

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* sets up a rather tortuous complex of cultural and sociological dynamics. However, what is important to creating this complex is the concept of identity, for these varying dynamics could not exist without the varying identities of each of the characters. When analyzing the origins and facets of identification for each character, differences and similarities can exist across socio-cultural lines. More specifically, the identities of characters of varying class levels can be explained by similar means: there is often out-group dynamics and constructs of reality at work. However, how they function can differ in interesting ways.

Before delving into this analysis, the definition of class or "social status" should be given more attention. There are varying connotations of this term. The one that will receive the most focus is that of economic status. From this particular meaning, a hierarchical spectrum can be drawn using the characters, with those at the highest living standards, such as Maureen Peal, representing the top or elite, and those living in the poorest of conditions, such as Pecola and Cholly, representing the bottom. However, there is another connotation that, although involved with economic status, can also represent behavior. The terms "high-class" and "low-class" can create a myriad of in-between cases. The Maginot Line, for example, may be thought of as "low-class," or even without class, but is able to financially support herself without reliance on a husband. Soaphead Church presents another case, for although he comes from quite a lineage of well-esteemed predecessors, his actions and reputation do not constitute being of "high-class." Both of these connotations may be considered in this analysis.

In the Hewstone and Cairns piece, the concept of positive social identity is discussed. Through this identity, an individual can vicariously attain a positive self-identity through a positive group identity. This group identity, which is also considered the in-group, can be achieved through comparison to another group, which is the out-group. Comparison is able "...to establish a positively valued psychological distinctiveness for the in-group vis à vis the out-group." (p. 321) In Morrison's novel, one aspect of the identity of the character Geraldine is achieved in this way. Her in-group is a set of women that Morrison typifies as being from places such as "Mobile" and "Aiken." These women are of a higher economic status, who keep nearly picture-perfect homes, breed their children to have good manners, or higher-class behavior, and make the important distinction between them, who are "colored people" and the rest, who are "niggers." The functioning in-group versus out-group dynamic here is blatant: their identity is contingent upon setting them apart from these "niggers," and it manifests itself into every aspect of their lives, including, as mentioned before, the way they raise their children.

There is a scene in the book where Junior, Geraldine's son, wrongfully blames Pecola for the death of his mother's beloved cat. The hatred Geraldine is able to quickly muster for Pecola is quite remarkable, for she immediately and rather harshly removes the young girl from her house. To her, Pecola represents that which she has striven to never become: "She had seen this little girl her whole life. Hanging out of windows over saloons...Hair uncombed, dresses falling apart, shoes untied and caked with dirt...The end of the world lay in their eyes..." (pp. 91-92). Pecola is a representation of poverty and all of the adulteration that can accompany that status. Geraldine's immediate placement of Pecola as part an out-group with which she cannot associate seems to function almost as a justification for her higher status in society.

To further analyze this placement, Geraldine's out-group can even function as a construction of Geraldine's own reality. Ger Duijzings piece states that violence can invoke, or further solidify, the identity of a group. Geraldine obviously sees Pecola's presence and supposed crime as an affront. He then states that "Through its [violence's] ability to engineer new situations, it...makes reality resemble the ideological constructs that underpin the violence." (pg. 33) In Geraldine's view, Pecola has to have been the culprit, for otherwise it would not support her view of the out-group. The possibility that her own son, who is a "colored" person, may have killed her cat, does not even occur to her. For Geraldine, her construction of reality functions to support her view of the out-group for which she has so much contempt.

Pauline Breedlove is another character for which there exists similar structures of identity. However, she is at the other end of the spectrum. She and her highly dysfunctional family live in a store front in a poorer part of town. In Pauline's life, there is definitely an in-group/out-group dynamic, but it is markedly different due to her status. Because Pauline is part of what would probably be an out-group for someone such as Geraldine or anyone in a higher-class status, her out-group has to function in a different way. The in-group with which she identifies is of a high moral character: she does not drink, is not coarse, and does not smoke nor carouse. "She came into her own with the women who had despised her, by being more moral than they..." (p. 126). Her out-group also functions on a personal level, for it includes her husband. To someone like Geraldine, an out-group could never function on a personal level, for again, it would indicate associating with those of a lower status. For Pauline however, this personal association with her out-group is not only allowed, but necessary: "She needed Cholly's sins desperately. The lower he sank...the more splendid she and her task became." (p. 42) Therefore, Pauline's out-group functions as a justification for her moral standing.

The other aspect of Pauline's identity lies within her job. In the Berger and Luckmann piece, reality, outside of "everyday reality" is described as available in many infinite forms: "The paramount reality envelops them [people of an everyday reality] and envelops them on all sides...consciousness always returns to the paramount reality as from an excursion." (p. 25). They use the example of a person in the theater, for whom a transportation takes place when the curtain rises and falls. The return to and from work for Pauline is similar to this curtain. When she is at work she is able to create a different reality for herself. When the curtain is up, she is in a world comprised of white fluffy towels, plush carpets, order and cleanliness. She has a false sense of authority when dealing with markets, for she is buying for the Fisher house. However, when the curtain is down, her aforementioned moral identity comes back into play, and it is rare that these two identities combine: "Pauline kept this order, this beauty, for herself, a private world, and never introduced it into her storefront, or to her children." (p. 128) For Pauline, her constructed reality and out-group do not always function to support each other, as in Geraldine's case, but work to create a balance on which Pauline's survival is dependent.

Lying somewhere in the middle of the economic hierarchy are Frieda and Claudia. Their identifications are also somewhat contingent on an out-group dynamic. Hewstone and Cairns discuss the "social competition principle" which states that people of different groups tend to view each other in terms of "...competition, rather than comparison, with the out-group." (p. 325) This can be seen in the sisters' jealousy of Maureen's socks and carefully packed lunches, for these are luxuries that cannot be afforded by their parents.

It is also apparent when, upon their realization that Maureen was not going to buy ice cream for them, their sudden contentment with her turns into rude behavior towards her. In general, their out-group partially consists of people who can afford toys and accessories that they cannot.

However, what is more important are those people who are *not* part of their out-group. Despite her low-status and ugliness, on which other children constantly comment, they receive Pecola without question and treat her as a sister. Therefore, their out-group functions in a way that is somewhat flexible. Had Pecola been a mean-spirited girl, perhaps they probably would have grouped her along with Maureen regardless of her economic status. Perhaps this is also the product of being a child, for their stereotypes and classifications of others may not yet be as stringent as that of adults. However, it could also be because of the reality in which they were raised. They grew up within a supportive family, and have each other to turn to. Although they are not wealthy, they have enough money to live in a way that, if enough work is done, is comfortable. In this way, their reality functions to support who they include in their in-group, instead of who they exclude.

Obviously, there are many questions that can arise from this analysis. What if, despite their poverty, Pecola's family was as healthy and supportive as that of Frieda and Claudia? Or is it their circumstance that causes Cholly to drink and Pauline to escape to her job and away from her children? On the other hand, if Geraldine did not have the money to live way that she is able to, would she be able to even live within her concept of reality, which includes so much contempt for those such as Pecola? These are all important questions to consider, for in any of these cases the answers would probably indicate that, yes, if economic circumstances were different, so would be these situations. Therefore, is money to blame for all of this? Perhaps not, but it is a factor that obviously cannot be subtracted when considering the construction of the various identities of these characters.