, Pecola is forever lost. There is nothing to be gained for her when her wholesome being is destroyed. She spent her whole life hunched and crouched wishing she could be invisible.

Morrison contrasts two little girls living in the same white racist society and black community but in different families. Claudia have some love from her family. Her mother taught her to be strong and she has the mother-daughter bonding. She is able to be aggressive and stands for herself. She is able to have a normal growth and possess a strong personality during her childhood and later on when she is an adult. Unlike Pecola who did not find love anywhere. Because she did not find love from her parents she became fragile and could not step out of the box of the beauty standards of the society. She has no self-confidence because no one taught her to love herself and appreciate her own beauty. She wanted the bluest eye to gain the love she desperately wanted thinking that all what matters in life is beauty.

Family is the most important pillar in a child's life and when a child does not find love and support inside her family, she tries looking for love and support outside home. When the world outdoors refuses her, neglects her, and despises her she becomes a lost case.

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الْإِنْسَانِيَّةِ