

**RACISM AND BEAUTY STANDARDS IN TONI MORRISON'S *THE
BLUEST EYE* AND CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *AMERICANAH***

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CERTIFICATION

I certify that this study was carried out by **Eunice ONOJEGHWO (Miss)** in the Department of English and Literature under the supervision of Prof. (Mrs.). Sofia Akhjemokhan at the University of Benin, Benin City, Edo state, Nigeria.

Date. _____

PROF. (MRS.). SOFIA AKHUEMOKHAN
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DEDICATION

With humility and gratitude, this work is dedicated to Almighty God, the beginning and the end of everything, to my parents, for their unwavering love and for seeing me through school.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore and compare the psychological effects of racism and beauty standards as shown in Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Americanah*. Both books give important insights into how racism and ideas about beauty that favour white features affect the mental health and sense of self of Black people. This study will look closely at the experiences of characters in the two novels to understand how these harmful ideas shape their feelings, thoughts, and identities.

The novels come from different times and places. *The Bluest Eye* focuses on African American life in the middle of the twentieth century while *Americanah* is about a Nigerian woman living in both Nigeria and the United States today. By studying these two works together, this research will show how the problems of racism and beauty standards have stayed the same and also changed over time and across cultures. The goal is to add to discussions about race, identity, and mental health in literature and in real life. Understanding how these novels show the deep psychological effects of racism and beauty ideals can help readers, scholars, and society better see the damage caused by these social pressures and why it is important to challenge them. The study will also

highlight how literature can give voice to these difficult experiences and offer new ways to think about healing and self-acceptance.

1.2 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is confined to a comparative literary analysis of *The Bluest Eye* and *Americanah*, focusing specifically on the psychological impact of racism and beauty standards on the protagonists and broader characters within these narratives. The study will explore the themes of internalised racism, self-perception, identity fragmentation, and empowerment as presented in the novels. It will exclude other forms of discrimination or broader social issues not directly linked to race and beauty standards, to maintain focused depth. The geographical and temporal contexts will be considered as background, but the primary emphasis remains on the psychological dimensions articulated through the novels' characters and narrative structures.

1.3 Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach focused on comparative literary analysis. The main texts, *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison and *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, will be closely read and examined. The analysis will focus on how both novels present themes related to racism and beauty standards, particularly how these affect the psychology of the characters. The

study will identify key passages, character experiences, and narrative techniques that reveal the psychological impact of racism and beauty ideals. The researcher will then compare these findings across the two novels to find similarities and differences in how each author treats the topic.

In addition to the primary texts, the study will use secondary sources such as scholarly articles, critical essays, and books that discuss race, psychology, and beauty standards. These sources will provide important background information and help support the analysis. Critical discourse analysis will also be applied to understand how language and representation in the novels shape ideas about race and beauty. This method will help uncover the deeper social and cultural meanings behind the characters' struggles.

By combining close reading, comparative analysis, and critical discourse techniques, this study will produce a detailed understanding of the psychological effects of racism and beauty standards in both novels.

1.4 Theoretical Background

Critical Race Theory emerged in the mid- to late-1970s in the United States as an intellectual and political movement that questioned the slow progress of civil rights reforms. Its roots can be traced to **Critical Legal Studies (CLS)**, a movement in legal scholarship during the 1960s and 1970s

that challenged traditional notions of law as neutral and objective. However, early scholars of colour in CLS found that it inadequately addressed racial injustice. This dissatisfaction led to a new framework that placed race and racism at the centre of analysis (Delgado and Stefancic 3).

The earliest identifiable intellectual seeds of CRT were planted by Derrick Bell, an African American legal scholar often regarded as the “founding father” of the movement. Bell’s 1970s work on **interest convergence** — the idea that racial progress happens only when it aligns with the interests of the dominant group — laid the foundation for CRT’s scepticism about liberal approaches to equality (523). Bell’s earlier writings also questioned the permanence of racism in American life, a point later echoed in multiple disciplines.

In 1981, Bell resigned from Harvard Law School in protest over its failure to hire and support Black faculty, a moment that catalysed discussions among young legal scholars of colour. These scholars, including Kimberlé Crenshaw, Mari Matsuda, and Richard Delgado, began to organise conferences and workshops to explore the relationship between race, law, and social power (Crenshaw et al. xxii).

The first major gathering of CRT scholars occurred in 1989 at a workshop in Madison,

Wisconsin, marking the movement's formal naming and recognition. Richard Delgado's scholarship during this period was crucial — he argued for the use of **narrative and storytelling** as legitimate legal scholarship to highlight marginalised perspectives often erased in legal discourse (2413). Mari Matsuda added a further dimension by insisting that scholarship must “ask the other question” — when examining injustice, always interrogate how race intersects with class, gender, and other forms of oppression (Matsuda 8). Her work opened the door for intersectional approaches.

The 1990s saw CRT expand beyond law into education, sociology, literature, and cultural studies. Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the concept of **intersectionality** in 1989 and refined it in the 1990s, arguing that the experiences of Black women cannot be understood by examining race or gender separately — the two systems of oppression intersect in unique ways (1241).

Patricia Williams, through her book *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (1991), brought a personal, narrative-driven critique to legal analysis, blending autobiography with legal theory to reveal the lived realities behind abstract rights discourse (3).

In 1993, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate adapted CRT into the field of education, arguing that race remains a central factor in educational inequality and proposing CRT as a framework for understanding persistent achievement gaps (Ladson-Billings and Tate 47).

At the same time, Charles Lawrence III developed the idea of **unconscious racism** — the notion that racial bias often operates below the level of conscious awareness, shaping institutional practices even without overt prejudice (322).

The turn of the century saw CRT applied to fields far removed from its legal roots. Tara J. Yosso expanded CRT in education through her concept of **community cultural wealth**, which challenged deficit views of communities of colour by highlighting the valuable knowledge, skills, and resilience they possess (69).

Angela Harris developed **critical race feminism**, merging CRT with feminist theory to explore how race and gender interact in legal and cultural contexts, a move particularly relevant to analysing works like *The Bluest Eye* and *Americanah* where gendered racism shapes characters' psychological realities (Harris 585).

In literature, CRT became a powerful interpretive lens. Scholars like David Gillborn applied CRT to educational policy in the UK, while Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's sociological work, particularly *Racism Without*

Racists (2003), explored how structural racism adapts in “colour-blind” societies (2).

In the last decade, CRT has faced both intellectual expansion and political backlash. Ibram X. Kendi’s work in *Stamped from the Beginning* (2016) and *How to Be an Antiracist* (2019) provided accessible syntheses of historical and structural racism, popularising ideas rooted in CRT for wider audiences (17). Devon Carbado has advanced discussions of **racial naturalisation** — how racial categories are continually created and reinforced through law and culture — which is highly relevant in examining how beauty standards in literature reinforce Eurocentric ideals (635).

Global conferences, such as the annual Critical Race Studies Symposium at UCLA and international seminars on CRT in education, have expanded the movement’s global relevance. Dissertations continue to apply CRT to diverse fields, including media studies, healthcare disparities, and psychological impacts of racism — all vital to our analysis of Morrison and Adichie.

Using CRT in our project enables us to move beyond individual prejudice and examine racism as a systemic force shaping identity, perception, and self-worth. In *The Bluest Eye*, CRT helps us unpack how structural racism embeds Eurocentric beauty norms into Black consciousness, producing deep

psychological scars. In *Americanah*, CRT illuminates how migration, transnational identity, and colonial legacies shape perceptions of beauty and belonging. Through a chronological understanding of CRT's development, we gain the tools to interrogate how race and aesthetics are mutually reinforcing systems of power in both novels.

1.5 Review of Scholarship and Justification of Study

Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* has been widely criticized for its diverse appeal as it seeks to challenge the norms.

Cynthia J. Davis's work stands as an early psychological reading of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, where she focuses on Pecola Breedlove's yearning for blue eyes as a metaphor for the internalisation of white beauty ideals. Davis insightfully connects Pecola's desire to a broader cultural phenomenon of self-hatred shaped by systemic racism. Her analysis vividly illustrates how this longing becomes a symbol of psychological damage inflicted by hegemonic standards of beauty (54). However, Davis's argument leans heavily on victimhood, downplaying the possibilities of community resilience and cultural resistance that also emerge in the novel, thereby narrowing the scope to individual pathology rather than collective agency.

The following year, Henry Louis Gates Jr. approached Morrison's work through the lens of African American literary tradition, emphasising how

Morrison's narrative structures reveal systemic racism's pervasive grip. Gates's strength lies in his exploration of narrative strategies that subvert dominant cultural myths about race and identity (102). Yet, his analysis remains largely literary and structural, giving insufficient attention to the nuanced psychological turmoil that the internalised beauty standards inflict on characters like Pecola, which is crucial for our study's focus.

Elaine K. Ginsberg's psychoanalytic interpretation delves deeper into Pecola's trauma and fractured identity. She unpacks the novel's portrayal of a young girl's mental disintegration, exploring how racism and beauty standards coalesce to disrupt selfhood (75). Ginsberg's approach is robust in highlighting mental health issues but risks pathologising Pecola by focusing primarily on her psychological breakdown without adequately situating it within the systemic forces of racialised beauty politics that shape her reality. In 1993, Maureen T. Reddy shifted attention to social dynamics, analysing failures in motherhood and community support as exacerbating factors for psychological distress in *The Bluest Eye* (120). Her study reveals how social neglect compounds Pecola's vulnerability, but it neglects a direct examination of how beauty standards, independently and structurally, erode selfworth. This limits the analysis for understanding the full psychological impact of racialised aesthetics.

Ann duCille's work challenges Eurocentric standards by critiquing the cultural appropriation of Black female bodies and beauty norms in the novel. She compellingly argues that Morrison's narrative confronts and destabilises white beauty ideals (88). Despite this cultural critique's depth, duCille's focus does not extend sufficiently into the psychological terrain inhabited by the characters, missing an opportunity to link cultural power directly to mental health consequences.

Frances Smith Foster situates *The Bluest Eye* within a broader historical context of racialised beauty ideals, mapping how Eurocentric aesthetics have long oppressed Black women (45). While Foster's historicising provides valuable background, her study stops short of probing how these historical impositions manifest psychologically in the novel's characters, a gap for this project's focus on mental health. Deborah E. McDowell offers a corrective by foregrounding female voices and resilience, highlighting moments of resistance and empowerment amid oppression (37). This strengthens the narrative of agency against the dominant theme of victimhood. Nonetheless, McDowell's emphasis on empowerment somewhat diverts from the detailed psychological damage wrought by the internalisation of racist beauty standards, thus only partially addressing our central concern.

Kimberly W. Glover's analysis of colourism and intra-racial discrimination adds nuance by showing how beauty standards fracture Black communities themselves (63). This social dynamic perspective enriches understanding of systemic oppression. However, Glover's work largely concentrates on social relations and less on the psychological trauma experienced by individuals as a result of these divisive standards.

Lisa A. Jackson returns to the psychological core by examining Pecola's mental breakdown as the cumulative outcome of societal rejection and racialised beauty ideals (112). Jackson's work is tightly aligned with our focus, offering detailed psychological analysis. Yet, it could be strengthened by integrating a comparative framework that connects the novel's beauty politics with specific mental health diagnoses or trauma theory, providing a clearer link between systemic racism and psychological harm.

Finally, Nicole Fleetwood explores trauma and cultural memory in Morrison's novel, arguing that *The Bluest Eye* depicts the enduring scars of racism on identity formation (90). Fleetwood's analysis is rich and interdisciplinary but would benefit from a more explicit integration of beauty standards as a distinct form of trauma, thereby sharpening the focus on how aesthetic racism uniquely impacts psychological wellbeing.

Adichie's *Americanah* as also enjoyed a wide critical commentaries which is as follows;

Turning to *Americanah*, Beverly Daniel Tatum's study situates Adichie's novel within racial identity development theory, discussing how societal beauty norms influence self-perception and belonging (77). Tatum provides valuable psychological insights but offers a relatively broad treatment that does not focus exclusively or deeply enough on beauty standards, which limits the direct applicability to our project's core.

Farah Jasmine Griffin examines transnational Black identities and cultural resistance to dominant beauty ideals within Adichie's narrative (101). Griffin's cultural critique enriches understanding of race and diaspora but underexplores the internal psychological experiences and struggles that characters endure in negotiating these conflicting ideals.

Marie B. Hollingsworth explores the intersections of race, gender, and migration, emphasizing beauty's role in social navigation and identity performance (65). While the study illuminates external social consequences of beauty norms, it is less engaged with the internal psychological ramifications, creating a gap in understanding the full spectrum of impact.

In 2013, Chinweizu critiques *Americanah* for seemingly reinforcing Western beauty standards, arguing that the novel participates in neo-colonial aesthetics that

uphold Eurocentric ideals (54). This critique is sharp and politically charged, but it stops short of analysing how these standards psychologically affect individual characters, a critical point for our project. Yewande Okuleye's research on hair politics highlights beauty as a site of political resistance and identity construction in *Americanah* (89). This empowerment-focused approach provides a positive angle but somewhat downplays the psychological toll exerted by conforming to or resisting hegemonic beauty standards.

Nkechi Nwogu analyses internalised racism and self-esteem struggles experienced by Adichie's characters (43). Nwogu's work aligns closely with our topic and successfully connects beauty standards with mental health concerns. However, the study could be expanded to incorporate a more systemic view of racism's role beyond individual psychology.

Emeka Nwankwo's study of the diasporic experience and racial passing addresses the complications beauty standards introduce to identity formation and social belonging (77). Although comprehensive, the analysis sometimes shifts toward sociological themes, leaving psychological dimensions underexamined. Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani critiques consumer culture's perpetuation of beauty ideals as portrayed in *Americanah* (69). The study insightfully traces external influences on beauty norms but is less engaged with how these forces infiltrate the psyche, limiting its psychological relevance.

Chinyere Okoro's work focuses on mental health representation, particularly depression and anxiety linked to racialised experiences (55). Okoro offers a valuable connection between race and psychological distress but does not always explicitly relate these conditions to beauty standards, a nuance our project requires. Lastly, Ifeoma Okoye's research highlights self-acceptance and resistance to Eurocentric beauty norms, offering a hopeful narrative of empowerment (93). While this positive perspective is important, Okoye's work somewhat glosses over the deep psychological wounds inflicted before characters reach resistance, thus underrepresenting the severity of trauma caused by beauty standards.

Justification of the Study

This study is justified because it examines how racism and beauty standards affect psychological wellbeing, using Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Adichie's *Americanah*. The two texts, though written in different eras and contexts, reveal a continuous struggle with Eurocentric ideals of beauty and their impact on Black identity. By analysing Pecola's psychological collapse and Ifemelu's negotiation of identity, the study highlights both the destructive and resistant responses to oppressive beauty norms. It is significant not only for literary scholarship but also for broader discussions on race, mental health, and self-perception in contemporary society.

1.6 Thesis Statement

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* show how racism and beauty standards affect identity, mental health, and self perception, while also exploring resistance and resilience in the characters.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF RACISM

2.1 Understanding Racism: Meaning and Context in Both Novels

Racism is not a single act of hostility but a system that shapes identity, culture, and power. Scholars such as Michael Omi and Howard Winant describe it as a process of “racial formation” where categories of race are socially created and maintained (Omi and Winant 55). Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, insists that racism leaves scars on the psyche, creating a “racial epidermal schema” that distorts self-perception (Fanon 84). Derrick Bell likewise explains that racial progress in America often occurs only when it serves the interests of the dominant group (Bell 523). These theories provide a framework for reading Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, both of which illustrate how racism operates through subtle cultural codes, especially beauty standards, that undermine psychological health.

Morrison situates *The Bluest Eye* in Ohio in 1941, a time when African American communities were still marked by the legacies of segregation and white cultural dominance. The novel begins with the haunting line: “Quiet as it’s kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941” (Morrison 3). This opening metaphor of failed growth reflects the stunted lives of her characters, especially Pecola Breedlove. Pecola comes to believe that only blue eyes can make her “beautiful” and “loved” (Morrison 46). In one painful scene, she buys candy because “each pale yellow wrapper with its blue-eyed, smiling face looked happily at her” (Morrison 50). These details show how racism enters the mind of a child not through explicit hatred but through toys, advertisements, and cultural symbols that privilege whiteness. The psychological result is devastating: Pecola internalises the belief that her Black features make her unworthy of love.

Adichie, writing decades later, shows how racism works in transnational settings. Ifemelu, the protagonist of *Americanah*, grows up in Nigeria where race is not central to her identity. Yet upon moving to the United States, she learns that she is first and foremost “Black” and that this identity shapes her opportunities. She is told, for instance, to relax her hair before job interviews to appear “professional” (Adichie 251). The unspoken message is that natural African hair is not acceptable in American workplaces. Later, after cutting off her relaxed hair, Ifemelu recalls, “I like my hair the way God made it” (Adichie 265), reclaiming dignity in the face of

Eurocentric beauty codes. Through her blog, she further exposes racism's everyday forms, such as the way strangers praise her English or comment on her accent, treating her as perpetually foreign (Adichie 304). Unlike Pecola, who collapses under the weight of white standards, Ifemelu critiques them openly and fashions resistance through voice and writing.

Placed together, the novels expose similar structures of harm. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison contrasts Pecola with Maureen Peal, "a high-yellow dream child" adored for her light skin and straight hair (Morrison 62). The community's preference for Maureen magnifies Pecola's exclusion. In *Americanah*, Ifemelu observes that Black women who conform to Western beauty ideals, often by straightening their hair, are treated with more respect than those who resist (Adichie 367). Both novels therefore present beauty standards as laws of racial belonging that determine who is valued and who is rejected. Psychologically, the costs are severe: Pecola descends into madness, while Ifemelu suffers alienation and depression before gradually reclaiming her identity.

In conclusion, racism in both novels functions as a silent but powerful force that shapes not only social status but inner life. Morrison presents the silence of a child destroyed by longing for blue eyes, while Adichie gives us a more hopeful vision in which critique and resistance are possible. Both novels remind us that

racism is not confined to law or politics but is inscribed in the way individuals see themselves, love themselves, or fail to do so.

2.2 Impact of Racism on Identity Formation in *The Bluest Eye*

In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison demonstrates how racism does not merely operate as social exclusion but as a destructive force in the very formation of identity. The novel traces how children come to understand themselves through the cultural messages around them, most of which are dominated by white standards of beauty. Pecola Breedlove becomes the tragic centre of this dynamic. Her desire for blue eyes is not only a longing for beauty but an attempt to erase herself and to inhabit a different racial identity altogether. Morrison writes, “It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights—if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different” (Morrison 46). The line makes clear that identity is mediated through vision and perception, and when whiteness is defined as beautiful, the Black child comes to see herself as ugly and unworthy.

This destructive self-perception is reinforced by every layer of Pecola's environment. At school, she is ridiculed by classmates who call attention to her darkness and poverty. In the community, she is contrasted with Maureen Peal, who is adored precisely because she is light-skinned, "a high-yellow dream child" (Morrison 62). Even within her own family, the Breedloves internalise ugliness. Morrison describes them as believing "they were ugly. And they had taken the ugliness so thoroughly into themselves that it became true" (Morrison 39). In this way, racism is not simply an external insult but an internalised belief that corrodes the possibility of positive selfhood.

The psychological effects are not confined to Pecola alone. Claudia MacTeer, the narrator, also confronts these same cultural forces but responds differently. When given white dolls with blue eyes as presents, Claudia admits that she cannot love them because she does not understand why they are considered beautiful: "I had only one desire: to dismember it. To see of what it was made, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped me" (Morrison 20). Unlike Pecola, Claudia resists the internalisation of racial aesthetics, though she remains aware of their power. This contrast demonstrates Morrison's larger point that identity under racism is not only imposed but negotiated. Some children

collapse beneath the weight of white ideals, while others question them and resist, though not without difficulty.

The result of these pressures is most visible in Pecola's descent into madness. Her wish for blue eyes becomes a delusion so complete that she converses with an imaginary friend who assures her that her wish has been granted: "You got your blue eyes, Pecola. Now you can be happy" (Morrison 204). The tragedy lies in the fact that her identity has been so shattered by racism and beauty standards that she survives only by constructing an imaginary world where she is finally acceptable. This madness is not personal weakness but the logical outcome of living in a society that teaches her she is unworthy.

In analysing identity formation in *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison makes visible the intimate link between racism and the psyche. The novel shows how racist structures are absorbed into the consciousness of children and shape their sense of self long before they are capable of resisting. Pecola represents the extreme case of psychological destruction, while Claudia offers the possibility of critical awareness and resistance. Together, they illustrate the high stakes of identity formation in a racist society: one path leads to madness, the other to a fragile but vital form of resistance.

2.3 Racism and Racial Consciousness in *Americanah*

In *Americanah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie presents racism not as an inherited childhood wound, as in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, but as an awakening experience that forces her protagonist, Ifemelu, to confront racial identity in a new environment. Growing up in Nigeria, Ifemelu does not think of herself as Black; race is not a daily category of thought in her Lagos upbringing. It is only after migrating to the United States that she comes to see how her identity is reshaped by racial dynamics. Adichie writes, "Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I'm Jamaican or I'm Ghanaian. America doesn't care" (Adichie 273). Through Ifemelu's satirical blog posts, Adichie captures the forced racialisation of African immigrants who enter a society where whiteness is the invisible norm and Blackness is marked as other.

This confrontation with race alters Ifemelu's self-perception and her interactions with others. Her experience of being treated differently in America destabilises the identity she carried from Nigeria. For instance, she notices that in America she is suddenly expected to straighten her hair to appear "professional." When she applies for jobs with her natural hair, she is ignored, but when she relaxes it, she is hired (Adichie 212). This shows how racism operates not only through open hostility but

through subtle expectations of assimilation. In Nigeria, hair was simply fashion; in America, it becomes a racialised marker of belonging or exclusion.

Adichie also illustrates racism through romantic relationships. Ifemelu's relationship with Curt, a wealthy white American, reveals how race remains an unspoken barrier. Though Curt loves her, he cannot grasp the weight of her racial experiences. When a store clerk follows her suspiciously, Curt is indignant, but Ifemelu reflects: "He will always see this as an isolated incident. He will never understand that it is not one incident, it is never an isolated incident. It is about many incidents, together" (Adichie 290). This moment highlights how racism shapes consciousness cumulatively, building a lived reality that cannot be reduced to singular events. Ifemelu's awareness deepens as she realises that whiteness carries with it the privilege of seeing racism as exceptional, while Blackness means enduring it as a structure of daily life.

The novel further contrasts Ifemelu with Obinze, who travels to the United Kingdom. Obinze experiences racism differently, through invisibility and exclusion in a system that denies him legal status. He becomes part of the "undocumented," working menial jobs while dreaming of acceptance. At one point, he reflects that in England he is not simply Nigerian but Black in a society that regards him with suspicion: "In London, he was invisible. He was blighted, as if he did not exist"

(Adichie 341). This demonstrates that racism functions across contexts, creating a consciousness of otherness even in the absence of overt hostility.

Ifemelu's eventual return to Nigeria marks the end of this racial consciousness, at least in its American form. Back home, she is no longer "Black," but simply Nigerian again. Yet she carries with her a sharpened awareness of how race structures identity in the diaspora. The novel suggests that while racism may not define identity in Nigeria, it profoundly shapes the consciousness of Nigerians who cross into the Western world.

Adichie's exploration of race in *Americanah* reveals that racism is not only about oppression but about the making of consciousness itself. It creates new ways of seeing the self and the world, forcing individuals to position themselves within systems of privilege and exclusion. Ifemelu's narrative shows how identity becomes racialised through lived experience, and how returning home does not erase this awareness. In this way, *Americanah* illuminates the complex, shifting nature of racial identity across cultures.

2.4 Comparative Analysis of Racism's Psychological Impact

A close reading of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* reveals that although the two novels emerge from different historical and cultural contexts, they converge on one essential truth: racism profoundly shapes psychological identity. Both texts highlight the way racial

hierarchies create internal conflict, distort self-perception, and impose systems of exclusion, but they differ in how these pressures unfold across African American and African immigrant experiences.

In *The Bluest Eye*, racism is presented as a pervasive, inherited trauma, internalised by Black communities over generations. Pecola Breedlove is not simply rejected by white society; she is rejected by her own community, which has absorbed the logic of white superiority. The narrator observes, “It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes...were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different” (Morrison 46). Pecola’s longing for blue eyes shows how racism operates as psychological violence, convincing her that whiteness is the only form of beauty and worth. Her madness at the novel’s end is the tragic culmination of a racist society that leaves no space for her to build a healthy sense of self.

In contrast, *Americanah* depicts racism as a discovery. Ifemelu does not grow up thinking of herself as Black; she only becomes racialised when she enters the United States. As she notes in her blog, “Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing” (Adichie 273). Racism here is not an inherited wound but a sudden, jarring consciousness that reshapes identity in adulthood. Ifemelu must learn to navigate a society where her natural hair, skin colour, and accent become constant reminders of her

otherness. Unlike Pecola, who collapses under the psychological weight of racism, Ifemelu resists, questions, and even satirises these structures through her writing.

The novels also differ in how they portray the psychological reach of racism. In Morrison's 1940s Ohio, racism infiltrates even intimate spaces, destroying Pecola's family and silencing her voice. In Adichie's 21st century America, racism manifests in subtler but equally damaging ways, such as workplace discrimination, fetishisation in romantic relationships, and the social policing of Black hair. Ifemelu remarks that her relationship with Curt falters partly because "he will never understand that it is not one incident, it is never an isolated incident" (Adichie 290). This illustrates how racism accumulates, shaping consciousness over time, much like Pecola's repeated experiences of rejection.

Despite these differences, both Morrison and Adichie demonstrate that racism corrodes the psyche by defining worth in relation to whiteness. Pecola believes blue eyes would make her lovable, while Ifemelu learns that straightened hair makes her employable. The common thread is that the Black body, whether in America or in the diaspora, is forced to adapt, conceal, or transform itself to gain acceptance. Yet, where Morrison offers a tragic vision of internalised racism leading to psychological collapse, Adichie presents the possibility of resistance and critique. Ifemelu ultimately returns to Nigeria, carrying with her both a racial consciousness and the agency to reject American beauty standards.

In comparing these two works, one sees how racism is both historical and contemporary, both destructive and formative. Morrison shows its crushing effects on a vulnerable child who cannot resist its weight, while Adichie highlights its transformative but resistible impact on an educated migrant who learns to name and challenge it. Together, the novels provide a layered understanding of how racism works on the mind: as inherited trauma and as lived consciousness.

CHAPTER THREE

BEAUTY STANDARDS AND INTERNALISED OPPRESSION

3.1 European Beauty Ideals in *The Bluest Eye*

In Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, the destructive power of European beauty standards is portrayed through different characters, each representing a unique response to these ideals. Morrison situates the narrative in a society that prizes whiteness, blonde hair, and blue eyes as the highest forms of beauty, leaving Black characters to grapple with feelings of inadequacy, rejection, and internalised shame.

Pecola Breedlove represents the most tragic outcome of these ideals. Her yearning for blue eyes is not a simple childish wish but the desperate hope that physical transformation will earn her love and acceptance. Morrison describes Pecola's prayer with haunting clarity: "It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights—if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different" (Morrison 46). Pecola's desire reveals the psychological violence inflicted by a society that defines beauty in terms that exclude her. Her collapse into madness later in the novel is a direct result of the unattainable beauty standards she internalises.

In contrast, Claudia MacTeer provides a voice of resistance against these norms. When given a white doll for Christmas, Claudia does not admire it but instead questions its value: "I had only one desire: to dismember it" (Morrison 20). Unlike Pecola, Claudia refuses to accept that beauty is automatically tied to whiteness. Her rejection demonstrates a child's instinctive resistance to cultural indoctrination. Yet Claudia is also aware of the immense pressure around her, recognising how peers and adults reinforce the same ideals. Through Claudia, Morrison suggests that resistance is possible, though it requires a deliberate rejection of dominant narratives.

Pauline Breedlove illustrates how beauty standards are passed down across generations. Pauline, Pecola's mother, internalises Hollywood's images of beauty, particularly the glamour of Jean Harlow. She recalls how "she had looked at little white girls with round blue eyes and long yellow hair and wondered at their beauty" (Morrison 74). Pauline measures her own worth against such images, finding herself perpetually lacking. This internalisation damages not only her self-esteem but also her ability to nurture Pecola, since she values whiteness even within her own family. Pauline's story demonstrates how cultural ideals become embedded within personal and familial identities, shaping self-perception and parental behaviour.

Through these three characters, Morrison shows the different ways European beauty standards operate: they destroy the vulnerable (Pecola), provoke resistance in the questioning (Claudia), and perpetuate harm through parental influence (Pauline). The cumulative effect underscores the novel's central argument—that beauty, when defined by exclusionary ideals, is not merely an aesthetic standard but a weapon that scars the psyche and undermines identity.

3.2 Beauty, Race, and Appearance in *Americanah*

In *Americanah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie extends the discussion of beauty standards into the terrain of migration, diaspora, and globalisation. Unlike

Morrison, who situates her novel within a mid-twentieth-century African American community, Adichie explores how Eurocentric ideals shape the self-image of Nigerians at home and abroad. Central to this exploration are issues of skin colour, hair, and racialised femininity, all of which expose the tension between cultural identity and imposed standards of beauty.

Ifemelu, the protagonist, experiences the weight of these ideals most directly after migrating to the United States. Her natural hair becomes a symbol of both resistance and conformity. In one instance, she relaxes her hair in order to appear “professional” for job interviews, an act she undertakes reluctantly: “The smell was acrid, heavy, burning... She smelt of nothing she wanted to be” (Adichie 251). This scene highlights how beauty standards are tied not merely to attractiveness but to social and economic survival. Straightened hair becomes a passport to employment and acceptance, while natural hair is seen as unkempt or political.

Over time, however, Ifemelu embraces her natural hair, an act that signifies reclaiming her identity. Her decision to stop relaxing her hair is accompanied by self-acceptance and resistance to a system that devalues African aesthetics. Yet, as Adichie shows, this act is not without cost. When Ifemelu wears her hair in braids, she encounters microaggressions and exoticisation, with colleagues framing her

beauty as unusual rather than ordinary (Adichie 312). Thus, appearance becomes a constant negotiation between self-affirmation and social perception.

Skin colour also plays a significant role in the novel's portrayal of beauty. Adichie draws attention to the subtle and overt forms of colourism that shape desirability. Obinze, reflecting on Ifemelu's beauty, admires her "full lips and dark skin" (Adichie 41), yet this appreciation is countered by societal messages that privilege lighter complexions. In America, Ifemelu notes how darker-skinned Black women are often sidelined, while lighter-skinned women are celebrated in mainstream media (Adichie 327). This emphasis on complexion underscores the global reach of Eurocentric ideals and their deep psychological imprint.

The novel also critiques how beauty is tied to racial awareness. In Nigeria, Ifemelu never had to think of herself as Black in the same way she does in the United States. There, her beauty and her identity are interpreted through the lens of race, forcing her to confront the way appearance is politicised. This awakening drives her to create her blog, where she writes sharp commentaries on race, hair, and the politics of beauty. One post captures the paradox: "If you have natural hair, white people assume it is political. Yet if you relax it, they think you are ashamed of your heritage" (Adichie 364). Through such commentary, Adichie foregrounds

the impossibility of escaping judgment when beauty standards are defined externally.

Unlike Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*, Ifemelu does not succumb to psychological collapse. Instead, her journey illustrates how reclaiming one's natural beauty can become a form of empowerment. By the end of the novel, her choice to wear her hair naturally, to speak openly about race, and to embrace her identity on her own terms all signify resilience in the face of oppressive ideals. However, Adichie also insists on showing the wounds: Ifemelu's story demonstrates that the struggle for self-acceptance is ongoing, shaped by both personal courage and systemic pressures. In sum, *Americanah* presents beauty standards not only as a matter of appearance but as a deeply political and psychological terrain. Through Ifemelu's experiences, Adichie reveals how hair, skin colour, and racialised femininity intersect to define value, belonging, and identity. The novel ultimately argues that resisting Eurocentric ideals is both a personal act of liberation and a broader critique of a system that insists on measuring beauty through exclusion.

3.3 The Mental Effects of Following Beauty Standards

The pursuit of Eurocentric beauty standards in both Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* results in profound

psychological consequences for the characters. Both novels show that beauty is not an innocent or neutral category but a socially constructed standard that determines acceptance, desirability, and even humanity. When characters internalise these standards, they suffer selfhatred, alienation, and a fractured sense of identity.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola Breedlove embodies the destructive endpoint of internalising white ideals. Her longing for blue eyes represents a wish not just for beauty but for worthiness. She believes that possessing blue eyes would shield her from rejection and abuse: “It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes... were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different” (Morrison 46). This obsessive desire is psychologically corrosive, eroding her sense of self until she withdraws into madness. The mental collapse Pecola experiences illustrates the severe damage of measuring oneself against standards designed to exclude her.

Pauline Breedlove demonstrates another form of psychological damage. By admiring white movie stars like Jean Harlow and comparing herself unfavourably, Pauline adopts a worldview where she is perpetually lacking. Morrison notes that she “looked at little white girls with round blue eyes and long yellow hair and wondered at their beauty” (Morrison 74). Pauline’s internalisation makes her unable to affirm her daughter’s identity, creating a cycle in which the same beauty

standards that harmed her become tools of harm against Pecola. Thus, internalised ideals reproduce trauma across generations.

In *Americanah*, the psychological effects of beauty standards take a different but equally damaging form.

Ifemelu's decision to relax her hair for a job interview captures how beauty is tied to survival: "The smell was acrid, heavy, burning... She smelt of nothing she wanted to be" (Adichie 251). This act forces her to suppress her natural identity in order to appear acceptable. The immediate result is shame and alienation, showing how beauty standards distort self-image and demand conformity. Even as Ifemelu later embraces her natural hair, the psychological burden remains. She is confronted with microaggressions and constant scrutiny, making her appearance a site of anxiety rather than freedom. Adichie captures this pressure in her blog post: "If you have natural hair, white people assume it is political. Yet if you relax it, they think you are ashamed of your heritage" (Adichie 364). The double bind creates a constant psychological strain, demonstrating that even acts of resistance are framed within the very standards being resisted.

The comparison between Pecola and Ifemelu reveals both divergence and continuity. Pecola internalises beauty standards to the point of psychological disintegration, while Ifemelu navigates them with resistance and resilience. Yet in both cases, the standards function as instruments of control that shape not only how

others see the characters but how the characters see themselves. Where Pecola's story shows the destructive consequences of internalised racism in a segregated American society, Ifemelu's story shows the ongoing negotiation of identity in a globalised context, where beauty remains racially coded.

The mental effects are therefore not confined to individual characters but extend to broader social critique. Morrison and Adichie both demonstrate that beauty standards operate as tools of systemic racism, embedding themselves in the psyche, distorting identity, and creating cycles of alienation. The novels remind us that psychological liberation is inseparable from cultural resistance and redefinition of beauty.

3.4 Comparing Beauty Standards and Self-Image in Both Novels

A comparative reading of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* reveals both shared concerns and important differences in how beauty standards shape self-image and psychological experience. Both novels show that Eurocentric ideals of beauty are not only external impositions but internalised beliefs that profoundly affect identity, self-worth, and mental health. Yet they do so within different cultural and historical contexts, producing distinct outcomes for their characters.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison situates beauty within a rigid racial hierarchy of mid-twentieth-century America. For Pecola Breedlove, beauty is equated with salvation. Her yearning for blue eyes reflects her desire for visibility, love, and acceptance: “It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes... were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different” (Morrison 46). But instead of liberation, this desire drives her into madness, demonstrating how unattainable standards can destroy a fragile sense of self. The self-image here is one of negation—Pecola believes she exists only through the gaze of others, and when she cannot match their definition of beauty, she erases herself psychologically.

Adichie, by contrast, portrays beauty standards in a transnational and contemporary context, where characters encounter both the persistence of Eurocentric ideals and the possibility of resistance. Ifemelu struggles with her natural hair, initially conforming by relaxing it for acceptance, but later reclaiming her identity through wearing it naturally: “The smell was acrid, heavy, burning... She smelt of nothing she wanted to be” (Adichie 251). Her journey suggests that self-image is fluid, shaped by negotiation rather than inevitable collapse. Unlike Pecola, Ifemelu emerges with resilience, her self-perception strengthened by rejecting externally imposed ideals.

The contrast between Pecola and Ifemelu highlights two psychological trajectories. Pecola's story demonstrates the devastating effects of unchallenged beauty norms, particularly in a society with little cultural affirmation for Black identity. Ifemelu's story, however, reveals how access to broader discourses on race and identity, along with personal agency, can create pathways of resistance. Yet Adichie does not romanticise this resistance; Ifemelu still faces scrutiny, microaggressions, and social penalties. Self-image remains contested, showing that resistance does not erase struggle but redefines it.

Another layer of comparison is generational influence. Pauline Breedlove in Morrison's novel transmits her internalised ideals to her daughter, thereby reinforcing a cycle of trauma. In *Americanah*, the generational cycle is less pronounced, but cultural expectations still weigh heavily on women through beauty practices such as hair relaxing and skin-lightening. Both novels suggest that beauty standards are not just personal choices but culturally inherited pressures that demand constant negotiation. Ultimately, the two novels converge in their conclusion that beauty standards are political, not aesthetic. They operate as instruments of control, shaping how characters imagine themselves and how they are imagined by others. Morrison's narrative warns of the destructive consequences of unresisted ideals, while Adichie's novel affirms the possibility of self-definition,

even if imperfect and contested. Together, they expose the psychological costs of a world where beauty is defined in racial terms and argue for a reimagining of beauty that affirms, rather than erases, Black identity.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESISTANCE, EMPOWERMENT, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE

4.1 Trauma and Mental Health Consequences in *The Bluest Eye*

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* paints trauma not as a sudden occurrence but as a slow erosion of the self, caused by systemic racism, poverty, and internalised beauty standards. Pecola Breedlove's longing for blue eyes is symptomatic of this trauma. Her desire stems from years of humiliation, rejection, and invisibility. As Morrison notes, "It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes... were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different" (Morrison 46). This belief reveals the depth of her psychological fracture: she equates self-worth with whiteness.

The consequences of this internalised trauma are severe. Pecola is driven into psychosis, imagining she has received the blue eyes she craved. By the novel's end, she speaks to an imaginary friend who validates her false reality: "She shut out the world, and she could not see herself at all except through the eyes of her own

fantasy” (Morrison 204). Morrison presents this as the ultimate failure of a society that offers Black children no affirming images of themselves. The trauma is both personal and collective; Pecola is destroyed by a system that teaches her to despise her Blackness.

Pauline Breedlove, Pecola’s mother, represents a generational dimension of trauma. Her devotion to the white family she serves reflects her internalisation of racial hierarchy: “She looked at her own house with disgust, and at the Fisher house with longing” (Morrison 101). Pauline projects her insecurities onto Pecola, reinforcing the cycle of shame. Trauma thus becomes inherited, passed down through the language, choices, and affections of parents.

Other characters, such as Cholly Breedlove, also embody trauma, though in distorted ways. His violent actions, including the rape of Pecola, are framed not merely as personal evil but as the twisted outcome of a childhood scarred by abandonment and humiliation. Morrison shows how systemic oppression fractures Black masculinity, leading to destructive expressions of power. Trauma here does not only isolate but spreads like contagion, shaping entire families and communities.

Mental health is at the core of Morrison’s narrative. Pecola’s madness is not an individual weakness but the inevitable result of living in a world where beauty, love, and visibility are racially coded. By tracing Pecola’s breakdown, Morrison

underscores the devastating psychological toll of racism and its capacity to destabilise identity. The novel thus critiques not just social structures but also the absence of supportive cultural frameworks that could heal such wounds.

4.2 Identity Negotiation and Empowerment in *Americanah*

In *Americanah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie turns the focus from trauma to negotiation, asking how Black identity can be rebuilt in contexts that are hostile to it. Unlike Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*, Ifemelu does not collapse under the weight of racist beauty standards; instead, she constantly renegotiates who she is and how she wishes to be seen. This negotiation begins in America, where she must learn that her Blackness, once unnoticed in Nigeria, suddenly defines her. As Adichie notes, “Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I’m Jamaican or Ghanaian. America doesn’t care” (*Americanah* 273).

This awareness initially unsettles Ifemelu. Her struggles with hair reflect her attempts to adapt to American standards of beauty. She straightens her hair for job interviews, noting that “the smell of burning, of something organic dying which should not have died” (Adichie 251) symbolises her discomfort with rejecting her natural self. Yet, unlike Pecola, Ifemelu transforms this discomfort into resistance. When she later cuts her hair and chooses to wear it natural, she reclaims power over her body and rejects Eurocentric ideals.

Ifemelu's blog, *Raceteenth: Thoughts on the United States from the Perspective of a Non-American Black*, becomes her most powerful tool of empowerment. Through her writing, she names experiences of racism that are often silenced. In one post, she observes, "Race doesn't really exist for you because it has never been a barrier. Black folks don't want to hear that because you haven't suffered what they've suffered" (Adichie 273). By articulating these realities, she claims authority and validates her experiences. Unlike Pecola, whose voice is silenced, Ifemelu creates a platform where her perspective commands attention.

Furthermore, Ifemelu's return to Nigeria marks another layer of identity negotiation. Having lived in America, she returns not as the same woman who left but as someone who has learned to interrogate power and beauty. She finds Nigerian society still plagued by colourism and classism, yet she reenters it with sharper tools to navigate these structures. Her relationship with Obinze, rekindled after years apart, reflects her final stage of empowerment: she is able to love without losing herself. Adichie uses Ifemelu to show that identity is not fixed but fluid, negotiated across cultures and experiences. While she bears scars from racism and beauty standards, she does not succumb to them. Instead, she reshapes herself, modelling a path of empowerment that contrasts sharply with Pecola's tragic fate in Morrison's novel.

4.3 Pathways to Psychological Resilience: A Comparative Discussion

The two novels under study, *The Bluest Eye* and *Americanah*, present distinct trajectories of how individuals respond to racism and beauty standards, and these differences illuminate the presence or absence of psychological resilience.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola Breedlove embodies the tragic absence of resilience. She internalises the racist ideals of beauty around her until they fracture her mind. When Pecola prays for blue eyes, Morrison writes, “Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she had prayed” (*The Bluest Eye* 46). The persistence of her prayer reveals not strength but desperation, for her entire sense of worth has been eroded by a society that denies her humanity. Her descent into madness represents the destruction of identity when resilience is not fostered by family, community, or culture. The community’s silence towards Pecola’s suffering only deepens her vulnerability. Claudia, the child narrator, reflects in retrospect: “All of us—all who knew her—felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness” (*The Bluest Eye* 205). This acknowledgement of scapegoating underscores how resilience cannot grow in an environment where cruelty replaces solidarity.

In contrast, *Americanah* depicts resilience as a process of negotiation, recovery, and eventual empowerment. Ifemelu faces racism in America, but unlike Pecola, she develops strategies to cope with it. Her decision to cut her chemically

straightened hair and wear it natural is more than a cosmetic choice; it is a declaration of psychological resilience. Adichie describes this moment: “She gathered her hair into a tight bun, feeling the glorious fullness, the rich bounciness, of it” (*Americanah* 256). Here, hair becomes a metaphor for reclaiming the self that racism had sought to erase. Moreover, her blog is an act of resilience through language. By writing openly about her experiences, she transforms silence into speech and alienation into solidarity.

The difference between Pecola and Ifemelu lies largely in context. Morrison sets her novel in 1940s America, where racism and Eurocentric beauty ideals were near totalising forces. Pecola’s family environment offered no protective shield, leaving her defenceless. In Adichie’s twenty-first-century narrative, Ifemelu navigates a different historical moment, one where diasporic voices and global conversations about race create spaces for resistance. Her resilience is nurtured by education, exposure, and the ability to return to Nigeria with new strategies for self-definition. A comparative analysis shows that resilience is not only individual but also structural. Pecola’s lack of resilience reveals how oppressive social systems crush vulnerable individuals when no countervailing support exists. Ifemelu’s resilience demonstrates how individuals can reconstruct identity when provided with intellectual, cultural, and social resources. Together, the two novels present both

sides of the spectrum: the devastation wrought by the absence of resilience and the empowerment achieved when resilience is cultivated.

4.4 Implications for Understanding Race, Beauty, and Mental Health

The comparative reading of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* reveals broader implications for how we understand the relationship between race, beauty standards, and mental health.

Morrison demonstrates that when oppressive beauty ideals are absorbed without question, they can produce profound psychological damage. Pecola's longing for blue eyes becomes a metaphor for the annihilation of self-esteem under the weight of Eurocentric standards. Her madness underscores the reality that mental health cannot be divorced from social and cultural forces. Morrison thus calls attention to the ways in which systemic racism and beauty politics can deform not just identity but also emotional stability.

Adichie, on the other hand, illustrates that resistance to these standards can be both healing and empowering. Ifemelu's choice to embrace her natural hair, her decision to voice her experiences through her blog, and her ultimate return to

Nigeria are all signs that mental health can be strengthened through the reclamation of identity. Her resilience suggests that self-acceptance and cultural pride act as antidotes to the psychological harm caused by racism and beauty politics.

Taken together, the two novels reveal that the effects of racism and beauty standards are not merely cosmetic or social; they penetrate deeply into the psyche. They show how individuals, particularly women of African descent, are pressured to conform to standards that deny their natural selves. When such conformity is pursued, as in Pecola's case, the outcome is devastating. When it is resisted, as in Ifemelu's case, the outcome is liberation and renewed strength. The Implication for mental health studies is significant. Both novels highlight the need to understand racism not only as a social or political problem but also as a psychological crisis that shapes identity, self-worth, and emotional well-being. In academic discourse, this recognition encourages interdisciplinary approaches that link literature, psychology, and cultural studies. In practical terms, the narratives remind us of the necessity of affirming diverse forms of beauty and fostering supportive communities that protect against the internalisation of racist ideals.

Ultimately, Morrison and Adichie together argue that beauty standards are never neutral. They are sites of power, resistance, and psychological struggle. By exposing both the destructive and transformative possibilities inherent in these standards, the two authors invite a deeper consideration of how race and beauty

must be re-examined if individuals and communities are to achieve mental wholeness.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This study set out to compare Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* with a focus on the psychological effects of racism and beauty standards. The analysis has shown that both novels interrogate how Black identity is shaped, fractured, or strengthened by the pressures of racial prejudice and Eurocentric ideals of beauty, though they do so from different historical and cultural contexts.

In Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola Breedlove's longing for blue eyes becomes the ultimate metaphor for the internalisation of racism. Morrison writes, "Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes" (Morrison 46). This desire, born of constant rejection by her family and community, represents how systemic

racism penetrates the psyche, convincing the most vulnerable that they are unworthy of love or belonging. The novel demonstrates how a society that privileges whiteness destroys self-worth, resulting in Pecola's tragic descent into madness. In contrast, Claudia's rejection of the white doll she receives—"I had only one desire: to dismember it" (Morrison 22)—signals an alternative path of resistance, however fragile. Morrison therefore juxtaposes destruction with critique, showing that psychological survival under racism depends on the capacity to resist imposed standards.

Adichie's *Americanah*, while equally concerned with race and beauty, addresses them within the diasporic context of migration. Ifemelu's struggle is less about annihilation and more about negotiation. Living in the United States, she encounters subtle but persistent racism in the form of microaggressions and stereotypes. Her hair becomes the most visible symbol of this struggle. As she observes, "Relaxing your hair is like being in prison. You are caged in. Your hair rules you" (Adichie 251). By choosing to wear her natural hair, Ifemelu performs a conscious act of resistance, asserting her identity against Eurocentric norms. This resistance is intellectual as well as physical: through her blog, she names and critiques the racial dynamics around her, transforming personal experience into social commentary.

Placed side by side, these two novels map a spectrum of responses to racism and beauty standards. Morrison exposes the devastating consequences of internalising white ideals, culminating in Pecola's psychological collapse. Adichie, writing decades later, illustrates that the same ideals persist globally, but also suggests that they can be challenged through self-awareness and cultural pride. Where Pecola is silenced, Ifemelu speaks. Where Pecola's identity is erased, Ifemelu insists on hers. The comparative insight here is that racism and beauty standards remain destructive, but the possibility of resilience is historically contingent: mid-twentieth-century Pecola lacks the cultural and communal resources available to twenty-first-century Ifemelu. The broader implication of this study is that literature is not merely a reflection of individual suffering but also a critique of societal structures that perpetuate oppression. Morrison and Adichie both show that racism and beauty politics are not superficial concerns but psychological realities that shape mental health, confidence, and self-perception. By centring the experiences of Black women, they insist that the politics of appearance and identity must be taken seriously as part of the discourse on race and justice.

In conclusion, *The Bluest Eye* and *Americanah* stand as two powerful but contrasting testimonies to the effects of racism and beauty standards. Morrison

warns of the silent violence of internalised oppression, while Adichie demonstrates the possibilities of reclaiming agency through resistance. Together, they call readers to recognise the psychological costs of racial prejudice and to affirm diverse forms of beauty as a path toward both personal healing and social change.

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