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FIQWS Literature/Composition

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“The Hate U Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody” is a popular quote by Tupac that calls out the negative nature of society and how the vicious cycle of hate will affect everyone. Individuals in society fail to address their personal issues and lets them accumulate; as a result, there is a ripple effect and society is tainted. In society, the acts of a person do not only affect them, but also affect innocent bystanders as they are forced to deal with the faults too. Collectively, society needs to be mindful and cognizant of what they are contributing to their environment and contemplate on its nature. In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison critiques the cycle of trauma that is often passed down by damaged adults through demonstrating the lack of responsibility Pauline Breedlove and Cholly had over their personal issues; it is portrayed through Pauline and Cholly’s displacement of strong, negative emotions and Cholly’s id-driven actions.

Gradually, Pauline’s cathexis on white people causes her to condemn her own identity as a black individual, driving her to abuse Pecola and reinforce the cycle of self-hate. When Pauline was pregnant with Sammy, she stayed home alone and that made her feel lonely. To mitigate her feelings of loneliness, Pauline went to the movies and felt happy and enchanted by the white actors. She felt like she was one of them but it made “coming home hard, and looking at Cholly hard”(Morrison 123). According to In Search of a Female Self: Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* and Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior,* Pauline starts to feel dissatisfied with her own home and husband because she “absorbs and internalizes the white ideas concerning physical beauty and romantic love”(Ho 9). This is harmful for her sense of self worth and her relationships because she has accepted within herself something that she will never become, instead of accepting who and what she is. She will measure everyone and everything to white standards of beauty, thus cultivating contempt for blackness. Consequently, her obsession with white people makes it hard for her to come home to Cholly because of the contradicting nature of his blackness and the white actors she idolizes; it also makes it impossible for Pauline to accept herself. Pauline’s actions convinces readers that what is enough for her and worthy of being lauded, is being white and all things it is affiliated with. Pauline’s obsession with white people, in addition to self-contempt, will manifest itself into her relationship with Pecola.

Contributing to Pauline’s abuse of Pecola is her self-contempt and externalization of shame and bitterness onto Pecola; Pauline displaces these negative emotions that she feels about herself and projects them onto Pecola. Coined by Freud, displacement is the psychical process of unconsciously redirecting intense emotions from its original object to another one. Pauline is unconsciously projecting the way she feels about herself onto Pecola because Pecola is a reflection of herself. For instance, during the first moments of Pecola’s birth, Pauline calls her ugly: “I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly”(Morrison 126). Pecola is a literal and figurative extension of Pauline; therefore, calling Pecola ugly is Pauline’s own perception of her own blackness. Pauline’s shame of her blackness derives from the internalization of white ideas, and it is projected onto Pecola. She is a condensation of everything Pauline strives to suppress in herself: black, poor, dirty, ugly, and shameful. Pecola comes from Pauline which reasons why Pauline is so judgemental toward her and ashamed of her.

Another instance of Pauline’s displacement is when she comforts the white daughter of the Fishers’ after beating Pecola. Unintentionally, Pecola drops a hot pie and it spills all over her, but Pauline, with no ear for explanations, quickly slaps Pecola twice. This unjustifiable abuse illustrates the strength of Pauline’s toxic emotions and how desperate they are for an outlet- that being Pecola. In this scene, one can insinuate that Pauline has a profound preference of white over black, as well as no maternal instincts for Pecola. Pauline’s feelings of shame and insecurity is displaced onto Pecola because of Pecola’s reflection of what Pauline perceives to be flawed and ugly.

Pauline’s displacement of contempt and shame is exerted onto Pecola and as a result, Pecola becomes just as obsessed with white beauty standards as Pauline. The juxtaposing treatment that Pauline gives Pecola versus the Fishers’ daughter reinforces Pecola’s belief that having blue eyes will make someone love her. The lack of sympathy and affection from Pauline affects Pecola’s self esteem and perception of her self-worth. As a result, Pecola is passive towards the neglect and abuse she receives throughout the book-she does not know that she is not deserving of that negativity, regardless of her appearance. Pecola internalizes white standards of beauty like Pauline does, and Pecola fantasizes and idolizes white people like Pauline does. Pecola inherits the same delusionment that her mother has, as well as self-contempt and shame of her identity.

On top of that, Cholly’s displacement of anger and id-driven mindset dominates his relationship with Pauline and traumatizes Pecola. When Cholly’s first sexual encounter was pervaded by three white men, he felt emasculated and indignant. Cholly’s response to this trauma was to express his anger onto black women and to act upon his impulses. Through the consistent battles with Pauline, Cholly would impose “the sum of all his inarticulate fury and aborted desires”(Morrison 42). Cholly still bears the scars from his childhood trauma and copes by abusing Pauline. His subconscious mind knows that directing anger to white men would be dangerous because they are superior to him; so the release of anger to black women would suffice as a substitute.

In Lecture XXXI: The Dissection of the Psychical Personality, Sigmund Freud explains that the id is the “satisfaction of the instinctual needs”(Freud 91). And according to Toni Morrison’s "The Bluest Eye": Shirley Temple and Cholly, inspiring Cholly’s impulsiveness was his struggle “against a society that treats him, intentionally or not, without compassion or sympathy”(Portales 503). One can reason that this is what provokes Cholly to express his anger towards Pauline without weighing the consequences; he doesn’t care to inhibit his instincts for the greater good of society. Why shouldn’t Cholly let his anger out on Pauline when society bred this behavior and doesn’t care to stop him either? In addition, the tumultuous relationship between Pauline and Cholly would disorient Pecola’s perception on love. Pecola would ask herself how people act when they’re in love and is left with only the impression of her parents’ dysfunctional relationship: “ Into her eyes came the picture of Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove in bed...Maybe that was love”(Morrison 57). Because of Cholly’s acquiesce to his instincts, Pecola does not know how love-healthy love-looks like. She will continue to either wonder about it or accept the wrong kind of love. Children are easy to impress, so what Pecola witnesses now with her parents will have a great impact on her development as a person.

Adding on to the effects of Cholly’s id-driven mindset was the sexual abuse of Pecola. Our ego “stands for reason and good sense” and it steers the “untamed passions” of the id based on what reality looks like and what’s acceptable to society(Freud 94). However with Cholly, he acts on passions without reasoning with himself and being rational of what is around him. The ego restrains the id to an extent, but since Cholly has lost respect for the judgement of society, he is liberated by those inhibitions. When Pecola innocently scratches her calf while washing dishes, he’s brought back to a time when he used to lust for Pauline. Then, he feels a wave of contradicting emotions that overwhelms him and causes him to act on the impulse to rape Pecola. Raping Pecola violated the sanctity of her childhood innocence, and Cholly was fully aware that what he wanted to do was wrong, but he did it anyway. The ego should’ve warned him of what it would have done to his character and position as a father but again, Cholly is not concerned with how society looks at him.

All things considered, Toni Morrison uses Pauline, Cholly, and Pecola to represent what trauma does to society. Pauline and Cholly are culpable for the inevitable downfall of Pecola when they decided to raise a child while being burdened with psychological issues. Pauline’s self-hate and idolization for white ideas factored in her abuse of Pecola, causing Pecola to follow Pauline down that same path of discontent with herself. Cholly’s unhealthy coping mechanism of displacing anger exposes Pecola to an unstable environment that befuddles her idea of love and stability. Lastly, his id-driven decision to rape Pecola traumatizes her and pushes her to delusionment. Morrison uses the Breedlove family to show what happens when individuals of society don’t take care of themselves or are not mindful of how they are negatively affecting other people. Pecola has nothing to do with the society-driven issues her parents have, yet she is oppressed by the effects. Morrison suggests that society as a whole take care of their mental health and that the trauma one experiences, if not healed, can unknowingly be inherited down to someone else, like between Pauline and Pecola. If one is not careful, they will continue the cyclic nature of violence and hate to people who don’t deserve it.

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