

## Social Construct Of Racism: A Critical Study Of *The Bluest Eye*



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**Abstract:** *This study investigates race as a social construct, racial discrimination and its normalization in American society. The researcher investigates the issues by critically analyzing The Bluest Eye (1970) by Morrison and claims that the notion of racism is created by people to maintain white supremacy on the blacks. Racism has become a normal thing because people have to experience it on daily basis. Prejudiced attitude of white people towards blacks shows that racism has no biological or rational basis rather it is a self-created notion based on their hatred towards people of color. The research is qualitative descriptive in nature and the critical race theory (1970) by Delgado and Stefancic is chosen as a theoretical framework for this research. The researcher has concluded that racism is strongly embedded in the minds of people and that they are unable to avoid it by recognizing it a real menace of society. The characters of The Bluest Eye (1970) by Morrison show their prejudiced attitude towards people of color because it is inculcated in their minds that black people are not normal human being and thus do not deserve to be treated well and equally. Consequently, its everyday experience has normalized racism in American society because no one recognizes it as a serious issue which needs to be recognized and addressed properly to ensure equality for the people of color in white dominant societies.*

**Keywords:** Racism, Racial Discrimination, Black People, White People.

### 1. Introduction

Racism, like gender roles, is socially constructed. People practice it in everyday life in such a way that it becomes normal in society. Whites and blacks become two races on the basis of their skin color and in a society where two types of people live, one is going to establish its status as superior because the ones who are beautiful in looks, are going to think that they have the right to live life and they will start treating the other group as inferior and less competent so they should be suppressed by them in order to serve the interest of superior class. By practicing such type of behavior over a long period of time this thing starts appearing as

reality and both groups of people start thinking this way as if this is how people of two colors should live in a society.

This is because of the people who have decided that humans with certain looks should live in a certain manner. So, this is gradually and socially inculcated in the psyche of both types of people. A person who is sensible enough will definitely raise this objection that how people can decide the social status of other human beings on the basis of their skin color. If one talk about parts of body, senses and the human brain then black skinned people have got everything similar to that of white skinned people making it clear that they have no biological flaw in their bodies. So,

just because they are black, they are subjugated by the whites is not an acceptable thing in human society. The researcher investigates this issue by applying Critical Race Theory (1970) by Delgado and Stefancic on *The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Morrison. African Americans have had many issues on the basis of their skin tone. In American white society and throughout the world, they have been excluded and treated unfairly. White people forced them into slavery because they were thought of as less human. Black people were perceived as being less normal than white people in general. They believed that two main groups of humans are divided based on inherited physical and behavioral variations.

### 1.1 Background to the Study

African Americans have had many issues on the basis of their skin tone. In American white society and throughout the world, they have been excluded and treated unfairly. White people forced them into slavery because they were thought of as less human. Black people were perceived as being less normal than white people in general. They believed that two main groups of humans are divided based on inherited physical and behavioral variations.

Blacks were considered different species and therefore of different origin than the whites. Africans, being closer to the apes than to the mankind, were treated unjustly. British merchants used to send ships to the African Gold Coast. Africans were then shipped under appalling conditions to America or the West Indies to work on tobacco or sugar cane plantations. Race is distinction in bodily appearance but actually racism is an ideology which is socially developed by a superior class about an inferior class. The superior class has all the advantages and opportunities which negatively affected the inferior class. "Racism has drawn a distinctive borderline between two classes" (Jasmine, 2019).

When Europeans began to dominate the American continent in the sixteenth century, racism in America started. Sociologists claim that during the civil rights struggle, white people's prejudices toward black people

diminished. For instance, racial equality increased by 40% in the 1940s, and by the 1980s, it had increased by more than 90%. During the post-civil rights era, the majority of sociologists studied racism (1970-2000). They concentrated more on debating and defining particular types of racism. These academics contend that racism, whether overt or covert, is an ingrained component of society.

The majority of African Americans were held in abhorrent conditions as slaves. There was no economic, social, or political freedom. African Americans experienced severe restrictions and segregation on a variety of levels and fronts. Formal racial discrimination ended after the civil rights movements when the federal government made it illegal. Because of this, a sizable segment of American society now considers racism to be morally and socially repugnant. Despite this, racial prejudice persisted in the US and continued to have a detrimental effect on the socioeconomic standing of African Americans. Racial discrimination is still a significant issue in America. According to the United Nations and the US Human Rights Network, they claim that racism is present in all black communities in America and permeates all aspects of society.

Due to the Militia Act of 1862, African Americans were finally permitted to enlist as soldiers in the Union Militia during the American Civil War. Despite having this permission, they faced salary discrimination, with Black members earning only half as much as White members. Black people were expected to perform more labor and put forth more effort than white people. They served as drudges and laborers. According to estimates, more black people died during and after the war than white people. They served the interest of white people but later on abandoned as if they served no purpose. It is quite upsetting for people of color that white people used them as tissue paper out of selfishness.

In United States some laws were passed to give equal but separate rights to people of color. Jim Crow Laws were state and local laws that were implemented between 1876 and 1965 in the southern and border states of the United States.

The phrase "Jim Crow" originated from a lighthearted theatre production whose creator was Thomas Dartmouth Rice, in which actors would blacken their faces to mimic black people. Jim Crow was originally used to disparage people of color, and in the 19th century it evolved to symbolize the laws that established white supremacy. Jim Crow laws granted people of color distinct but equal status. Due to the fact that blacks were forced to attend less successful schools and use public spaces than whites, this system created a second problem. The United States Supreme Court ruled in 1954 that this state-sponsored segregation was unconstitutional. It can be deduced that despite all efforts to grant black people equal rights, racial discrimination has not been eradicated from American society.

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The basic problem of the present research is to investigate racism as a social construct, which makes people believe that blacks have some physical flaw that is why they are justified to be kept under the subjugation of whites. But in reality, racism has no rational basis. This is the construct of society and it has no biological basis. This study aims at investigating this problem in *The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Morrison by showing different characters and their behavior towards each other and about themselves as well. Furthermore, the researcher investigates normalization of racial discrimination in American society. The researcher chooses critical race theory (1970) by Delgado and Stefancic as theoretical framework. This study makes people realize that black people should be accepted in white societies in a normal way.

### 1.3 Significance of the Study

This study aims at giving an in-depth analysis of the mind-set of white society that how they perceive and treat each other in such a manner which makes them divide human species in distinct groups on the basis of inherited physical and behavioral variations. It highlights stereotypical behavior of people which can cause serious mental illness in the people of color. This research work, through an in-depth

analysis of different characters, situation and incidents, provides an apt understanding of the novel who are interested to read text between the lines to understand the hidden meaning of certain behaviors, dialogues and circumstances. This study can also help scholars in the field of social sciences and literature to further investigate social constructivism of races while observing different patterns of behavior of people or while reading any literary piece of work.

### 1.4 Delimitations

This study focuses only on *The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Morrison as a primary text for critical analysis. Though the novel covers many issues of African-American people such as social injustice, sexual abuse, home violence, male dominance, black feminism, obsession with white standards of beauty etc., but this research study primarily deals with the social construction of racism, racial discrimination and its normalization within the parameters of *The Bluest Eye* (1970). Different characters and their thoughts events and situations from the novel are analyzed to investigate the research problems.

### 1.5 Objectives of the Study

1. To find out the social construction of racism in *The Bluest Eye* by Morrison
2. To investigate and analyze *The Bluest Eye* by Morrison from the perspectives of racism and normalization of racial discrimination in America

### 1.6 Research Questions

1. How does *The Bluest Eye* by Morrison show the social construction of racism?
2. How does *The Bluest Eye* by Morrison highlight racial discrimination and its normalization in America?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Racism

Racism was socially constructed reality and gradually blacks were made to believe that they are ugly and through systematic segregation they were ostracized. To adhere to the white standards of beauty, is of central importance in

*The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Morrison. According to Morrison, concept of race is culturally constructed because whites are considered beautiful in America whereas blacks are totally invisible in such a society where white color is the standard of beauty.

Hudson, Eaton, Lewis, Grant, Sewell and Gilbert (2016) had done a research article about “Racism?!?. . . Just Look at Our Neighborhoods”: Views on Racial Discrimination and Coping among African American Men in Saint Louis. They investigated that there were a lot of challenges being faced by the victims of racism therefore they tried to find out ways to cope up with those problems. African American men go through a lot of stress and challenges as a result of racism in American society. A focus group study was conducted in Saint Louis, a few miles from Ferguson to find out different coping mechanisms being adopted by men of Africa in America. In that focus group study, many stress-related themes were discussed but racial discrimination theme was pervasive stressor among those men. Those men discussed racism and racial discrimination in multiple settings including workplace, school and residential, and within the criminal justice system. Their coping strategies include drinking and smoking besides religiosity and familial support.

Melor (2019) worked to highlight the problems being faced by minorities at their workplaces and he had done a research paper about “Racial Discrimination in the Workplace”. The aim of this research paper was to highlight discrimination being faced by all minorities in a dominant culture. The researcher gave various examples of discriminatory behaviors of the people towards non-native or minorities of any particular country. He talked about the racial harassment and victimization of different ethnicities at a workplace.

Shulman and Glasgow (2010) had done a research paper about “Is Race-Thinking Biological or Social, and Does it Matter for Racism? An Exploratory Study”. The aim of conducting this research was to investigate and determine whether people conceive of race biologically or socially. This study tried to

examine the ordinary thinking of the people of America regarding different perceptions of racism. The researchers tried to investigate the relationship between different conceptions of race such as biological, social or psychological conceptions of race in the United States. It is important to know that what do people think about race; “whether they think of it as a biological reality or a social construct or some combination of both of them”? The goal of this study was not to come to a conclusion that what actually race is but rather it was conducted to reveal what does people think about race; whether they take it as biological realism or a social construct. An empirical investigation was carried out by the researchers. People were invited and asked one single question regarding race and that was, “Do you think people really have a race or is race not real but something that we have merely imagined? Those who defined race on the basis of biological realism, they did that on the basis of mere physical appearances of people. After statistical analysis of results of study, it was deduced that seventy five percent of the people viewed race as real. Out of those realists’ eight percent believed that psychology has some role in determining race. Provided that, this data may be interpreted in a number of ways and it can be said that people attach many meanings to the term ‘race’. All the previous researches were done qualitatively to determine what do people think about race but as far as this research is concerned the researchers deliberately chose to investigate this problem using quantitative approach and came up with statistical answers to the research questions. The data, gathered from this study, show that how society has shaped the mind-set of the people regarding race that without any scientific truth, seventy-five per cent people viewed race as real.

## **2.2 Social Construction of Racism**

Omi and Winant (2016) had done their research paper about “Blinded by Sight: The Racial Body and the Origins of the Social Construction of Race”. In this article they stated that social construction of race was there from the beginning in European colonized states. The purpose of this research article was to show that on what basis white people had divided human

beings of two different colors in the past. At that time “the only systematic classificatory tool that people had was their religion”. They used religion for their purpose to assert themselves as the masters of the black people. Some of the people still consider race as biology is real and true thing while others think it is constructed and inculcated in the minds of the people by the people and science has nothing to do with it. To determine whether race is biologically true or is it a social construct, (Smedley and Smedley, 2005) had done research paper about “Race as Biology is Fiction, Racism as a Social Problem is Real”. The purpose of the research article was to show how colonialists defined race. They demonstrated that European naturalists of 18<sup>th</sup> century were working to build classifications of human groupings at the same time as colonialists were busy trying to establish the folk idea of race by labeling indigenous people as “savage” and “primitive”. The goal of the study was to determine how and on what basis colonialists and later naturalists defined individuals in order to construct races in society. Their remarks on the race were very arbitrary because they focused on the natives’ appearances and behaviors. Later, the idea of race as biological realism was greatly influenced by Thomas Jefferson’s only book, *Notes on the States of Virginia* (Jefferson, 1785-1955), since he used science to buttress the ideology of race. Jefferson’s views were founded on his contact with a figure who was a Negro, whom he only knew as a slave. They supported the popular notion of race with science.

Obach (1999) had done his research paper about “Demonstrating the Social Construction of Race”. The purpose of this experiment was to demonstrate the construction of race by proposing the idea to conduct discussion among students that on which basis do they categorize people in different races? By asking them to categorize the ethnic groups of somewhat ambiguous race, he proved that students gave subjective answers based on their knowledge of race having no scientific groundings. The objective was to achieve results regarding construction of race that whether people construct races on subjective opinions or they

are completely objective while categorizing people into groups.

Taking the example of Middle Easterners, he argued that some call them white while others may say that Middle Easterners are a race in themselves, similarly people divided races based on where they lived and how they dressed, demonstrating that race is founded in culture. Its significance is shaped by history and culture. Sex can be biologically classified since it is obvious, but race cannot be biologically proven. Another instance of race being a social construct was when a student from Morocco noted that while she was seen as white in Morocco, she was not in the United States. The findings demonstrated how completely subjective race is. People classified it based on their individual perceptions, and their views varied from one another.

Shih, Bonam, Sanchez and Peck (2007) had done their research about ‘The Social Construction of Race: Biracial Identity and Vulnerability to Stereotypes’. Their purpose of study was to highlight facts about monoracial and multiracial people and they found out that multiracial individuals challenge society’s traditional notions of race and face more challenges in society than monoracial individuals because they cannot be easily placed into any of society’s preexisting racial categories. Society is unable to answer about where they belong in terms of racial community. They called race ‘arbitrary, subjective and ultimately meaningless in any biological sense’.

Ashe and McGeever (2011) conducted an interview with Professor Robert Miles. While answering a question he came to the conclusion that although the concept of race is historically accurate and appropriate for use in both written and oral discourse, it should not be employed as a concept since it a consequence of the racialization process. He contends that the idea of race has changed over time and rooted in historical truth. It has unique historical antecedents, thus what it meant in one context does not signify anything different in another. Racism was not a concept. It was developed by individuals via repeated practice. The more people have practiced it the more it became

normal and gradually it has been normalized by people. Now in America it has become an ordinary experience of everyday life. No one takes any notice when people are marginalized and pushed to the status of 'the other'. Eurocentric mental approach of Europeans is the major cause of many problems for the people of color in America. Blacks also suffered mentally as well as physically because of this racial segregation over a long period of time. Due to racism people of color have become extremely sensitive and alert towards any racial attitude against them. They often get hurt and discouraged on receiving racial remarks from their fellows. Many people are forced to quit their jobs because of this bullying at workplaces. People usually make fun of their looks and appearance and they hate them because they are considered ugly and filthy.

Many of the whites have used racism as a weapon to oppress black people and to take advantage from them. To do so they oppressed them. Wilson (2011) had done research article about "The Dominant Class and the Construction of Racial Oppression: A Neo-Marxist/ Gramscian Approach to Race in the United States". The aim of this study was to tell the purpose of American racial oppression on blacks. Their objective was to talk about the historical facts regarding American racial oppression on blacks over a long period of time. They came to the conclusion that racism in the United States was created to keep black people under control and oppressed in order to get the most labor from them. They were initially employed by whites in plantation fields, but later, white employees began competing against them to weaken their strength there. They received political assistance to prevent black people from owning land. Despite all of this, black people began to possess their own businesses and 1188 acres of property, but white people still began to drive them into lower-status positions with lower pay. Thus, racism was created by white Americans to perpetuate their subjugation of black people, keep them in poverty, and force them to work for them. White people imposed economic, political, and social segregation on them.

Castrellon (2010) had done her research paper about "An exploration of social construction of race and racial identity: a project based upon an independent investigation". Her research's aim was to explain the factors that led to the development of racism. She accomplished the study's goal by looking into the concepts of race and discovering that race and racial identity are social constructs with ramifications for people living in the United States on the social, political, and economic levels. Her dissertation described the mechanism through which individuals create their own sense of race. For this investigation she used Queer Theory and Narrative Theory. It is clear that people use racism as a tool to invade the lands of less civilized people in order to achieve power and resources of that land. According to her the motive of constructing this idea was to gain social, economic and political control over the people of color and to make them dependent upon whites for everything.

Perry (1995) had done a research review on Ruth Frankenberg's book, "White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness". The goal of the study was to describe the kind of life that people lead under racially discriminatory settings. According to this study, both white people and black people lead racially structured lives. Due to their increased privileges, white people's supremacy over black people is concealed from view, giving the impression that they are leading non-racial lifestyles. Women of color see racism as a Black problem as well. Their efforts towards anti-racism work are also an optional project for them as they view this as an external issue. Moreover, as black people are the most effected by racism so only, they have to resist against it in order to achieve basic human rights in white societies. This is quite reasonable that why would whites bother to struggle for the elimination of racism when they are enjoying all the privileges and rights in their most appropriate manner.

There are also researches that are conducted in favor of biogenetic notion of racism, as (Shiao, Bode, Beyer and Selvig, 2012) in their article, "The Genomic Challenge to the Social Construction of Race", challenged the social

construction of race by proving how race as biogenetic notion is true concept. Their objective was to look at construction of racism from different perspectives rather than social one only. They found out that there are a lot of human genetic variations within groups and between groups as well. They investigated that interracial genetic variation is greater than intraracial variation. According to Shiao and his fellow researchers there is more genetic difference between French and Vietnamese than between French and Germans but there can be more variations among the French alone.

Dean (2020) conducted research about, 'Categories We Live By: The Construction of Sex, Gender, Race, and Other Social Categories'. The aim of study was to explain the role of institutional and communal properties in dividing people into different social categories. His objective was to elaborate that there are two social properties which confer people different social categories; institutional and communal. According to him these social properties are vital factors in constructing and shaping the image of certain things in society. He came up with the result that Institutional agents openly confer institutional properties on individuals within certain institutional contexts. For example, being married is an institutional property given to them by someone who has some legal authority to declare them as lawfully wedded husband and wife whereas people present there at that time accept them as a couple out of sentiments, fear, or respect. So, communal properties are conferred by other humans who have standing in the given context. So, society is in the center behind construction various ideas and roles for others. Without its approval life among them becomes all the more challenging and difficult. People defined gender roles and everyone started practicing it and gradually it became as a widely accepted reality. Same happened with the construction of race as it was given and defined by the people and the rest of us accepted it as a reality.

### **3. Methodology**

The nature of this study is qualitative descriptive. To understand thoughts, attitudes, and experiences, non-numerical data is gathered

and analyzed using the qualitative method. It delves deeply into the issue in order to give in-depth analysis of the research problem. In the humanities and social sciences, qualitative research is frequently employed. Creswell defines qualitative research as "an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem". Using this method the researcher analyzes *The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Morrison and tries to analyze different situations, behaviors and events of the novel in order to give an in-depth analysis of the problem statement regarding social construction of racism. Furthermore, to investigate racial discrimination and normalization of racism in American society the researcher also uses qualitative approach to generate in-depth meaning from the novel. Novel's utterances, situations and behavior of different characters have been thoroughly examined in order to give a detailed analysis of the research problem. Qualitative method is very helpful and useful to firstly analyze the things and then to generate results from that analysis.

### **3.1 Theoretical Framework**

The researcher chooses critical race theory (1970) by Delgado and Stefancic for the analysis of construction of beliefs such as racism. Researcher applies this concept on *The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Morrison. The critical race theory (1970) by Delgado and Stefancic mainly deals with racism and its eradication. This theory highlights racial discriminatory behaviors, its social construction and its normalization in a society where it is practiced as a normal thing or where it is an experience of everyday life. It has three main principles. According to this theory race is socially constructed phenomena rather than biological realism. The second principle is 'material determinism' means that white is dominant over black both physically and materially. The third principle is that racism is ordinary rather than aberrational.

### **4. Analysis and Discussion**

#### **4.1 Social Construction of Race**

The first significant instance regarding social construction of what is beautiful and acceptable in society, is shown through the thoughts of Claudia; the narrator of the novel. When she sees

the pink skinned doll with blue eyes and yellow hair, she begins to think that what has made her beautiful in the eyes of the world? She wonders that what is the cause of her dearness? In order to discover this, she tears it apart.

“I could not love it. But I could examine it to see what it was that all the world said was lovable” (Morrison, 1970, p.22).

This particular part of the novel shows that the world only accepts beautiful white skinned, blue eyed, yellow haired people. They have completely disregarded those who are not as beautiful as this doll is. In other words, people have marginalized black people like Claudia or Pecola and turned their backs towards them by totally ignoring them. Claudia breaks apart the beautiful yellow haired, blue-eyed doll to discover that what does make her get public attention, praise and recognition? At that time, it seems as if she is complaining against the unjust and cruel judgmental behavior of her society that has divided humans into distinct groups on the basis of their skin color. She seems not at ease on seeing this discrimination and when she examines the doll, she finds nothing extraordinary in it except her outward lustrous beauty which is superficial and fleeting with time. It is because of the people that they are awe struck on seeing such a doll and not do so when they see people of color. Claudia concludes that as beauty is superficial so is the approach of people towards other people and it is these people who have established and promoted the concept of racism.

Claudia does not only examine the doll by breaking it apart but also, she is trying to examine the behavior of people that why do people react in highly adorable manner towards white people. What makes them to express feelings of love and admiration like ‘Wow!’ on seeing white girls and do not express the same feeling on seeing girls like Claudia, Pecola or Frieda. This monologue of Claudia shows the typical behavior of people towards black people that’s why they are compelled to think in this way to figure out that what makes them to express and hold two different opinions for same human beings; that why they praise one group of people and hate the other one. Why do they

accept one group of people and treat them normally while on the other hand they completely ignore black skinned only because they are black so they are categorized as ugly, detestable and have no respect in society. So, this shows that society has inculcated this racial thought in the minds of people to such an extent that Claudia is unable to ignore this discriminatory behavior of people and begins to hate white doll i.e white people. This also shows the helplessness of black people that they are unable to change their mind-set for a certain group of people. The impact of society in inculcating certain thoughts in the minds of people is so strong that they never thought to challenge them and reject them but rather, they become part of it by silently accepting and endorsing such type of self-created notions.

Breedlove family faces a lot of problems while settling down in Lorain, Ohio. They came from Kentucky to settle down there but their living condition in Ohio was miserable. It seems as if white people have not accepted them in their community and they are made to live under appalling circumstances, having no access to a good quality life. It was because of this poverty that many issues emerged out of it. Even at the age of eleven Pecola seems mentally disturbed because no one pays any attention towards her and she seems badly affected by the daily fights of her parents. Her parents have also lost all hope of a good life and sought refuge in fighting every day and blaming each other. Cholly Breedlove has also become a drunken man and their son, Sammy Breedlove, has adopted many bad habits and finds pleasure in teasing others and staying out of home for most of the time. Pauline, Breedlove’s wife, works at different houses to meet both ends meet. In short, their life in Ohio is miserable, poor and pathetic.

White people have made fun of them and maintained a distance from them though they make a lot of efforts to be part of their society but the more they tried the more people made fun of them as it is shown in the novel through the efforts of Mrs. Breedlove. They looked at them as if they are some sort of obnoxious creatures bound to be abhorred and rejected by society. White people seem to have drawn a line



between whites and blacks and have not given them enough opportunities to flourish and develop in American society. They have very low opinion about them and made Breedlove understand the fact that they are ugly as the narrator says, “and they had each accepted it without question” and thus they should remain in their abject poverty for the rest of their lives in a white dominant society. Such a behavior of white people shows that they treat people of color this way because their minds are programmed in this way. They are made to think and react in this way because they have seen their ancestors and all others in their surroundings behaving in this particular manner and carrying out the same tradition without finding it awkward or unacceptable.

It is because of social construction of racism that whites have always exploited blacks and maintained superiority over them over the course of history. In novel, Cholly has once been exploited by two white men when he was for the first time,

“Earnestly engaged in eliciting sexual pleasure from a little country girl. The two white men show flashlight right on his behind and Cholly stops at once, the two chuckled’, ‘Go on’, they said. ‘Go on and finish. And, nigger, make it good’” (Morrison, 1970, p.134).

Because of this incident, Cholly begins to hate that girl and his own self for this is the worst kind of exploitation one can ever go through. This incident shows that how such constructed beliefs work and cause serious psychological problems for those who are subordinate and oppressed physically, mentally, or emotionally by the dominant cultures of society.

The kind of treatment Pecola receives at school by teachers and classmates also shows that racism is quite strongly inculcated in the minds of people by society. It seems quite strange and surprising that even the educational institutions and the educated people are under the influence of this thinking and mind-set. Through the story of Pecola, the narrator tells that how she has been despised and mistreated by teachers and classmates. Teachers used to ignore her in class even though the first letter of her last name

forces her to sit in the front because the students were supposed to sit in alphabetical order but she is the only one who is made to sit alone at a double desk whereas the other classmates have their partners on double desks.

“But what about Marie Apollinaire? Marie was in front of her, but she shared a desk with Luke Angelino” (Morrison, 1970, p.45).

Teachers have also never tried “glance at her, and called on her only when everyone was required to respond”. It is also shown that when any girl wants to insult a boy or wants to get an immediate response from him, she would say,

“Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove, Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove and never fail to get peals of laughter from those in earshot, and mock anger from the accused” (Morrison, 1970, p.45).

It is quite obvious that from children to adults, from ignorant to educationists, from ordinary people to the religious ones, everyone has shown disgust and anger at the sight of black people and this is because their minds do not allow them to treat blacks as normal human beings just like others. Their minds are unable to break away from the tight shackles of society and eradicate the evil of racism.

Then there is another incident when Pecola goes to shop to buy some candies for herself. The storekeeper, named Yacobowski, does not pay any attention to her. He thinks he is going to waste the effort of casting a glance on something which is not pretty,

“She does not know what keeps his glance suspended. She notices the same sort of distaste in the eyes of all white people for blacks, the distaste must be for her, her blackness. All things in her are flux and anticipation. But her blackness is static and dread. And it is the blackness that accounts for, that creates the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes” (Morrison, 1970, p.47).

This shows that all the whites have same thoughts for blacks and remains the same since it is embedded strongly in the psyche of people. In a metaphorical way Pecola talks about the weeds and expresses her feelings of likeness for them and she wonders that why do people

always hate them and call them weeds. She calls them

“Dandelions, she thought they were pretty. But grown-ups say, ‘Miss Deunion keeps her yard so nice. Not a dandelion anywhere’” (Morrison, 1970, p.46).

This metaphor also shows that people’s way of thinking towards certain things depends upon what society thinks and says about them. The reality of things is not fixed rather it is flexible depending upon the opinions of people. Their opinion regarding certain things makes and shapes a permanent image in the minds of others that is why people’s treatment and way of thinking regarding blacks and weeds is not appreciative and it is the society which has constructed this image of black or white people and weeds in the minds of people. People’s opinion about each other and the way they treat each other make things work and stay in this way in the minds of the rest of the people. This process of image making is slow but it has severe and long-lasting effects in society.

Maureen, who is school fellow of Pecola, Frieda and Claudia, also makes fun of them and bluntly calls Pecola ugly and black. The point is, what has made a little girl to speak such things about her fellows? Clearly the answer would be society. She, being part of a racist society, could not stop holding low opinion about blacks and unconsciously, during a casual discussion, she puts more emphasis on the word “black” making Pecola angry and keeps on yelling at Pecola,

“I am cute and you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I am cute” (Morrison, 1970, p.69).

Then Pecola’s encounter with a boy named, Junior, also shows the typical racist mental approach of people. When he accuses Pecola for killing his mother’s cat, Geraldine all of a sudden scold Pecola without letting her make her position clear to Junior’s mother and tell her the truth. Geraldine, without taking any time, utters harsh words for Pecola,

“Nasty little black bitch” (Morrison, 1970, p.86).

All the above-mentioned instances clearly show that racism is socially constructed and ingrained

in the minds of people. Role of society is very important in setting or creating certain sort of concepts regarding some particular things and notions such as racism. It is obvious that race is not a fixed reality and people have set this norm in society by constantly practicing it. They have passed the concept of blackness and whiteness from one generation to another generation. Though, people are more aware now and many campaigns and movements to give awareness for the rights of black people have tried to eradicate this evil concept but racism is not fully erased from the minds of people and often consciously or unconsciously people talk in a derogatory manner about people of color. They look down upon them. Though, they do not want to be biased or racist in this modern era but the construction of racial belief in white society is so deep that they cannot control their unconscious to speak out at any moment.

People of color find it challenging to ignore the racist remarks that are continually coming to them from a society where racism permeates institutions, politics, and communities. As a result, people of color start to loathe their race and themselves. People with internalized racism may despise their distinguishing physical traits, such as their skin color, hair texture, or the shape of their eyes and nose. They consistently believe that people of color are inferior to white people and are their subordinates.

In *The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Morrison, it is noticed that Pecola, the female eleven years old protagonist, begins to hate herself because of her physical features which make her appear ugly and do not get her public recognition. She often thinks and wonders that why white people hate her and never accepted her in society. She feels rejected and dejected by the behavior of white people towards her and the like. Yacobowski does not look at her while giving her candies, teachers and classmates ignore her totally, Junior uses her to fulfill his own purpose, Maureen yells at her openly and call her black and ugly. As a result of this she internalizes racism and often ponders over her facial features which are not as sweet and attractive as those of whites.

“The eyes, the small eyes set together under

narrow foreheads. The low, irregular hairlines, which seemed even more irregular in contrast to the straight, heavy eyebrows which nearly met. Keen and crooked noses, with insolent nostrils. They had high cheekbones and their ears turned forward. Shapely lips which called attention not to themselves but to the rest of the face” (Morrison, 1970, p.38).

On encountering with almost everyone in society Pecola resigns for getting beautiful blue eyes. She begins to think that only white and beautiful facial features can make her look good and can get her public recognition. By the end of the novel, it is seen that she wants the bluest eye at any cost, bluer than anyone around her and loses her mental balance.

To be loved, admired and accepted is a natural desire of any normal human being. But Pecola and the like are devoid of this privilege. They face a lot of challenges in their life because of the constructed notion regarding their skin color and consequently begin to hate themselves and start aspiring for what they can never get. They begin to think of themselves as inferior and look at white people as superior which keep them frustrated and irritated. They immediately react to criticism and hatred and if they do not express it immediately, they keep it buried in them which later on, come up in the most disgusting, destructive horrible manner. When Maureen uses the word ‘black’ Pecola immediately picks it and gets furious over this and that causes a fight between both of them in the form of exchanging harsh words with each other but when she gets tired of this prejudice towards people of color, she loses all hope and her mental balance consequently. Morrison, through this novel, tries to make people realize the impact of their prejudice and discriminative behavior towards people of color. People of white societies should be more considerate and gentler towards all kinds of minorities and accept them just the way they are, for they have equal right to live their lives in their own way without getting bullied by the dominant cultures.

#### **4.2 Normalization of Racism**

Racism has become quite common as people have become quite accustomed to it. Because of

its daily practice, people don’t mind being racist and prejudiced towards blacks nor does people of color pay that much heed towards their racial segregation and unjust treatment by the white people. As blacks are often kept on low paying jobs and mostly, they are considered to be involved in criminal activities and they are often subjected to imprisonment for a longer period of time, so they have become used to it and racism has become an ordinary experience for them without stirring in them any violent and aggressive feelings of anger and revenge. Whites also do not check on their remarks and behavior for blacks. Their behavior is often subtle and careless towards blacks. People have just normalized it the way they have normalized many other things in their respective societies. When a thing or practice becomes normal in any society it does not bother the people who are practicing it because they have accepted it just like any other thing or norm which is normally being accepted and practiced by them in their lives.

Maureen is seen being careless regarding making remarks for blacks. She bluntly uses the words such as black and ugly and thinks of it as something which is absolutely common, ordinary and normal. Then in the school teachers seem somewhat oblivion of the seriousness of their prejudiced behavior towards blacks. Teachers of Pecola ignore her completely though she sits on the front desk and make it appear normal to ignore black people if you don’t feel like looking at them. No one seem objecting this kind of discriminatory behavior and keeps on going with their daily lives. As far as her classmates are concerned, they don’t want to sit with her on the desk. She is the only one in class who sits alone on double desk and it seems that neither teachers nor do her classmates take it seriously. Pecola also seems used to sit alone on desk as she has accepted the reality that no one wants to sit with her because of her blackness and ugliness and she seems ok with that because otherwise she would have raised question or left that school for its being racist institution. She knows that people love beautiful and white things so she, rather than showing love and acceptance for herself, tries to make

herself beautiful with a pair of blue eyes.

Storekeeper, Yacobowski, is also an apt illustration of normal racial attitude towards blacks. He knows that he is going to waste his time by looking at Pecola so he does not make any effort to look at her. Very ordinarily and casually he ignores her and minds his own business. He considers it normal to ignore people of color and being racial towards them is not a big issue. He will ignore her and the people alike because he thinks it will make no difference whether he looks at them or not. Then the mother of Junior does not seem careful while expressing her anger on seeing her dear cat dead. On receiving information from Junior that Pecola has killed her cat she abruptly utters harsh and insulting words for Pecola and calls her, "nasty little black bitch" (Morrison, 1970, p.86). This example shows that people don't mind to bully blacks and put blame of all the things on them because they are sure that at the end people will surely think of blacks as wrong doers and inhuman. They automatically accuse them for those things which they have not done but because it is normal to punish blacks for no genuine reason and for longer period of time than whites and partly because people consider them criminals and drug addicts who brought all the bad things to their lands, so they, very normally punish them considering them the real culprits without any prior investigation. This whole scenario shows that it is very normal for white people to accuse and punish people of color without any proof of any crime. Racism has become very normal thing in America because people have always segregated blacks, consequently this thing has become a normal practice in their lives and this way they have normalized it in their society.

When Claudia examines the white doll, she actually tries to see how easily people can normalize any practice or behavior in a society. She tries to find that; on what basis do people make and instill the image of a certain thing in the minds of people. She says that it is the people who have normalized the concepts such as whiteness and blackness. People have normalized whiteness as something beautiful and acceptable whereas they have normalized

blackness as ugly, detestable and not as much worth appreciating as whiteness is. This example clearly shows how racism is being normalized in white American society and they do not feel any hesitation while showing discrimination towards people of color.

The kind of treatment Cholly Breedlove receives at the time of his first sexual intercourse with a country girl from two white men shows that being exploited by whites is a normal thing in the eyes of white. They can invade on anyone's privacy without taking into consideration the pride of people of color as if they have no self-dignity. Those two white men behave in that way because they have been taught nothing about the honor and self-respect of people of color. They think they can treat them in this humiliating way because there is nothing wrong with being racists towards them. They consider themselves as superior and they can treat inferiors in whatever way they think they should treat them because, after all, racism is a normal thing in America and who is going to punish them for this heinous act of them

To sum up, it can be said on the basis of above-mentioned arguments that racism has become an experience of everyday life in American society to such an extent that it no longer appears strange. People do not seem that much moved by the racial prejudices by the whites towards people of color because it has been normalized there. Both, the privileged and unprivileged seem ok with what happens around them on the basis of racial discrimination because of the existence of two types of people in American society.

#### **4.3 Racial Discrimination**

Racial discrimination can be seen everywhere in *The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Morrison. It is the major theme of the novel as Morrison mainly talks about racial segregation in her works. She is against this injustice and therefore tries with her pen to eradicate this evil from the minds and lives of people. She is the spokesperson of the rights of blacks. She is seen giving interviews regarding racial discrimination in America and calls it moral bankruptcy of the whites who seem quite stubborn and unable to accept black people

among them. She says their moral bankruptcy is a serious issue and it must be tackled seriously.

In her seminal novel, *The Bluest Eye* which was published in 1970, Morrison clearly shows discriminatory behavior of the whites towards blacks. In this novel she tells the story of Breedlove family who are black. Through their miserable plight in America, she highlights that how badly they suffer only because they are black and ugly. They are totally marginalized by the whites and have no privileges as compared to the whites. Their living standard is quite low and owing to that they are less educated and occupy no good occupation. It seems as if they are quite systematically segregated and kept less privileged so as to remain under white supremacy. They are treated like animals and quite often mocked at by the whites.

An eleven-year-old girl, named Pecola Breedlove faces a lot of problems in white dominated society, shows that racial discrimination is quite common in the United States. She is abhorred by her classmates and they often make fun of her. No one likes to sit with her in classroom. Teachers pay less attention to her and girls often irritate boys by accusing them that they have an affair with Pecola Breedlove in order to make them angry and furious. No one likes to have an affair with her as they consider her black and ugly. Maureen makes fun of her blackness and keeps on calling her black and ugly after having exchanged some harsh words with each other. Whites have completely boycotted the black community in America as it is seen that no one likes them or to sit with them. Junior uses Pecola for his own purpose and his mother does not take a second to rebuke her when she finds her cat is dead and Junior puts all blame on Pecola. Pecola's helplessness shows that no one even believe them despite them being honest and innocent.

Pecola's observation of Yacobowski's behavior towards her also shows how cruelly and badly they are ignored by the whites as if they don't exist around them. She tries quite hard to figure out that what makes him ignore her altogether and she comes to the conclusion that it is entirely her blackness that the storekeeper does not even bother to waste the effort of glance. When Polly

tries to be like white women and to be accepted by them as their friends, she gets rejected very badly by them as they make fun of her efforts of putting makeup over her face just to appear like them but all her efforts go in vain as they are not at all in the mood to accept any black women among them.

*The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Morrison is an obvious illustration of racial segregation of people of color. The novel shows clearly that how black people are considered less worthy of anything. They are not allowed to live a normal life. They don't get equal opportunities and do not get the just treatment from white people. Whole American society seems prejudiced and biased in the matter of blacks. They all want to see blacks under their subjugation. Eurocentric notion seems prevalent everywhere in American society. They think that they are at the center and blacks are pushed to the margins having no privileges like the white people.

To end the discussion, it can be safely deduced that society has played pivotal role in constructing racism. Society has always been in the center to construct images and concepts of certain things and people in particular ways. If we look at gender roles then we come to the conclusion that it is not written in any book to assign certain duties to two sexes based on their gender, it is this society that has decided and given them duties to perform and gradually it has become part of their lives and they began to think man and woman in this way though it is not a fixed reality but people think it is fixed and unchanged part of their lives. Same is the case with racism. Racism is built and constructed by people of society and later on it passed from one generation to another and it has reached to this present condition that people now consider it something normal and unchallenged aspect of life.

Clear marginalization of people of color has also set this image that people of color should be kept under the oppression of whites. It is because of Eurocentric approach of people that divides them into two poles making one good, positive, lovable, superior, civilized and educated while the other negative, bad, detestable, inferior, uncivilized and uneducated. The same thing can

be seen happening in the novel when it comes to Breedlove family and all the other people of color. Their living standard, their occupations and their appearances, all make them to be abhorred by the whites keeping that old colonial notion of marginalization of black people alive and valid but it is clear that racism, then and now, is the production and invention of people and not a fixed reality. Morrison highlights this Eurocentric approach of people and describes the miserable condition of people of color in America. She shows through *The Bluest Eye* that how racially prejudiced mind-set is still working in the back of the minds of 20<sup>th</sup> century people of America.

Many other instances in the novel clearly show this social set-up of construction of racism such as behavior of school teachers and classmates towards people of color, Yacobowski's total negligence towards Pecola, Junior and his mother's behavior and the behavior of Maureen are all examples of society's role in constructing and inculcating the notions like racism among others. Moreover, it is also alarming that people of color have internalized racism and fallen into the trap of society that has tried to set the image of whites as superior while instilling inferiority complex among blacks. Secondly, it has also become normal in their society to be treated in discriminated manner and yet it stirs no resistance among them is because they have normalized racism by making it experience of their everyday life and by paying no serious attention towards this menace of the society which is the main cause of conflicts between whites and blacks.

## 5. Conclusion

There are many people who have conducted studies in order to know about racism that whether it is socially constructed or it has some biological realism in it. It is argued by most of the researchers and analysts that it is a historical reality (Ashe & McGeever, 2011). Earlier people constructed racism in order to get services from the subjugated group of people. They utilized them for their interest and material purposes (Wilson, 2011). In short, it can be said that racism has subjective approach. People divide other people in groups on the basis of

their own personal and subjective approach (Obach, 1999).

*The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Morrison clearly shows the social construction of racism. This novel tells that how discriminatory behaviors of the whites are purely because of their typical mind-set towards blacks. This novel shows social construction of racism, racial segregation and normalization of racism in American society. There are various instances which are taken from the novel to support the argument in favor of the above-mentioned allegations against American people.

It can be concluded that racism is entirely a construct of society. It has no biological basis. People have also normalized it and racial discrimination on daily basis does not move people on seeing such discriminatory behavior of people. Thus, the present study answers to the questions it poses in the first chapter and gives clear illustration of construction of racism, racial discrimination and normalization of racism in American society by applying critical race theory (1970) by Delgado and Stefancic on *The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Morrison.

## 5.1 Recommendations

This study is delimited in the sense that it only covers those parts of *The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Morrison which highlights the social construction of racism, racial discrimination and normalization of racism in American society particularly. It goes without saying that within the small scope of this article, a comprehensive but limited attempt has been made to highlight the social injustice and cruelty being caused by the stereotypes of the society. To expose these issues, one has to go deep into the minds of characters to understand the root cause of their utterances and behaviors towards people of color.

Based on the encouragement I got from studying *The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Morrison with the help of critical race theory (1970) by Delgado and Stefancic, I would recommend for the future researchers to analyze social construction of race in literature and it will help people to understand that how these socially constructed beliefs are practiced in everyday life in such a way that

people think these things are normal having no impact on people but deep down it has serious impacts on the lives and psyche of those who are victim of these social practices. There are many works done by different black and white authors on racism, the future researchers can apply the principle of social construction of race on any of their novel, drama or poems to expose this social set-up and the stereotypical approach of racist people which is an inappropriate but undeniable and unavoidable reality.

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