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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND COMMUNICATION

DISSERTATION TOPIC

An exploration of the destructive impact of the construct of Physical beauty on the African American woman. An analysis of Toni Morrison: *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and Zora Neale Hurston: *Their Eyes were Watching God* (1937)

By

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A dissertation submitted to the Department of English and Communication, Midlands State University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts English and Communication Honours Degree.

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DECLARATION

I, **Zimunya Charntel Chiedza**, Registration number **R121026T**, hereby declare that this dissertation is my own original work that has not been previously submitted for any degree or examination at any other university. Proper citation and acknowledgements in line with copyright law and ethical requirements have been strictly adhered to, in writing this project. This dissertation is submitted to the Department of English and Communication, Midlands State University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts English and Communication Honours Degree.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate the success of my research to my parents Mr and Mrs Zimunya, my sister Shaleen and my brothers Andrew and Owen Zimunya who have been my spiritual, emotional and financial pillars, above all my sources of inspiration.

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For the precious gift of life and noble guidance throughout this research and life in general, I would like to praise the Father in Heaven. All my efforts are due to him.

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ABSTRACT

The crux of the study is to unearth the effects of the process of the construct of physical beauty on the Black American woman. The study also analyses the inferiority, color complex which is defined as the psychological fixation about color and feature that leads to whites discriminating the blacks. It is in the study that I also ask how issues of the constructs of physical beauty by the African American woman leads to issues of continued self –denial, denial by the superior race and identity crisis. Throughout the history of colonialism and slavery the black race or the black colour so to speak has always been associated with negative stereotypes such as barbaric, evil and ugly. Such stereotypes have forever burdened the black woman especially the fact of ugliness. As such the study seeks to reveal how the black woman tries to run away from these stereotypes imposed on them by the coloniser, the master or the white woman who refer to themselves as the complete opposite who are clean and above all beautiful. The Black woman, through exposure and pressure from their immediate community, have put much great efforts to become white that is to become beautiful that is to have blue eyes and long blond hair as is revealed by Morrison and Hurston’s work. However these efforts are fruitless in fact affected the black woman that is to imply that they have become a taste of their own medicine. The have contributed more to on-going self-denial, identity crisis and continuous denial by those whom they try to imitate as they ultimately realise that they will never operate on the same footage with them.

KEY WORDS: racism, colonialism, beauty, construction, destructive.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION OF RESEARCH

1.0 Introduction

In discussions of beauty among African American woman, a controversial issue has always been whether internalised racism affects the way black people perceive themselves as well as interacting with each other. According to the oxford dictionary racism is defined as a complex system of social inequality with an ideological base that is cemented by day to day discriminatory discourse and other social practises. The research in this view intends to explore how the superior race has affected the other which is the black community in particular the black women. Baldwin (1979) speculates that racism and racist practises are closely and directly associated with white people. To a greater extent this view is of much relevance to the study since it can be observed that throughout history, Black which is the other or the colonised has always been in constant assimilation of western ideas, values and beliefs in order to mould their own identities so as to be like the superior race. Since the black woman has been made to think and assimilate these, they have been made to think that skin colour and in this case light skinned, long straight hair and blue eyes define beauty thereby determining acceptance, due to the process of colonialism which elevated the idea of white supremacy. In this sense, the study is designed to reveal how this internalised racism has come to shape how the colonised who is the inferior race should think act and behave. In other words the study seeks to define how white ideas exclude the Black woman since she is supposed to look or to be regarded beautiful only in relation to their own expectations.

Wolf, (1990) opines that almost every woman is concerned with beauty. She adds that her ability to perform well is influenced by her appearance. In this regard, it is the Black woman's desire to be beautiful not only that but in relation to the white world in the plea to be recognised not only by the whites but by her immediate society .It is in this process of the

construct of physical beauty that the black woman inflicts pain and rather continue to disenfranchise her own self, her identity which ultimately lead to self-denial and low self-esteem which ultimately destroys her, thus the major aim of the research. This idea is clearly revealed by Fanon (1967) who in his famous work *Black Skin White Mask* investigates the psychology of the process of colonialism by examining how it is internalised by the colonised, how the inferiority complex is uncalculated and how through the mechanism of racism black people end up emulating their oppressors. In defining beauty as far as the white world is concerned, Fanon asserts that whiteness has become a symbol of purity, justice, beauty and truth thus defining what it means to be human. On the other hand he presents blackness as a diametrical opposite which encompasses in it ugliness, darkness as well as everything negative. This distinction therefore depicts the inequalities between the black and the white race, the superiority as well as the inferiority of the two.

Furthermore, the research seeks to reveal that the issue of racism goes beyond history and whiteness. The research will also unravel that one's immediate community whose major players are the family, peers both male and female as well as media messages also contribute and perpetuate Eurocentric notions of beauty and detect what it means to be beautiful on the women of their community. This view can be supported by sociologist Collins, (2000) who states that the pain most deeply felt is the pain that the black inflict on one another. According to this view the intra community infliction of racism has deeper impact than when judgement comes from the non-blacks.

In addition a deeper analysis of Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* through female characters like Pecola the protagonist and her mother Pauline who yearn to be beautiful will reveal the destructive impact of the construct of physical beauty which ultimately affects their own identity and self-esteem as it suggests that the objective definitions of physical beauty are

created by the dominant culture in order to reinforce power dynamics. Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God* through the character Janie will also reveal how African American women yearns to belong to the white race up to the extent that they feel comfortable when associated with the superior race. Therefore a greater appreciation of these works and other immediate literary critiques and scholars will be used to clearly bring out the concept of beauty in the white world, how it is imitated and internalised by members of the black community, how these members contribute to the perpetuation of these ideas on the African American who deviates furthest from them and its ultimate destructive impact on the African American woman. Thus to say, the research is set to unravel how the process of racism has negatively affected the "other". It also explores the feeling of dependency and inadequacy that the black woman experience in the white world that ultimately makes her want to be like her oppressors, the white people.

1.1 Background of the study

The entire concept of the Eurocentric constructs of beauty can be wholly attributed to colonialism where the African countries were colonised by the European countries which imposed their values and beliefs on the colonised. This serves to suggest that the entire process meant that for the colonised to be identified or recognised they should abandon their own beliefs and values and adopt those of the superior power thus giving birth to racism which is a major factor in the most harmful of beauty ideals.

Racism has since flourished in most of African American literature as revealed by various critiques and scholars. In this case black and white racism is the most uneducated, naked and ugly manifestation of the tendency currently taking place in the world. Dubois has always been accredited for his contribution that the problem of the 21st century is the problem of the colour line. The superior race who are the Europeans advocates for everyone to imitate their

values and ways of life, in other words they have imposed their values on the colonised, the blacks. According to them whiteness means being clean, pure and beautiful. Therefore being beautiful is having blonde eyes, long straight hair, and a lighter complexion. Blackness on the other hand is the complete opposite that possesses negative stereotypes such as being ugly and barbaric. Various scholars have propounded views and insights portraying how it has affected the Black Nation.

Franks et al,(2008) states that they are often poor power relations between the colonised and the coloniser which result from colonisation which lead to negative stereotypes against the colonised. This in turn affects the colonised identity construction. Therefore the blacks in terms of colonisation view themselves as ugly and cannot be equally compared to the whites thus they are forced to abandon their original identity and adopt that of the superior race so that they may be closer to their dominant culture. In other words black race in order to eliminate such stereotypes imposed on them they go through the process of self-denial that is to say the seize to be what they really are and want to become that which they were made to think is right and in this case being beautiful which however ultimately does not yield positive results on them.

Fanon (1961) opines that, the aim of colonisation is not only to take almost all control of the colonised people's life but also to try to blank the colonised people's mind from all form and content which keeps the colonised people down, disfiguring and destroying them historically and culturally. This is so because the coloniser has denied the black people their own reality, existence and culture and wants them to adopt theirs. This can be attributed back to the years of slavery were the Africans were uprooted from their families which meant abandonment of culture and history to go and work in the Caribbean Islands. Therefore throughout

colonisation divided self-perception of the Black subject who has lost his native cultural origin and embraced that of the mother country produces an inferiority complex.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Previous studies have focused mainly on the constructs of physical beauty by the Black American woman in literary texts as emanating from racist ideas where they dwelt much on historical background and them being the major players in defining one's self. This study however hopes to explore how these constructs of what it means to be beautiful are shaped and perpetuated by the immediate community, the media, the family, and peers as well as how these helps in the forging of the women's identities which results in the African American's a feeling of worthlessness, low self-esteem and self-denial.

1.3 Research objectives and aims

The goal of this study is mainly

- To show the whipping effects of racism on the African American woman in literary texts.
- To unravel the extent to which colonialism has contributed to the negative stereotyping of the black race.
- To explain the concept of beauty in relation to the white world on the African American woman's identity.
- To define how white ideas exclude the African American woman socially and physically.
- To show how the black American woman strive to possess the epitome of western beauty standards within themselves and their communities

- To explore the destructive impacts of the constructs of physical beauty on the African American woman.
- To show how one's own community which constitute of the family, peers both male and female and media perpetuate to the notions of Eurocentric standards of beauty.

1.4 Research Question

The research main question is how the construction of physical beauty in relation to the white world ultimately destroys or affects the African American woman .While there has been research on how the negative stereotypes on the black affects the entire race as a whole, my research will therefore depart from the race as a whole instead focuses on the African American woman that is how she tries to fight off such stereotypes which apart from history are perpetuated by her own family, peers as well as the messages from the media but ultimately sees herself trapped. The research also seeks to find out how the images and stigma during and after slavery and the construction of beauty is reflected in the social interactions causing individuals to believe that they are imperfect and unacceptable the way they are.

1.5 Justification of the study

This research is vital because it will help in exploring how colonisation has affected as well as bridged a wider gap between the white and the black in such a way that the black feels inferior therefore inorder for her to eliminate this inferiority complex the black woman tries to conform to the expectations of the superior race but despite all these efforts the black woman is doing herself no good instead destroying more her self-esteem and denying her original being. The study in this case will help elucidate the fact that imitating the superior race will not always yield positive results. This is so because during the process of constructing physical beauty with the aim of yearning to be recognised or identified as

belonging to the white race, the African woman is further denying herself, her culture and history to adopt the values and beliefs of the whites who in actual fact will never accommodate her. In fact it is not an easy process and taboo for the Black race to be wholly accepted and suit the white world. The research will also unearth the importance of appreciating one's own self that is their identity, culture and history.

1.6 Significance of Study

Baldwin (1979) postulates that many black women perceive their beauty through the influence of the family, media, peers as well as the division within the black community. The research therefore will also unravel how the constructions of physical beauty occur within literary discourse through various authors with their characters who try to imitate the white race. The research is significant in that it addresses Anahita (2006)'s idea that one should mould themselves to fit in expected constructs of beauty for them to be accepted and be part of their own communities.

Therefore in short the study is significant in that it explores the ultimate effects of the constructs of physical beauty to the African American woman, these which are perpetuated by their own communities, which they try to imitate so that they can be identified and accepted by them. It is evident that these are as a result of the internalisation of racism.

1.7 Literature Review

This literature review focuses on other scholarly views on the subject being researched. Past studies have mostly focused on the effects of colonialism on the African American woman in terms of the constructs of physical beauty but ignored how these have been perpetuated by their own immediate communities, their families, peers, men as well as the media. Fallon (1990) alludes to the fact that scholarship has deliberated various views on the constructs of beauty and how these European standards are perpetuated by the society, family, peers as

well as the media. European standards of beauty emphasize skin color, hair types as well as eye color that which exclude many black women especially those of the darker skin thus black women become vulnerable because they deviate furthest from them. The study therefore explores the black women's internalization of these European standards through the perpetuation of the Eurocentric notions beauty by family, peers, the society as well as the media, and the related outcome of this internalization especially on self-perception.

A review of the research indicates that European standards of beauty can bare damaging effects on the life of the Black American women primarily in the form of internalised self-hatred. The research therefore seeks to find out how these ideals of physical beauty are being perpetuated and how this reoccurring issue leads to such concerns of self-acceptance among other African women.

Colonisation a catalyst in the construction of physical beauty

Colonial beauty construction plays a significant role in disenfranchising the Black women's own identity and self-esteem. This view can also be attributed to Fanon (1967) in his famous work *Black Skin White Masks* which is believed to be the first book to investigate the Psychology of colonialism. It examines how racism is internalised by the colonised, how through the mechanism of racism, black people particularly the black woman in this case end up emulating their oppressors. According to him his anger is not directed towards the "Black man" but the preposition that he is required not only to be black instead he should be black in relation to the white man, thus he stresses that it is this epidermisation that concerns him. It is in the research that the researcher appreciates such views as it is evident that because of colonisation when the black man comes into contact with the white world they go through an experience of sensitisation, they begin to appreciate the world in the manner the white man does because racism has taught them that they are invisible and can only become visible

human beings in the presence of the white man. It is during this process that they lose their ego, identity and self-esteem because they cannot depend on their own instead on their colonisers. Thus Yancy (2005) suggests that, through the process of “othering” the black woman has been ascribed a subordinate position, as she has been made to conceptualise herself only in the presence of the white man, she has been designed to be inferior and presented as the antithesis of the coloniser thus she is set to imitate the values of what it means to be beautiful.

Moore (2008) suggests that European beauty standards have not been adequately addressed therefore they still exist. He further opines that a closer look at the literature indicates that this self-hatred permeates throughout the life course, it is passed through generations of black women and is rooted in early childhood interactions with both the immediate environment and the social sphere. This view clearly suggests that the internalised racism which is a result of colonisation has greatly affected the way the colonised views issue of beauty, instead has hold on to how these are presented by their superior power and how these are perpetuated through their immediate community.

Black community’s contribution to the forging of African American women identities.

The distinctions created by Whites to distinguish between Blacks and White have come to be used within the African American community, this is to say Black communities which constitute of one’s family, peers both male and female have internalised the Eurocentric notions of beauty to such an extent that they impose them on their women and despise the women who do not conform to these notions. Hall (1995), demonstrates that social construction of beauty has taken the African American community further apart, impacting on the development of the women, thus it is in this study that I dig deeper into the circumstances which leads the African American woman to believe that she is not beautiful in

the eyes of her own community because through the influence of the family, media and peers who are all significant in understanding the impact of this phenomenon, how it has and continues to have an impact on the African American woman's identity.

Young and Collin (2004) also support this view as they opine that the perpetuation of a lighter skin, long hair that have been continuously used as the representation of Black women in our communities which contribute to the African American woman's struggle for self-esteem suggesting that the intra-community infliction of racism has a deeper impact than when judgement comes from non- Blacks.

Furthermore, male counterparts also serve as perpetrators of the white standards of beauty on the African American women. I discovered that young African American women are affected by this phenomenon which is evident in my research and analysis of the texts *The Bluest Eye* and *Their Eyes were Watching God*, through black men preferring lighter skinned over the dark skinned. Callaghan (2001) emphasises that women accept and unquestion definitions of ideals of beauty contributed and emphasised by men in their society. Her statement explains men's role in the reinforcement of expected notions of beauty which they have been taught to assimilate by the superior race.

To add on, it is evident that female characters belonging to one's family circle predominantly utter and emphasize appearance. Bronfen Brenner (1993); Hutchinson(2007) suggest that the family often helps shape a child's ideals as far as accepted and unaccepted standards of beauty are concerned, they are often the biggest influence on a child's life. This view is also supported by Gordon (2008) who says that beauty standards perpetuated by the family play a significant role in one's self-acceptance and contribute to low self-esteem. Moore (2008) also subsumes the view as he postulates that internalised negative self-perceptions derived from familial messages as far as beauty is concerned further bombard the African woman.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

This research finds theoretical grounding on Critical Race Theory. Using the theory as a framework, the research provides an examination of how black-white racial or white stereotypes affects constructs of physical beauty of the African American woman,

1.8.1 Critical Race Theory

The theory was derived during the middle 1970's as a response to the failure of critical legal studies to adequately address the effects of race and racism. It lays its foundation from the inspirational work of scholars like Derrick Bell (2001). Addressing the hegemonic system of white supremacy, the theory focuses directly on the effects of race and racism. Matsuda (1991) has defined critical race theory as a theory that attempts to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism by progressive legal scholars of color. It is also important to note that among those who utilise the theory within educational research, interrogate whiteness, as suggested by Pennington (2003).

This research in the use of the Critical race theory began by defining race and racism. Banks (1995) opines that an examination of the United States history reveals that the "color line" or race is a socially constructed category which emphasizes dominance and superiority of one race over the other which was created to differentiate racial groups. In other words racism is the process of downgrading, looking down and suppressing the other on the bases of color so that those who hold the color with the higher status remain superior and dominates the other. Lorde (1992) also defines racism as the belief to the right of dominance by those with inherent superiority. It is in this research that i reveal how the dominant culture has suppressed the black and discriminated them so that they feel inferior and ultimately feel the need to become like the superior race.

1.8.2 Racism and its Permanence

The theory involves many tenets but I decided to use the theory's basic premise which is the notion of the permanence of racism in society because of the nature of my research. Bell (1992) states that racism is a component of American life therefore adopting a realistic view of the American structure reveals the acceptance of the ideas of the permanence of racism. According to Bell (1995) a realist view requires realising the dominant role that racism has played and continues to play in the American society, which can either be unconscious or unconscious as suggested by Lawrence (1993). The notion of the permanence of racism suggests that, racist hierarchical structures govern all political, economic and social domains. Such structures privilege the white and contribute to the "othering" of people of color in all areas of their life which suggests that the situation has become permanent to the extent that the inferior race no matter how they try to become like the superior race their efforts become fruitless because of the gap that has been bridged between the two races so as to keep the superior in power.

The theory in this case is deemed of great importance as it reveals how the dominant culture has used its powers and ideologies as well as beliefs to define the lesser power. The fact that they the colonisers, the European nations hold superior powers, they impose these ideologies to those whom they othered who can also be referred to as the inferior such that the victims become sensitised to its subtle nuances as well as exasperated looks, these which the key ideas the research is based on. In other words, the ideologies of the white race which define beauty have been greatly assimilated by the inferior who is particularly the African American woman. These European notions of physical looks which are ultimately perpetuated through immediate society family members, peers as well as the family result in the rippling effect on

those who try to imitate them in a plea to be recognised and accepted by both their own community as well as those who poses them.

Furthermore, in analysing Morrison's fictional work the theory is of much importance as Morrison presents how the dominant society has contributed to the double stigmatisation of the protagonist Pecola. She firstly suffers from the stigma of color, that is being an African American woman and the stigma of ugliness because of her black color is associated with such stereotypes. Morrison wants the white readers to feel the tragedy of racism thoroughly as suggested by Bump (2010). Moreover, to show the complexity of black and white identity in the novel, Morrison highlights the issue of racism. This is clearly shown through the messages from media platforms which speculate the notions of those who possess white standards of beauty as better than those who do not fit or conform to them, the family circle as well as the peers who have internalised white standards of beauty, what is expected for women in terms of their physical beauty. This makes the characters like Pecola and her mother Pauline to believe deeply in European beauty aesthetics. The theory in this case serves to be relevant as it will also help examine such choices at the expense of others.

1.8.3 Post Colonial Theory

The theory refuses a neat definition because of the multiple angles that it takes. The study however started in the 1950's when colonialism started dismantling. Europe was losing power over its colonies and a new generation of writers such as Fanon, Ceaser tried to understand the implications of the New World Order as well as dealing with the damages done by the Old World Order. This is to say, scholars and theorists write to reveal the damage caused by the Old World Order. It is also in this theory that we witness how one is defined by the one in power. According to Fanon (1967) in his famous work *Black Skin White Mask*, he warns readers to be perpetually on the guard against European

unconsciousness where the most shameful desires lie dominant against modern society where life has no taste, in which the aim is tainted, in which ideas and men are corrupt and which spells death against the idea of progress where everyone climbs up towards whiteness and light and is engulfed by a single, monolithic notion of what it means to be human. Fanon in this regard is revealing the whipping effects of colonialism in plea of wanting to be identified.

To better understand some of the basic ideas of post-colonial theory i first defined colonialism as the imperialist expansion of Europe into the rest of the world during the last four hundred years in which the dominant imperium or centre carried on a relationship of control and influence over its margins or colonies. This serves to suggest that Post colonialism broadly is a study of the effects of colonialism on cultures and societies. It is indeed concerned with how European nations conquered and controlled “Third World” cultures and how these groups have since responded to the encroachments. In this regard the theory is of great importance as it helps deliberate on the issue of colonialism and its whipping effects on the cultures which were conquered by the European nation who continued to exterminate the natives because of their superior weaponry thus European whiteness are set to stand for power, beauty and truth as compared to the black who is associated with everything negative and ugly in particular as according to the research.

It is undeniable that the concept of beauty held both by the whites and the blacks is one of the products of colonialism. Taylor (2000) says that that white dominated culture has racialised beauty in that it has defined what physical beauty means which is only attributed to the whites who possess the expected standards and notions of beauty. In this regard it is evident that colonial beauty construction plays a significant role to make the characters perceive that black is ugly for the obvious reason that they do not conform to the white beauty standards of having long hair, blue eyes and a light skin. It is this perception that is undeniable that it

cannot be separated from the effects of colonialism. This is also evident in the research that as we witness how the Black women through their own communities families, peers as well as the media are made to feel ugly because those who impose to them notions and standards of what it is to be beautiful were also brainwashed and made to think in that way by their colonisers which in turn destruct and disturb the women who are forced to imitate these standards for them to be recognised and accepted by their society as well as to try and match so as to fit in the society of those who impose on them, shape the way they should think and act.

1.9 Research Design

In coming up with various facts and results I used qualitative approach to explore human experience, analyse beliefs, opinions, emotions and relationships among individuals as well as to examine how conflict around beauty has continued within the black American women and how she has continued to devalue herself and continue to equal the superior race so as to be recognised.

Additionally, I used textual analysis to gather information about how human beings make sense of the world as well as to understand the ways in which members of various cultures make sense of who they are and how they fit into the world in which they live. The research therefore dwells much on how various scholar's contributions to how issues of colour and physical beauty on the African American women. This is to say in compiling the research, I made use of already existing views of various scholars on the subject and ultimately identified the gap as I dig deeper to find out how our own community leads the African woman to believe that she is not beautiful in the eyes of her community.

The next chapter will therefore reveal what the Eurocentric standards of beauty embody and how the various characters in Morrison (1970) and Hurston (1937) escape from their real

identities, constructing the expected white standards of beauty so as to be identified and accepted by their community and the white world at large.

CHAPTER TWO: An in-depth analysis of African American women and the Eurocentric Construction of Physical Beauty in *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *Their Eyes were Watching God* (1937)

2.1 Introduction

This chapter dwells much on the Eurocentric constructs of beauty that is, what it means to be beautiful in the eyes of the whites. Furthermore the chapter will discuss how those who do not fit these standards of beauty feel left out as well as despised and invisible. The fact that they yearn to be visible ultimately contributes to the internalisation process which make them try to imitate these standards of beauty so as to be visible that is, so that they are recognised. In analysing the constructions of beauty the chapter will therefore make reference to *The Bluest Eye* and *Their Eyes were Watching God*.

2.1.2 Author Biographies

This section gives brief biographical information of accomplished female African American authors Toni Morrison and Zora Neale Hurston whose texts *The Bluest Eye* and *Their Eyes were Watching God* are examined in the study.

2.1.3 Toni Morrison: *The Bluest Eye*

Toni Morrison was born in Lorain, Ohio where she places the setting of some of her novels because the place is neither plantation nor ghetto thus it offers an escape from stereotypical black settings. Her parents moved there hoping to raise their children in an environment friendlier to blacks. Her writings concentrate on the cultural inheritance of the rural Afro Americans communities and their cultural inheritance where she consistently reveals that it is in these communities and community experiences that place and identity are found. She brings out the effects of racism as she concentrates more on what is going on in one's community. In the novel she reflects the destructive impact of the constructs of physical

beauty on the African American woman which come as a result of internalised racism. Her style of writing and all her works show the reader issues of African Americans. Her upbringing contributes to how she views white people, her character choice and her themes. Her idea of writing the novel was lodged twenty years earlier after her classmate revealed a secret that she had received no answers from God after praying for two years to have blue eyes. Morrison therefore centres her story on her protagonist Pecola an African American female adolescent who yearns to have blue eyes after she had been taught to believe that she is ugly by her own community. Some of her works include, *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977) and *Beloved* (1987).

2.1.4 Zora Neale Hurston: *Their Eyes were Watching God*

Born in Nostalgia Alabama, Zora Neale Hurston and her family moved to Eatonville Florida, which in cooperated all black towns in the United States and a typical of Black communities in America where she places the setting of the novel. She wrote her novel *Their Eyes were Watching God* in the (1920's) at a time where a black woman was considered to hold a place at the margins of the society and was invisible which is revealed by the character Janie Crawford who is devoid of any perception of true identity in the early years spent while living with her grandmother at the white couple's home. It is in the novel that we also witness the realities of race relations in the (1930's). Based on sex and race established by the white people in the period of slavery the novel presents the growth of a naïve girl to a "handsome" woman.

It is evident that both authors are very much aware of the condition of the African American woman in a racialised society, her invisibility and her efforts to try and escape this web that she is caught up in which can only be traced back to slavery and colonialism.

2.1.5 Eurocentric standards of beauty

Thomas (1997) says that the black man is expected to live among the rules of the coloniser who are the superior White Europeans who enslaved the Africans into the New World, Caribbean, United States and South America because it has defined what beauty is like in terms of physical features that the superior race have. These such as being light skinned, possessing blue eyes and long blond hair. These standards are clearly evident to have been internalised and have taken shape in the Negro or the “other” as evidenced by Fanon (1967) in *Black Skin White Mask* who presents to us the story of Mayotte in his chapter *The Woman of Color and the White Man*. He says that what Mayotte wants rather the qualities that qualify one to be handsome is whether the man has blue eyes, blond long straight hair and a lighter skin. Her preferences clearly reveal the internalisation of the Eurocentric standards of beauty by the black woman. This is so because considering that there are always groups of majority and minority in the society, the minority will always remain at the periphery while the majority remain in powerful. Thus ultimately suggests that in terms of beauty construction, the dominant culture of society which represents the majority class plays an important role to easily indoctrinate its values and notions in order for the minority to follow the concept of beauty they have in their minds. Franks et al (2008) dominant is used interchangeably with majority and minority means the same with subordinate in sociology suggesting that, the subordinate members have less control or power over their own lives instead they are made to imitate the ones in power .They are forced to be beautiful only in relation to the values of the dominant or the majority group. This view is also supported by Fanon who argues that for not only must the black man be black instead he must be black in relation to the white man.

To support the topic In *Black Skin White Mask*, Fanon (1967) speaks of the divided self-perception of the black subject who has lost his native culture and originality and embraced that one of the dominant culture, the mother country. He says that the Black man is forced to appropriate and imitate the cultural code of the coloniser after going through the process of internalisation which results in an inferiority complex. This clearly brings out how Eurocentric standards of beauty greatly affected the black or the African American woman who has been presented as the antithesis of the white because they have been taught to believe in the standards of the dominant culture. According to the whites who is the coloniser, to be black means to be ugly, evil and invisible.

2.2 Invisibility

Clark (2001) postulates that those who determine what is seen determine what exists because controlling vision means controlling what is seen and defines the world because visual power brings political power. It is evident that African American woman is invisible throughout history because they are the minority group. They have been made to internalise the Eurocentric standards, beliefs and values and because they themselves do not possess these they become invisible that is to their colonisers, they are non-existent and cannot be recognised. Instead they can be recognised if only they think, look and act the white man or the coloniser way. This view is clearly supported by Miles (1998) who states that, existence is conceptually erased by the psychological construction of the inner eyes and therefore it is not a fault in the physiological body that results in the state of invisibility which makes he or she to be taken into account at all in their moral calculations. It is this invisibility of the African American woman which causes her to hate herself and her culture and try to imitate the dominant culture or the one who defines her existence. For Fanon, in the white man's eyes, the woman of color is never respectable. Making reference to *The Bluest Eye* Roko

(2007) suggests that it is Pecola's belief in her own ugliness and experience of invisibility which results in a feeling of worthlessness. She is invisible in her own community. The novel therefore presents black's reaction to the white parameters of beauty and behaviour. It is this invisibility that causes the victims in Morrison and Hurston's work to take drastic measures to try and escape this notion such that they can also be seen, loved and be recognised in their own communities as well as by the dominant society, those who determine their visibility.

2.3 Pecola, Pauline and Janie's Eurocentric Construction of Physical Beauty

2.3.1 Pecola and the Eurocentric Construction of Beauty

Growing up poor and black in the 1940's Pecola the protagonist in Morrison's work is repeatedly called ugly by almost everyone in her community. She fantasises about becoming beautiful as a way to escape from her misery. She believes that if she could just achieve physical beauty which is the Eurocentric standard, her life would automatically improve. Pecola is a representative of the African American girl. She shares her family's conviction that she is ugly therefore she is despised by her own community who are her peers, schoolmates and the men in her society just for the obvious reason that she has dark skin, therefore she is unworthy. Pecola suffers from a double stigma that of being ugly and poor thus deviates furthest from the white society which is the dominant culture as well as her own community and because of this, she is unaccepted neither is she recognised. However, to overcome such trauma in her life she finds ways and tries to imitate Eurocentric beauty ideals these which have been internalised and perpetuated by members of her own community. Pecola always admires those of the white race as she also believes that whiteness is beautiful. The steps she takes in a bid to be recognised and accommodated bear a rippling effect throughout her life course.

Pecola desires to have the blue eyes which she thinks will reverse the miserable circumstances of her life because she believes that blue eyes are an epitome of Eurocentric standard of beauty. Therefore, for her to have these she will be adored and accepted not only by her own community but the white community as well. (Bump 2010) suggests that Pecola suffers because of race and gender. Thus to say she suffers because she is both Black and she is a woman. In addition Nkrumah (1970) supports the view as he propounds that race is inextricably linked with class exploitation meaning that the Blacks who deviate furthest from the white society are the poor thus very vulnerable to exploitation.

Pecola comes to the conviction that she is ugly and worthless the way she looks and unless she alters her ugliness she will remain ignored and despised by her teachers and her classmates at school and as such by the time she grows up she already knows the difference between becoming white and black in terms of physical appearance and privilege. Morrison presents her as the character who mostly feels colonised by the white society. Therefore, this forces her to find the only solution in acquiring some of the white feature because the African American woman according to Hernton (1987) is the antithesis of the American beauty as her blackness is the complete opposite of a creamy white skin, her hair is kinky and her lips are thick.

This clearly means the African American woman is the inferior thus far from those of the white race therefore she wants to raise her standards so as to be nearer to the superior race. She is therefore forced to imitate the Eurocentric white beauty ideals because as Morrison suggests that *The Bluest Eye* is centred on dependency on the world for one so that they have feelings of self-worthy, self-value so that they can be identified this explains why the African American women have always had positive attitudes in adopting white beauty ideals.

Pecola is presented as a character with her weaknesses because she accepts her position as a victim in the community around her. Her madness and destruction is caused by the inculcation of blackness as a “negative signifier” in the minds of the black community as posited by Tally (2007). To the white society she has become an object of mockery as she presents the negative stereotypes of the black woman, she is poor, ugly and a victim of sexual abuse

In internalising the white beauty ideals, Pecola adores Shirley Temple who is a child star with golden curls, pink cheeks and sky blue eyes. For her to look down at her face, out of the Shirley Temple cup, Pecola drinks three quarters of the milk. In drinking the white milk, literally, Pecola is internalising the white substance and therefore it cannot be presented as a mistake. As part of her desire of internalising white beauty Pecola is driven to drink the milk excessively from Shirley Temple.

To add on, Pecola is also obsessed with white dolls. Her love for white dolls becomes a symbolic movement that predicts her desire to possess blue eyes. This obsession is clearly evidenced when she goes to the shops to buy candy. She chooses the one which had a white doll wrapper Mary Jane which is blonde and blue eyed who appears pictured on the wrappers smiling. The love for Mary Jane candy according to the critique Walters is a subtle way Pecola’s psyche is infiltrated by the white aesthetic values and the American culture in general, he says that, Pecola has to find other ways to make the transition from Black to White that is to resolve to digest whiteness, he says she achieves this by eating Mary Jane candy and drinking from Shirley Temple cup because she cannot escape the culturally promoted image of blonde hair and blue eyes. The fact that she chooses this wrapper over the black doll one, Pecola has learnt therefore to assimilate the Eurocentric standards of beauty thereby abandoning her own identity which is resembled by the black doll. Pecola therefore

prays for these blue eyes and goes to Soaphead church and ultimately has these blue eyes. It is also evident enough that Pecola wants these eyes for two reasons: so that she can change what she sees and so she can also change how others see her. To her, these reasons are interchangeable because she believes that how people see her as ugly creates what she sees which teaches her to hate herself.

2.3.2 Pauline and the Eurocentric construction of beauty

Pauline is Pecola's mother who is vulnerable to media messages especially those which she sees on the movies. These messages conveyed by the white culture to her present that white culture represents romantic love and happiness which she could not find in her own world thus these messages confirm her ugliness as she cannot match or attribute to any of these. She abandons her own home and family and finds comfort, happiness and solace living with the Fishers family who are a white couple. Morrison presents her as a social failure

Pauline is so obsessed with the white world. In her plea to construct physical beauty, the world she views in the theatres make her indulge in a fantasy world to such an extent that she yearns to be like the popular child actress Jean Harlow she sees on the screen. To imitate her, she wears her hair like her so as to escape her shortcomings because the characters like Jean to Pauline symbolise beauty, cleanliness. She is made to think that white is right because of her constant interaction with the media and its continuous portrayal of Eurocentric beauty standards. Pauline finds a world she cannot have reality in because the movies she sees inspires her to equate physical beauty with virtue. Doing her hair like Jean Harlow Pauline wants to identify with the white world.

Apart from imitating Jean Harlow, Pauline also finds employment in the Fischer's house after she runs and abandons her own home which leads to her further fragmentation. To her, the house is the antithesis of her abandoned storefront where she lives an ugly life as she enters a

home which represents a world of relevance and beauty. After moving from Kentucky to Ohio she loses her relationship bonds with the land and the emotional ties, Pauline expects to get education from the cinemas, the places to dream and to be educated in new values. Pauline identifies with Eurocentric standards of beauty such as having long blonde hair, as well as its values, she has adopted them. She is ultimately shaped into a new figure who is protected because to her the white world means protection and self-confidence, those attributes which she cannot find in her own daily life. Pauline envies this family that she cares for and admires them at the same time. This reveals that the family signifies for her the life she longs to lead and the white beauty she could not obtain. In her employer's household which was a reflection of porcelain, Pauline's skin glowed like taffeta as propounded by Morrison (1970). Pauline now feels she is part of the beauty because she is only surrounded by it.

Pecola and Pauline are taught to believe in their own ugliness because of what they read, what they are told and what they see. This however cannot be dismissed because others will not let them forget it as they are the ones who continue to despise and segregate them because they do not conform to their expectations, of how they should look like as far as physical beauty is concerned. In this case Morrison presents to us a mother and child who live in a world that recognises them as less than secondary citizens. Moses (1999) asserts that In Morrison's work, beauty is the most problematic concept as the omniscient narrator asserts that in the history of human thought romantic love and physical beauty are the most destructive ideas. This however suggests that the African American woman often internalise the definitions of beauty from the dominant culture which therefore marginalise characters like Pecola and her mother in the novel.

2.3.4 Janie and the Eurocentric construction of beauty.

Janie Crawford is a sixteen year old teenager who is raised by her grandmother. The two reside with a Whiteman's couple who are portrayed as Mr and Mrs Washburns in the novel. In her early ages Janie plays with the Washburns children who are also white to such an extent that she thinks they are the same thus strongly identifying with the white race, She is unaware that they both present two different poles, the white and the black. It is in this period that she cannot identify with her own race because she associates with the white people.

She has assimilated the white culture and this is revealed in the scene where she is shown a picture of her and the Washburn family. In the picture she cannot identify herself because what she only sees is a dark girl left after all other who are white in this case had pointed or rather identified themselves. The fact that she has been associated with the white family she now thinks she has the same skin color and everything else is the same with them. This ultimately explains the reason why she could not identify herself as a black girl on the picture. Janie has adopted the white culture and does not identify with her own race which is the black race. She developed a strong feeling that she is white which led her to act and behave the way the white man behaved. This is so because the black is taught to hate herself because of the dark color that which according to the whites represents everything evil, ugly, poor and the fact of being invisible. The white man is rich and light skinned which presents to us the factor of the color prejudice which Fanon refers to it as nothing more than the contempt of the stronger and richer peoples for those whom they consider inferior and the unreasoning hatred of one race for another. Just like Pauline, Janie seeks to be identified that is by belonging to the Washburn family. Colour is therefore portrayed as the most obvious outward manifestation of race upon which man is judged, irrespective of their social or educational attainment. The light skinned race has come to despise all those of a darker

colour which makes the dark skinned people to accept the inferior position which they have been relegated without protest.

From the analysis it is evident that both Morrison and Hurston's characters are affected by the same beauty constructs. They both yearn to be identified in the white world for them to be recognised. Pecola desires to have blue eyes, Pauline ties her hair just like the white female television star Jean Harlow does and finds comfort, love and peace in a white family's home. Janie on the same note yearns to be identified with the white world because she resides at a white family and plays with white children she now thinks she has become white also. All the characters have been socialised in a way that they see everything good, positive and nice to belong to the white world thus they want to imitate and become part of this rich culture.

2.4 Conclusion

It is however undeniable that the products of colonialism are portrayed through the concept of beauty held both by the black and the whites which make it difficult and impossible to separate perception of beauty from the effects of colonialism. Therefore it is evident that the colonial beauty construction plays a significant role to make the characters Pauline, Pecola and Janie perceive black as ugly because it is the white colonialist strategy to get the colonised black, thus positioning the blacks at a lower class in all aspects as compared to them as far as the beauty concept is concerned as opined by Kehinde (2009).

It is evident enough in the above analysis that the coloniser has ultimately succeeded to destroy the history and culture of the colonised people by imposing new set of rules for them. These values have become the coloniser's standard of living and a norm which is greatly influential even in the day today lives of the black woman. This is so as many have gone under the knife to try and alter their real identities so as to become closer to the white world. Thus the chapter has been successful in revealing the African American woman and the

Eurocentric construction of beauty which is a tool that helps them to be recognised by their communities who also contribute in the perpetuation of these white standards of beauty.

The next chapter will therefore unravel to a greater extent how these community values the prevailing concept of beauty, media messages and the environment's contribute to the forging of the African Americans identities.

CHAPTER THREE: Community values, media, the prevailing concept of beauty, and their contribution to the forging of African American women's identities in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God* (1937).

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused mainly on scholarly views on the subject of the exploration of the construct of physical beauty where many scholars seconded the view that these constructs are perpetuated by the immediate community, these include the family, peers and messages from the media. This chapter will therefore go on to explain how the community perpetuate such notions of Eurocentric standards of physical beauty, which ultimately have a negative impact on the African American woman who tries to imitate them so as to be recognised and fit in the particular dominant society and community.

The African American community have come to use the Black and White differences created by the whites. Brown (1993) opines that, various scholarship have suggested that African American girls are bombarded early with negative messages about their beauty, intelligence and worth, due to the perpetuation of Eurocentric standards of beauty by their families, peers and most of all by media messages, up to the extent that they struggle with self-esteem. These standards include lighter skin, long straight hair and blue eyes. This is to say that these standards are being continuously used by one's community as the representing collective of black women of the same community. A community in this case is defined as a social group of any size, whose members resides in a specific locality, and possessing a common cultural, historical heritage. These include the family, peers of both sex as well as the media. Thus evident enough that African American woman's subjugation comes from their own community. It is in this research that I found out the fact that African American women perceive their beauty through the influence of their family and peers who have also internalised the notions of beauty to be held by the white race.

The level of interaction among members of the community is affected due to the internalization of the effects of racism. Through the images and stigma portrayed by the media during and after slavery, social interactions also reflect the construction of beauty, causing individuals to believe that they are imperfect and unacceptable the way they are by their own people which causes them to strive to achieve the beauty standards their communities suggest and believe they should have.

Old researches have deliberated as well as discussed on how history has shaped how the Blacks are perceived and how they should perceive themselves but however there is lack of dialogue around the impact of how the past has turned the focus towards hurting each other. This research therefore discusses how one's own community views, detects and perpetuates notions of what it means to be beautiful and how the notions are imitated by the African American woman who does not suit the ideals of that community and the ultimate rippling effects they have on them. In this case the African American woman suffers from discrimination from their own people which ultimately leads to issues of self-image that is how one sees herself and how the community sees them, racial identity and a skewed perception of beauty due to the interactions they engage in, overhear and the information they observe in their community.

It can never be denied however that society is one of the most influential factors to build such ideas, that is, what is good and what is bad. Hall (1996) opines that a self cannot avoid developing herself through cultural influences because when we refer to a culture it means an individual can identify themselves as social beings as they belong to the society that is attributing to their identification. Therefore by virtue of wanting to be part of a particular society or community which constructs discourses of many living aspects, one is supposedly meant to try and fit into the system. This means that one will always be driven into such

identification while they interact with their community. Thus it is evident as far as the constructs of physical beauty are concerned that the dominant society's culture plays an important role to easily indoctrinate their values and beliefs to the inferior race so that they follow and desire to imitate. This is supported by Kohler (2006) who is of the view that, these values of the dominant white society contributes great problems, that make the African American women yearn to be just like them thus contributing to them devaluating their own African American heritage and encourage them to long for capitalist and patriarchal values of the whites which to them are unreachable.

Throughout Morrison's work, Gillespie (2008) acknowledges that, the marginalised who are the African American woman ultimately suffer from the resultant lack of affirmation as they have been traditionally excluded from consideration as attractive. Referring to the novel, *The Bluest Eye* the White coloniser who holds the power of the society surrounds Pecola and Pauline and their existence is ignored as the two are caught up in the trap of constructing physical beauty though for various reasons and on different levels. They are undoubtedly unidentified as beautiful since they have black skin and they are also poor. The black community therefore in the novel continually devalued by the Eurocentric values and the popular culture impose the notions on their women these however result in negative effects to those who do not fit and suit the standards. This however leads to the issue of color complex which is to be discussed below. The concept will also help in bringing out how other members of a community both male and female differentiate one woman from another who are of the same race and in this case the African American on the basis of skin tone and color that is to say light skinned and dark skinned. They favour the light skinned African American women because the distinction is one of the qualities of the Eurocentric standards of physical beauty which they have internalised thus imposing them on their own people. This is because

they have been taught and forced to believe that those with the light skin closely resemble the white society even though their blood is black.

3.2 The Color Complex

Color holds high stakes in society and it is the most outward devious manifestation of race. Rosenberg (1979) is of the view that a person's feeling of self-worth and self-esteem is influenced by the skin tone stigma since it contributes to whether or not an individual is to be accepted externally. This is to say, it is the skin color that determines whether one should be visible physically in terms of beauty, and it is in this case that racism has created a dichotomy that clearly distinguishes white from black in which the white color or light skin is preferable thus determining one's self worthlessness. Color prejudice then becomes nothing more than the unreasoning hatred of one race for another, the contempt of the stronger and richer people's for those whom they consider inferior to themselves as according to Fanon (1952). Thus to say, those members who appear more white are the most preferable as according to the community's hierarchy of color and caste as compared to those who have black skin. In *The Bluest Eye*, Geraldine a coloured neighbour embodies the codified system of caste which is strict as she exemplifies black middle class hatred of poor blacks. Geraldine has a strong feeling of hatred with those who have black skin and this is shown when she tells her son Junior never to associate with the Black because she believes they bring misfortune. Her son is already exposed to racial identification and also develops hatred with the people with black skin to such an extent that he kills his mother's cat and lies that it was Pecola responsible for the death. To Geraldine Pecola becomes a *black nasty bitch*. It is this color complex which contributes more in making people of the same community inflict pain on one another thus skin color division becomes a possible way black communities perceive beauty.

The issue of color complex also brings in the issue of race and class since the light skinned are believed to be more nearer to the white world therefore they are believed to be richer than those who are far from the white world and are more poorer. This goes further to address how their perception is affected due to various factors at play. Thus in cooperating issues of class and race. According to Fanon (1960), class and race gain meaning from one another. This is to say throughout history the white has always been the rich and this is clearly evidenced in the process of slavery where the white man was the master and owned slaves who were black. This implies that the black man has always and is supposed to be under the white man economically and physically. The two are constituted as opposed to being casually related because they are inseparable, the black skinned are poor while the light skinned are rich. In his work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon (1963) goes on to suggest that neither class nor race predetermines or is a consequence of the other rather each one of them is dialectically co-produced this which he continuously argues again in his first work *Black Skin White Mask*.

Yancy (2005) also supports the above view as she states that, the society is divided along two racial lines or two societies, one black and one white. In the white society the African American woman who has the lighter skin resemble the characteristics of the white society or the European physical features, therefore they undoubtedly get more privileges thereby easily accepted among both the black and the white dominated society. This explains why Maureen in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is viewed as beautiful and pretty by other African American girls and boys both black and white which results in her being loved by her classmates both male and female, black and white as well as her teachers. This is so because they have internalised the ideology which bridges a broader gap between her light skin and the dark skinned girls of her community like Pecola who represents a typical African American girl

because she has dark skin, least accepted and shunned by the majority of the community. Maureen Peal is light skinned and she on her own thinks she is pretty and Pecola is ugly and because of this she is the complete opposite of Pecola as she is treated well at school by everyone, which makes Pecola very uncomfortable as she is despised. According to Morrison (1970) Maureen has long brown hair which is braided into two lynch ropes that hang down her back and is a high yellow dream child. The fact that she is light skinned Maureen Pearl is believed to be nearer to the white race and rich thus everyone at her school likes her. In the *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison (1970) highlights that, black girls stepped aside whenever she wanted to use the sink in the girl's toilets, white boys did not stone her neither did black boys trip her in the hands. He adds that she enchanted the whole school when the teachers called her.

The issue of the color complex therefore reveals how the community contributes to the perpetuation and the African American construct of physical beauty. This promotes the displacement of a single community as far as issues of beauty are concerned, because those who do not fit these desired notions are almost unrecognisable, despised and thereby feeling left out in their own community and as a result they resume to constructing the beauty notions which will make them closer to others in the community. This is to say they try and seek ways to fix their flaws because they only feel bad about themselves. However this ultimately does not yield positive results because the mainstream beauty ideal is almost exclusively white thus making it more unattainable for the woman of color , the dark skinned and in this case the African American woman. Morrison (1970) supports this as he postulates that the victim who in this case is the African American woman is forced to imitate the Eurocentric notions of beauty denying her own originality unaware of the fact that she can never be the

same with them thus she is in a way reproducing the enemy who has humiliated her over and over and as a result heading to the journey of destruction and reinforcing her despair.

3.3 Media, Family and Peer Perpetuation of the Eurocentric Standards of Beauty

3.3.1 Perpetuation of Eurocentric standards of beauty: Media Context

Mass media consumes our day to day lives and is incredibly pervasive in almost every society. It being the most powerful source of information in this day and age, it bombards ones society with notions of what is considered desirable versus undesirable, acceptable versus the unacceptable good versus bad. Combined together, these create a culture of misconceptions about women as the messages are capable of affecting each and every member of the society because it provides deep seated racial bias on the portrayal of the African American women who have been constructed to fit these ideals as beautiful, causing an entire group of African American women to be deemed invisible, unacceptable and unworthy.

Furthermore, media messages constantly bombard us with strict Eurocentric standards of beauty thus shaping conceptions of race which according to (Sekayi 474) are accepted as reality by the majority of the African American women, understanding the fact that they will be judged by these notions whether or not they embrace them as their own. This is so because the mass media has great effect on a person's identity that is most profound because without an identity a person's value lessens in a culture made up of consumers serving as the target audience thus bearing negative effects of incredible destruction to the larger African American woman who do not fit or conform to the standards being endorsed by the dominant culture. Morrison clearly reveals this through her character Pauline who is convinced that she is doomed to isolation by other women and friends who also condemn her loneliness because she has a lame foot. The treatment results to a feeling of worthlessness and low self-esteem.

She escapes this world and finds solace in watching movies which however reaffirm her belief that she is ugly. She consumes the messages, ideas and notions of beauty of the white culture conveyed in the movies she sees to such an extent that she becomes vulnerable to them because to her these messages emphasise the notions that being white means one is beautiful with long hair, light skinned and above all the white culture is key to happiness. This also explains why she finds happiness, peace in the comfort of the white family she works for thus despising her own home, culture and identity. It is evident in this case that media messages have a detrimental effect on the self-worth, identity and self-esteem of the African American woman.

The ideologies or the notions of what it means to be black and what it means to be white are easily assimilated and internalised by the African American women who deviate furthest from them. This is so because the African American woman is forced to strive for this unattainable ideal in every facet of the media. Pauline can be used as an example. Her ideal beauty rests with a biased image of whiteness which is portrayed through the movies she has become obsessed with. The fact that she consumes all the messages of what it means to be beautiful she sees on television she tries to imitate how a white child actress Jean Harlow ties her hair. It is evident enough that the African American women are pushed to such extremes ugly thus showing that many African American women take drastic measures in attempts to try to align their appearances with these set of beauty ideals and notions. This pervasiveness of generally one specific type of Western beauty impacts the African American women because it is often not their image that becomes the vision and standard beauty.

In a sample, Gordon (2008) examined one hundred and seventy six black girls in terms of the consumption of the media programmes which concentrate more on beauty and appearance. This sample revealed that black girl students' descriptions of the images shown were mainly

centred on of skin tone, skin color and hair texture in favour of the white race. The study's results suggest that the black girls mostly those with darker skin may be more vulnerable than their lighter skin peers to negative messages from the media as far as their physical appearance and attractiveness is concerned. This also explains why fair skinned women are chosen to feature hip hop as suggested by Sharpley and Writing (2007). This also explains why Maureen is favoured more as compared to Pecola. This means that the light skinned can pass for white standards of beauty easily as compared to blackness which is not so prominent and seem to be out of line with prevailing standards of beauty. The same can be said for the Hollywood film industry where they are few roles for black women. This also explains the reason why lighter skinned women in the media have more privileges as compared to the dark skinned ones. Townsend et al (2010) is of the view that such incidences erase the real being of the black woman because the media influences are assessed by observation. Thus the black women recreate themselves trying to follow the images of the white Hollywood ideals they see on the television.

Female victims in Morrison's work like Pecola try to conform to the imposed ideals of femininity as they are marginalised by various cultural icons who are portraying the standards of beauty, what it means to be beautiful. Pauline on another hand with her love for movies learns almost everything from romantic love to physical beauty. They see these in movies, billboards as well as magazines. According to Wolf (1990) images of beauty found on media platforms like the television, women magazines and advertisements are detrimental to those who do not fit them. Media therefore becomes a vehicle for transmitting these images for public consumption.

3.3.2 Perpetuation of Eurocentric standards of beauty: Family Level

Apart from the media, black families are also responsible for shaping the self-image of their children as well as how they should internalise notions of the Eurocentric beauty standards. This can be depicted through experiences around family member's comments and treatment for their children. Female characters belonging to one's family circle emphasize that although the beauty ideals are inserted by peers and the media, women are also active participants in the evaluation of female beauty standards and expressing disapproval of those who dissociate themselves from them.

In perpetuating these beauty norms, parents at a family level act as influential figures as evidenced by Geraldine a female character and a mother of one son named Junior who resides in Ohio. Geraldine teaches her son that light skinned African American women are better as compared to dark skinned African American women and because of this distinction he should always remain separate from them and in this case the issue of the color complex comes into play. This means that, as he grows he is bound to impose such ideologies on the women he will meet in her life. This suggests that he has already become a participant on imposing western ideals of beauty on the African American women in his own community. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola's mother also contributes to her internalisation of the fact that she is ugly. This is so because when she is born her mother dismisses her as soon as she sees her. This is clearly shown on (pg126) of the novel where she asserts that she is ugly despite the fact that she had pretty hair. Thus it is evident that the distinctions created by whites to distinguish between blacks and white light and dark skinned have come to be used within the African American community this is to say, families have a direct effect on shaping the self-image of their children and also shape how they should think about others in terms of what and who does not embody such qualities or standards of physical beauty.

3.3.4 Perpetuation of Eurocentric standards of beauty by Peers

Apart from the family and the media, peers are also likely to influence and contribute to the forging of female identities basing on their internalisation of beauty from a Eurocentric perspective. These are likely to reflect negative messages through behaviour or what they might have heard and thought is good or real or through behaviours that may have implications on certain standards of beauty. They have high impact and crucial roles in the trauma experiences by the African American woman especially those at a tender age due to the internalised racism and discrimination. Therefore through peers my research takes a step further to show how these physical beauty ideals are being perpetuated and how this reoccurring issue leads to concerns of self-acceptance among African American women.

In most cases, friends and classmates both male and female are evident active participants who shape and impose on how African American women should look like. This is to say through their actions that is how they behave in one's presence in this case in the presence of the African American woman and also the way they treat them and speak to them. This can be clearly revealed in Morrison's work through the character Pecola who thinks that by constructing the beauty notions that of possessing the blue eyes her peers, classmates, parents and teachers would love and appreciate her. This is evidenced in one of the scenes in the novel where her classmates who are also black are making fun of her at the play grounds calling her **black** and talking about how her father sleeps naked. They despise and shun her because of her skin color which is black. This serves to suggest that if she had a lighter skin they would not treat her in this manner because they have been made to believe that lighter skinned girls are beautiful thus they torture her because she does not possess such the expected standard of beauty. This also reveals that not all acts of racism attitudes in the novel are perpetuated by the whites per se instead are also manifested by the black community, the

black who have also internalised the Eurocentric values and beliefs. This is so because Pecola's classmates and peers both girls and boys and teachers have internalised these Eurocentric standards of beauty such that if any of the women does not possess these they are meant to be discriminated and called outcasts of that environment. A vivid example can be also be drawn from Weldon(1912) *An Autobiography of an Ex-coloured Man* through his narrator who brings out that as long as one was black he or she was referred to as a nigger by those of the other race who are the ex-colonisers and would be despised and labelled all sorts of negatives. The narrator in Weldon's work recalls an incident whereby the white boys in the school would throw stones, teasing and laughing at him this black boy and calling him all sorts of names.

Furthermore, through interaction peers of the opposite sex influence how young African American women should perceive themselves in terms of beauty. Interactions between male counterparts lead to a reassessment of women's appearance. This can be clearly highlighted in Hurston's work *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Janie is a girl who has come to be loved by almost every man in her community and they call her beautiful only because she has long straight hair that resembles the white lady. This is so because men as active participants of the community have been made to think and assimilate the Eurocentric definitions of what it means to be beautiful which in this case having long hair is one of the standards. The porch talkers constantly gaze at her body that is her outer appearance and see her as "sexed". It is clear that men play a big role in the way African American women assess and internalise these notions of beauty and because of this women of their society who deviate furthest from their notions of beauty have long term effects. This is to say young African women are affected by this phenomenon as they are forced to adopt the qualities based on the men's interests or choices of the ideal women which they reflect.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated how a community which has been defined earlier which comprises of one's immediate family, peers both male and female as well as the media are at play as they contribute to the forging of Black women's identities in terms of physical beauty based on Eurocentric standards. The chapter has also clearly explained how these notions are perpetuated by these participants who have been brainwashed, assimilated as well as internalised the White's or European ideologies, which state that for one to be beautiful they should have long straight hair, they should be light skinned as well as have blue eyes. In addition the chapter also shows how these participants despise, how they do not accept neither do they recognise those African American women who deviate furthest from such notions or ideals of beauty.

The next chapter will therefore reveal the destructive impact of these constructs of physical beauty to those African American women who imitate these white standards of beauty who deviate furthest from them. These affect them throughout their life course. The protagonist Pecola, her mother Pauline and Janie ultimately suffer psychological destruction due to the community's abandonment as it is successful in rejecting them thus contributing to their downfall. The community is both a catalyst and the final blow to both character's disintegration.

CHAPTER FOUR : The Destructive Impact of the Constructs of Physical Beauty on the African American Woman in Morrison *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and Hurston *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)

4.1 Introduction

The experience of racism to the black race which operates at the margins of the society is likely to induce deep negative feelings in their lives because when it is experienced so often their well-being that is, their minds and bodies are compromised. Making reference to *The Bluest Eye* Drummond (2004) contributes that while Morrison's emphasis is on racism, she is specifically concerned with the African female adolescent thus she investigates the effects of beauty standards of the dominant culture on her self-image. The view is supported by Fultz (2003) who postulates that, the novel depicts several sources of black woman's pain. In her work, Morrison regards racism as the African's primary obstacle. Therefore it is in this chapter that i analyse and discuss the ultimate destructive impact of the constructs of beauty that the African American woman has learnt to internalise and ultimately imitate. The chapter therefore reveals the effects of the construction of these Eurocentric standards of beauty on the African American female characters in Morrison and Hurston's work. These constructs contribute and destroy the self-esteem, original identity, self-worth as well as the increased feeling of inferiority complex which ultimately leads to denial by the dominant culture which they try to imitate.

In the novel *The Bluest Eye* Morrison (1970) as far as white racial dominance in the United States is concerned, address a timeless problem of the females growing up in the 1930's particularly pointing to the impact it has on them , that is the cruelty and destruction that emerges after the adoption of the pervasive Eurocentric standards of beauty, it fails to recognise and value the difference which is to say that in as much as the black female try to

construct beauty ideals on the basis of recognition they will never occupy the same position the whites occupy neither will they be accepted by the society.

The previous chapters have revealed what it means to be the “other” that is to be an African American woman searching for love and beauty influenced by the white society. Pecola, Pauline and Janie are members of the African American family who are victims of the society around them. They desire to be holders of the white beauty. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison (1970) stresses the devastating effects of the constructs of white physical beauty standards on the lives of those who try to imitate them.

4.2 Inferiority Complex

According to Fanon (1967) a feeling of inferiority is a feeling that arises when one comes into contact with the superior power. In his *Black Skin White Mask*, Fanon supports his definition in the first Chapter *The Negro and Recognition* when he says that, The Blackman is always in comparison, that is to say they are constantly preoccupied with self-evaluation. This is so because they have been shaped to think in such a way that whenever they come into contact with someone else who is superior to them questions of self-value and merit arises. They have no inherent values of their own instead they are always contingent on the presence of the other, the dominant race which has set up values and standards of how they should be physically in terms of beauty thus creating a dichotomy between them and the minor race. This is to say the black race has been told to believe in their inherent invisibility by the superior power such that they have lost their values and adopted the white values so that they can be visible and dismiss the feeling of being inferior.

White beauty bears an enormous influence on the African American community. It therefore becomes the beauty ideal for every black woman particularly for almost everybody from Pecola’s community. Bearing in mind that they have been made to feel inferior to the

superior race they strive to fight of this feeling and try to imitate the dominant culture. They however cannot reach the ideal of blond hair, blue eyes and white skin. This white beauty therefore becomes a dangerous trap for characters like Pecola, Pauline and Janie because they are born black and cannot escape this blackness which they are born with. For Pecola, Morrison (1970) suggests that her ultimate destruction comes from extreme case of self-hatred which has resulted from a series of exceptional and monstrous rejection. Pecola succumbs to white beauty. She searches for love, trying to become somebody she is not and never can be. Thus it is this feeling which becomes a catalyst in shaping identities that will make her act as if she exists which ultimately bears a rippling effect throughout her life

4.3 Destructive impact of the construct of physical beauty as a result of internalised racism

Clark and Clark (1947) through what they have termed The Doll Test show that racial beauty standards and the internalisation of these have a significant impact on the black women throughout their life course as they contribute to their self-worth, perception.

4.3.1 The Significance of the Doll Test

The two conducted an experiment with two hundred and fifty three black children in nursery as well as public schools in Arkansas and Massachusetts where the children were shown two identical dolls one white and one that was black. In spite of their color, it is approximated that nearly two thirds of these black children liked the white doll better which they chose. The same experiment was also reproduced by Davis (2005) and her results showed that sixteen out of twenty one black children involved in the experiment still chose the white doll (ABC News, 2006). In this experiment, one of the children was asked to show the doll with a bad appearance and he pointed at the black one. Later on, the same child was asked to show the doll that looked like her and she touched the white doll and then reluctantly chose the black

doll. This experiment shows us that it is evident that between 1947 and 2005 the doll study did not change suggesting that this internalisation of racism which leads self-hate among black children particularly the women based on European beauty standards still exist why because of the permanence of racism which is a result of colonialism. This is to say that the black woman has been raised and designed to think and act according to those in power who are superior and possess power over the inferior. She has been made to assimilate the notions and values of the white race from childhood. The process of colonialism has taught her that she is invisible on the basis of skin color and therefore for her to be visible she should imitate her superiors. Thus evident that colonialism is insidious that we still feel its effects. This experiment shows how the black woman abandons her own identity and wants to adopt the white culture which quite evidenced through the protagonist Pecola in the text *The Bluest Eye*. She goes to the shops to buy candy and choses the one with a white doll wrapper Mary Jane and not the one with the Black doll wrapper. The fact that she is growing in a world dominated by white values and beliefs of beauty aesthetics which are Eurocentric, she is forced to conform to them because they are the ones she can be judged with. She loses her own identity in the process by choosing the white doll wrapper instead of the one that represents her own identity, people and culture.

Hunter (1998) also reveals the effects of this internalised racism as far as the constructs of beauty are concerned perpetuated through the family, peers, men as well as the media as he opines that the detrimental effect of these European beauty standards on black women is a societal issue that is often unaddressed on a multisystem level. He goes on to say that black women today are subjected to incessant messages about European ideals of beauty mainly by family, peers, media and the larger society. Therefore in this case, if the young black women stand in contrast to what society dictates as attractive, they may find it difficult to grow to

accept themselves. A long intergenerational culture of self-hatred is likely to grow due to the perpetuation of racialised beauty standards. This is clearly evidenced through Pecola and Pauline mostly, who have learnt through the movies, their family as well as their peers the meaning of beauty and how it is measured. They have been taught that beauty is whiteness which carries in it light skin, long blonde hair and blue eyes. They learn that they do not embody any of these thus they begin to hate themselves. This view however serves as a guide to recognise and identify how these European standards of beauty can negatively affect the life course of the African American woman and the context in which the impact is felt.

Hall (1995) summarizes the long term mental health issues that black women may encounter because black women especially the dark skinned deviate furthest from European standards. He says that because of the traits of their skin color and hair which are complete opposites of the white hair and skin color result in the feeling of inadequacy which therefore report emotions of pain which results in self-hatred of their appearance from adolescence to adulthood which ultimately results in loss of identity, low self-esteem and worthlessness.

A review of this research suggests that based on the preferences demonstrated by their family, peers, male counterparts as well as the media platforms today as revealed in the previous chapter, Black women still feel pressured to choose the white doll. This is so because the white doll symbolise the Eurocentric beauty which is accepted by their community. Therefore the African American women are forced to try and construct some of the beauty qualities possessed by the white dolls such as having blonde hair, blue eyes and light skin. Ultimately the construction bears pervasive and devastating consequences for the black woman throughout her life course. Just like the black children in the **Doll test experiment**, Pecola, Pauline and Janie find pleasure in imitating the white culture which can be clearly compared to choosing the white doll. This serves to suggest that they have failed to

maintain their previous and original identity as blacks in other words they have lost their identity and culture.

4.3.2 Loss of identity

An identity is a special aspect which defines who someone is and the culture they belong to. That is to say it refers to one's original being. It is in this chapter that I reflect how the black man has been robbed of their own identity especially on the basis of skin color. Fanon (1952) affirms that the social relations expressed through the skin colour are manifested psychologically by the black man's obsession for the whitening of their skin which he refers to as lactification by the coloniser. He suggests that, the issue of race which emphasises on the discrimination of the black race by the white race on the basis of color which resulted from colonisation define them as nothing hence denying them their own identity and excluding them from recognising themselves as individual beings. Thus, based on race, the black men do not have an identity in the white man's eyes. He has been taught to self-hate unless they try and alter themselves to become a bit whiter which however has a detrimental effect on them, they lose their own identity in the process. This also shows the extent and damage of colonial oppressions.

Pauline in *The Bluest Eye* is forced to discriminate herself from her own people. She is a strong holder of the white culture and is obsessed with white beauty which she manages to pass on to her daughter Pecola who also becomes obsessed with the same culture. She now resides with the white family, the Fishers and thinks that she has found comfort in the white lifestyle and it becomes impossible for her to identify with her own society, her own people and above all her own family. This is clearly revealed in the scene when Pecola her own daughter visits her at her employer's home. Pecola out of childish curiosity, accidentally spills a hot blueberry pie, which her mother had just made. She suffers minor burns but

shockingly her mother hits and violently rebukes her while consoling and comforting the little Fisher girl who is just unsettled and unharmed by the event. This serves to suggest that because of the movies she is always in constant interaction with, she is taught to believe that to be white is to be beautiful, clean and above all, one can become the happiest person if they operate in the white world. Pauline now identifies with the white race, she has made herself part and parcel of the white people only because of the family she resides with. She has lost her original identity that of being African American thereby finding consolation within the white society which makes her see heaven at the Fisher's house. She no longer identifies with her own people her own roots as well as her own family.

The same is also evident in Hurston's protagonist Janie. Janie and her grandmother reside in the Washburn's homestead who resemble the white race. The fact that Janie grew with this white family, she becomes involved in almost every activity that happens in the family and spends most her time having fun with the couple's white children. Because of this constant interaction, Janie feels she is white also and this explains why she does not recognise herself in the picture where she was the only black one while others were white. Janie loses her own identity to such an extent that she cannot identify herself in the picture, she wants to be white and has adopted the white values and beliefs to such an extent that she feels she is part of the white society and not the black race who really have no identification outside the white world.

In addition, just like what Pauline and Janie do, Pecola is also caught in the web of wanting to belong to the white race. Pecola is an outcast in her community and she believes this is so because of her ugliness. Pecola is shaped into a victim of classical racism because her physical appearance is not appealing because she is black and poor. This however dooms her misery as she has become a sign of deeper ugliness and depravity, as suggested by Taylor

(1999). She is both denied by her community and the white culture which results in her breakdown and psychological fragmentation. Pecola however yearns to make a complete turn in her life, she also wants to be white. Pecola only wants and prays for blue eyes which are one of the markers of white beauty standards which means that, by possessing these her identity will also change as well. That is to say, it would change how she herself views herself and how the community views her. This therefore symbolises the erosion of culture as culture determines one's state of belonging to a certain group whom they share or have same beliefs and values in common.

4.3.4 Low Self-Esteem

The destructive impact of the construct of physical beauty affects the self-esteem of the characters Pecola and Pauline throughout the novel *The Bluest Eye* who have internalised the Eurocentric standards of beauty. This physical beauty has been created by the dominant society who wants to reinforce power dynamics. This is to say the white race has created these notions because they are aware that they exclude the black race and because of this fact they remain in power because the blacks who deviate furthest from such norms will never get to a point where they will fully acquire them. This suggests that the African American women have learnt to believe in their ugliness and inferiority therefore they lack confidence which results in low self-esteem. The African American woman suffers from the resultant lack of affirmation because traditionally they have been excluded from consideration as attractive. This can be observed through Pauline who does not see an image of herself in the films she is obsessed with. She tries to replicate the beauty notions she sees on the screen portrayed by white celebrities only to find such imitation impossible because she deviates furthest from the white woman. She continuously asks herself questions why she does not suit these white American celebrities like Jean Harlow. She enjoys eating candy when

watching the films till one day she pulls out one of her teeth. Losing her tooth became a determining event in her life, because it is after this incident that she gave up her efforts to be beautiful to the fact of her ugliness. She admits that she let go her hair which she was trying to tie the exact way Jean Harlow does and plaited it up. She develops a low self-esteem, a feeling of unworthy because despite her efforts to construct physical beauty she cannot hold up to the standards. This heightens her awareness of physical beauty. She realised she would never be beautiful and loved like Jean Harlow. She however at the same time felt that without the tooth she will be considered ugly and unlovable because according to her, only women with nice teeth are allowed to be loved. It is clear, the fact that she fails to identify with the white world in the process of wanting to be accepted by the race, her life is continuously breaking down and fragmenting such that she ends up engrossing a low self-esteem, she sees herself ugly and all her efforts become fruitless instead lead to a further self-destruction. Thus evident that the African American woman's self-worth and esteem is defined by the white world.

4.3.5 Denial by the White world

Pecola, Pauline and Janie are unable to compete with the white race in as much as they try to imitate as well as to hold upon their culture. Through their various encounters and efforts to construct Eurocentric standards of physical beauty, they can never be wholly accepted by the dominant society, they can never become equal to the whites because the idea of what is called beautiful in the white world is a measure that cannot be fully attained by those who were not born with it. This is to say the African American woman was born black with features that define her blackness therefore she cannot escape her true identity she remains black and can never be accepted by the race she imitates. It is the dichotomy that has been created to differentiate the two races and it has been created in such a way that one should be

superior than the other therefore should maintain the superior power. Pauline can never identify with Jean Harlow instead she pulls out her tooth in the process and remains ugly, Pecola prays and finally obtains the blue eyes but still it does not change the way her own community see her and as such she does not pass on to be white and Janie, she wants to identify with the white world that is why she fails to locate herself in the picture because she was the only one who had black skin. She remains to be black despite her immense interaction with the white race.

The three characters can also be compared to Mayotte who Fanon (1967) talks about in *Black Skin White Mask*. Mayotte goes to Didier a preserve of the richest people in Martinique with his white man who was a soldier. She explains that she does not feel comfortable to be between these people despite the fact that she had put on make-up in order for her to be recognised as a white woman. This explains why other white women look at her with distaste because she is a woman of color resembling the fact that she could not pass to be white despite her efforts of constructing beauty according to the Eurocentric standards thus they dislike her because she is artificial. This is also the reason why Black women of today lose their original identities in the process of trying to imitate the white beauty standards. Black women of today use whitening creams, lip staff, eyelid extensions and artificial hair so as to look like the white ladies who resemble white beauty but it is unfortunate that they can never pass on and will never be wholly accepted by the white race. This clearly resembles the perpetual conflict that lies between the black and the white poles of the world.

4.4 Conclusion

The quest for ideal beauty has devastating effects on Pecola, Pauline and Janie, the outside forces cause them to underestimate their own value and encourage their self-destruction. From the previous chapter it is clearly evident that the notions and standards of beauty that

the family, peers as well as the media perpetuate are the most destructive ideas of human thought, the African American woman in particular. They embrace a feeling of insecurity thus the need to imitate. The next chapter will therefore analyse if the research objectives were met and contains concluding remarks and the outcome of the research.

CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion and Recommendations

After an in-depth analysis and understanding of research I have been led to conclude that Eurocentric standards of beauty bear a rippling effect on the way the African American woman views herself because in as much as she tries to imitate their notions of beauty so as to look and pass onto their race, they will never be wholly accepted which ultimately causes them to hate themselves leading to loss of identity, low self-esteem and a feeling of worthlessness. This is supported by Wyrick (1988) who emphasizes that effects of the process of racism erases the black thinking and denies black individuality because it is through this process that blacks yearn for white acceptance which results in them abandoning themselves individually and collectively. He goes on to suggest that the Black's quest and efforts they put in order for them to be accepted by the white result primarily in deep disturbing feelings of inferiority complex because they ultimately are fruitless.

In my research I also found out how issues of colorism within the Black community lead as well as contribute to concerns of self-acceptance and perception of beauty among young African American women. I also found out that African American women perceive their beauty through the influence of family, peers as well as through the consumption of media messages as well as how young African men influence and contribute on the perception of women's beauty with the emphasis of lighter skin being favourable.

The first chapter clearly highlighted how slavery had a destructive and abiding effect on black families which can be attributed to colonisation, a process that created a strong dichotomy between the blacks and the whites. The whites being the superior race had to take advantage of the blacks whom they overworked, rapped and referred to in derogatory terms such as being barbaric, savages and ugly, while they represented everything clean, pure and

beautiful so as to maintain their superiority. Thus leading to racism where they discriminated themselves from the blacks on the basis of color. The chapter shows that it is this racism that the black people have internalised which makes them believe, think and consume the whites' values and standards of beauty so that they may at least have a sense of belonging and visibility because they on themselves are as good as a people who lack visibility and identification in the absence of the white man which is still visible to date. Therefore I concluded that Bell's Critical Race theory and the post-colonial theory would be ideal in conducting this research.

Chapter two discussed the Eurocentric standards and beliefs of physical beauty and found out that to be beautiful in the white world means the possession of blue eyes, to be light skinned and to have long blond hair and without those one can never be identified neither can they be visible in both their own communities and in the eyes of the dominant society at large. That is to say, what the Black race has been taught to think and assimilate are the Eurocentric notions of beauty. It also identified the issue of the color complex that makes one be either considered as beautiful or not only on the basis of the skin color despite the fact that they are black. The chapter thus revealed how the African American woman who deviate furthest from these notions try to imitate and construct physical beauty on the basis of these white standards of beauty so as to be visible, identified and as way of trying to penetrate into the white world.

In chapter three I looked at how one's community which is the black community is responsible for the negative categorisation and subjugation of the African American women. I deliberated on the fact that, not only are these standards perpetuated by the white people themselves but by one's immediate community which comprises of peers and family who have also assimilated the white standards of beauty. It is evident from the research that in

one's family the standards are perpetuated through the depiction of comments and treatment around family members where mothers and fathers are most likely to give or utter comments which will ultimately affect the girl child to such an extent that they think white beauty is the only way to go. The chapter reveals that Peer influences are mostly defined by behaviours and comments which are then internalised by the victims who in this case is the African American woman. This reveals that if women do not experience effects of color complex through the family, they definitely feel it through friends and classmates both male and female. Above all the chapter has revealed that media message plays the major role in perpetuating these standards of beauty. Characters in both novels have an obsession to media portrayals of female celebrities who represent the white world. I also found out that apart from the characters in the novel black women of today still feel pressured to imitate the white celebrities and are prepared to go under the knife so as to alter their physical appearances only because they want to be closer to European beauty, basing on the preferences demonstrated by families, peers as well as the media. Therefore the chapter has clearly shown that black women today are subjected to incessant messages about European ideals of beauty through peers, family as well as the media.

The fourth chapter then explored the destructive impact of these constructs of physical beauty on the African American woman. I highlighted that the European standards of beauty accepted by the society at the expense of those who do not meet them, the dark skinned black women who deviate furthest from them have pervasive and devastating consequences for them throughout their life course. Therefore the African American grapples with repressed self-hatred which results in low self-esteem, a feeling of worthlessness as well as denial by the dominant society which they try to imitate. The chapter thus revealed that constructs of

European standards of beauty by the African American woman can have damaging effects on the life trajectories of the women primarily in form of internalised self-hatred.

From the research it can be concluded that changing The African American women should be content with how she looks that is her appearance that is to say there is no need to for them to change their physical looks in order to be like other people because the result will impossibly show that way. This is so because everyone is unique in their own way because everyone was created differently from the other particularly in physical appearances. Bennet (1998) asserts that everyone must have an equal chance of becoming unequal. His view is also supported by Yancy (2005) who emphasizes that, Blackness and whiteness are not equivalent because the situations of black and white people are not and can never be the same. This suggests that Pecola, Pauline and Janie's desires to be identified with the white society and to be referred to as beautiful by following the white beauty construction can be a risky thing to do as they will never be equal to the dominant race neither will they be wholly accepted by them. It is evident that white beauty identities or the idea of what is so called beautiful cannot be established simply by having blue eyes, having long blonde hair and identifying with white families. These characters will not be easily become white only by having these notions of beauty since their skin ancestry is black. Thus self-receptiveness as someone who is different from another is important to be applied in each and everyone's soul and mind, in spite of pressures from the community, media messages and the white world at large.

5.2 RECOMANDATION

I therefore suggest and recommend other literary students interested in studying the two novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Their Eyes were Watching God* to explore whether or not the beauty concept is still held by the white skin only and its ultimate effects until now. This is to say they may do this by comparing the beauty concept between the time the novels were

published up until today's situation particularly with a critical eye of whether Eurocentric beauty standards still control the construction of beauty or not.

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