

SEXUAL ASSAULT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA: *THE BLUEST EYE* AND *THE
COLOR PURPLE*

by

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing my degree at BRAC

University.

2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.

3. The thesis does not contain material that has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.

4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Abstract

This Paper examines the complex analysis on the two novels *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker in the context of sexual assault and psychological trauma in African- American literature. This research dives into the subjects of sexual assault, racism, power dynamics, patriarchal dominance, spirituality and also the challenges that the protagonists confront in terms of discovering selfhood or self-destruction by a close analysis. These two novels were published as a background history of African-American community which creates a complex interconnection with the experiences of the protagonists to the wider historical and sociocultural atmosphere. This paper examines how the perpetrators commit sexual assault as a victim of the complexities of racism, power dynamics of African-American community. It also examines how the patriarchal dominance and racial discrimination affects the protagonists psychologically and directs them towards self-discovery and self-destruction. This paper also discovers the character's belief in spirituality as a coping strategy which provides a perception in terms of developing faith in religiosity as a path of escape from hardship. This study enhances the comprehension of the long-term impacts of trauma and sexual assault on victims, societies, and the greater context of history by examining the social contexts of African-American literature. Lastly, this study explores how the authors utilize literature as an equipment by raising these complex issues and developing empathy for the protagonists. It challenges readers to engage with the narratives of hardship and resilience critically by highlighting a general discussion on the long-term impacts of trauma and the chances of healing through the African-American experience.

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INTRODUCTION:

Toni Morrison and Alice Walker are two African-American writers who had a significant philosophical contribution to American society. As the representation of sexual assault in literary works is complex and often contentious, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker show how two distinct and interrelated narratives can describe the sensitive topic of sexual assault and psychological trauma through the fictional characters, Pecola Breedlove and Celie. It seems that Pecola and Celie are portrayed as an image of those individuals, particularly black women, who encounter difficult circumstances in their society. Both writers dive deeply into such an unpleasant topic and provide a closer view about the lives and struggles of these African-American women who had to live with the devastating effects of sexual assault. The two novels were written and published in the second half of the 20th century, and both authors are recognized for their compelling narratives and their powerful awareness of sexual assault. *The Bluest Eye* and *The Color Purple* demonstrate how racism, sexism, destructive family trauma, categorization of individuals and criteria for beauty are all combined into one category by sexual abuse. Sexual assault is represented in these two novels as a very terrible and traumatic experience which affected the survivors, Pecola Breedlove and Celie, for rest of their life in a physical, mental and intellectual manner. It leaves scars on the sufferers and the characters start questioning about their self-worth rather blaming the perpetrators, Pa and Cholly Breedlove. Sexual assault is very sensitive and complex issue which triggers Toni Morrison and Alice Walker to write about it in

their works. This particular subject plays a vital role to represent how black women suffered as a victim of sexual abuse. African-American authors such as Toni Morrison and Alice Walker depict black women's experiences of mental trauma and the healing process through their works to show how devastated their life was and how they survived. Both of the authors portray how the characters take initiative to cope up with the trauma of sexual abuse. Morrison depicts how Pecola could not get over from the trauma and her life journey becomes so painful. Again, Walker demonstrates how Celie dealt with to get over from her traumatic journey by raising her voice. In African American literature, the abusers sexually harassed black women which leads to an eternal impact on their experience and identities. They were categorized based on their color and gender. Many authors employed the power of literature to challenge the issue of violence and mistreatments of black women against the stereotypes that are created by the society. This paper will demonstrate how both authors introduce an in-depth understanding of the emotions of female characters who experience the emotional and bodily effects because of sexual abuse and mental trauma and how they deal with it in the context of *The Bluest Eye* and *The Color Purple*. By comparing the portrayal of sexual assault and psychological trauma in these two novels, this research will set a unique perspective of how literature explores two different yet interconnected context addresses the issue of trauma, racism, power dynamics, sexual assault and coping mechanism.

THESIS STATEMENT:

Sexual assault of Pecola and Celie by their fathers is referred to the portrayal of victimization of a prohibited conduct which is represented in *The Bluest Eye* and *The Color Purple*. Cholly Breedlove and Pa who have committed sexual assault have faced prejudice because of their gender, color or perspective on superiority in *The Bluest Eye* and *The Color Purple*. This unlawful act creates an extra layer of suffering for Pecola and Celie who already have experienced unstable family trauma which leads them towards the path of healing by believing in spirituality as an escape from the reality.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:

This paper will examine Pecola Breedlove and Celie's multifaceted incidents by providing insight into the intricate connection between racism, sexism and abusive actions in African-American society and how they cope with psychological trauma. Furthermore, it will discuss how sexual assault causes harm to Pecola and Celie physically and how it is a constant and damaging activity that reinforces the patterns of emotional trauma and fear. This paper will demonstrate how both writers use their creativity by pointing out the devastating consequences of psychological trauma that Pecola and Celie have experienced. Therefore, by examining similarities and differences, this study will focus on how these two novels represent sexual assault and mental health of these fictional characters and how psychological trauma direct the protagonists towards transformative force of self-determination and self-exploration. This research will help to understand the experiences of the protagonists, the pattern of human behavior, traumatic recovery and the influence of race and power dynamics related to sexual assault.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY:

According to my thesis, my research will address how do the female characters experience sexual assault and psychological trauma differently or similarly in *The Bluest eye* and *The Color Purple* and how does this affect the lives of the protagonists? What are the reasons of committing sexual abuse by the male parent in *The Bluest Eye* and *The Color Purple*? How do racial, class and power dynamics intersect with sexual assault addressed comparatively between these two novels? How do Toni Morrison and Alice Walker portray psychological trauma of the protagonists through the perspective of literature in these two novels? How do the characters cope with the trauma of sexual assault in *The Bluest Eye* and *The Color Purple*? What methods or techniques do the characters use in contrasting or compatible way to heal and recover from the effects of sexual assault in these two novels? Is there a particular support system or relationship that helps the survivors in their recovery in *The Bluest Eye* and *The Color Purple*? How does the trauma of sexual assault impact the characters' relationships with themselves, their family members and their communities in these two novels? In *The Bluest Eye* and *The Color Purple*, why do both of the protagonists choose belief in spirituality as a way to escape from the reality of their lives? In order to discovering the answer of the research questions that I introduced, I will apply a qualitative method in my work. I will look at earlier study on the causes of sexual assault, psychological trauma and make comparisons thorough readings of both of these works,

and I will also gather academic data to support my claims. In my study, I will use theories of psychological trauma, racism, power dynamics and belief in spirituality.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

The article “Anatomies of Rape” delves into the many aspects of assault stories in literary, social, and cultural settings. It addresses the silences and tensions within discourses on sexual assault and looks at how interpretations of rape not only describe incidents but also establish standards of sexuality. The writers of “Anatomies of Rape” explore how politics, aesthetics, and cultural conceptions of identity are intertwined in symbolic depictions of sexual assault. The study also recognizes the contribution of African-American authors like Ellison, Morrison, and Walker to break societal taboos by giving voice to both offenders and victims and exposing the unacknowledged histories of those who have been sexually, economically, and racially abused. It also considers the difficulties in interpreting incest stories in the context of developing family structures, intensified by discussions about the influence of feminism and the supposed destruction of conventional family systems. By restricting the analysis of the incest genre to narratives of father-daughter abuse or surrogate father-daughter abuse, *Telling Incest* reinforces this statement which Heller mentions in her article. These interpretations provide a powerful criticism of the public and private patriarchal structures, shedding light on how the oppressive ideology of white cultural paternalism and the seemingly nonpolitical dysfunction of the incest genre are connected. Furthermore, the study emphasizes how trauma, whether psychological or political, acts as a thematic connection between different fictions while also establishing individual experiences, highlighting the intersectionality of trauma within

the literature. It also discusses the importance of how rape has been interpreted throughout time in American literature and society (Heller, 2004). This particular study discusses about the pattern of sexual abuse which is connected to my research topic as my research will examine about sexual assault, family structures and trauma.

A significant amount of study has been done to identify the characteristics that males who sexually assault women have in common. These characteristics often fall into three categories: past experiences like childhood abuse, personal attributes such as social skills and thoughts, and situational factors like views on peers' behavior or substance use. Even though, the majority of research focused mostly on American data, a few studies from other countries were taken into consideration because of their applicability or to enhance the limited American data on certain topics. This research examines the association between childhood assault and subsequent sexual assault is motivated by outcomes that connect childhood abuse with adult problems such as relationships, drug misuse, despair, and aggressive conduct. This paper defines how researchers have examined the relationship between actions that affect a child's mental health or sense of self-worth throughout childhood and becoming a victim of sexual assault later in life (Greathouse et al). This article identifies the reasons of committing sexual assault by the perpetrators which is a most significant part of my research to discuss about.

Sharon M. Wasco defines the restrictions of trauma response models for women who have been raped are discussed in this article. He focuses on two primary problems: first, how therapeutic implementations of trauma models may prioritize certain symptoms, establishing certain types of distress while neglecting others. Secondly, how limited standard trauma notions are in expressing the variety of women's experiences in a sexist society. According to him, the essay challenges Western notions on trauma by using the rape of women as an example to

provide different perspectives to promote a more in-depth and culturally sensitive approach in understanding sexual violence. This article describes by observing a traumatic event, such as a rape, the requirements used to determine posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) frequently concentrate on particular elements like extreme fear and threat to life but they may ignore the social and cultural influences that impact how women interpret and respond to such events. Wasco mentions that social rules and regulations, for instance, influence women to justify the offenders or take responsibility on themselves for the assault, which could worsen the emotional damage caused by the trauma. It also emphasizes how rape should not be seen as a one-time event since it has a lifelong effect on victims. Rape has impacts that go beyond the physical attack and include long-lasting, psychological sensations. A specific cultural standard of suffering may be reflected in the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Various ethnic groups may not share similar symptoms such as avoiding indications of the traumatic incident or feeling too conscious, but disturbing memories and emotions relating to the traumatic event, like rape, may. The text also raises the possibility that women with differing degrees of privilege or from different cultural backgrounds may react differently to similar traumatic experiences. Many variables influence these reactions, including gender, socioeconomic class, race, and prior experiences of victimization. For example, compared to women with more social or financial benefits, women from underprivileged background such as women of color or those from lower socioeconomic status may perceive and respond differently to sexual assault. These variations in perspective may have an impact on whether the horrific experience validates or damages their established misconceptions about an equal world (WASCO, 2003). As psychological trauma is an essential part in my paper, this article shows the form of psychological trauma and its side effects.

Jerome Bump shows how the Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* engages readers in experiencing the internal reality of a character, Pecola, who would probably be classified as "schizophrenic" because Pecola suffers from racism and is afraid of ugliness. Readers are deliberately drawn into Pecola's tale by Morrison's use of narrative style which creates a sense of intimacy and curiosity while maintaining them from immediate, painful details. According to the novel, readers are compelled to confront their role in maintaining society's ideals of beauty and the misery that impacts individuals who don't fit in by connecting with Pecola and Claudia. Bumps demonstrates that Morrison brilliantly addresses the idea of cultural views of ugliness to expand the discussion beyond racism. In order to develop empathy and a greater comprehension of the emotional suffering faced by Pecola, how readers are encouraged to consider their own experiences of feeling inadequate compared to societal norms. In the end, this study highlights how stories like *The Bluest Eye* have the power to make readers more aware of how they participate in sustaining social stereotypes as well as their sensitivity to the suffering of others. It emphasizes on the ability of literature to generate empathy and encourage action against injustices as well as an in-depth examination of accepted beauty and acceptability standards in society (Bump, 2010). This article identifies a beneficial point for my research which indicates how social awareness can be raised by using literature as a powerful tool among the readers.

This study of "Probing Racial Dilemmas in *The Bluest Eye* with the Spyglass of Psychology" aims to illustrate the advantages of combining psychological concepts with works of literature. It considers that combining these theories enables an enhanced understanding of the actions and concepts of fictional characters. This more in-depth understanding provides a new perspective on these people and emphasizes how relevant the problems they face are to modern

society. In this study, both of the authors demonstrate Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* in particularly this point because of the difficult moral and societal problems it implements, especially those connected to the female body and racial difficulties. The main objective of this study is to illuminate these subjects by using the use of psychological frameworks, offering fresh perspectives that correlate with current social issues. In this particular article, Zebialowicz and Palasinski emphasize on how black people are fascinated by the white standards of beauty and not confident about their own skin color, blackness. In this study, both authors mention that Toni Morrison and Du Bois aim to go beyond conventional ideas of race and culture by challenging white ethnocentrism. They also mention that Morrison's and Du Bois's analysis of black psychology advises against impulsively following the white ideals that are considered higher by white people. By demonstrating Pecola's experience, their works emphasize on the importance of going beyond these profound ideas and cultural frameworks and emphasizing against the catastrophic consequences of following whiteness. They also demonstrate how Claudia and Frieda are confident about their blackness rather than focusing on the standards of white beauty. Anna and Marek also discuss that how a negative attitude toward one's Black identity could arise from not only a dissatisfaction with one's skin tone, but also the feelings of embarrassment about everything associated with African culture, such as a rejection or lack of appreciation for African customs, language, attire, or music. Thus, both of them portray the issue of race and beauty standard that are founded in the characters of *The Bluest Eye* (Zebialowicz and Palasinski, 2010). This study has a purpose to show how black people like Pecola are fascinated by white people and also highlights how Claudia and Frieda have different perspective on that. But this study lacks in establishing the fact that Claudia and Frieda's perspective could not help Pecola to change her perspective.

Lauren Berlant explores how complex Afro-American identity is portrayed in the context of sociological and historical factors by examining *The Color Purple*. Beyond only examining gender oppression, the essay delves further into the social and historical context of oppressive paternal ideals. A major change in the narrative occurs when racial violence takes dominance over sexism as the root cause of social violence. This transformation complicates ideas about Celie's identity by exposing the inconsistencies of sexism and racism established in her experiences. She mentions how the novel uses an opposite method to highlight the experiences of women above patriarchal events to criticize the injustices of sexism and racism. It also offers a national and personal identity framework, nevertheless, one that is based on mythical justifications for social interactions. All things considered, *The Color Purple* successfully combines themes of race, gender, and social representation, providing a sophisticated examination of Afro-American identity in the larger framework of societal systems and systematic oppression (Berlant, 1988). This article reflects the effect of sexism and racism in terms of creating identity of the protagonist in *The Color Purple* which is related to my discussion about Celie's self-discovery.

The article "Queering black patriarchy: The salvific wish and masculine possibility in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*" identifies how Walker's literary works, especially *The Color Purple*, are examined in detail, as well as the works of prominent critics like Gayl Jones and Ntozake Shange. It looks at how these writers dissolve the traditional black family, emphasizing the possibility that it sets black women in danger because of the power relations amongst black males that are patriarchal by nature. It also looks at Walker's goal of "queering" and modifying black families by eliminating the traditional authority from black men and reframing connection for black fathers, brothers, and sons. Jenkins explored the gendered complexities that define the

black community's quest for a patriarchal family structure are also discussed critically. It clarifies how Walker's narratives' breakdowns of this framework can question and complicate the traditional definitions of black masculinity. Beyond the representation of a distant or inadequate father figure, Walker's portrayal of the black family challenges the conventional patriarchal structure and questions the idea of the powerful black patriarch. The article explores the concept of "fatherlack" as indicated forward by Sharon Holland, emphasizing the difficulty created by black culture's inability to uphold patriarchy or its absence. It presents the idea of the "salvific wish," connecting it to the desire, especially held by middle-class and female persons, to free the Black community from the negative images of domestic and sexual dysfunction that are perpetuated by white racism. Walker's portrayal of individuals from diverse socioeconomic origins is seen as an approach to disprove claims of racism, as shown by their yearning for bourgeois professionalism. This study also examines how the male characters in *The Color Purple* impose restrictive societal standards on black women by controlling their conduct at home and during pregnancy. These depictions highlight the connection between the enforcement of strict social norms and violent acts intended to force women into predefined patterns of behavior in the home. The article clarifies how patriarchal control over family life is always aligned with masculine assertions of salvation, illuminating the nuanced and complex nature of power relations within Walker's novel (Jenkins, 2002). This article notifies the black patriarchy which has a great impact on the protagonist's life which plays an important role in my thesis.

The essay "Don't Tell": Imposed Silences in *The Color Purple* and *The Woman Warrior*." explores how racism is portrayed in literature within the framework of various cultural situations. It highlights the representation of how sexism appears differently in many cultures, taking into consideration the various causes of it. King-Kok draws an attention to the

differences between Chinese Americans' silences which are shaped by anti-Asian immigration laws and Black Americans' which were affected by the legacy of slavery. According to her, these two cultures exhibit distinct forms of sexism. Compared to Maxine, he defines that Celie's suppression is significantly more brutal and aggressive and her resources have been severely limited from the beginning. Due to her lack of formal education, Celie is first unwilling to express herself, while Maxine becomes mute in class as she has to learn a second language. Their psychological demands for expression are comparable, despite cultural variances. King-Kok's goal is to highlight significant similarities between the authors' narrative techniques and the characters' challenges. Upon closer examination, the barriers imposed by gender and race ultimately transform into sources of artistic and personal power. The notion of silencing women introduces both *The Color Purple* and *The Woman Warrior* narratives by highlighting a similar theme of imposing silence. The female victim carries the weight of the consequences of an illegitimate relationship, limiting her opportunity to express her feelings or share her narrative, while the male transgressor avoids punishment. The restriction of the woman's voice serves as the main form of punishment in both narratives and it is a purposeful act of power and control. In the communities and cultures shown in the novels, women are punished for raising their voices and their stories are lost in silence. It also highlights the way in which these limitations finally become sources of creativity and personal power for the people in the stories (King-Kok, 1988). As this article talks about race, gender and power control about the novel *The Color Purple*, these theories are also interconnected with my thesis.

Terrence Musanga and Theophilus Mukhubaand, two prominent writers discuss about a womanist interpretation of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* which highlights a significant difference from African American literature authored by men. In their work, they emphasize on

race and class above gender and depicts how Walker's examination of the multidimensional intersectionality of Black, Poor, Ugly, and Female in America is often neglected. African American women who have been selected for solitude but struggle for authority and emancipation are shown throughout the story. This struggle is demonstrated by women like Celie, Sofia, Shug, Mary Agnes, and Nettle who aim for freedom and self-determination while crossing capitalist, patriarchal, and racially divided cultures. They identify the central theme of this novel that is Celie's progress from a silent and submissive character to an independent and powerful one, which is supported by womanist notions of "family" and "sisterhood." They discover Walker's dedication to African Americans' "survival and wholeness" is reflected throughout the narrative by highlighting how crucial these ideas are (Musanga and Mukhuba, 2019). This article shows how Celie's struggle towards independence become successful through the support of family and sisterhood, the journey of self-exploration of Celie will also be identified in my paper.

Rosalie Murphy Baum represents how the consequences of alcoholism of the parents affects their children through a close reading of *Maggie* and *The Bluest Eye*. According to Rosalie, it is a common issue in both white and black community that children suffer from mental pain for their parent's behavior and action. She points out that a combination of societal and financial pressures as well as the protagonists' efforts to escape this stressful situation leads them to alcoholism. But mostly, it is formed by family and personal behaviors that developed from the stress. She mentions that alcoholism is not the only factor contributing to domestic violence and abandonment of children, while it is evident that alcohol can increase and even permit violent behavior in these situations, greatly affecting how people see the families that are impacted. Turning to alcohol is only one way to express oneself and it is a way to escape

suffering and stress and a way of proving one's self-worth. In her essay, she demonstrates that how this understanding of alcoholism resonates with the research of multiple psychological and social behavioral scholars. She explains that how Stephen Crane's 1893 novel *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* described a young Caucasian girl growing up in the Bowery with her two brothers, where they witnessed their parents get into violent conflicts. After seventy-seven years, in 1970, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* illustrated the challenges faced by an African American girl and her brother as they grew up in Lorain, Ohio, despite domestic violence. Alcoholism has an intense impact on the parents' lives in each of these literary works, which causes harmful effects on the children. But these situations highlight the fact that drinking alcohol is more of an effect than a cause. Rosalie depicts how Mrs. Johnson and Cholly's drinking habits ruined their children's mental health through this article. She identifies that both works focus significantly on the family structure to explain how the difficult upbringings of the characters in Morrison's and Crane's novel affect them as adults. The family dynamic is profoundly impacted by this upbringing, which is shown as devastating. In both novels, the effects of parental violence on the children are disastrous. She illustrates that Crane and Morrison highlight the victims' agency in shaping their own fates, even if they are also victims. They draw attention to the fact that even the children have a role to play in their life for their own outcomes. She explains that the story represents a terrible reality in which breaking out from a victimization cycle seems difficult due to its enduring impact on future generations (BAUM,1986). Rosalie's article points out the negative effects of alcoholism of the parents towards their children, my paper will also connect this with Pecola and her father and how their family were affected by this.

Susmita Roye emphasizes the philosophy of Morrison's writings, especially her genuine concern for the lives of neglected girls, and exposes a constant subject of feminine weakness

taken advantage of by social injustices. Morrison's stories—which cover decades and a variety of social classes—elucidate the ways in which race, poverty, and familial relationships hold up the advancement of characters such as Florense, Sorrows Pecola, and Claudia by highlighting the brutal mistreatment they endure. Her purposeful attention on marginalized people exposes the flawed gender and social structures that perpetuate injustices, challenging society blindness and forgetfulness. Morrison's campaign transcends racial barriers, embracing a common childhood that is harmed by pervasive sexist prejudices. This article highlights how Morrison's feminist theory breaks beyond racial, social, and cultural boundaries, highlighting the universality of girls who are privileged or prevaricated being victimized by the prejudices of their eras. Additionally, it explores deeper symbolic meanings in Morrison's titles, comparing *The Bluest Eye* to symbolize restrictions of society and "A Mercy" to represent the promise of many forms of human redemption, demonstrating her wide range of artistic vision. The essay ends by emphasizing Morrison's fiction as a world shaped by social realities but operated with resiliency and optimism, depicting disturbed girlhoods as an expression of courage and survival and as violent eruptions of anger (Roye, 2012).

It seems that Lewis T. W. offered a thorough examination of Walker's writings, illustrating her investigation into the development of a moral community against the background of the individual and societal catastrophes that early 20th-century Black Southerners experienced. She clearly states the risks she takes to get her work recognized as fiction rather than as a reproduction of reality. Walker offers a role model for those struggling with cultural disorder and a feeling of alienation from both the outside world and oneself through his depiction of the black experience within the larger American narrative. Lewish mentions that her novel explores a world in which people's lives, shaped by unpredictable social forces, are a search for

meaning inside themselves, in their communities, and in the larger globe—a place where both life and death are worthy of celebration. This research gains depth from Gunn's viewpoint on spiritual direction comes from literary elements found in fables, as opposed to explicit commands or character theological criticism. It seems that Walker's novel uses a variety of techniques that challenge its imitating structure, turning it from a real-life narrative into a fable with a wider range of references. Walker's work seems to negotiate the complexity of human life in the context of history and society, providing not only a narrative but also a contemplative journey that goes beyond simple storytelling. Her proficient use of literary devices appears to take the book above a simple account of events and provide a complex examination of human behavior, identity, and connection in the context of a fable (Lewis, III, 1990). Lewis's article talks about how Alice Walker portrays real-life incidents through fictional characters which is significant for my research as my paper will discuss how Walker's fictional character's represents the lives of black women.

This article "Coping Strategies of the women in Alice Walker's novels: Implications for survival" examines how Alice Walker depicts numerous coping mechanisms used by African American women in her writing, especially as shown by characters like Margaret, Mem, Celie, and Shug. In contrast to Shug's certain self-reliance, Celie's perceived dependence and lack of self-sustaining motivation are highlighted as the subtle differences in their coping mechanisms are addressed. It also highlights the necessity for an in-depth examination of coping methods' efficiency beyond their fictional context, highlighting the caution that must be used when extrapolating literary depictions to real-life situations. Robbie J. Walker analyses that Alice Walker's characters explore a variety of coping mechanisms, highlighting the need for appraisal in overcoming obstacles but also recognizing that appraisal by itself cannot ensure success

(Walker, 1987). This article benefits my paper as it identifies the process of coping mechanism with trauma by showing empathy and support of an independent fictional character to the survivor.

According to the article “Sewing, Quilting, Knitting: Handicraft and Freedom in *The Color Purple* and ‘*A Women’s Story*”, handicrafts are becoming more and more popular, which suggests that people are realizing how important they are for developing communities and maintaining traditions. It recognizes that these crafts are more than simply products; they are also a means of passing along knowledge from previous generations. Furthermore, it implies that when individuals work on handicrafts, they discover a safe haven where they can express themselves freely and without hesitation. This might imply that working together to produce art creates an atmosphere in which people feel free to express themselves honestly, allowing for unrestricted conversation and the sharing of ideas. In general, it highlights the importance of handicrafts in modern society on a social, cultural, and communicative level. This article discusses about how oppressed women fight for their freedom by choosing the path of doing handicrafts in the context of *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker and Peng Xiaolian's film *A Women's Story* (Lewis, 2001). The concept of this article shows an outstanding outcome of Celie’s hardship which is a significant part of my research paper.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

CHAPTER 1:

Portrayal of Sexual Assault in *The Bluest Eye* and *The Color Purple*:

Sexual assault is an influential issue to discuss about in African-American novels. It is an allegorical depiction of the larger social violence that African Americans, particularly black women like Pecola or Celie have ever experienced. It can also be a significant element in both Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* where they introduced sexual assault and the process of healing from the past trauma through their characters to portray black women's sufferings.

The term "Sexual assault" describes undesired sexual behavior or action that is placed on someone against what they want. In most countries, it is illegal and considered a violent crime since it violates a person's rights, dignity, and freedom of choice. Sexual harassment is a forbidden act which causes misery that is even worse than physical harm. In addition, the scars of sexual assault affect the survivors severely which causes long-lasting emotional and psychological damage. Beyond the act itself, sexual abuse has a lasting impact on a survivor's relationship, self-worth, and general well-being that may extend for years or even a lifetime. In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison demonstrates how the character's experience of psychological and emotional trauma particularly Young Pecola who is greatly influenced by the surroundings of 1940s Lorain, Ohio. In order to address Pecola as a victim of her darkest experience which her own father attempted, Toni Morrison highlights the issue of sexual harassment against black

women. It was not an easy-going path to overcome the worst nightmare for any women but Morrison beautifully depicts it through a school going girl Pecola. The relationship of Pecola and her father portrays a twisted plot that elaborates the experience of black people who have suffered from dysfunctional family trauma which can be depicted in *The Bluest Eye*. Children are very delicate and most of the times they suffer from mental trauma because of their own family issues. They can not cope up with the circumstances that they face for dysfunctional family system. Most of the people who suffers from trauma in society originate from households. Pecola goes through an emotional damage because of her family members. The people surrounding her always neglects her including her own father, mother, brother and her neighbors which makes her more desperate for getting blue eyes. Pecola's quest for blue eyes further emphasizes on the racial tension and malfunctioned family stress that ruined her self-esteem. She views those blue eyes as an ideal state of approval and beauty, but her yearning also serves as an indication of the predominance of European ideals of beauty in America at that time. African-Americans people have experienced racism, segregation, and a steady erosion of their cultural identity in the context of society. They were formed according to the society's system instead who they are and how their lives matter. Similarly, in rural Georgia, at the height of segregation and persecution, unfolds the journey of Celie, a black girl who was living in the early 1900s. Celie's circumstances provide a representation of the difficulties black women encountered, particularly in relation to physical and sexual assault. It also alludes to the black feminist movement, when Black women first challenged established gender stereotypes and standards, just as Celie did. Black feminist movement theories employ multiple kinds of strategies in shaping the connection between social inequality, establishing complex structures and geographies of Black women's lives. Additionally, Black feminism affirms the diversity and complicated nature of Black

women's situations which represents in accordance to the significant eradication of distinction that comes with objectifying African-American women as the "Other". Black feminists have been particularly aware of the forms in stereotypes and socioeconomic representations which varies for women according to their ethnic background and race (Burnham, P. 03). During that significant period in American history, the protagonists of *The Color Purple* are affected. The novel explores the struggles and victories faced by African American communities at that period.

1.1 Pecola's experience of sexual assault:

Cholly, Pecola's father, sexually assaulted her in an unexpected manner. Cholly was drunk when he arrived at his home. Cholly spotted Pecola scrubbing the dishes one spring Saturday afternoon. Pecola's movement of her body made Cholly to feel uncomfortable. While doing the dishes, Pecola shifted her whole body to one foot and scratched on the back with her toe in a quiet and dejected manner. As she was washing the dishes, her hands moved in a circular motion around the frying pan, bringing black flecks into the cold, shimmering dishwater. She had her back bent over the sink, making Cholly restless to imagine what he was feeling or seeing. He was remembering the memories of Pauline by watching Pecola doing the dishes. He was confused about his feelings and he mixed his emotions of love and intimacy at that moment. He was not prepared at that point. His dissatisfaction turned into love when he realized how uneasy he was. He was overwhelmed with emotion, he bent over and put his hand on Pecola's foot. He went close to Pecola and tried to play around with her after grabbing her leg while she was doing the dishes in the kitchen. When she paused, on the edge of slipping, Cholly placed one of his hands on her backside and pulled her. At first, Pecola felt uneasy and powerless but she was compelled to participate in the sexual activity by Cholly. "The confused mixture of his memories

of Pauline and the doing of a wild and forbidden thing excited him, and a bolt of desire ran down his genitals, giving it length, and softening the lips of his anus” (Morrison, 1970, P. 128). The pain inside her vagina was too much for him to handle. She made a sound like a void as he drove into her so hard, like his heart and mind were exploding into her. It was so hard to get away from her that he had to grab his genital and press it out. Because her father was more powerful than her physically, Pecola felt powerless over him which was unfortunate. After experiencing sexual assault, Pecola was unconscious and Cholly did not know what to do with Pecola as she was lying on the floor. He covered her with a blanket and left her there in the kitchen floor. When she opened her eyes, her mother was gazing at her with great curiosity that why she is lying on the ground. When Pecola's mother appeared and she had been wrapped in a thick blanket, the small girl made an effort to make sense of what was happening between her thighs and the way her mother's face hovered over her. Pecola's mother was unaware of the incident that happened with Pecola and she felt uncomfortable when she saw her lying on the kitchen ground with a blanket. Cholly's action made her to desire for the blue eyes to be accepted in his eyes. She thought that if she had blue eyes, her father would never treat her in that way. Aftermath, she suffered from psychological trauma as a result of being made to engage in sexual actions in order to appease her father. Additionally, she was pregnant with her father's child which damaged her sense of self-worth.

1.2 Celie's experience of sexual assault:

In addition, Celie is the female protagonist of *The Color Purple* where Alice Walker shows how her lead character experienced sexual assault by her step-father, also known as 'Pa'. Nevertheless, Pa contributed to Celie's terrifying life rather than being a nurturing and supportive

parent. Celie went through an endless stream of physical and psychological assault while she was in his possession. Celie, a young black girl who was just fourteen years old, her stepfather mistreated her and never said anything kind to her. She experienced physical violence, suffocation, being forced to do physical tasks also at the same time she was experiencing sexual assault. Celie expressed how she felt because of the abuse, “When that hurt, I cry. He start to choke me, saying You better shut up and git used to it” (Walker, 1982, P.03) Because of her mother's condition, Celie was compelled to fulfill her father's demands since her mother was not able to do. He was desperate to satisfy his sexual desires also he was cruel to her mother. Celie's stepfather used her while her mother was not around for medical care. Celie explained, “She went to visit her sister doctor over Macon. Left me to see after the others. He never had a kind word to say to me. Just say You gonna do what your mammy wouldn't.” (Walker,1982, P.03) As she was compelled to have sexual orientation with her stepfather, Celie frequently became unwell. “And now I feels sick every time I be the one to cook.” (Walker, 1982, P. 03) Celie continued to satisfy her stepfather's need for women, and in doing so, he looked at her mother in kindness as she was sick. When she was fourteen, her father had deceived her about executing the first of her children. He also sold her second child and she had become impregnated repeatedly. She was never permitted to do whatever she wants. Pa always tried to control Celie and his frequent interruption in Celie's life was making it hard for her to cope up with. Her mother was concerned that Celie became pregnant, she asked Celie that whose baby was she carrying in her womb. But Celie did not want to expose the name of the father of the child. As her mother was ill, she did not want to hurt her by revealing the father's name of the first child. So, she replied, “God's”. (Walker, 1982, P.04) The people closest to her never provided her with any mental assistance, and she experienced psychological neglect during her early years. No one

inquired about her choices. Due to her pregnancy and health issues, her father disallowed her from attending school. Celie wanted to study but Pa thought she was not so smart like Nettie. So, when Mr. __ who was also known as Albert, came to see Celie for marriage, Pa started convincing him that Celie would be a perfect household for his children as she was good with taking care of children. Celie expressed to Shug Avery how Pa abused her while her mother was not around. She explained the girls had their own room with a wooden walk connecting it to our home. Except for Mama, no one ever entered that space. However, Pa came in one day and asked her to trim his hair while Mommy was out of home. He carried a stool, comb, brush, and scissors. He gave her a strange look as she chopped his hair. He seemed a bit uneasy as well. Until he grasped her and dragged her up to his legs, she had no idea why. She was stunned and it was so painful for her. The pain was unbearable as she was doing his hair. Her pants were ruined by the blood flowing down her leg. After assaulting Celie sexually, Pa never gave her and Nettie a straight glance. She was crying and telling Shug about the assault which was committing by her step-father.

Both of the protagonists, Pecola and Celie, went through similar type of abuse yet different circumstances in *The Bluest Eye* and *The Color Purple*. Both Celie and Pecola got pregnant by their fathers because of the assault. Pecola was sexually assaulted by her own father because of her father's traumatic situation. On the other hand, Celie was sexually abuse by her-step father only for fulfilling his physical desire which he could not get from Celie's mother.

CHAPTER 2:

The cause of committing sexual assault:

Power dynamics and racism can influence individuals to attempt assault in black women by black communities. In black communities, racism plays a significant role in doing systemic injustice which can affect relationships of family members. Past oppression and the consequences of racial discrimination influences individuals to feel marginalized or powerless in certain situations. The dynamic of racism arises from the loss of achieving a level of the expected norms. This loss triggers the feelings of resentment and sadness and make the victim parents feel guilty for not protecting their children from the damaging effects of racism (Utsey, P. 72). In *The Bluest Eye* and *The Color Purple*, the attempt of sexual assault of Cholly Breedlove and Pa creates a hazardous social prejudice in African-American novel. It reflects the complicated dynamics of discrimination which includes race and power through the character of Cholly Breedlove and Pa's experience. Pa and Cholly lived their life with limited sources as they were black people and used to live in an isolated societies which tried to oppress them. They were frustrated by the legacy of racism, sexism and superiority complex which has created such a community where Black men were not valued even as human being that forced them to commit the major sin like sexual violence.

2.1 Cholly Breedlove: The Victim of Racism and Power Dynamics in *The Bluest Eye*

Cholly Breedlove, Pecola's father engaged in sexual activity with his daughter in *The Bluest Eye*. He did not grow up with his family. He was rescued at the age of four days by his aunt Jimmy after his mother neglected him at a young age and put him in a garbage bin. He was completely unknown about his biological father's identity. Jimmy, his aunt, nurtured him by herself. His inability to establish relationships with people was a result of his parents' lack of appropriate affection and care. It is really hard for a child to accept parental abandonment whereas Cholly Breedlove had experienced that in an early age. Racial prejudice and financial hardship prevented both of his parents from giving him the parental affection and care that all children require. They mistreated and rejected him which left an effect on him with a lifelong feeling of loneliness. Cholly felt unloved and unsupported by his family, which prevented him from developing the caring interactions that he required to grow both physically and mentally. He was obligated to deal with the difficulties of life by himself. His heart was empty from this feeling of emotional loss and solitary existence which he attempted to replace with drinking and harmful conduct. He was constantly in need of affection and companionship but never knew how to get either. His feeling of estrangement from society was further exacerbated by discrimination. Because of all of this, Cholly found it difficult to feel worthy of affection or capable of giving it to others. Cholly's problems connecting with others became harder as he grew older. He turned to alcohol as a coping mechanism for the traumas of his childhood, which preserved him disconnected from his family.

Cholly Breedlove is a convoluted and catastrophic character who attempts a terrible crime by assaulting her own daughter sexually. Cholly committed this illegal act out of rage towards the society and the system which were formed for the black people where he lived. His inability to provide love and care to his own daughter has forced him toward the path of self-

destruction. Cholly was frustrated because of his past experiences which has come out later through his actions. He has grown up with the burden of his parent's abandonment and also the lack of love and support which develops emotional growth for a human being. This kind of dysfunctional family brought internalized pain and trauma. Furthermore, racism and systemic oppression has affected Cholly in deeper level which further exacerbates him mentally. Later, it came out as his actions such as attempting sexual assault of his own daughter.

As a black man, Cholly was dominated by the white people. His past experience exemplifies how frustrated he was because of his childhood trauma. The feeling of a helpless father and the victim of racial discrimination in society have made him to do this kind of violent act which is prohibited and considered as a major crime. In *The Bluest Eye*, Cholly has experienced the worst moment of his life when he was with the girl whom he used to love. Two white people embarrassed and made fun of Cholly Breedlove when he was young. He experienced the most difficult phase of his life, which caused emotional distress. He was in an insecure relationship with a young girl called Darlene after his tragic death of his aunt Jimmy. He was obsessed with Darlene. Cholly was intrigued to have a sexual experience with Darlene. He was interrupted by two white men as they were in a position of intimate moment. They said, "Get on wid it. An' make it good, nigger, make it good" (Morrison, 1970, P. 116) He was forced to continue sexual activity while they were looking on since they were in front of them holding a spirit lantern and a flash light. He felt weak and unable to take any action during that time compared to those two white men as he was a black boy. They wanted to witness their love making process which converted Cholly's pure mindset into hatred for Darlene. It indicates how crucial the white people were towards the black people. Rather than giving them privacy, those two men enjoyed their intimate moment by interrupting violently. Cholly was experiencing the

feeling of helplessness and devaluation, and this terrible event was the starting period of his subsequent unstable and disastrous life. This terrifying experience was something that he would never heal.

As a coping mechanism for his childhood experiences, which included social prejudice and other traumatic experiences, he became addicted to alcohol. He was temporarily relieved of the intense pain by drinking alcohol. Cholly's action towards Pecola has come from his distorted point of view about intimacy and superiority. His inability to control his mixed emotions was bounded with his terrible experiences and exhibited as a violent act. Cholly's assault of Pecola was not intentional, it did not come out of desire or lust rather it was attempted out of his inner conflict and trauma. He had distorted point of view about sexual intercourse which misguided him towards destruction. He could not identify the difference between giving unconditional love and making love. He attempted this sin to gain superiority and control over someone who is helpless as like as him. Before attempting the assault, there were lots of question that was roaming around his head. He felt so helpless that he could not answer his own question. He was unable to understand why Pecola admired him so much. He questioned what he could do for her, what he could give her, and what he could say to her while feeling useless and guilty. It was not easy to show affection to a black father to his children and make them happy. Cholly could not understand how to show his affection that will make Pecola happy. He asked himself that what a black man could say who had experienced so much hatred possibly to his daughter who was in such distress. He was in dilemma how to express his emotions to Pecola. His affection and hatred hold his mind so immensely that he could only think about how he loved Pauline and made her giggled with happiness. He wanted to passionately grasp her because she was clearly in despair and he was accusing him. A feeling of regret and powerlessness overcame him, and he

contemplated how he might console her verbally and what he should do to uplift her state of mind. There was a troubled, compassionate glance in her stare, and when he gazed at her, the hatred he felt for her seemed to explode in his stomach. He couldn't figure out the reason Pecola adored him. His mind was rushing, questioning how it could be that she loved him so much. She had no reason to love him, yet she still did. The question that immediately came to his mind that what he should do in response to that? Give it back? In what manner? (Morrison, 1970, P.127) He had no idea how to cheer up Pecola. He questioned himself that what his wrinkled hands could offer to make her giggle? (Morrison, 1970, P.127) At that moment, he was recalling those memories he had with Pauline. He was standing over a wall in Kentuch and gazing at nothing, Pauline was doing the same thing the first time he had seen her. A weird tenderness, not the typical rich lusciousness that comes with spreading right legs, but rather a kind of tenderness and protection, filled him as her creamy toe scratched her velvet leg. He tries to bite her leg and make Pauline laugh. She was tighter than Pauline when she giggled so he felt it with his closed eyes and allowed his hands to push into her waist. He felt an overwhelming feeling of excitement run down his body, giving him power and warmth in his genitals, as it combined Pauline's thoughts with the act of doing something violent and taboo behavior. He secretly wished to express gentle affection to her in between of all this courtesy and yearning. But the kindness, however, was short-lived and he committed the major crime.

2.2 Pa: The Victim of Racism and Power Dynamics in *The Color Purple*

The character Pa, often referred to as Alphonso in Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple*, has an ambiguous background. His personality examines the larger cultural landscape that created him in this way, even though Alice Walker did not provide much information about

him in her novel. A period of systematic discrimination, extreme poverty, and sexism in the early 1900s in the rural South is depicted in *The Color Purple*. Pa's image captures both the terrible realities of women's struggles in his household and the pervasive authority and violence that prevailed in the time's inadequate rural communities. Pa's early life was damaged by great poverty and prejudice based on race. Pa would have experienced the racial discrimination where he grew up in the rural South. During that time, racism was pervasive and African Americans had minimal financial choices. Pa felt powerless and frustrated, and this undoubtedly made him feel that way. It can be contemplated that Pa experienced brutality and hardship at his youth. Pa could have reverted to violence as a coping mechanism for the harsh circumstances he experienced due to his upbringing in a segregated and financially underprivileged community. It can be presumed that Pa's early existence was characterized by the same systematically unfairness and misery as Celia and Nettie's as Alice Walker did not share any details regarding Pa's past. It can be assumed that Pa was raised in a racist society where he might have suffered from trauma continuously because of systemic discrimination. His dominate nature came from this kind of established rules which were created by the American community. The feeling of helplessness came within him as he was subjected to constant prejudice and exile. He did not have any control over his life after being subjected to such dissatisfaction. It is s possible that in this circumstance, Pa adopted the idea of power dynamics that he learned from the society and ultimately realized that dominating and controlling others was the only way to get honor and freedom of action. The toxic masculinity standards that were presented in Pa's surroundings and might have encouraged him to accept violent and dominating conduct as acceptable which might have contributed to the formation of this influenced mindset. It can also be considered that Pa's action should be generational abuse. From one generation to the next, violence is often learned

and transmitted. It is possible that the society he belonged from accepts these kinds of actions. It can also be assumed that he observed or was abused by family members. Male members of a family as like as Pa had a lot of influence over the people around them in this patriarchal environment and were often seen as the unquestionable rulers of their homes. The continuous pattern of physical assault and the mistreatment of women were made possible by this dominant structure. The fact that Pa abused Celia sexually and which eventually led to her carrying his two babies in her womb, is among the most disturbing feature of his character. Celie was separated from her children because of Pa which confirms his brutality to his own blood. He demonstrated his deficiency of empathy for his own children with this terrible action. Celie defined his cruelty through her writing, "He took my other little baby, a boy this time. But I don't think he kilt it. I think he sold it to a man an his wife over Monticello." (Walker, 1982, P.04) It implies that Pa could have been apathetic to his offsprings as a consequence of his early experiences. The repercussions of established discrimination and assault against women are both highlighted and perpetuated by the pattern of oppression. Even though the novel skips over Pa's past life, it offers an effective Criticism of the systemic prejudice against women at the period. Pa represents the rigid gender norms and authority structures that dominated the culture he grew up in. His acts serve as an exact representation of the abuse and suffering which women often endured with no support or safety as like as Celie. Pa had subjected Celia to physical assault at a young age. He used to often beat her, causing her emotional and external suffering.

Both perpetrators were victim of racism which influenced their lives and mindset. Cholly Breedlove was an African-American man who lived in a racist community and Pa was also an African-American man who lived in same community in another time period. Racial discrimination is a major factor which dehumanized these two characters as a result both Pecola

and Celie suffered for the rest of their life with the feeling of guilt and disrespect. Both Cholly and Pa must contend with the constraints imposed by a culture that routinely subjugates people of color. They face discrimination due to their race. Their actions and interactions are shaped by this, which leaves them feeling helpless and frustrated. In both of their cases, gender stereotypes also play a significant role. These two particular characters were influenced by masculine standards which were strictly enforced by society. According to Cholly and Pa's mindset, the qualities of violence, control of emotions, and domination characterize a man which created a misinterpretation of power dynamics. As both of the main characters suffered because of power dynamics, their feeling of isolation and helplessness is increased by it in their different cultures which perpetuates patterns of rejection and confines them in systems of oppression. As a result, Pa and Cholly found it difficult to live up to these expectations of society.

CHAPTER 3:

Experience of Psychological Trauma:

The consequence of experiencing of sexual assault leads to Pecola and Celie's psychological and emotional trauma. They were struggling with the emotions of grief, shame and unacceptability which they received from their offender. The ideal society which systemizes all the rules and regulations were unsuccessful in terms of ensuring safety to the sexual assault survivors because of their race, gender and inferiority as black people. Both Pecola and Celie suffered from mental trauma as a result of their unstable family condition and the experience of sexual assault.

The term "psychological trauma" describes the damage that may be caused to the body and mind as a result of one traumatic experience or many related ones. Dealing with the impacts of trauma may be quite difficult as they are often very serious. Several studies have shown that people who are subjected to a variety of traumatic events, such as assaults, conflicts, and catastrophic events, have a higher chance of developing long-term mental trauma. Researchers have studied the impact of emotional trauma on individuals, the people they love, and the larger society for decades, so this is not a new discovery. Anything may cause trauma, such as the unexpected discovery of a sexual assault that leaves the victims with lifelong consequences. It may have a long-lasting effect on their physical and mental health, and it can be difficult to get over it. The basic symptoms of trauma include depression, memories of the traumatic event, anxiety, difficulty in sleeping, and feeling hyper-alert to any signs of danger (Kaminer, Debra,

and Gillian Eagle, P. 29). It might be hard for one to move on from these wounds as they can last a long time. Trauma impacts not just the individual experiencing it but also their family and community. Family dynamics that are chaotic, unhealthy, and characterized by dysfunctional patterns can provide cause for trauma. Psychological trauma which happens because of family relationships can refer to a variety of situations and occurrences as well as the immediate and long-term impacts on the victim of psychological trauma. Whether intentional or unintentional, these traumas arise and spread in interpersonal space and have especially strong effects when they are intimately related to early primary attachment bonds (Isobel, Sophie, et al. P. 550). Long-term exposure to dysfunctional family dynamics, which may take many different forms, including drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, neglect, manipulative behavior, and more, is what leads to this kind of trauma. This kind of trauma has permanent consequences that might follow a person for the rest of their life. Survivors of abuse who are raised in a disruptive household often experience a lack of affection and support. The survivors of abuse often take all the burden of guilt that happens with them instead of the abuser. They believe that they deserve to be mistreated than admitting someone they admire did something to hurt them intentionally. This reflects the strong feelings of worthless, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Kaminer, Debra, and Gillian Eagle, P. 45). Additionally, it may hinder children's ability to connect and create healthy attachments, which may make it challenging for them to establish long-term relationships in the future. It may be challenging and time-consuming to figure out every aspect of dysfunctional family trauma. Adult survivors of this kind of trauma could be carrying unaddressed emotional baggage from their early years, which can lead to harmful coping mechanisms like drug abuse or unhealthy relationships.

3.1 Pecola's experience of dysfunctional family trauma in *The Bluest Eye*

Pecola's family was extremely malfunctioned as she lived with her father, mother and brother Sammy. It was difficult for Pecola to stay with her family members because her family was dealing with lots of issues. She has faced a lot of worst experiences which causes her emotional and mental pain because of her own surroundings and people. Her mother and father were not concerned about their daughter's mental health. They were dealing with their own problems for living their life. It was a common scenario of black family at that era because they were struggling in establishing their own identity in 1940s at Lorain, Ohio. Pecola's parents could not provide the affection and protection she deserved as a younger child from her parents. They did not have enough time to take care of their own children. Pecola's father, Cholly Breedlove, was an alcoholic and his past trauma of racial discrimination and neglect from his parents led him to attempt sexual abuse of Pecola. Pecola was always wanted her parents love and care. Pecola's mother Pauline were more obsessive about her job as she was a house attendant in a white family. She loved to work in a white family and she was also obsessed with their life style. She was more committed to the white family rather than her own family. She gave importance to the child of that family instead of giving love and care to her own child Pecola. When Pecola, Claudia and Frida visited the white family, she insulted and thrown out them because of ruining her work. Pecola felt unloved and uncared for her parent's misbehavior, and the family's incapacity to create a safe and secure atmosphere for her. It demonstrates how much personal stress can damage familial ties and negatively affect a child's mental health. Pecola's brother Sammy was also never showed up for her. Pecola was all alone and ignored by her relatives, even to her sibling. Sammy often ran away from the house when their parents

started quarrelling and went violent against each other. He never cared about what Pecola felt. She felt even more abandoned when he was not around her. Sammy always tried to separate himself from the concept of family structure, but his actions were ineffective. Pecola's parents were not providing the loveable and supportive approach to her which made her feel too lonely and she was hurt by her brother Sammy's disengagement.

Relationships grows better in a family if there is love, care, support which creates a deeper bond among the family members. Even, a child's healthy mentality can be raised in a healthy familial environment. But children like Pecola could not afford this kind of family bonding because of their race, color and gender. At a period when racial discrimination and dissociation were pervasive in America in the 1940s where Pecola and her family used to stay. They were subjected to deliberate discrimination as an African-American family which had an impact on every part of their life. Due to racial prejudice, Pecola's family had minimal financial opportunities. In addition, they used to get lower salaries and restricted professional choices which were available to African-Americans in the work sector, there was a significant economic difference between the races which made it challenging for people like the Pecola's family to achieve economic security. Family income can be a substantial risk factor for sexual assault, however, many researches have used datasets that are not similar by race in terms of family structure, marital status, faith, parental status, occupation, and socioeconomic position (Amodeo, Maryann, et al, 2006). Pecola also encountered racism on a regular basis. Her psychological and emotional health was impacted by the overwhelming prejudicial views that has produced a traumatizing and stressful atmosphere. The way society perceives beauty, particularly in relation to being white, had a significant impact on Pecola. Pecola was obsessed with the concept of Eurocentric beauty which focused on having light skin and blue eyes. The notion of Eurocentric

beauty was popular in 1940s back then which created excessive expectations in young girl's mind that makes them to feel inadequate. *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison depicts the response of a young girl to a social norm that suggests that beauty is limited to young white girls with blonde hair and blue eyes (Cardona, Nancy K, P.13). The fact is hard to swallow for any black girl that they are judged by her color which ruins their identity. Pecola was bound by the concept that if she possessed light skin or blue eyes she would be admired and appreciated by her father, mother and brother. If she achieves the blue eyes, she would create an example of beauty and she would be valued by others. Her aspirations and identity were greatly influenced by her ambition to transform herself. Pecola's mind was contaminated by the concept of an exemplary appearance which was depended on racism and discrimination and it was extremely genuine. She felt useless and started self-destructing because of this unachievable beauty ideal. It was hurtful to Pecola, but it was also a symbol of the way in which beauty standards are exploited to oppress and harm individuals, particularly young girls of color. It emphasizes on the fact that the concept of beauty standards leads to self-damage. This type of concept should be examined and changed as it is a threat to the black community. Because of this beauty standard, Pecola was ignored and humiliated by her neighbors including the shopkeeper, Geraldine, Maureen etc. It was difficult for Pecola to ask for help and she felt left alone as they were bothered by their own stuff. All these actions led Pecola to feel not worthy for the community and led her to suffer from interpersonal mental trauma. She could not express her feelings to anyone. She was alone which led her to hallucinate about getting blue eyes.

3.2 Celie's experience of dysfunctional Family Trauma in *The Color Purple*:

In *The Color Purple*, Pa, who is also known as Alphonso or Fonso, created most difficult path for Celie to cross at a young age in her life. It was not only about the incident of sexual assault but he also made her life worst that anyone can ever imagine. His humiliating and dominant behavior towards Celie impacted on her so badly. Celie got pregnant with Pa's child as a consequence of sexual assault which highlighted the extreme level of physical and mental torture. She was unaware that her children were alive or not because Pa took them away from Celie which led her to the grief of disrupting her motherhood.

Celie endured inhumane abuse from him on a regular basis, which crossed the limit of tolerating the sexual assault. His intention was ruthless. Celie not only suffered physically but she also went through mental pain because of the assault. For her, mental pressure was too much which she could not able to handle. In compare to this, physical pain was less painful to her. Celie expressed the incident of her assault to Shug Avery that how her Pa made excuse to abuse her physically and how she was mentally affected because of that incident. When Nettie was separated from Celie, she became lonely and broken. Nettie was the only one Celie loved and cared in her life. Nettie was the one who used to give Celie comfort and consolation in every stage of her life to fight from the harsh realities. Pa decided that Mr. __ should marry Celie instead of Nettie as she was good with taking care of children. Mr. __ did not like Celie but he had no option rather than marrying her because of his offsprings. Celie was forced to tie in a marriage where is no love and freedom of speech. She was unaware of the fact that she was entering into another disastrous situation which would give her more mental and physical pain. Mr. __ was a brutal dominated male character. He always devalued women around him. Celie suffered a lot because of his dominating and oppressed behavior. It was filled with assault both

physical and emotional. The instability in her family which set out with Pa's violence and concluded with her mother's desertion, had a significant impact on Celie's life from an early age.

Celie's mental condition was also impacted by the unstable family structure, in addition to her individuality. Celie felt insignificant as a result of her father's behavior, which made her feel unworthy. Her lack of self-possession and realization of inadequacy prepared her for all the difficulties that she encountered later in life. Simultaneously, Celie's mother did not provide her any kind of physical or emotional support when she was alive. Celie said, "My mama dead. She die screaming and cussing. She scream at me. She cuss at me. I'm big. I can't move fast enough." (Walker, 1982, P.04) She was unable to provide protection from her father's violence and to intervene on her behalf. Celie felt neglected and unwanted as a result, and her emotional wounds worsened. Celie's tremendous anxiety and disorientation arise from her father's abandonment and abuse, which is preventing her from developing her own identity. Her father mistreated Celie physically and sexually throughout her early years, which had a profound effect on her personality and mental state. This kind of abuse may have disastrous long-lasting impacts and is a typical issue in abusive households. Celie felt terrified and powerless after seeing how much control Pa held over her through his cruel assaults. She lived under continuous pressure because of this anxiety. The most devastating incident in Celie's life was being sexually abused by her father. The physical assault severely affected Celie as a result she could never be able to engage in any kind of healthy relationships. Celie's unstable family structure led her to life-long trauma which she suffered for a long period of her life. In her house, she was not safe and her mother was failed to give her the protection she needed at that time. She was physically assaulted by her mother's second husband and her mother was unaware of that. Celie could not tell her

mother about the abuse because she was sick. She was carrying all the burden of this traumatic incident silently within herself which she faced because of her dysfunctional family structure.

Both Pecola and Celie were experiencing psychological trauma because of their unstable family structure. Both Pecola and Celie did not get any support from their mothers. Pecola was all alone and there was no one to support her or take stand for her. She was not treated well by her family members. Even, Pecola did not get any support from her brother Sammy as well. Again, Celie went through the same trauma because of her dysfunctional family structure. As Celie's family was malfunctioned, she was traumatized by her step-father's actions. However, Celie got enough motivation and encouragement from her younger sister, Nettie.

Chapter 4:

Coping mechanism with Psychological Trauma:

Pecola Breedlove, a character in *The Bluest Eye*, desires she had blue eyes to escape from the reality of her life. Pecola's desire for blue eyes is a result of her inaccurate opinion of her beauty and her need for affection and approval from others. Pecola's need for this unrealistic desire is an expression of her spiritual desire for approval and transformation through a physical transformation that stands for acceptance and belonging. It reveals that Pecola's longing for blue eyes is a tragic way for her to escape the standards that society imposes on her worth as an individual. On the other hand, Celie in *The Color Purple* uses her faith as a means of coping, healing, and self-discovery. Celie finds solace, courage, and a means of self-expression in her letters to her god. Celie finds peace in her spiritual connection, protecting her from the harsh realities of sexual assault, injustice, and social norms. Celie's path to self-acceptance and self-love is similar to her spiritual path. Her deepening connection with God serves as a direction, guiding her through difficulties and finally recovering her voice and dignity.

To escape from emotional pain, People those who have gone through psychological trauma try to heal through religious belief. The term “Religious beliefs” assist those who suffer from trauma and conflict with emotions of distrust, anxiety, or hopelessness by encouraging them to believe in something beyond themselves. People who have experienced trauma mostly search for an alternative perspective on the meaning of life and objectives. Certainly, spiritual or religious beliefs and values play a significant role in every community. Spirituality and

religiosity focus on the search of individuals inner self to find out the meaning of life, connections through divine (Peres, Julio FP, et al, P. 346). This belief may develop into confidence that things will improve or that what they are experiencing has purpose. It builds hope in the believers that belief in spirituality will provide comfort to those who hold faith and their suffering will be ended. Pecola and Celie's traumatized assault led them to the path of religious belief to heal from their harsh realities.

4.1 Pecola's path of escapism: Belief in Spirituality

Pecola went through a lot of sorrow in her life. Her family did injustice to her and did not treat her the way she deserved. She was also experienced hatred due to her color and her appearance by her own community people. For Pecola, it was a secure way to have trust in spirituality where she could escape from her pain and find comfort. She was able to isolate herself for a while from the extreme pain that characterized her existence through to this particular kind of distraction. She knew that only the path of spirituality could fulfill her desire to get back the honor and acceptance in her community which she lost due to her sexual assault. Pecola proceeded to Soaphead Church who was a fraud and a false mediator of the creator. He claimed, "He (Lord) sometimes uses me to help people" (Morrison, 1970, P. 138) As he pretended as a spiritualist, Pecola visited Soaphead's place with a hope of convincing God to fulfill her request for blue eyes. When Pecola requested him to communicate with the God for her desire, Soaphead Church gave her false hope and replied, "If He wants your wish granted, He will do it." (Morrison, 1970, P. 138) Though she knew it was impractical, she considered it as a means of enhancing her self-worth. It demonstrates how much Pecola was desperate to get acceptance and affection. She believed that her desire for blue eyes would make her unique in

appearance and she would be valued and appreciated for who she was. Even though it was an unrealistic desire, she felt hopeful and valuable because of this thought, which illustrates how society's expectations of beauty may severely damage someone's self-esteem and how people can go in extreme ways in order to gain acceptance and love. But Soaphead Church was known for his wicked actions which he used through the use of words and logic to fool others. He had a very pessimistic perspective on God. He believed that offering prayers is insufficient to God that is why he does not give any importance to the suffering of the people. He thought that God is powerless and he has nothing to do about it. He was proficient in social psychology but he did not utilize his knowledge for the betterment of society instead he utilizes it for his self-interest. He focused on vulnerable people in order to satisfy his own evil desires. His infatuation with young women defined Soaphead's deformed mentality. He believed that he could assist these young women in achieving their goals or satisfying them by fulfilling their wish by utilizing his deceptive powers. For instance, he wrote letters to the little girl Pecola to develop an illusion of hope and freedom in her just to demolish it later and enjoy the suffering that he created for her.

4.2 Celie's Path of escapism: Belief in Spirituality

Celie suffered a lot both mentally and physically. She could not able to share what was happening with her to anyone. Then, she found a way to express her pain and helplessness through her letters. She used to write everything that Pa did with her. She believed that God was there to listen when nobody wanted to. Religious belief gives individual the strength and courage to be strong in any circumstances. Celie had suffered a lot but her trust within God gave her the comfort to move forward. She could only describe her true feelings and let go of the difficult periods in her life by writing letters to God in which she expressed emotions of sorrow,

anxiety and solitude. Religion shows a path to deal with hardship in life. Celie was quite sure that her God was with her and he was keeping his eye on her though she could not see him as he was keeping eye on her from her away. Her belief gave her the courage and hope to deal with every obstacle that came on her way to destroy her honor and identity. Her strength and ability to persevere through difficult situations come from her trust in God. It provided her with hope and motivation to go on. She wrote, “Dear God, I am fourteen years old. I have always been a good girl.” (Walker, 1982, P.03) The novel also explores how various people's expressions of religion might vary from one another. Though extremely private, Celie's religion was shared by others. Shug Avery, a friend of hers and companion, on the other hand, had an independent set of beliefs. Her faith was more naturalistic and extraordinary. According to Shug, “God is inside you and inside everybody else.” (Walker, 1982, P. 176) She considered that God existed in the lovely world and that there was a closer, more personal relationship with him. Her philosophy was profound even though it differed much from the conventional religious views of that particular time. Her perspective on spirituality emphasizes the diversity of spiritual experiences and demonstrates how religion can reveal itself in a multitude of ways, all of which can provide consolation and strength. Celie's belief increased as she became closer to Shug and began to see God more clearly and intimately. Shug assisted her in seeing the divine presence in her own life and the beauty of the planet. Celie experienced an important transition and discovered God not only in her writings but also in the smiles of her loved ones and the beauty of the natural world. At some point, Celie's faith became weak for spirituality and Shug Avery played a vital role in rebuilding her faith in God. She showed her different perspective of feeling God's existence which created a deeper bonding with God and Celie. *In The Color Purple*, Celie's faith in God showed how belief in spirituality can be an effective way to fight against injustice and

overcoming difficulties and exploring inner power. It also identifies how harmony and positivity can be found in the belief in spirituality when every path seems closed.

Both Pecola and Celie chose the path of believing in spirituality as an escape from their harsh realities in these two novels. Celie took the path of spirituality for the sake of self-discovery, in contrast, Pecola took it as a fulfilment of unrealistic physical transformation. These different representation of believing in spirituality examines that it can be effective source of strength and empowerment like Celie's journey or it can bring harmful consequences like how Pecola went through. Thus, it shows that the path of spirituality can lead someone to discover their identity, self-worth and respect. Similarly, it can also lead the individuals to the way of destruction.

CHAPTER 5:

The Consequence of Psychological Trauma:

Both Celie and Pecola from Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* established on self-reflection journeys, but they executed it in quite different contexts and come to very different outcomes. Though both Pecola and Celie choose to escape from the harsh reality through the path of religious belief, they had different outcomes in terms of choosing it in a negative and positive way. Many studies identify the connection between religious involvement and mental health. In some cases, Positive religious coping plays a significant role in terms of better physical and mental outcomes. On the other hand, the consequence of religious coping is not always come up with better outcomes (Peres, Julio FP, et al. P. 347). Pecola's experience of believing in religious belief led her to the self-destruction, in contrast, Celie found her identity by exploring her own abilities. Both Toni Morrison and Alice Walker portray how sexual assault and psychological trauma lead the protagonists towards different outcomes through a traumatic journey by their creative writing skills.

5.1 Pecola's Self-destruction:

Pecola, a young black girl in *The Bluest Eye*, is a victim of inhumanity, poverty, and a fundamental desire to be loved and attractive in a society that considers her as unworthy. Pecola's yearning for blue eyes is a manifestation of the damaging consequences of racial discrimination and conventional beauty standards, as well as her self-hatred and need for social acceptability.

She went to Soaphead Church to fulfil her desires but her desire for blue eyes directed her towards self-destruction that she lost her sense. But the way to escapism led her in negative way. As Pecola was sexually abused by her father, she became pregnant with her father's baby. Pecola was shamed and embarrassed by her community people for carrying a baby of her own father. Nobody cared for her, never came to talk to her. She was all alone. She could not go to the school and talk to anyone. Later on, her baby died because it was pre-matured. She lost her sense and started imagining her blue eye out of madness. Claudia, the narrator illustrated Pecola's condition, "She, however, steeped over into madness, a madness which protected her from us" (Morrison, 1970, P. 163). Her journey to accept herself is tragically filled with tragedy, as she is a victim of the criticism and violence of society which causes her to lose her sense of self-worth completely.

5.2 Celie's Self-discovery:

Celie is a black young woman in *The Color Purple* who experiences terrible violence and torture. Celie develops her self-reliance, is taught to raise her voice for herself, and becomes strong in how she looks in the novel. The letters that she wrote to God and then to her sister Nettie helped her to discover her voice. Celie had a realization of her own abilities and discovers the affection and pleasure she might find in the world by utilizing her interactions with other women, especially Shug Avery. Shug Avery helped her to find her self-worth. Celie thought she was ugly and did not even look at her own body in the mirror. But Shug told her how beautiful she was and what could she do for living rather than being just a wife of Mr. ___. Shug released Celie from her captive life and encouraged her to make pants. Shug said, "We have to git our hands on somebody's army uniform. For Practice. That Good strong material and free. Every day

we going to read Nettie's letters and sew" (Walker, 1982, P. 132). Celie raised her voice against Albert's abuse and followed a path of self-discover. Celie got both opportunity and support to create her own identity in society. Celie's narrative is one of self-realization and strength as she accepts her situation as a marginalized as well as a silent individual.

Even though Celie and Pecola proceed on their respective paths of personal development, Celie's narrative is one of prevailing hardships and establishing independence. Celie was sexually abused and oppressed by her step-father. Even, her marriage with Mr. ___ made her life more complicated. Mr. ___ used to abuse her like her father. But Shug Avery taught her and stood up for her freedom. She built confidence in Celie for herself. She helped her to raise her voice against Mr. ___ and encouraged her to establish her own work. Celie's journey exemplifies the strength of courage in the face of difficulty and inspires hope and tenacity. However, Pecola's journey is about the terrible consequences of power in society and unrealistic objectives. Pecola was surrounded by a group of people who are very subjective towards her and it led her towards loneliness. She could not express her feelings with anyone like Celie. That is why she could not get any emotional support which led her to madness. She was captured in her trauma and she could not escape that and became senseless. Celie was surrounded by independent women which developed her courage to create her own identity. Pecola's journey also serves as painful reminder of the difficult circumstances faced by individuals who are excluded and subjected to unfair treatment in society. Pecola had irrational perspective about religion which directed her to believe in getting blue eyes. In contrast, Celie believed in herself of getting what she deserved in general circumstances.

CONCLUSION

This thesis tried to delve into an in-depth knowledge which is related to distress, resiliency, and sexism in society by examining into the themes of sexual assault, psychological trauma, and racial discrimination in African-American literature, particularly in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. In these two novels, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker effectively point out the experience of the protagonists who deal with trauma, sexual abuse, and prejudice because of their systematic communities. This paper examines a comparative analysis between two African-American novels which shows similar type of psychological trauma and sexual assault under different circumstances and the process of coping with that. The portrayal of mental health of the fictional characters by Toni Morrison and Alice Walker show how to understand the human psychology of coping with trauma through the lens of literature. Both Toni Morrison and Alice Walker depict the sensitive topic like sexual assault by the power of literature. The authors employ their creative writing technique by highlighting the complexities of trauma, resilience and the desire of self-discovery and healing. They address the issue of societal norms and characters' internal struggles to heal from the trauma. In *The Bluest Eye*, it is addressed that the negative effects of racism, sexual assault and beauty standards has badly impacted on the protagonist's sanity. Pecola Breedlove's, the main character of the novel, desire to get blue eyes to be accepted in her community. It is used as a metaphor by Morrison which indicates an emotional damage caused by the white communities. Similarly, in *The Color Purple*, it is portrayed that the pessimistic side of race, sexuality and different kinds of violence and self-esteem which made Celie felt that the only way to preserve herself is to remain

silent and invisible which affected her mental health. Both novels identify a combined effects of racism, sexism, and societal standards can lead towards mental trauma. In essence, the examination of sexual assault and psychological trauma of African-American Tragic Stories highlights how the oppressed people like Celie and Pecola show courage to deal with the long-lasting effects of abuse. Toni Morrison demonstrates Pecola's circumstances in a way which is a way more painful because of her loneliness which captured her thoughts within herself. Morrison shows the lack of empathy and support of the society people towards Pecola and her miserable situation. She has less possibility to overcome her trauma. In contrary, Alice Walker explores Celie's struggling journey which directs her towards self-awareness and resiliency. Shug Avery motivates Celie to overcome her pathetic situation and encourages her to create her own identity in the society. Celie's dedication leads her towards the opportunity to establish herself. This research is done to explore how these two authors portray the experiences of the protagonists, the pattern of human behavior, traumatic recovery and the influence of race and power dynamics related to sexual assault.

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