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Ideological State Apparatuses and Interpellation in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*

Althusserian Reading of the Novel

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Introduction

Toni Morrison was an American Nobel Prize-winning author, book editor, and college professor. Among many of the extraordinary and provocative works written by Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* published in 1970 is the first and one of the author’s most widely known novels. In his discussion of the evidence of Marxist ideas, Michael Ryan in “Suggestions for a Marxist Reading of *The Bluest Eye*”, states that: “in the late 1960s and published in 1970, the book emerges out of time when the status and place of African-Americans in American society had moved to the forefront of national attention.” (66). The novel was written in the post-civil rights era, as explained by Morrison: “the writing took place, 1965-69, a time of great social upheaval in the lives of black people” (208). Set in Lorain, Ohio in 1940-41, the novel follows the tragic story of a young African-American girl named Pecola Breedlove who grew up during the end of the Great Depression. In her book *To Ask for an Equal Chance: African Americans in the Great Depression*, Cheryl L. Greenberg examines the impact of the Great Depression on people and states: “The economic crisis affected everyone, rural and urban, skilled and unskilled, black and white” (21). The main narrator of *The Bluest Eye* is Claudia McTeer, Pecola’s childhood friend with whom Pecola once lived. The novel is characterized by its unconventional structure and innovative style and it is split into four distinct time sequences, the four seasons of the year. The novel depicts several black lower-to-middle-class families in Lorain and it recounts a detailed story of their plight. The most notable are the stories of the Breedloves (Pecola’s parents), the MacTeer family, and Geraldine and Louis Junior (a young mother and son).

In *The Bluest Eye*, the *Dick and Jane* children’s book, the proliferation of institutions such as cinema and advertising are central, and they act as the most powerful transmitters of culture, promoting ideas or a racial norm based on whiteness. Black characters who
belong to the low-to-middle classes suffer because the media images are dominated by white people. The black community in the novel tends to adhere to the norms of white society and uncritically accepts their submission to white authority. The media perpetuation of a white norm and the ubiquitous nature of whiteness across media and state institutions creates a normative ideal, white and typically middle-class, which acts to assert white power and privilege in society and identifies black Americans as Other.

In terms of previous research undertaken on the novel, Md Reza Hassan Khan and Md Shafiqur Rahman in “The Framework of Racism in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*: A Psychosocial Interpretation”, implementing a psychoanalytical approach, explain that the characters are affected by the notion that whiteness is connected with ideal beauty. Moreover, their research draws attention to the mass media’s influence on the image of a black female character in the novel: “Morrison here shows how the notion of ‘beauty’ can be manipulated by popular media and film to produce racist self-hatred by compelling females to feel insecure and awful about their figure and color.” (26). Khan and Rahman use both Marxist and psychoanalytic perspectives to examine the white standards of beauty that are mainly accepted and embodied by the black female characters in the novel.

Moreover, Kathleen Woodward in her text “Traumatic Shame: Toni Morrison, Televisual Culture, and the Cultural Politics of the Emotions” offers an interesting reading of *The Bluest Eye* since she argues that the black characters are overwhelmed by the emotion of shame: “Within *The Bluest Eye*, the black characters feel shame in the land of white America, a space they cannot escape.” (228). By way of illustration, Woodward supports her claim by pointing to the fact that shame is identified as the collective failure of the characters to correspond to the social norms and standards of that period. Furthermore, according to Woodward, the novel exposes a society where prejudice is fostered, victims
like Pecola are stigmatized and shamed for not conforming to the traditional standards of beauty defined by the dominant culture.

In addition, Laura Dubek in “‘Restorying’ the Past: Toni Morrison’s Remember, a Black-and-White Primer for American Children” focuses on the impact of children’s narratives on the children’s mentality. For example, Dick and Jane’s story in The Bluest Eye glorifies blue eyes and blonde hair, which appear to be the epitome of whiteness, and signifies standards of beauty, as well as wealth and safety, and Dubek states: “books and various forms of popular culture, [are] the lie of white racial superiority spreading like a virus from which no one living in America is immune.” (859). The writer highlights that the black characters in the novel undergo traumatic experiences due to the hegemony of the white narratives and children’s books that normalize white supremacy.

A further analysis of the influence of American culture on women is evident in Michelle Hunt’s dissertation “Women as Commodities in Danticat’s Breath, Eyes, Memory and Morrison’s The Bluest Eye”, where she explores the way Toni Morrison tries to depict how African-American women are fundamentally treated as commodities in a white, male-dominated society. Moreover, black women are not represented by the white beauty standards of the Hollywood film industry. Particularly, Hunt points out: “Morrison links many of these images of properly sexualized white women to the medium of film which, in 1941, was increasingly enabled technologically to represent them and, because of the growth of the Hollywood film industry, is more likely to limit the production of alternate images” (121). In her dissertation, Hunt emphasizes the female characters who internalize their inferiority as they do not measure up to beauty standards.

It appears that in previous research, different theories are applied to interpret the suffering of the black characters as subjects. It is important to note that a great deal of the
previous research has almost exclusively examined the traumatic effects of mass media on relationships, the formation of identities, and how the standardization of beauty is one of the forms of oppression that forces African Americans to define themselves. However, little research has been done on the way Communication Ideological State Apparatus and Education Ideological State Apparatus function as the primary means of maintaining and reproducing the white power over the oppressed and marginalized black characters.

French philosopher Louis Althusser in his essay titled “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” adds a new concept that is already present in the Marxist theory, which is called the “Ideological State Apparatus”. (Althusser 14). According to Althusser, Ideological State Apparatuses are part of the private domain and they work through important social institutions such as “Churches, Parties, Trade Unions, families, some schools, most newspapers, cultural ventures, etc.” (Althusser 15). In particular, Althusser argued that the state, through the Communication ISA seeks to maintain its power by shaping the beliefs and values of its citizens. Althusser wrote that Communication ISA reinforces the existing power structures of the state by “cramming every ‘citizen’ with daily doses of nationalism, chauvinism, liberalism, moralism, etc, by means of the press, the radio and television.” (Althusser 23). Furthermore, Althusser, argues that the Education ISA has become an important tool in maintaining the dominant ideology of the ruling class. According to Althusser, the Education ISA has been “installed in the dominant position” as a result of a political and ideological class struggle against the old dominant Ideological State Apparatus. (22). Therefore, the ruling class aims to preserve its power by disseminating its cultural ideas, imposing them on the marginalized groups, according to Althusser: “the existence of a small number of cynical men who base their domination and exploitation of the ‘people’ on a falsified representation of the world which they have imagined in order to enslave other minds by dominating their imaginations.” (Althusser 31).
Regarding the state apparatuses, Althusser’s theory of ideology encompasses the Interpellation which transforms individuals into subjects, as Althusser says: “all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, by the functioning of the category of the subject” (Althusser 40). The ideological manipulation through Interpellation encompasses the supremacy of one group, nationality, or its cultural norms over the other, because the selected inferior group lacks the set of criteria as appointed by the powerful group, and accelerates the procedure of suppression. Althusser’s theory of Interpellation is deeply rooted in the class structure of society and has been used as a means to understand the position of the superior and inferior groups in society: “the State and its Apparatuses only have meaning from the point of view of the class struggle, as an apparatus of class struggle ensuring class oppression and guaranteeing the conditions of exploitation and its reproduction.” (48). Subsequently, the class struggle is essential for the establishment and the predominance of the ruling ideology.

Regarding social classes, Walter Goldschmidt in “Social Class in America - A Critical Review” notes that modern society is made up of different classes: the elite, the middle class, the working or laboring class, and the last class is made up of laboring people who accept their laboring status uncritically. Goldschmidt states: “This emerging pattern is toward four basic classes, each with its own basic cultural orientation, its own life ways, with differential degrees of power, and with sharply differentiated status” (494). The upper class intends to maintain control over the lower classes and wants to pass certain ideas. This is illustrated by John Fiske in “Culture, Ideology, Interpellation” who states that: “The social norms, or that which is socially acceptable, are of course neither neutral nor objective; they have developed in the interests of those with social power.” (1270). Ideology is practiced through Interpellation, which privileges the upper and middle classes and makes the lower-to-middle classes more prone to dominance.
In particular, this thesis uses Althusserian ISAs and Interpellation as theoretical lenses to examine how the book *Dick and Jane* and mass media disseminate white ideals and analyses low-to-middle-class black characters who aspire to look white. This thesis shall be structured in three parts: In the first section, the historical background and effects of mass media as a whole are discussed since the approach of this thesis is specifically linked to the way mass media is used by the white dominant community. The second section provides evidence of Education and Communication ISAs that demonstrate that black characters in the novel are being introduced to white normative ideals with the children’s book *Dick and Jane* that develop through to adulthood in other forms like Hollywood celebrity culture and advertising of skin-lightening, and hair-straightening products. The last section is a focused character analysis based on significant low-to-middle-class African-American characters Pecola, Pauline, Cholly, Geraldine, and Louis Junior. Using the Althusserian theory of Interpellation and social class, the third section shows that there is a process of Interpellation followed by assimilation.

**Historical Background and Effects of Mass Media**

Since this thesis examines the impact of mass media in *The Bluest Eye* characters’ daily life, it is essential to begin with a brief historical overview of mass media in early twentieth-century America. According to Ellen Wartella, Lawrence Grossberg, Charles Whitney, and J. Macgregor Wise in *Media Making, Mass Media in a Popular Culture*, different forms of entertainment media merge and intersect: “newspapers, magazines, books, radio, broadcast, satellite and cable television, film, records, and tapes.” (9). The dominant entertainment medium of the twentieth century was undoubtedly Hollywood cinema, which gained popularity and cultural significance. Regarding the evolution of cinema, in his book *An
Introduction to Studying Popular Culture, Dominic Strinati elucidates: “The emergence of cinema can therefore be seen as an industrial, technological, narrational and commercial phenomenon. These factors were linked to an emergent public interest in the visual spectacle as a type of mass entertainment.” (8). Moreover, in Strinati’s view, “[c]inemas quickly multiplied, especially in big industrial cities, with large working-class populations” (11). Subsequently, Hollywood cinema was mainly entertainment for the lower economic classes and addressed the vast majority of American consumers, those who had relatively little money, leisure time, or education compared to the wealthy.

The development of popular Hollywood cinema became a mass public entertainment and it brought an important change in American culture. In addition, Hollywood cinema had a great impact on modern life and the younger generations. A further definition of the Hollywood cinema influence can be found in his book Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise 1930-1939, in which Tino Ballio states: “The movies revealed itself not only in the public’s preoccupation with the lifestyles of the stars but also in the presumed power of the movies as a socializing force.” (2). This definition suggests that Hollywood along with the subsidiary media such as newspapers and magazines nurture the culture by promoting Hollywood celebrity culture. The movie stars could be said to mold beauty norms as well as social norms and distort the perceptions of American consumers. The American media focused on the promotion of Hollywood glamorous lives of its stars, on-screen and off-screen.

Mass media perpetuate specific cultural ideals, and they create an idea or norm that is based on authoritative power. In The Guide to United States Popular Culture by Ray Broadus Browne and Pat Browne, it is written that popular culture: “is the everyday world around us: the mass media, entertainments, diversions; it is our heroes’ icons, rituals,
everyday actions, psychology and religion- our total life pictures.” (1). From this perspective, Grossberg et al. discuss the function of mass media, wondering: “about the ways in which particular media practices reinforce or challenge existing social trends and tendencies.” (27). This idea is used to refer to capitalism, which was not simply a phenomenon of physical force and exploitation. In a postmodern society, capitalism typically depends on constructing a desire and longing to function within an idealized white society.

**Ideological State Apparatuses: Educational and Communicational Institutions**

This section engages with the primer *Dick and Jane*, the Hollywood celebrity culture, the use of skin-lightening creams, and the use of hair-straightening products, which influences the African-American characters in *The Bluest Eye*. The black characters try to look white by using popular skin-lightening and hair-straightening products and they try to assimilate the way of life and ideas of white people. Therefore, it is vital to emphasize how ideological apparatuses act as forms of social pressure on individuals and play a significant role in the dominance of white culture in African-American society.

It would be wise to start the representations of ISAs with the Educational ISA, which disseminates the ideas of the white ideology and makes African Americans accept their place in society. Additionally, references to the children’s book *Dick and Jane* are made throughout *The Bluest Eye*. *Dick and Jane*’s focus is on a basic, suburban, white, middle-class nuclear family with a limited depiction of other family types or lifestyles. Although other marginalized communities live in America, the primer has no representation for different nationalities and socio-economic classes. The reality that black and poor Pecola
faces at home is completely different from the reality of the ideal family depicted in *Dick and Jane*, where the family members are happy as mentioned in the novel: “See Mother. Mother is very nice. Mother, will you play with Jane? Laugh, Mother laugh. See Father. He is big and strong. Father, will you play Jane? Father is smiling.” (Morrison 1). In contrast, in the Breedlove home, a serious conflict arises between Pecola’s mother, Pauline, and her father, Cholly when Cholly neglects to bring home coal to heat the house, as described in the novel: “She had not let go of the dishpan, and began to hit at Cholly’s thighs and groin with it. He put his foot in her chest, and she dropped the pan.” (Morrison 43). After this incident, Pecola is depressed: “The sick feeling, which she had tried to prevent by holding in her stomach, came quickly in spite of her precaution.” (Morrison 42). Therefore, in *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola wonders how to get love from people and asks her friends Claudia and Frieda: “‘How do you do that? I mean how do you get somebody to love you?’” (Morrison 30). Pecola is haunted by her desire to conform to *Dick and Jane*’s social norms and be loved by others. Therefore, Pecola falls far short of America’s family archetype since she feels that she is deprived of this and will never fit this description.

As noted, the school prepares black students to accept a life of exploitation, and Educational ISA serves the dominant ideology by promoting the idea of whiteness as the norm and suppressing marginalized African Americans. In his theory of ISA, Althusser claims that to understand the relation between the Educational ISA and ideology, where educational institutions act as ISAs that help to pass on the ruling class ideology to justify the capitalist regime: “the School (and the School/Family couple) constitutes the dominant Ideological State Apparatus, the Apparatus playing a determinant part in the reproduction of the relations of production” (26). To better understand, in “Not so Fast, Dick and Jane: Reimagining Childhood and Nation in the Bluest Eye”, Debra T. Werlelin claims that: “Morrison’s ideological critique suggests that the primers alienate students who do not fit
the white middle-class standard.” (62). For example, in *The Bluest Eye*, Sammy, Pecola’s fourteen-year-old brother, feels alienated from his society and copes with his family’s problems by running away from his family’s house whenever there are strong fights in the family “Sammy cursed for a while, or left the house, or threw himself into the fray” (Morrison 41). Sometimes, he is also involved in the violent family conflict, encouraging his mother to kill his father, Cholly, telling her: “‘Kill him! Kill him!’” (Morrison 42). This behavior does not comply with the social norms established by *Dick and Jane*.

In addition to the Education ISA, the Communication ISA, specifically the Hollywood Cinema industry contributes to the dissemination of ideas and ideals, and it reproduces social ideals in such a way that these can become normalized in society. As already mentioned in the introduction, black characters are targeted by the capitalistic ideology and they are enticed to consume and assimilate white cultural ideals of beauty and identity. This can be illustrated by the fact that cinema becomes an instrument for the transmission of white ideology. The black characters enjoy cinema without realizing that cinema spreads the ideology of the white dominant class. In other words, in his effort to discuss the function of ISA, which can themselves become involved in the class struggle, Althusser claims: “no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses” (17).

In *The Bluest Eye*, the function of the dominant white ideology through cinema aiming at reshaping the identities of African Americans is exemplified in characters such as Pauline. Pauline discusses the delight of watching popular films featuring white actors Clark Gable and Jean Harlow, who portrayed the ideal relationships in movies during that era. However, she expresses her disappointment upon returning home and being confronted with the realities of her own relationship: “Them pictures gave me a lot of pleasure, but it
made coming home hard, and looking at Cholly hard.” (Morrison 121). That is an evident example of the numbing effect of cinema, where Pauline is immersed, and she only finds happiness in cinema and says: “The onliest time I seem happy was when I was in the picture show” (Morrison 121). Hollywood’s depiction of a romantic relationship is white and middle-class, contrasting Pauline’s domestic relationship with Cholly, who is black and poor. This is how Hollywood cinema establishes and sustains white beauty as the norm.

Another Communication ISA shown in a detailed way in the novel is the Hollywood celebrity culture, which manipulates the consciousness of African-American characters through the images of supposedly beautiful white actresses seen everywhere. In particular, in an attempt to describe the American role model, in “The Girl on the Magazine Cover: The Origins of Visual Stereotypes” Carolyn L. Kitch states that: “American Woman in the century’s early media (mass or otherwise) was almost unfailingly white.” (92). In her book Shirley Temple and the Performance of Girlhood, Kristen Hatch also analyzes the role of Shirley Temple in American society: “Temple functions here as a touchstone for understanding the centrality of girlhood to the first decades of Hollywood film.” (2). Moreover, the Hollywood persona Shirley Temple is encountered almost everywhere, Hatch says of Shirley Temple: “endorsed a number of products, from Quaker Oats to Dodge cars, despite the fact that she was far too young to drive.” (17). The popularity of Hollywood celebrity culture is constantly present in the novel, solidifying the white actresses’ status as the ideal beauty and it has a huge impact on the black characters’ personalities.

In The Bluest Eye, references to actresses and movies appear throughout the novel since they are significant parts of its characters’ daily life. Furthermore, Mr. Henry, a board of the MacTeer family, the black family that takes care of Pecola, refers to young daughters Claudia and Frieda as “Greta Garbo” and “Ginger Rogers” (who are famous, white
Hollywood actresses of the period) to make them laugh, when he introduces himself and says: “Hello there. You must be Greta Garbo, and you must be Ginger Rogers.” (Morrison 14). The presence of white beauty permeates every aspect of society and this can be illustrated succinctly when Pecola converses with her classmate Maureen, and they observe the billboard with the picture of a famous white American actress and say: “Dreamland Theater, and (that) Betty Grable smiled down at us.” (Morrison 66). Pecola is exposed to the white ideal of beauty at a young age, wants to achieve the white beauty of Shirley Temple, and therefore drinks a lot of milk. Her friend Claudia confirms Pecola’s obsession with milk, stating: “We knew she was fond of the Shirley Temple cup and took every opportunity to drink milk out of it just to handle and see sweet Shirley’s face.” (Morrison 23). Furthermore, Pecola eats candies with a picture of the famous white persona Mary Jane on them in an attempt to look similar to her idol: “To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane, Be Mary Jane.” (Morrison 48). Desperate to achieve white beauty, Pecola consumes milk and candies depicting famous white actresses of the time as she has the belief that these contain the properties of Shirley Temple and Mary Jane. Subsequently, by consuming these products, Pecola, attempts to absorb white beauty.

In addition to cinema and Hollywood stars, advertising is also meaningful for a better understanding of the function of Communication ISA. In particular, Browne and Browne hold the view that advertisements: “constantly tell us that we are a little inadequate, that we need to buy–buy–buy in order to become happy, healthy, and whole” (15). Advertising perpetuated static and stereotypical assumptions about African Americans. Furthermore, in analyzing Stuart Chase’s work on advertising in the 1920s, Brown and Brown state: “He noted that advertising went beyond earlier concerns about dishonesty and deception. Chase examined advertising’s role in facilitating waste and furnishing fantasies for the masses” (15). Respectively, people receive the message from the visual media that they are going to
look attractive only if they buy more commercialized products and fix themselves using these products.

Advertising contributes to spreading the ideas of the white ruling class. In *The Bluest Eye*, the Communication ISA uses tactics such as bombarding subjects with cosmetics such as hair oil, face cream, and vanishing cream, which contributed their part in creating economic and cultural exploitation, identifying the white image with beauty, and giving black people a secondary identity. More specifically, the young Claudia and Frieda immediately welcomed Mr. Henry into their home just because he uses products such as hair oil and skin lightening creams designed to lighten dark skin and make hairstyle closer to white, as Claudia says: “So when Mr. Henry arrived on a Saturday night, we smelled him. He smelled wonderful. Like trees and lemon vanishing cream, and Nu Nile Hair.” (Morrison 13). In addition, Geraldine is among a group of black middle-class women who have internalized their racial hatred and end up using commercial products that are intended to make black skin closer to white, as the novel states: “They wash themselves with orange-colored Lifebuoy soap, dust themselves with Cashmere Bouquet talc, clean their teeth with salt on a piece of rag, soften their skin with Jergens Lotion” (Morrison 80). As mentioned earlier, these examples of black characters intending to live up to the white ideal illustrate the conformity of black characters. The novel’s black characters feel inferior because they do not conform to white beauty standards and they end up consuming popular products marketed to achieve these ideals.

In *The Bluest Eye*, advertising appears as a Communication ISA that promotes the internalization of white values by the African-American community. In particular, in her book *The Story of African Hair*, which discusses African hairstyles, K. N. Chimbiri states that Afro hairstyles: “were not valued or seen as fashionable anymore. These hairstyles
reminded women of the past. And the past meant poverty and enslavement.” (47). Thus, Afro hairstyles are identified with terrible moments in black history and are considered outdated. In *The Bluest Eye*, this can be seen in the case of Pauline, the mother of Pecola who recently moved to Lorain, Ohio, and receives negative comments from other black women because of her afro hair. According to the novel, Pauline: “felt uncomfortable with the few black women she met. They were amused with her because she did not straighten her hair.” (Morrison 116). Later, Pauline rejects her natural Afro hair and adopts the white hairstyle under the influence of the movie stars she sees in magazines, as she says: “I fixed my hair up like I’d seen hers in a magazine” (Morrison 121). Moreover, the impact of advertising is also evident in the lives of black middle-class girls such as Geraldine who use hair-straightening products: “They straighten their hair with Dixie Peach, and part it on the side” (Morrison 81). They seem to be annoyed when their hair is not straight: “they worry, worry, worry, about the edges of their hair.” (Morrison 81). The black female characters end up flattening and straightening their hair to fit the white standards. Thus, the function of the powerful ideology behind the advertising of particular products has a detrimental influence on African Americans and promotes a white standard of beauty, shaping black Americans’ perception of self-worth.

Furthermore, skin-lightening lotions are very popular in the novel and persuade individuals to submit to the ideology of the established order. Additionally, in “Modernism, Postmodernism and the Problem of the Visual in Afro-American Culture”, Michele Wallace discusses visibility and its negative effects on African Americans and she argues: “how one is seen (as black) and, therefore, what one sees (in a white world) is always already crucial to one’s existence as an Afro-American. The very markers that reveal you to the rest of the world, your dark skin and your kinky/curly hair, are visual.” (26). Moreover, an example of this is the study carried out by Anne Anlin Cheng in her essay “Wounded Beauty: An
Exploratory Essay on Race, Feminism, and the Aesthetic Question”, in which she states: “In the 22 September 1951 edition of Amsterdam News, the Harlem weekly, we could find an ad for Dr. Fred Palmer’s skin whitening cream that spelled out without reservation: “Be Whiter, Be Better, Be Loved.”” (194). Therefore, African Americans were taught to consider white skin as beautiful and right, which implies that black skin is ugly and wrong. Black people were specifically targeted in advertising to desire white skin and buy skin-lightening products.

African-American characters who want to achieve a lighter skin color consume skin-lightening lotions that are aimed at lightening dark areas of the skin or achieving an overall skin tone. In *The Bluest Eye*, the influence of advertising is displayed in the case of Geraldine, Louis Junior’s mother, who wants to keep Junior’s white skin, and applies Jergens Lotion to him in the winter to prevent his skin from darkening and thus be connected with his African roots. As Geraldine says: “Jergens Lotion on his face to keep the skin from becoming ashen.” (Morrison 85). The Communication ISA works to spread attitudes and behaviors through advertising and this is exemplified by Geraldine who is taught the concept that whiteness is superior to blackness. In this respect, it is possible to argue that the white ideology uses the Communication ISA to secure its power by forcing subjects to buy commercialized products, keeping them subjugated, and molding their mindset according to its benefit.

**Interpellation and Social Class of African-American Characters**

With the state apparatuses, Althusser’s theory of ideology encompasses an evaluation of the subject. This section of the thesis analyzes the way Interpellation is used as a tool by
white people who stand for the middle and upper-middle class to manipulate black characters who represent the lower-to-middle class in the white capitalist society. In the world of *The Bluest Eye*, the major black characters such as Pecola, Pauline, and Cholly represent the lower class, and the characters Geraldine and Louis Junior represent the middle class. As already indicated in the introduction, the characters of the novel are subjectivized according to the norms of the authoritarian society and can only think of what they see in white society. Interpellation is evident in the novel, although Cholly manages to resist it in certain instances.

Pecola grows up in the lower class, and she cannot circumvent the subjectivization strategies of the white ideology. Moreover, Ryan substantiates the fact that black people represent the lower classes since they lack the basic provisions, and are regarded as inferior: “by being obliged to live in poor housing in cities.” (66). The above lines give a glimpse of the powerlessness of black people; they do not have access to basic provisions and they are marginalized and oppressed by society. In *The Bluest Eye*, the Breedloves live in a storefront house because they were black and poor, and even their furniture reflects their deteriorating condition: “They lived there because they were poor and black, and they stayed there because they believed they were ugly” (Morrison 36). Pecola’s living conditions show that she is economically and socially disadvantaged.

Pecola submits to the rigid values dictated by white ideology. The Interpellation of particular individuals begins even before the birth of the individual, specifically, Althusser claims: “Before its birth, the child is therefore always-already a subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial ideological configuration in which it is “expected” once it has been conceived.” (42). In the same way, Pauline is prejudiced against her daughter and believes that Pecola is ugly. On Pecola’s birthday, Pauline states: “But I knewed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly.” (Morrison 126).
Subsequently, Pecola suffers from a sense of inferiority and inner self-loathing: “It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights—if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different.” (Morrison 44). Pecola is interpellated by her community’s ideals, internalizes the idea that white people are the most beautiful, and hates herself and the image her mother and society impose on her. Moreover, defining the term “subject”, Althusser claims that: “In the ordinary use of the term, subject in fact means:... a subjected being, who submits to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission” (46). Therefore, a key point of Pecola’s submission is that the subject remains in the same state of degradation to maintain the social structure.

Similarly, Pauline belongs to the lower class as well. Goldschmidt describes the term “lowest class” of the social hierarchy: “The fourth sector is made up of laboring people who also accept their laboring status, but who are reared in such a psychological atmosphere of hopelessness that they do not expect to advance, either individually or collectively, from a position of labor.” (495). In The Bluest Eye, Pauline epitomizes the conditions identified by Ryan, who emphasizes that black people represent the lower classes. Ryan states: “African-Americans once again found their efforts to advance themselves blocked by school segregation, by the denial of well-paying jobs” (66). Pauline’s mother was a poor black woman who worked as a servant in a white house, as mentioned in the novel: “Mrs. Williams got a job cleaning and cooking for a white minister” (Morrison 110). Pauline herself, is a black poor woman who later works as a servant at a white house as well: “She became what is known as an ideal servant, for such a role filled practically all of her needs.” (Morrison 125). Pauline works as a servant and urgently needs money to survive, but the landlord refuses her money, and Pauline says: “I seen she didn’t understand that all I needed
from her was my eleven dollars to pay the gas man so I could cook.” (Morrison 119). Pauline’s economic status and despair signify that she belongs to the lower class.

Pauline’s identity is transformed into a passive subject constructed by the dominant ideology as she belongs to the lower class. Adopting the system of Althusserian concepts, the role of Interpellation is to recruit good subjects that behave according to the ruling ideology. The subjects work alone: “the absolute guarantee that everything really is so, and that on condition that the subjects recognize what they are and behave accordingly, everything will be all right: Amen – ‘So be it’.” (44). Thus, Interpellation exists when the dominant ideology is accepted by the individuals in their daily life. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pauline, who is a member of the black community, falls victim to the subjective tactics of Interpellation. A prominent example of Interpellation that gives a glance at the frailty of the poor black woman is when Pauline moves to Ohio and she receives negative comments about her appearance from other black women, according to Pauline: “Northern colored folk was different too. Dicty-like. No better than whites for meanness. They could make you feel just as no-count, ‘cept I didn’t expect it from them. That was the most lonesome time of my life.” (Morrison 115). In response to the Interpellation, Pauline is influenced by the white standards of beauty and she ends up changing her physical appearance to be accepted by society: “The sad thing was that Pauline did not really care for clothes and makeup. She merely wanted other women to cast favorable glances her way.” (Morrison 116). As has been noted, having been indoctrinated inside the white community, Pauline idealizes the beauty of dominant white ideology and white supremacy and she suffers from a sense of inferiority and inner hatred.

Moreover, Pauline acknowledges her submission to white supremacy and she is left without an identity, unable to think beyond what she sees in white society, and her personality is transformed into a passive subject. For example, Pauline was in love with
Cholly before moving to Lorain, Ohio, as the couple is described in the novel: “Young, loving, and full of energy, they came to Lorain, Ohio.” (Morrison 114). However, Pauline becomes a loyal servant of the Fishers, idealizes the white family, and rejects her family in an attempt to conform to white society’s values: “More and more she neglected her house, her children, her man,” (Morrison 125). Pauline acquires white ideas and norms after she has lost her true self. The above lines imply Pauline’s identity as a passive subject constructed by the dominant ideology serving the interests of the white ideology rather than an active individual.

The third character that will be discussed in this section of the thesis is Cholly, the father of Pecola who belongs to the lower class as well. In particular, Mary McGlynn in her article “Why Jimmy Wears A Suit: White, Black, And Working Class”, attempts to point out that the term “nigger” is used to invoke a sense of subjugation not necessarily connected to racial hierarchy, but to the socioeconomic hierarchy, she claims: “blackness seems to be connected to class rather than to skin color, she notes, “[t]he word ‘nigger’ […] becomes a class signifier rather than a racial one” (237). Fiske discusses Althusser’s concept of Interpellation and claims that it is the process by which language identifies and structures a social class for the addressee: “These terms derive from the idea that any language, whether it be verbal, visual, tactile, or whatever, is part of social relations and that in communicating with someone we are reproducing social relationships.” (1271). In The Bluest Eye when people refer to Cholly as “nigger”, the focus is on social division rather than a racial one. Thus, the word “nigger” reflects Cholly’s personality as an unfortunate man: “He had joined the animals; was, indeed, an old dog, a snake, a ratty nigger” (Morrison 16). It is almost certain that Cholly has been abandoned by his community, his place of residence, and the use of the term “nigger” that people use for him in the context of the novel is chiefly a signifier of his lower-class status.
Cholly is exposed to the white supremacy ideology from an early age, and his sense of identity is threatened when two white police officers encounter him and his girlfriend, Darlene, and force them to have sex. Althusser illustrates the method of hailing by giving the example of hailing by a police officer who addresses an individual: “the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: ‘Hey, you there!’” (40). In *The Bluest Eye*, society interpellates Cholly while he is young, by applying social practice that directly humiliates, and dominates him. In particular, Cholly is trying to have intercourse with the young Darlene, however, they are forced by two police officers to continue having sex while the latter watch and shine a light on them: “The flashlight made a moon on his behind. “Hee hee hee hee heee.” “Come on, coon. Faster. You ain’t doing nothing for her.” “Hee hee hee hee heee” (Morrison 146). Cholly experiences the cruelty and brutality of white authority. However, throughout his life, there are incidents where he becomes an active agent and he reacts to society’s demands.

Unlike other characters in the novel who never avoid Interpellation, Cholly largely overrules his subjection and he does not absorb the white ideals. Cholly is transformed from an obedient subject who blindly obeys the police officers’ orders to a “bad subject” in certain instances. According to Althusser’s quadruple system of Interpellation, subjects primarily follow the rules without the need for external intervention. However, there are instances where some subjects may not comply with the rules, as Althusser points out: “with the exception of the ‘bad subjects’ who on occasion provoke the intervention of one of the detachments of the (Repressive) State Apparatus.” (46). Correspondingly, in *The Bluest Eye*, there is a scene where Cholly questions white ideology and this is illustrated by abandoning his family, and burning his house: “Dog Breedlove had burned up his house, gone upside his wife’s head, and everybody, as a result, was outdoors.” (Morrison 15). Being “outdoors” means that he is a black man who has been cast out by the black
community as a way to detach themselves from his behavior. Moreover, Cholly refuses to be interpellated and tries to go against the order of authority, so he was sent to jail: “Cholly was in jail.” (Morrison 16). Cholly’s behavior is against the established social norms, he ends up hating his society and he does not adopt society’s values in this scene.

Geraldine, on the other hand, is a middle-class black woman who wants to be a part of the white ruling class. Goldschmidt describes the representatives of the middle class as follows: “Members of this class act as the elite in the local community, but are not usually a part of the upper group” (494). As the novel describes, Geraldine belongs to a group of financially privileged girls: “Such girls live in quiet black neighborhoods where everybody is gainfully employed” (Morrison 80). That entire racial group is inferior to the white society, they are born to serve the white middle class, and yet they try to look white.

In addition, Geraldine is a character in the novel who is interpellated and she tries to present herself as more white than black. In *The Bluest Eye*, the family institution is structured in such a way that black people desire to go from the middle class to the upper class. Moreover, black people are obedient to the white authority, and teach submissiveness to their black children: “They go to land-grant colleges, normal schools, and learn how to do the white man’s work with refinement: home economics to prepare his food; teacher education to instruct black children in obedience” (Morrison 81). Responding to Interpellation, Geraldine is proud of her subjection, she is identical to other black women since they are all recruited as subjects, recognize their subjection, and probably believe that everything will be all right if they recognize what they are and follow a similar pattern of behavior: “They do not drink, smoke, or swear” (Morrison 80). As an interpellated subject, Geraldine despises her blackness and rejects her African features: “They hold their behind in for fear of a sway too free; when they wear lipstick, they never cover the entire mouth for fear of lips too thick” (Morrison 81). Furthermore, another piece of evidence that
demonstrates Geraldine’s rejection of her blackness is when she encounters Pecola in her house: “You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house.” (Morrison 90). Geraldine uses blackness as a way to insult Pecola, demonstrating that she identifies blackness with ugliness and immorality. She falls victim to the white dominant culture which reinforces its concept of beauty, and which is a learned social construct where there is a desire to imitate the lifestyle of white people. Despite the color similarity between Pecola and Geraldine, Geraldine distances herself from black people who are considered to be the ugliest and the poorest and refuses to accept her black heritage because she seeks to reach a new class and strives for whiteness.

Finally, Geraldine’s son Louis Junior is another character who belongs to the middle class. As Goldschmidt points out: “the middle class is characterized by a set of values oriented toward the fiscal elite” (494). Interestingly, Junior is a black boy whose social standing may be better than Pecola’s because he lives in a beautiful home—“There was a big red-and-gold Bible on the dining-room table. Little lace doilies were everywhere—on arms and backs of chairs, in the center of a large dining table, on little tables.” (Morrison 89). Despite his supposed middle-class appearance, he is still in a state of what can only be described as hegemonic impotence.

Junior was interpellated by white society as well. Fiske discusses Althusser’s concept of Interpellation and claims that: “Similarly, a black person can have a white subjectivity and a member of the working classes a middle-class one” (1271). Interpellation is based on such premises as the societal family culture developed by Althusser to penetrate an individual’s situation in the capitalistic society and encourage black people to become the white class. Junior already knows the difference between becoming white and black in terms of appearance and privilege, as his fate was decided at an early stage by his mother. Geraldine, Junior’s mother draws the line between people of color and “niggers” based on
characteristics such as manners and behavior, as the novel says: “Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud. He belonged to the former group” (Morrison 85). As pointed out, Junior internalizes his society’s values and he is unable to experience relationships and connect with others. Moreover, Junior is an example of how ideology creates submissive subjects who implement the dominant values, and how ideology makes individuals subjects of a dominant social system. Althusser points out that the subject is interpellated when they acknowledge their submission: “if it interpellates them in such a way that the subject responds: ‘Yes, it really is me!’ if it obtains from them the recognition that they really do occupy the place it designates for them as theirs in the world” (43). Responding to white society’s hailing, Junior accepts the rule of white supremacy that blackness is inferior to whiteness and when he sees Pecola he thinks that she is ugly: “He had seen her many times before, standing alone, always alone, at recess. Nobody ever played with her. Probably, he thought, because she was ugly.” (Morrison 86). Although Junior initially seems to “long to play with the black boys.” (Morrison 85), little by little he learns to despise his blackness, and accepts his mother’s notions: “Gradually he came to agree with his mother that neither Bay Boy nor P. L. was good enough for him.” (Morrison 85). In other words, the hegemonic culture addresses Junior through his mother’s direct influence, forcing him to accept a white aesthetic and denying him the opportunity to embrace and appreciate his own body. Therefore, Junior represents how Interpellation enables the spread of racist values and ideals that create negative self-esteem among black low and middle-class children to keep in line with the white dominant culture. Such ideas strengthen the power and meet the interests of the white upper class.
Conclusion

To conclude, this thesis intends to explain how and the reason why black characters are affected by white ruling ideology. Through analyzing the presence of *Dick and Jane*, the Hollywood celebrity culture, the advertising, the popularity of skin-whitening creams, and the hair-straightening products in *The Bluest Eye*, it is clear that the black characters strive to live up to a white ideal. In particular, this thesis uses Althusser's concepts of the Ideological State Apparatus and Interpellation as a theoretical framework to show that the ideology of white supremacy, in the novel, recruits subjects from the lower and middle classes. As has been noted, this thesis attempted to depict the way the white ideology oppresses black characters in the novel to maintain its dominance. Media influence continues to play a significant role in contemporary society and unfortunately, the media often portrays white aesthetics as the ideal, which can perpetuate white standards of beauty. This representation in media can have a negative impact on those who do not fit into those standards, leading to feelings of exclusion and inadequacy.

The white standard remains a popular area of study about Morrison’s writing, and the topic has been explored from various perspectives. Scholars have already noted that the African-American characters in *The Bluest Eye* endure great hardship as victims of mass media. Much of the research in this area has focused primarily on the text’s psychoanalytic readings, particularly its effects on characters about physical beauty. However, this thesis not only examined the form of commercial mass culture that shaped black characters but also shed new light on the ways and causes of the subjectification and subjugation of African Americans. In the name of preserving and reproducing the rule of the white ruling society, the black characters of the novel are exposed to elusive ideas which they cannot gratify.
The first section of the thesis outlined the historical background and effects of mass media. The second section argued that there is a whole set of Education and Communication ISA such as the primer Dick and Jane, cinema, and advertising, that hold the social hierarchy together. The novel’s reference to the children’s book Dick and Jane highlights the archetypal white family in primary textbooks excluding the representation of any other marginalized family. The novel rests on the presence of Hollywood celebrities, appearing everywhere from Mary Jane candies to large street signs. In addition, there is an ongoing reference to skin-lightening and hair-straightening products that encourage the rejection of African-American identity and the acceptance of a capitalist, stereotypically white aesthetic. As a result, the greedy and decadent nature of American commercial mass culture culminates in the subjugation of African-American individuals to capitalist forces and the suppression of their national identity. Black characters constantly face exclusion from society through mass media.

The third section, drawing on the Althusserian theory of Interpellation and the social classes, illustrated that the process of Interpellation addresses indirectly black low and middle-class characters, reducing them to subjects and giving them a specific identity. In particular, Pecola, as a low-class character, suffers under the care of unsympathetic parents, and she is degraded for not being able to live up to conventional beauty. By the same token, Pauline, Pecola’s mother, is oppressed and victimized in a poor environment. She seems to be constantly interpellated and internalizes negative feelings toward her family and herself. However, Cholly is a character who refuses to be interpellated in some instances and goes against the social order. Moreover, Geraldine is a black middle-class woman belonging to a certain group of black girls who reject their identity as victims of social entrapment. Louis Junior’s delusional beliefs are shaped by immoral values which are passed down to him by his mother Geraldine. Finally, this work focused on the function of Education and
Communication ISAs, and the class of social symbols that white society invokes to maintain its power over the African-American characters. Interpellation is applied to the characters who belong to the lower and middle class; however, it fails in some instances with Cholly who mostly resists Interpellation.
Works Cited


