

# **Pauline's Acceptance to White Beauty Standard and Its Impact on Her Self-esteem in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye***

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study takes Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* as its subject and white beauty standard as its topic. It solely covers the three statements of problems that aim to reveal how white beauty standard is exposed to Pauline, how Pauline shows her acceptance to white beauty standard, and how Pauline's acceptance to white beauty standard affects her self-esteem. The first statement of problem is answered by using the concept of white beauty standard. Then, the second statement of problem is answered by showing the evidences of Pauline actions as the form of her acceptance of white beauty standard. Last, the third statement of problem is answered by using the self-concept inventory which is then supported by the concept of cognitive distortion to reveal Pauline's self-esteem. The analysis of this study reveals that the white beauty standard is exposed to Pauline through beauty images and education, both formal and informal that exists in her society. Pauline gladly accepts the white beauty standard through the lifestyle, beauty images, behavior, and education which she practices, imitates, and adjusts from her surroundings. Her acceptance of white beauty standard then destroys her self-concept that is proven by the great numbers of negative item shown in her self-description. The negative self-concept then leads her to having a low self-esteem, as proven by the distorted ways of thinking she practices such as overgeneralization, global labeling, filtering, polarized thinking, self-blame, personalization, control fallacies, and emotional reasoning.

**Keywords:** *ideal beauty image, self-description, self-concept, distorted thinking, lifestyle, education*

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Background of the Study**

Beauty is a term that practically has varied definition. One may say that beautiful women are those having white skin, lean body shape, and silky straight hair. While others may say that beautiful women are those who are fat; having a darker skin; curly hair. Thus, beauty somehow depends on the beholder (Sekayi, 2003). It means that there should be no absolute standard to define beauty because everyone may have their own view in defining it.

Toni Morrison is one who strongly disagrees with the idea of white beauty standard. She has a notion that every woman should be fine with her physical attributes. Since every woman actually can show their own beauty without changing or even denying any physical attributes they already have, they do not need to fit her with any peculiar beauty standard (Walther, 1990).

This idea is vividly revealed by Toni Morrison in her novels. Here, Toni Morrison strongly argues that white beauty standard which so many people believe in is actually

inappropriate. She believes that beauty is not something to behold, but something one could do (Morrison, 1994). "Morrison was one of the first writers, black or white, to ask what happened to the mind, heart and soul, of a young African-American girl who is raised in a society that values beauty standards that are not her own" (Rhodes, 2001).

In her novels, she tries to reveal how the black African-Americans react to the concept of white beauty standard itself which finally influence their self-esteem. As a great African-American writer, Toni Morrison has been being success to voice her aspiration. She argues that complexion is still to be a great matter among African-American society. Thus, she wants to explore all her aspiration through her great works. Her novels are known to have a "lyrical prose, storytelling, African-American folklore, and African-American history which are giving a new thing to the American literary establishment" (Rhodes, 2001).

As the one of those famous and well known authors Morrison gets so many noble prize in whole her life. She has won a Noble Prize in Literature and became a highly respected editor at Random House at that time

(Rhodes, 2001). As mentioned earlier, Morrison is one of black African-American author who has a great achievement in whole this world. In 1993, she was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, here she became the first black woman to win it.

Morrison has written nine novels in whole her life, so far. Her first novel was *The Bluest Eye* which at the first time was written as a short story talking about a young African-American girl who had prayed to God for blue eyes (Rhodes, 43). Then in 1970 this story evolved into her first novel entitled *The Bluest Eye*. In 2000, *The Bluest Eye* was chosen as a selection of Oprah's Books Club.

Here, this study investigated *The Bluest Eye* because the idea of white beauty standard is strongly revealed in this novel. Although it is the first novel of Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* is considered as one of the most well known work of her, as it was chosen as a selection of Oprah's Books Club. Besides, it provides an interesting problem related to black African-American people's way of thinking and also how they react to the white beauty standard which is to be a great matter. The concept of white beauty standard is completely appearing on the whole of this novel. It vividly tells the reader about a young black girl living in Lorain, Ohio named Pecola who is suffering from her own yearning of the blue eyes.

Pecola was unfortunately born to black African-American Cholly and Pauline Breedlove who crazily longed to have blue eyes. Pecola and her family consider their selves as ugly because of their blackness. The reason why the Breedloves are so ugly is because they fervently believe that they are ugly. They believe that whiteness is a standard of beauty. This term absolutely keep them to be the inferior one. Thus, being black for them is really a kind of curse.

This study investigated "*Pauline's Acceptance to White Beauty Standard and Its Impact on Her Self-esteem in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye*". This study focused on Pauline's self-esteem as the impact of her reaction toward white beauty standard. Pauline here believes that she is completely ugly. It is proven when she tried to make up her face as what the other women did (Morrison, 1994). Pauline really wants to be seen by the society. In conclusion, she cannot accept her condition. Therefore, this study will explore the idea about the impact of acceptance to white beauty

standard on Pauline's self-esteem in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*.

## **1.2. Statements of Problems**

From the background of study above, the researcher formulate the statement of problems as follow:

1. How is white beauty standard exposed to Pauline in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*?
2. In what way does Pauline show her acceptance to white beauty standard in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*?
3. How does Pauline's acceptance to white beauty standard affect her self-esteem in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*?

## **1.3. Objectives of the Study**

The purposes of this study are:

1. To describe how white beauty standard is exposed to Pauline in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*.
2. To depict how Pauline shows her acceptance to white beauty standard in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*?
3. To reveal how Pauline's acceptance to white beauty standard affects her self-esteem in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*.

## **1.4. Significance of the Study**

It is expected to be an example for students of English Literature Department who want to discuss about revealing white beauty standard which is analyzed through psychological perspective. Moreover, this thesis will also enrich the researches in the field of psychology.

## **1.5. Scope and Limitation of the Study**

The scope of this study is about white beauty matter exposed to non-white society, in this case African-American, in America. This study itself was limited mainly on the discussion of Pauline's acceptance to white beauty standard and its impact toward her self-esteem in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. This study is focused on Pauline as a character who strongly experiences the flaming of her self-hatred which finally influenced her own self-esteem.

## **II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Research method.**

Since the aim of this study is to describe the “Pauline’s Acceptance to White Beauty Standard and Its Impact on Her Self-esteem in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*”, the method used in this study is descriptive qualitative.

### **2.2 Data source**

The data were taken from the novel “*The Bluest Eye*” written by Toni Morrison. It was in the form of quotation of dialogues, monologs or phrases which can reveal Pauline’s thought, actions and attitudes related to her acceptance of white beauty standard and its impact toward her self-esteem.

### **2.3 Theoretical approach**

Since this study took a topic about the impact of acceptance to white beauty standard on Pauline’s self-esteem in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, so it used psychological approach. Psychological approach is used because it practically can help us to get a better understanding about human behavior, and of course it certainly can help us to understand literary text, which is also about human behavior (Tyson, 2006).

### **2.4. Data Analysis**

There were some steps taken to accomplish this study. The first step was doing the first reading. It was done to find out the general theme of the novel. This step was really important as the starting point of comprehending the whole theme of the novel.

The second step was doing the second reading. It is done to select some quotations in the form of dialogues, monologs or phrases which are related to the depiction of how white beauty standard is exposed to Pauline in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, which then were analyzed in order to get the characteristics of white beauty standard contained in the novel.

The third step was doing the third reading. This step is done to select some quotations in the form of dialogues, monologs, and phrases which are related to the depiction of how Pauline shows her acceptance to white beauty standard in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, which then will be analyzed in order to get the evidences showing Pauline’s acceptance to white beauty standard.

The last step was doing the fourth reading. This step is done to select some quotations in the form of dialogues, monologs, or phrases which are related to the depiction of how Pauline’s acceptance to white beauty standard affects her self-esteem in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, which then will be analyzed in order to get the evidence that Pauline’s acceptance to white beauty standard practically lower her self-esteem. In addition, it is a must to note all the quotations, phrase, dialogues, monologs and also the page where it is taken from in each reading step. It is done to make the process of analysis easier.

## **III. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURES**

### **3.1 a Concept of Western White Beauty Standard**

The idea of beauty is somehow debatable. Some people say that beauty is white; some say that beauty is something to do with the personality; whereas, beauty is actually relative as told by Morrison (1994) that “beauty was not simply something to behold. It means that beauty is not solely about physical attractiveness. However, white beauty standard exposed in non-white society, African-American, in America is absolutely destructive that unfortunately formed based on the physical attractiveness and believed to be an ideal standard.

A research implicitly stated that many African-Americans believe that a woman is considered as beautiful when she possess blonde hair or straight silky hair, slim and sharp body shape, fair skin, and blue eyes (Sekayi, 2003). And those who are not fit with this standard then will be considered as ugly.

Apparently, this belief has been clinging in people’s mind. It is proven as the mass media which is always provide an icon of ideal white beauty female models having all those white beauty attributes; blonde, silky hair, blue eyes, white skin, sharp body shape. These kind of standard completely influence those who do not posses such criteria with them. Thus, most of them will die to reach this standard.

### **3.2 Physical Appearance**

It is included descriptions of one’s physical appearance such as height, weight, facial appearance, quality of skin, hair, style of dress. Besides, it also includes the descriptions of specific body areas such as neck, chest, waist, and legs.

## **2.2. Self-Concept Inventory**

Self-concept is defined as a term referring to the global understanding of being him or herself. Some self-concept inventory includes as follows:

### **a. How You Relate to Others**

It is included the description of strengths and weaknesses in intimate relationships and in relationships to friends, family, co-workers, as well as how one relate to strangers in social settings.

### **b. Personality**

It describes one's positive and negative personality traits.

### **c. How Other People See You**

It describes the strengths and weaknesses that other people and family see on one's self.

### **d. Mental Functioning**

It includes an assessment of how well one reason and solve problems, the capacity for learning and creativity, the general fund of knowledge, the areas of special knowledge, the wisdom one has acquired, insight, etc.

### **e. Sexuality**

It is about how one sees and feels about their self as a sexual person.

## **2.3. Self-Esteem**

Self-esteem use to be defined as these three terms; it is all about how someone feels about himself or herself, it is how much someone likes himself or herself, or it is the amount of confidence a person has in himself or herself (Podesta, 1990).

## **2.4. Factors That May Affect One's Self-Esteem**

### **a. Overgeneralization**

Someone can be said as "overgeneralizing" when their pathological critic uses to agitate their mind with some key words such as; *never, always, all, every, none, no one, nobody, everyone, everybody* (McKay & Fanning, 1987).

### **b. Global Labeling**

"Global labeling is the application of stereotype labels to whole classes of people, things, behaviors, and experiences (McKay & Fanning, 1987)". It is even deadly in the way it creates the stereotypes and cuts someone off

from the true variety of life (McKay & Fanning, 1987).

### **c. Filtering**

Filtering is a distorted thinking style which is as dangerous to lower one's self esteem as driving a car with all the windows painted black would be to one's physical well-being (McKay & Fanning, 1987). Someone who practices "Filtering" selectively pays attention to the negative and ignores the positive and is too busy filtering the life experiences for its critical content instead of consoling himself or herself by recalling several compliments they have got (McKay & Fanning, 1987).

### **d. Polarized Thinking**

Someone who practices a polarized thinking will define things into absolute, black-and-white categories, in which they have to be perfect, or worthless (McKay & Fanning, 1987). They divide all the actions and expression into two absolute standards and tend to judge them self as a saint or a sinner, a good man or a bad man, a success or a failure, a hero or a villain, a noble or a bastard (McKay & Fanning, 1987). This style of thinking deadly diminishes one's self-esteem.

### **e. Self-Blame**

Self blame is a distorted thinking in which people love to blame their self for everything, whether they actually fault or not (McKay & Fanning, 1987). People practicing it tend to blame their self for all their shortcomings, for being coarse, fat, ugly, lazy, scatterbrained, incompetent and so forth (McKay & Fanning, 1987).

## **IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1. Beauty Images Exposed to Pauline**

To hold the beauty someone does not really need to possess an extremely attractive appearance, yet it is rather to see something worthy he or she can do. But unfortunately, this term seems does not work at the sphere where Pauline lives in, even it works in reverse in which appearance is the most importance things to hold in order to get the beauty.

All groups of people; children, older girls or even adults agree that such physical attributes are the beauty images that should

be a standard of beauty. The magazines might be also illustrated by beautiful white models having the image of blue-eyes, yellow-hair, pink skin, and slim body shape like Jean Harlow. Another beauty images mentioned which are also agreed to be the white beauty standard and said lovable are pearly teeth, red bowline lips, glassy blue eyeballs, and yellow hair (*TBE* 21).

“The eyes, the **small eyes** set closely together under narrow foreheads. The low, **irregular hairlines**, which seemed even more irregular in **contrast to the straight, heavy eyebrows** which nearly met. Keen but **crooked noses**, with **insolent nostrils**. They had **high cheekbones**, and their **ears turn forward**. .... and wondered why they were so ugly. .... it came from a conviction, .... (*TBE* 39).

It is become clearer when the two definitely different physical attributes being compared. The small eyes are considered as ugly when it is compared to the glassy-blue one; the low-irregular-curly hairline is consider less attractive when it is compared to the silky straight and yellow hair; that is why “they were amused by Pauline because she did not straighten her hair (*TBE* 118)”. It shows that a straight hair is one of the physical attributes which is also become a standard of beauty believed so far; the crooked nose with insolent nostrils are considered as ugly when it is compared to the sharp one; the fuller-lips are considered as extremely ugly compared to the red bowline lips; the black skin is considered as ugly when it is compared to the white and smooth one, etc. If such physical attribute are considered ugly as the conviction has made, then the existence of white beauty standard is also a conviction. They, the society, have made such conviction and at the same time they also believe and practice it by themselves.

### 3.1.1. White Beauty Standard Exposed to Pauline Through Beauty Images

Having the ideal beauty images is the thing that every woman treasured, and so does Pauline. However, “When she

[Pauline] tried to make up her face as they did, it came off rather badly (*TBE* 118)”.

All media assure that a beautiful woman should have the ideal beauty images by showing the figure of ideal women through magazines and movies. Jean Harlow is one of Hollywood actress who practically has all those criteria. The lean and sharp body shape, the blue ayes, the blond hair, and the white-and-smooth skin fascinating every woman who sees her.

*“I ‘member one when I went to see Clark Gable and Jean Harlow. I fixed my hair up like I’d seen hers on a magazine. A part on the side, with one little curl on my forehead. It looked, just like her. Well, almost just like. Anyway, a sat in that show with my hair done up that way and had a good time”* (*TBE* 123).

Pauline believes that a woman like Jean Harlow is really beautiful (Rhodes, 2001). The hair style of Jean Harlow, become nicely attractive for her. The short blonde hair of Jean Harlow fixed up in such way as a part being put on the side and one little curl is put on the forehead fascinate Pauline, so that she tries to imitate it.

The image of beauty has spread out to the African-American society in Lorain, Ohio as if it has a magic power to encourage all women to believe it. All the ideal beauty images appearing on the media strengthen the idea of white beauty standard and persuade the follower to fit it.

The society; either they are white, “brown”, or even black are somehow trying to adjust their value in order to make them self as white people. The colored “brown” people, who somehow do not purely belong to the whites, even prefer to judge their self as being in the same class with the white.

The attractiveness of physical attributes is also appearing in a figure of child. If such kind of beautiful woman, who obviously posses all the criteria of an ideal beauty image, can be so captivated and lovable, then the children who posses those criteria, blue-eyes, blonde hair or

yellow hair, and white skin, also deserve the same thing as them.

“... a little girl, ... she wore a pink sunback dress and pink fluffy bedroom slipper ... Her hair was corn yellow. ... the little pink-and-yellow girl (*TBE* 108-09).

It shows that, even a little child who possesses the criteria of ideal beauty images is more favorable than those who are not—like Pecola. Such little girl is considered as beautiful and lovable. Thus, they will attractively deserve a plenty affection and attention from adults, even from Pauline as the maid.

### **3.1.2. White Beauty Standard Exposed to Pauline Through Education**

Other virtues of white beauty standard are got more by Pauline through informal education absorbed from the daily life where she can directly observed the behavior, lifestyle, education of the people around her and their [the white people] culture as well.

#### **3.1.2.1. Formal Education**

Formal education, the “normal school”, holds a quite great contribution in implanting the value of the white beauty standard on people’s mind. Here the black children are taught how to be “well behave” person and how to serve the white man.

They go to land-grant college, normal schools, and learn how to do the white man’s work with refinement: home economics to prepare his food; teacher education to instruct black children in obedience; music to soothe the weary master and entertain his blunted soul. .... They learn how to behave. ... In short, how to get rid of the funkiness (*TBE* 83).

Initially, African-Americans are mainly prepared to work within the white man and serve them with all the politeness. From the education, they strove to wipe away their “funkiness” which is practically not suitable with the value of white standard. It means that they are striving for the fulfillment of the *social ideal image* existed in society.

The different treatment given by the teacher toward the students at school also describes the taking aside of white beauty standard. A white student solely deserves a better attention from the teacher than the black one. Moreover, the black students tend to be despised. It is proven when Pecola is treated differently by the teacher at the school. The blackness and ugliness “made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike”(*TBE* 45). She has to sit alone in double desk while other students get their company (*TBE* 45). It is clear that the white beauty standard has made the difference to be greater than ever. From this different treatment, people learn that the white beauty standard is somehow become everything.

#### **3.1.2.2. Informal Education**

White beauty standard exposed to Pauline through the informal education reflected in the daily life. It is reflected on the attitude, behavior and the lifestyle practiced by the white.

“Houses looked more sturdy, their paint was newer, porch posts straighter, yards deeper. Then came brick houses set well back from the street, fronted by yards edge in shrubbery clipped into smooth cones and balls of velvet green” (*TBE* 105).

The houses of white’ people are described as sturdy, neat, and beautiful house. Those houses look so sturdy because they are practically built from bricks. The virtue of whiteness is clearly seen through those houses. The tidiness, the cleanness, the sturdiness and the beauty are properly combined. Those houses should be inhabited by the wealthy family in which they live happily with all the wealth they have.

As the maid of Fisherman, the white family, Pauline possessively holds the beauty. Her skin glows in the reflection of the white porcelain. Almost all the stuff in that house, are white and all of them certainly clean and shiny. The porcelain is white and glow, the woodwork is white and definitely clean, the cabinets are

orderly polished therefore it is easy to be cleaned and of course shiny too.

“...linen...silk draperies ...the stacks of white pillow slips edged with embroidery, the sheets with top hems picked out with blue cornflower... a porcelain tub ... fluffy white towels ... cuddly night clothes ... yellow hair ... deep pile carpets ...” (*TBE* 127)

The linen and the silk draperies are practically possessed by them, the rich only. The family like Pauline’s is quite impossible possessing such valuable stuff. The beauty and the luxury of such things give a certain proud of the owner. The white pillow gives the impression of cleanness and gives the comfort to the one who use it. They are the stacks of soft and tender pillows that cannot be found in such storefront room.

The sheet with the blue cornflower on the top of its hems is definitely soft and clean, and gives a comfort whenever the skin touches it. A porcelain tub will keep the water clear and clean in it. The fluffy white towel will give the tenderness whenever it wipes out the body without scratching the skin even a few. A cuddly night clothes of the pink-and-yellow child make the little girl more lovable. And the deep pile carpets certainly give the warm whenever the footsteps on it.

Such kind of beautiful ideal house is also can be found in mulatto’s. As colored people who strongly adopt the value of white beauty standard they live prosperously in a “gold-and-green house...where there are porch swings hanging from chains. Where the grass is cut with a scythe, where rooster combs and sunflowers grow in the yards, and pots of bleeding hard, ivy, and mother in law tongue line the steps and windowsills” (*TBE* 82). As the wealth they certainly do not need to work that hard and always has the leisure time to relax them self swinging on the hanging porch—just like an ideal family as Dick-and-Jane story described. Making the house neat and beautiful they get the yard managed such way by cutting the grass neatly and overwhelm it by flowers.

As the real condition those lifestyle, the ideal house is also exposed through the movies – “they [the whites] all dressed up in a big clean houses with the bathtubs right in the same room with the toilet” (*TBE* 123). It shows the lifestyle of white people where they live their life luxuriously, smoothly and happily. All of them, people exposed on the movies, are living in a big clean houses in which completed with the bathtubs and toilet right in the same room inside. They live their life with all the luxurious that make them look so lofty. The big and clean house is become an ideal beauty images of house. Everybody, practically yearn for having this kind of house in their life. Those who can afford such house must be considered rich, wealthy or whites as showed in the movies.

Movies have so much brought great influence in spreading the idea of white beauty standard. It not only provides a picture of the an ideal physical beauty but also provides an ideal romantic relationship between man and woman of white people in which then become an example of ideal attitude in term of romantic relationship.

It is showed on the movie, where the “white men taking such good care of they women, ...(*TBE* 123)”. Being loved and given a good care by the husband is become every women yearn-for, and so does Pauline. The white men, on the movies, do loves and gives plenty affection to his spouse. He never treat his woman roughly nor even hurt her. They become a portrait of an ideal-happy couple living in a big and white house. They love each other and live their life passionately. And it should be a wonderful thing everybody treasured. Pauline pays her attention on this point seriously and really impressed when she watches the scene. Such kind of relationship is in fact craved by Pauline to get from Cholly, yet she notice that it will be quite impossible for her to get, even it is contradict with the things Cholly done toward her—the quarrels.

As the idea of white beauty standard is strongly clinging on people’s mind, it even

becomes more devastating when Pauline, the black people, also extremely believes in it. The society; either they are white, “brown”, or even black who somehow do not belong to the whites somehow trying to behave as white people in order to adopt the virtue of whiteness. Even though they are practically “brown” and obviously are not white, yet they clearly look like white people. Their physical appearance, attitude, behavior and life style, somehow, show that they believe and practice the white beauty standard existing in society which is fortunately nearly fit.

From the statements above, it is proven that informal education in fact give a greater contribution than formal education in the case of giving an exposé of the white beauty images to Pauline. It is absorbed by Pauline through the daily life either in the form of beauty images or the behavior and the lifestyle accepted by the white. Since it is learned by Pauline from the daily life, it is easily influence her mind as the black people which then lead her to be the victim of the existed conviction.

### **3.2. Pauline’s Acceptance to White Beauty Standard**

White beauty standard has created the conviction and at the same time forced almost all people: the whites, the “browns”, or even the blacks, the community where Pauline lives in, to believe it. Pauline, as the one of these people is practically victimized by the idea of white beauty standard existed among the society. She merely accepts the white beauty standard proved by the beauty images, lifestyle, behavior, and education which are she imitated, practiced, and adjusted from her surroundings.

#### **a. Regretting/Mourning Over Her Fate**

Breedlove family is unfortunately born as the “other” in which ugliness is becoming a part of their life. All the member of the family; the father, the mother, the son, and the daughter has their own way in handling and going through their life with all the blackness and the

ugliness covering them. Pecola, the daughter, miserably hides behind her ugliness (*TBE* 39). In other hand, Pauline, the mother that should give all the support, attention and affection to the family runs her role in reverse. Instead of giving plenty affection and bracing up the family, she decide to follow a destructive conviction ever, the white beauty standard, and regrets about all the ugliness which then being denied by herself.

“Mrs. Breedlove handled hers as an actor does a prop: for the articulation of character, for support of a role she frequently imagined was hers – martyrdom” (*TBE* 39).

While her children handle their ugliness in their own way, Pauline handles hers as if it is a curse. Being black and ugly is not a choice of anyone, and so does Pauline. As accepting the white beauty standard she rejects her own self of being black and ugly, “she stripped her mind, bound it, and collected self-contempt by the heap” (*TBE* 122). She cannot accept her ugliness and seems to be suffering holding it as if a martyrdom. Somehow she condemn herself to live her life that way, tortured, which then she wish to be judged as worth by God.

#### **b. Trying to Alter Her Self by Imitating the Beauty Images**

As a follower of such conviction, the white beauty standard, Pauline Breedlove who practically belongs to the second group, the “other”, has been trying to fit herself to meet the standard. She imitates the beauty images so much. She tries to make up her face as the white women did. As believing in white beauty standard actually Pauline wants to alter herself as the standard and tries to make her face to be more white by using too much powder on her face. Unfortunately, it is even become awkward.

Pauline’s desire in fitting the beauty images to be greater when she looks at the other women in town who also believe in white beauty standard. They “wore high-heeled shoes, and when Pauline tried to wear them, they aggravated her shuffle into



a pronounced limp” (*TBE* 117). As stated in the novel that unfortunately Pauline live in the area where most of people living around are the white people in which white beauty standard become their beliefs and lifestyles, then Pauline willingly follows the notion and always tries to internalize it. Pauline once said, “*they was everywhere—next door, downstairs, all over the streets—and colored folks few and far between*” (*TBE* 117). Looking at them, the women in the town, she absorbs some virtues of whiteness and learns how to be like them. In this case, Pauline tries to imitate what they do: wearing high-heeled shoes. Unfortunately, her crooked, arch less, flopped and limp foot does not really make it good to wear such high-heeled shoes.

Altering herself, Pauline tries to make herself to be what she has observed, trying to look like Jean Harlow (*TBE* 123), by fixing her hair like hers; a part on the side, with one little curl on forehead.

Her habit of watching movies has made a great change in her way of thinking. She begins to deeply believe in white beauty standard even obsessed. She does efforts in fitting herself in order to meet the white beauty standard she has learned from both from the surroundings and the movies themselves. It even becomes more serious when she starts to despise all the things that do not fit with that standard which practically adhered in herself.

#### **c. Being Obsessed by the Romantic Relationship Showed on the Movies**

Pauline becomes so often going to movies when she got pregnant of her first son – Sammy. At that time, she was still very young as she got married with Cholly Breadlove. Being at her young age, Pauline practically needs such kind of entertainment to cheer up herself. Moreover, she is not only being obsessed by the ideal white beauty image brought by the movies but also by the romantic love showed on the “silver screen”.

She forgot lust and simple caring for. She regarded love as possessive mating,

and romance as the goal of the spirit. It would be for her well-spring from which she would draw the most destructive emotions, deceiving the lover and seeking to imprison the beloved, curtailing freedom in every way (*TBE* 122).

Pauline has longed for a romantic love since she was adolescent. She used to have a fantasy of having a good man beside her who has “a simple presence with all tenderness, strength and promises of rest whom she can lay her head on his chest and he would lead her away to the sea, the city, the woods ... forever” (*TBE* 113). It has been clinging to her mind that love is all about an absolute possession of the mate in which she can hold the mate tightly in her hand and never allow the mate to leave her.

#### **d. Comparing Every Faces With the Scale of Absolute Beauty**

Pauline’s acceptance to white beauty standard even becomes more devastating when she learns the idea of an ideal physical beauty from the actress and actors of the movies and in fact tries to imitate it as what she has done with Jean Harlow. In equating physical beauty with virtue, “she stripped her mind, bound it, and collected self-contempt by the heap” (*TBE* 122). Here, she obviously believes the idea of white beauty standard and at the same time tries to adapt it.

She was never able, after her education on the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen (*TBE* 122).

It means that she obviously takes white beauty value from the movies she watches. As taking such value from the movies, she starts to appraise herself whether she has fit with the standard yet, or acknowledges whether her physical attributes quite attractive or not. Even more after the education about white beauty standard from the movies, she begins to compare herself whether she has fit the beauty scale she believed so far. Meanwhile, the scale she believe in is taken from the movies in

which there are many figure of white-Hollywood-actress who practically possesses all the criteria of white beauty standard. Certainly, it is not that easy for her to fit the standard and make her lumbered doing this.

### **3.3. The Impact of Pauline's Acceptance to White Beauty Standard on Her Self-esteem**

Pauline's acceptance to white beauty standard in fact gives a bad impact on her self-esteem. The revelation of the impact of Pauline's acceptance to white beauty on her self-esteem here is conducted through the revelation of her self-concept. It will be proved by using the theory of cognitive distortion so that it will be clearly seen what kind of self-esteem Pauline exactly hold.

#### **3.3.1. Pauline's Self-description Based on the Self-concept Inventory**

##### **3.3.1.1. Physical Appearance**

As stated in the novel, Breedlove family is described as such black family whose members are said as "extremely ugly". Pauline, as a member of the family is also holds this label. As other members of the family, Pauline merely has small eyes setting closely together under narrow forehead. The hair is in contrast to the straight—extremely curly, with the low and irregular hairline. She has heavy eyebrows which nearly meet. The nose is keen but crooked looked strange with its insolent nostrils. The cheekbones are high. The ears are turned forward. The lips are shapely thick, and the skin is black making her become extremely ugly (*TBE* 38-39). The cavity in one of her front teeth made when she tries to bite a candy make her even less attractive (*TBE* 118). Pauline has been described as the decayed girl since she was a child. When she was a toddler, she got an injured in her foot that left her crooked, archless foot that make her whole physical appearance even become worse (*TBE* 110).

##### **3.3.1.2. How Pauline Relates to Others**

Pauline in her present time is considered as an ignored mother. As mother she cannot run her role well. Along with her acceptance of white beauty standard she becomes more and more neglect her children and her husband (*TBE* 127). She neither provide any loves, cares, attention, nor gentleness to them.

##### **3.3.1.3. Personality**

As living in such surrounding, Pauline hates herself of being black and ugly by blaming on her foot. Thus, she grows to be such individual that practically lack of self-confidence. This condition leads her to be submissive and feel inferior. It is proven by her when she is treated differently by the doctors for her blackness and ugliness. At the time, she does not bear any protest and silent instead. However, she is become so resentful. At the same time, Pauline feels so irritated and jealous (*TBE* 125).

Her hatred of her own blackness and ugliness then lead her to be an ignorance mother by so much neglecting her family as the part of her blackness and ugliness as well. She merely cannot accept her fate of being black and ugly as well as she rejects her family as the part of her (*TBE* 127-28).

##### **3.3.1.4. Performance on the Job**

As a maid Pauline practically can run her job very well. She does all the things in the kitchen and does other household very well. She serves the white family and takes care of the master's daughter with all her best dedication. She takes care of the master's daughter wit all her gentleness and affection. Even she has become "what is called as an ideal servant" (*TBE* 127).

##### **3.3.1.5. Performance of the Daily Task of Life**

Pauline is practically good at keeping the household (*TBE* 112). She loves tidiness proved by her favors—"likes most of all to arrange things" (*TBE* 111). Pauline not only good at doing it but also enjoy it (*TBE* 112). But in other side, she is

an ignorance mother proved by her action of neglecting the children. Beside, Pauline is too much influenced by people's view of her proved by her action in altering herself in order to "cast a favorable glances" from the other women in the town (*TBE* 118).

#### **3.3.1.6. Mental Functioning**

As a black woman who is not well-educated Pauline merely grows as uncritical woman. It is proved when she accepts the white beauty standard existed in her surrounding without any objection. However, the idea of white beauty standard is distinctively different with her culture as African-American. She solely swallows the formed conviction hook, line and side. Thus, believing in the idea of white beauty standard, divorces Pauline from her own culture.

#### **3.3.1.7. Sexuality**

Pauline and her husband, Cholly, are practically cultivating an unhealthy sexual-living. A quarrel is often preceding their sexual intercourse. As wife Pauline is merely afraid to initiate, thus it drives her to be passive and tends to wait the actions doing by her husband (*TBE* 129-31).

#### **3.3.1.8. How Other People See Pauline**

The women in the town in Lorain, Ohio see her as a miserable limp woman. It is can be seen at the moment they aggravated her shuffle into a pronounced limp when Pauline tried to imitate them by wearing high-heeled shoes (*TBE* 117). They were also "amused by her [Pauline] because she [Pauline] did not straighten her hair" (*TBE* 118). Pauline has been being a figure of a black and ugly girl since she was a child. It is become worse when she got a punch of a rusty nail on her foot that left her "a crooked, archless foot that flopped when she walked..." (*TBE* 110).

#### **3.3.2. Pauline's Self-esteem**

##### **a. Overgeneralization**

From one rejection, Pauline, over generalized and made it a rule and never to ask again (McKay & Fanning 58). The rejection given by her own family

encourages her to form a destructive idea giving her a rule that there should be no one care of her. "Her general feeling of separateness and unworthiness she blamed on her foot" as the source of the indifference she get from the family (*TBE* 111). It sticks on her mind that she is such black and ugly girl that is rejected by everyone and nobody should pay any attention of her. She even thinks that there is no man that will be attracted by her, that is why she just cultivated quite and private pleasures (*TBE* 111). Pauline merely believes the term as a rule and never does any efforts to verify the rule. As the result of the rejection given by her family, Pauline grows to be a quite girl. She never goes out to make a friend or socialize with other. Here, she begins to be so introvert in which keeps everything by herself, even hold the pleasure she get privately for herself.

##### **b. Global Labeling**

The white beauty standard has created an absolute definition about what is called as beautiful. It bears a standard of physical attribute which then become an *ideal social images* that should be fit by those who believe in it. Totally accept the white beauty standard, Pauline not only alter her appearance but also her way of thinking by so much consuming the beauty products in which she wishes to be beautiful whenever she use it. She learns more about the white beauty standard from the movies she use to watch which then influence her view of physical attractiveness.

##### **c. Polarized Thinking**

Polarized thinking is the next distorted thinking style practiced by Pauline in which she lives in a black-and-white world. She divides things into two absolute standards. She judges herself either being beautiful or ugly. Her pathological critic keeps saying that if she can be as white as the whites-people, then she must be ugly. This way of thinking is deathly diminish her self-esteem. Therefore, this distorted thinking leads her to do the actions in fitting the beauty standard in order to bring

her self in to the white polar which then, as her wish, would put her as white beautiful woman. However, it is completely impossible for her to change her black appearance to be as white as the white people. Thus, all her efforts give her failures which then extremely lower her self-esteem.

..... make up her face as they did, it came off rather badly..... dressing developed in her desire for new clothes.....I [Pauline] fixed my hair up like I'd seen hers on a magazine. A part on the side, with one little curl on my forehead. It looked, just like her. Well, almost just like. Anyway, a sat in that show with my hair done up that way and had a good time .... Trying to look like Jean Harlow ... (TBE 118-23).

The treatment she gives to Pecola also represents her polarized thinking. If Pecola is beautiful, maybe she and Cholly would be different in treating her. Maybe they would say "Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We musn't do bad things in front of those eyes" (TBE 49). Since Pecola black and ugly, Pauline does not treat her such way.

#### **d. Self-Blame**

The next distorted thinking practiced by Pauline is self-blame. She merely blames herself upon her blackness and her ugliness. She even blames "all her general feeling of separateness and unworthiness she blamed on her foot (TBE 111)".

The imperfection certainly worsened her condition which then leads the people in her surrounding to despise her. As the matter of fact Pauline cannot deeply realize it which then encourages her to keep blaming her own self of being such black and ugly.

#### **e. Personalization**

The fifth distortion practice by Pauline is personalization in which she negatively compares herself to everyone else, in this case are the other women in her surroundings who practically believe in white beauty standard.

She was never able, after her education on the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen (TBE 122).

After her education from movies, she gets lots of things about what is called beautiful. The white beauty standard then dominated her in observing the ideal white beauty images. Finally, she realize that she completely different from them, that she is not as white and beautiful as them, the whites (and colored woman that adapt the white culture) women. Therefore, it extremely lowers her self-esteem then.

### **V.CONCLUSION**

White beauty standard somehow has been a destructive idea that is practically believed by Pauline. It is exposed to Pauline through various forms described within the daily life, that are beauty images and education existed in the society. The beauty images are presented through the figure of Jean Harlow possessing the criteria of white beauty standard, lean and sharp body shape, the blue eyes, the blond hair, and the white-and-smooth skin, that obviously fascinate Pauline so much; the other women in the town who are also the part of the society that practically agree with the idea of white beauty standard who always despise Pauline because of her blackness and ugliness; the "brown girl" as a part of the society claiming their self as being different from the black people who completely adjust the values of whiteness in whole their life; and the white pink-and-yellow daughter of Fisherman who practically become obviously lovable and deserve a better attention as a white girl as compared to the black one. Meanwhile, the white beauty standard is also exposed to Pauline through education, both formal and informal. Formal education is presented by the "normal school", where the black children are taught how to be "well-behaved" person and how to serve the white man with all the refinement. Here they are also taught to wipe away their

“funkiness” which is practically not suitable with the value of white standard. Another thing happens to the “brown-girls” who make themselves as well-educated person by going to the “normal school” in order to make their self distinctively different from the black people. In other side, informal education gotten from the daily life provides Pauline much more exposé of the white beauty standard. It is presented through the description of the ideal big, clean, white, and luxurious, house possessed by Fisherman as the white people and the “brown” people such as Geraldine as well. The picture of such ideal houses is also appearing on the movies completed by the picture of ideal romantic relationship between man and woman. In addition, the “brown-girls” attitudes in fact give its contribution in exposing the white beauty standard to Pauline. They are such colored people who merely practice and adjust all the things related to the white culture as if they are the real white people.

The beauty images and forms of education that present white beauty standard influences Pauline so much in a way the lifestyle, the beauty images, behavior, and education which she practices, imitates, and adjusts from her surroundings. Pauline merely mourns over her fate of being black and ugly. This condition then leads her to rejects her own self and the family as well. She merely accepts all the things that merely fit the standard and rejects all the things that are not. Abusing Pecola is a form of both her rejection to the blackness and her acceptance to the white beauty standard. Instead of taking care of her own family, she lavishes her affection to her master’s family. She obviously enjoys working with the white family as her total dedication in serving the family and delivering nice treatment to the pink-and-yellow girl. Living with the white family, teach her to be familiar with the whiteness value and adjust their lifestyle. Her acceptance to white beauty standard even becomes clearer when she imitates Jean Harlow’s hair style. Get along with her new habit of going to movies she obsessed by the

picture of ideal romantic relationship showed by the “silver screen”. She apparently so much enjoys the picture showed by the movies and absorbs the education of white beauty standard there. It leads her to cultivate a habit of comparing every face with the scale of absolute beauty she learns from the movies. Giving a name of “Pecola” to her second daughter is also considered as a form of her acceptance to white beauty standard upon her obsession of the picture of ideal beauty images gotten from the movies she watches, for this name of “Pecola” in fact is a name of one character in the movies entitle *Imitation of Life*.

As a result of her acceptance to white beauty standard, Pauline overgeneralizes an event of the rejection given by her family and her surrounding as a rule that there is no one care of her. It leads her to negatively appreciate her self by blaming herself of being black and ugly. Absorbing the whiteness value from the movies, Pauline starts to give a global labeling upon the physical attractiveness. She also begin to divide the things into two different polars; judging herself either being beautiful or ugly. Acknowledging herself, Pauline practices filtering in which she pays so much attention to her weakness rather than her worth. It leads her to negatively compare herself to the other. The feeling of being ugly solely appears on Pauline because she merely believes that she is ugly. This condition then put her as a victim who cannot take a control of the problem she gets in her life. Those are distorted ways of thinking that clearly indicates Pauline’s low self-esteem.

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