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**Male Gaze and the Female Self: A John Berger's Study of *God Help the Child* by Toni Morrison**
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**Abstract**

This study aims to investigate the relationship between the male gaze and the woman self by analyzing the portrayal of female characters in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*. This paper addresses the problem of white beauty standards as an emblem of ideal beauty and the way the male gaze plays a vital role in determining a woman's self. The male gaze acts as a mirror for the woman; therefore, she molds her appearance by keeping the male gaze in her mind, which makes her an object of the male spectacle and results in losing her genuine self. When a woman cannot attain these imprudent codes of beauty thus, this makes them psychologically and physically depleted. The violence inflicted upon the female self through the male gaze will be addressed with reference to John Berger's theory of voyeurism. A woman's whole identity is structured on the sense of others' appreciation. They unconsciously inspect their figure by keeping the male gaze in their mind. This research evaluates American beauty standards as an emblem of ideal female beauty and the role of the male gaze in sculpting a woman's self.

**Introduction**

*God Help the Child* portrays the lives of Black people after the Emancipation Act in post-racial America. It is assumed that in today's America, racial discrimination does not exist, but Morrison, through her novel, tries to present that it is just a myth. African Americans in the 21st century is still suffering due to their history of slavery and dark complexion. The imposition of white American cultural norms and beauty standards on African Americans creates problems in their lives. The prominent themes of the novel are racism, trauma, childhood abuse, colorism, and the mother-and-daughter relationship.

This research intends to analyze the effects of the male gaze on the woman self through Morrison's female characters in the novel *God Help the Child*. To achieve beauty aesthetics, they built their appearance conforming to the aspiration of the male gaze. In this manner, they lose their original identity. This research also intends to focus on the way women are expected to have an impeccable physique, even if they comply with society's beauty standards; still, there remains criticism. When women cannot achieve these idealistic codes of beauty it makes them psychologically and physically exhausted. Their self-esteem and confidence get low, especially if they are not taught from the beginning to appreciate their body as it is. When society enforces rules of ideal beauty on women, it makes them depressed, and few even starts developing the symptoms of body dysmorphia.

Numerous studies have explored different themes of the novel in detail, such as trauma, motherhood, racism, subalternity, post-colonialism, women empowerment, childhood abuse, and colorism. Hence, it can be concluded, based on the existing research, that a bit of work has been done from the perspective of the male gaze. Jiang Qiuping's research briefly talks about appearance anxiety under the male gaze with reference to feminist criticism. In his research, he addresses that if women cannot achieve beauty standards set by men, issues of appearance anxiety start to develop. Jaleel Akhtar, in his research "Benjaminian Dialectics of Fashion," addresses the new black identity by comparing Bride with forerunners iconic celebrities such as Iman and Grace Jhones, bringing them into the conversation through the Benjaminian register the way today's world style of clothing evokes the fashion of the past and the issue of obsession with clothes and jewelry that can destroy the self-image of a person with reference to Benjamin's theory of fashion. He discusses the way the fashion industry is commodifying females as an object of the spectacle to society or the male gaze. The focus of this study is neither the issue of appearance anxiety under the male gaze nor the way fashion industries commodify the female physique as a sight of the spectacle. This research is unlike

in the way that it portrays that men act as a mirror for women, and they create their identity through it. Women keep the male gaze in their minds when creating their selves. Their whole identity is determined by male voyeurism. In this way, this study will be a fresh work by analyzing "*God Help the Child*" to explore the association between the male gaze and the female self through John Berger's theory of voyeurism.

## Discussion

### Surveyor and Surveyed

John Berger, in his book *Ways of Seeing* says that a woman's self is divided into two: the surveyor and the surveyed. "The surveyor of woman in herself is male, the surveyed female. Thus, she turns herself into an object, and most particularly an object of vision, a sight" (Berger, 1972, p.47). In Toni Morrison's "*God Help the Child*," Bride surveys herself by keeping the male gaze in mind. The protagonist, Bride, is the victim of American standards of beauty and the male gaze. She has blue-black skin, which becomes the cause of her exploitation. Since her childhood, Bride suffers at the hands of the extreme beauty standards of American society. She is inflicted with psychological abuse as her biological father abandons her for being extremely black. She grows up to become a successful woman, but her accomplishments come with the sacrifice of her true self. She struggles for acceptance and approval by society. At the start of her career at Sylvia Inc., she comprehends that success can be achieved through the satisfaction of the male gaze. During Bride's first interview at Sylvia Inc., she presents herself to the interviewers who function as approvers of beauty. They question her style of dressing; however, she fails to satisfy the gaze of the interviewers and is rejected. The rejection is Bride's realization point that to be successful, she has to satisfy the gaze of others, especially men. As John Berger says, "She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life" (Berger, 1972, p.46).

To be successful, she must survey her appearance according to the male fascination. Bride hires a stylist, Jeri, who represents the male gaze and alters her entire appearance. To satisfy white beauty standards, he whitewashes her identity and recommends she "always wear white. Only white and all white all the time" (Morrison, 2015, p.21). Jeri, as a male, knows the way Bride can gain the attention of the male gaze and look striking to them. He decides to modify her appearance according to the aspiration of the male gaze. Bride does not query Jeri; instead, she agrees with him about changing her appearance. Her not questioning Jeri's style demonstrates her acceptance of changing her identity according to the male gaze. Jeri associates her body with eatable things. He compares her white clothing to whipped cream on a chocolate body, "You're more Hershey's syrup than licorice. Makes people think of whipped cream and chocolate soufflé every time they see you" (Morrison, 2015, p.22). His comparison of her body with chocolate and cream shows that by seeing her body in white clothes, he is also gaining erotic pleasure.

When Bride goes the second time to Sylvia Inc. for an interview, she notices the reaction of the staff at the office, especially the male reaction to her style altered by Jeri's gaze: "Then walking down the hall toward the interviewer's office, I could see the effect I was having: wide admiring eyes, grins, and whispers: "Whoa!" "Oh, baby." In no time, I rocketed to regional manager" (Morrison, 2015, p.24). Bride's appearance decides her position at the office, not her knowledge or intelligence. A bride's appearance determines how she will be treated by society, especially by men; as John Berger says, "Men survey women before treating them. Consequently, how a woman appears to a man can determine how she will be treated" (Berger, 1972, p.46). Men who rejected her at the first interview accepted her after seeing the changes in her appearance. She acquires a job by using her physique as an object to achieve a successful life. Bride contemplates she has control of herself and that wearing white is her choice, but it is not the case; she is at the mercy of the gazes of others. She starts wearing white clothes after seeing the reaction of males at the office. The bride wants approval from society that she is beautiful. In society, the male gaze leads to hegemonic ideologies. Patriarchal rules govern the world. Patriarchal rules and laws govern the world. Van Dijk, in his paper "Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis," discusses that power includes control by some group over another group or by one person over another person. According to him, powerful people influence the minds of others and limit their freedom. People who have power do not directly alter the minds of other people; they just manipulate language in texts and communication so they can rule over their minds and use them for their interests. Bride, after seeing the reaction of males in the office, keeps their gaze in her mind and molds her personality according to male desire. Her life changed after becoming a regional manager, and now she recognizes the way she can become acceptable in society by pleasing the male gaze. She starts using her body as a commodity and portrays it as a spectacle of pleasure to the male gaze. "True or not, it made me, remade me" (Morrison, 2015, p.24); the male gaze makes her remake herself as John Berger says that a woman surveys everything about herself and the way she portrays herself to others, especially to the male is considered as the achievement of her life.

Booker's dismissal brings back childhood memories when she did not have power, and people despised her because of her Black skin. In school, her classmates used to compare her to a monkey: "One day, a girl and three boys

heaped a bunch of bananas on my desk and did their monkey imitations. They treated me like a freak, strange, soiling like a spill of ink on white paper" (Morrison,2015, p.37). Louis' gaze is the first male gaze in Bride's life who rejects her because of her color. He never accepted her as his daughter. When the first time he sees Bride in the hospital, he gets shocked and says, "Goddamn! What is this?" (Morrison,2015, p.2). Louis reaction represents society or the male gaze attitude towards people who have a dark complexion. Booker's dismissal raises the fear of society's rejection of Bride as a beautiful woman. The self she has constructed by keeping the male gaze in mind starts to shake, which makes her psychologically stressed.

John Berger, in his book *Ways of Seeing*, says that the surveyor self in a woman treats the surveyed self according to the desires of others to get treated well, especially by men. In the novel *Bride*, the surveyor looks at the surveyed self through the male gaze. A few days later, after the breakup with Booker, Bride is miserably looking outside her apartment window. Booker's dismissal makes her world upside down: "Without him, the world was more than confusing—shallow, cold, deliberately hostile" (Morrison,2015, p.52). Booker's absence makes Bride's life confusing, and the world becomes a cold place for her. Her life gets confused after the rejection of her boyfriend because now she is confused about her true self. It seems like her entire world depends upon him. Booker's acceptance matters to her. The way he treats Bride makes her forget about her skin color, but his dismissal reminds her of memories of when people used to bully her because of her skin color. She is scared and feels like something bad is happening to her, like she is "melting away" (Morrison,2015, p.5). The self, which is built on the basis of the male gaze, is now melting away, and it is scaring Bride because the loss of her fake identity means losing her status as a beautiful woman. Bride thinks Booker is more gorgeous than her. He is a flawless and beautiful man. He just has a small scar on his upper lip and one bad scar on his shoulder; otherwise, he is a handsome man from head to toe, and Bride thinks she is not bad herself. Bride thinks she is less beautiful; even a flawed man with a scar thinks she is not the woman he wants. She is surveying her appearance through his gaze. In a patriarchal society, the looker gaze is male. The male gaze controls and disempowers the woman. John Berger says that a male member of a society is in a privileged position because he possesses a certain power: "The promised power may be moral, physical, temperamental, economic, social, sexual - but its object is always exterior to the man" (Berger,1972,p.45) on the other hand, woman's existence in society defines what she can do and cannot do to herself. In anger, Bride says to Booker that he is right. She is not the woman he wants. Booker does not like her remark and gives her a disapproving look before wearing his jeans. It seems like Booker uses her for sex. His main concern is her body, and he expects her always to speak pleasantly. Still, when Bride replies harshly to him, he does not like it because it's not a way men want women to be as John Berger says that women's role is just to fulfill the sexual desire of men "women are there to feed an appetite, not to have any of their own" (Berger,1972,p.55). Patricia Waugh, in her book, *Literary Theory and Criticism* refers to Lisa Harper's views about the gaze: "The desiring gaze is constructed as the gaze of a male subject at a female object so that little room is left for the active gaze of a desiring woman and no place for her desire" (Waugh,2006,p.927).

The bride is also obsessed with her body parts. She feels proud of having a big breast, eyes, lips, and butt "I became a deep dark beauty who doesn't need Botox for kissable lips or tanning spas to hide a deathlike pallor. And I do not need silicon in my butt" (Morrison,2015, p. 38). In childhood, her classmates used to make fun of her physical features, and her neighbors said, "She's sort of pretty under all that black" (Morrison,2015, p.23), but now she is proud of her physical features because it makes her attractive to the male gaze. Bride suffers a lot before getting a job at Sylvia Inc., the first job she gets as a working stock, but her duty is always in an area where people cannot see her. She wants to work as a salesperson at a cosmetic counter but never dares to ask for it because she knows that to have a cosmetic counter, she should have white skin. The bride also thinks she is not beautiful, and this belief is embedded in her mind by people around her. This belief makes her assume that she does not fall into the category of American beauty standards, which lowers her confidence.-When she became a regional manager at Sylvia Inc., she launched her own brand, YOU GIRL. She says its cosmetics are for all girls, no matter if they have light or dark skin. Bride emphasizes that her cosmetics are for all girls and represent not only girls with Black skin who need makeup. White skin girls also need makeup like Black girls. ironic,e the bride working in a cosmetic company is ironic. After all, at the store, she could not get a cosmetic counter due to her skin color, but now she is representing a cosmetic company. Morrison, through Bride's character, is challenging the taboo in society that girls with Black skin can also work and represent the cosmetic industry.

Bride, after fifteen years, meets Sofia Huxley. In the motel room, Sofia Huxley does not recognize her, and then Bride tells her she is a child from the court who indicted her of child molestation. Her revelation makes Sofia Huxley angry, and she beats her badly and throws her out of the room with all her gifts. Bride reaches her car by limping, not feeling or thinking anything until she sees her face in the car mirror. Her mouth is full of blood. It seems like she has stuffed it with raw liver, and one side of her face is scraped. Her whole body is bruised, and one eye looks like a mushroom. She needs help but does not know anyone in that area. Bride wants to get away from there but, at

the same time, does not want to call 911 for help because to call a helpline number, she must use a motel phone. She does not want to go inside the motel because she does not want the motel manager to see her in this state. The bride is injured and needs urgent help, but the male gaze matters to her more than her condition; as John Berger says, "Her sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another" (Berger, 1972, p.46). The bride always wants to be appreciated by others. That is the reason she is afraid of what the manager will think after seeing her terrible looks, and for this reason, she decides not to call the helpline number. Bride decides to go to the police station for help. When she reached her destination, suddenly, a thought came to her mind that if she entered the police station, they would author a report and interview her, and there was a possibility that they might take her picture as evidence. She represents a cosmetic company that demands Bride to always have a perfect physique. The Pressure of looking flawless to the male gaze and society is the main cause that is stopping her from taking help from the police. The male gaze controls her whole life, as John Berger in "*Ways of Seeing*" says that the female looks at herself through the eyes of the spectator. Bride sees her whole appearance through the male gaze. She does not move, eat, wear, or act without thinking about the gazes of other people.

In the novel, female characters not only survey themselves through the male gaze, but they also look at each other through the male gaze. Society as a whole looks at women through the male gaze. When Bride encounters Sofia Huxley for the first time, she surveys her physique like a man. She says, "She is as thin as a rope. Size one panties; an A-cup bra, if any. And she could sure use some GlamGlo. Formalize Wrinkle Softener and Juicy Bronze would give color to the whey color of her" (Morrison, 2015, p.10). Women's immense breasts and hips represent feminine beauty, and Sofia Huxley's figure is not according to the beauty standards of society. She has a small breast and a physique which do not appeal to the male gaze, and if a woman cannot gain male attention, it means she is not beautiful. Sofia Huxley's mouth used to be firm, but now it shudders: "A little Botox and some Tango-Matte, not glitter, would have softened her lips and maybe influenced the jury in her favor except there was no YOU, GIRL, back then" (Morrison, 2015, p.10). Females use Botox injections to make their lips attractive. Bride thinks if Sofia Huxley had used Botox treatment before coming to court, her soft lips might convince the magistrate of her innocence. The soft features of a woman are considered beautiful and linked with innocence. Bride, from her interview experience at Sylvia Inc discerns that if a woman wants to be successful in life, she must keep the male gaze in mind. Bride assumes if Sofia Huxley had used these certain products, it might have softened the judge's decision towards her.

Sweetness as a mother also perceives Bride through the male gaze and treats her badly because of her skin color: "I wished she hadn't been born with that terrible color" (Morrison, 2015, p.2). Louis's rejection of accepting Bride as her daughter fuels Sweetness's detestation towards her. His refusal is like a stamp that proves Bride is an ugly child. Sweetness surveys the Bride's appearance through society's gaze, which only accepts white skin as a sign of standard beauty. Sweetness's attitude might be different if Louis accepts Bride as her daughter because acceptance of the male gaze matters. Sweetness utters that Bride must learn how to behave and must keep her head down instead of creating trouble: "Her color is a cross she will always carry" (Morrison, 2015, p.4). John Berger says, "A woman must continually watch herself. Her own image of herself continually accompanies her. eWhile she is walking across a room or ewhile she is weeping at the death of her father, she can scarcely avoid envisaging herself walking or weeping. From earliest childhood, she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually" (Berger, 1972, p.46). Bride's only friend is Brooklyn. She trusts her blindly, but Brooklyn, in her imagination, is making fun of Bride's skin color and appearance instead of having sympathetic emotions for her. She is surveying Bride through the male gaze. Brooklyn reasons how Bride can look beautiful to men with her dark skin and alien eyes; she considers herself ugly and does not understand how she becomes a regional manager at a cosmetic company. She is a white woman but does not have that position. Brooklyn is jealous of the Bride position at Sylvia Inc. and the attention she receives from the male. Brooklyn says, "I shouldn't be thinking this.... How can she persuade women to improve their looks with products that cannot improve her own? (Morrison, 2015, p.17). To remain a part of the cosmetic industry, Bride must keep her appearance perfect.

In Bride's life, Booker's gaze can control the way Bride thinks about herself. He has a hold over her life as his words affect her throughout the novel. : The bride surveyor self-surveys the surveyed self through his gaze to analyze her beauty. On impulse, she opens the cabinet and picks out his shaving brush. She plays with the shaving brush by putting shaving cream on it and applying that cream to her face. Bride enjoys seeing her face in the mirror covered with the white foam; it seems like unconsciously she is painting her face white to see how she will look if she had had white skin, and maybe then Booker would not have left her "my lips between the white foam look so downright kissable I touch them with the tip of my little finger" (Morrison, 2015, p.23). Bride is not accepting her true self as a Black woman; she is continuously trying to change her appearance according to the beauty standards set by society and men. In this process, Bride is losing her genuine self. Morrison, in the novel "*A Mercy*," also addresses the relationship between a woman and a mirror. Rebekka is suffering from smallpox, which deforms her facial features.



She asks her slave, Lina, to give her a mirror. Lina tries her best to persuade her mistress not to see her face but fails. Lina obeys her mistress's order and gives her a mirror. When Rebekka sees the mirror, it makes her miserable. She starts apologizing for her facial features: "Eyes, dear eyes, forgive me. Nose, poor mouth. Poor, sweet mouth, I am sorry. Believe me, skin, I do apologize. Please. Forgive me." (Morrison,2015, p.74). John Berger discusses a picture of Susannah in which she is looking in the mirror by seeing herself through the eyes of others: "Susannah is looking at herself in a mirror. Thus, she joins the spectators of herself" (Berger,1972, p.50). A woman always judges her appearance by keeping the male gaze in mind.

Bride hides in her apartment after her plastic surgery. Some days later, she decides to go to a park, but before going, she sees her face in the mirror and is satisfied with the recovery. All her facial scars have healed. She selects her clothes very cautiously. The bride is conscious about her appearance. She is just going to a park but keeps the gazes of people in her mind. A bride dresses according to the way the male gaze wants to see a woman. As John Berger says, "To be born a woman has been to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men" (Berger,1972, p.46). At the park, she selects a bench and starts reading Elle magazine when she hears footsteps on the walking track. The bride looks up and sees an old couple strolling, holding each other hands. They are wearing slacks and loose shirts with a peace sign on them. Unconsciously, Bride notices an old coupe dressing. It seems like she envies their freedom of wearing whatever they desire because she does not have the liberty of choosing her clothes. She can only wear white clothes because these clothes make her body exotic to the male gaze, as John Berger in "*Ways of Seeing*" says that women's role is to submit to male desires.

Brooklyn, after the Norristown incident, is trying to convince Bride to have dinner with her. Brooklyn decides to eat at the restaurant named Pirate. She brings Bride to this specific restaurant because she thinks male waiters will make her feel better and she will forget about her worries: "Her cure is this overdesigned watering hole where male waiters in red suspenders emphasizing their bare chests will do the trick" (Morrison,2015, p.29). It seems like a woman's life revolves around males. Even if they are depressed, they need a man's approval or support to come out of that problem. Brooklyn thinks male gaze attention will make Bride feel better because it will denote to Bride that she is still beautiful enough to get male gaze attention after her recovery from injury. Bride says she knows the reason Brooklyn has selected this restaurant is because she loves showing off her beauty around men "she loves showing off around men. Long ago, before I met her, she twisted her blond hair into dreadlocks, and, as she is, the locks add an allure she would not otherwise have. At least the Black guys she dates think so" (Morrison,2015, p.29). Brooklyn is a white woman, but her efforts to gain male attention display it does not matter what skin color women have. They all need an appreciation of the male gaze to be called beautiful. John Berger says that a woman's whole identity is structured on the sense of other appreciation: "A woman's presence expresses her attitude to herself and defines what can and cannot be done to her" (Berger,1972,p.46). Brooklyn used to have plain blond hair, but when she curled her hair into deadlocks, it made her more beautiful in the gaze of Black men. It seems like Brooklyn never changed her hairstyle after knowing that she looks more beautiful to men's gaze with curly hair. Therefore, the male gaze defines what she can or cannot do to herself, just as in Mthe male gaze also plays a vital role in changing Brooklyn's appearance.

One day Brooklyn goes to Bride's apartment, and Booker's voice comes from the bedroom that Bride is not at home. Brooklyn goes to his room and sees him lying on the bed, reading a book. He is naked under the sheet. Brooklyn drops the package and starts undressing, "kicked off my shoes and then like in a porn video the rest of my clothes slowly followed" (Morrison,2015, p.40). She adjusts her hair and joins him in the bed by slipping under the sheets. She started kissing his chest with light kisses. "Between kisses, I whispered, "Don't you want another flower in your garden?" He said, "Are you sure you know what makes a garden grow?" "Sure do," I said. "Tenderness." "And dung," he answered" (Morrison,2015, p.40). She shoves him and jumps from the bed. Booker does not watch her getting dressed. He is busy reading a book.

Brooklyn does not like his reaction and thinks she could make him love her if she wanted to. This whole incident depicts that Brooklyn uses her figure as a commodity to seduce Booker. She knows the way the male gaze wants to see a woman, but in the case of Booker, her method of seduction fails. Brooklyn is right that she can make Booker love her because when she is undressing, Booker can stop her by saying something, but he does not. He does not cheat Bride, but unconsciously, he enjoys the view Brooklyn offers her. Brooklyn humiliates herself for gaining the male gaze's attention. . Just like Bride, she does not know her true self. The male gaze plays a significant role in establishing both female characters' selves.

Booker's denial makes Brooklyn envy Bride. Brooklyn thinks she is more beautiful Bride because of her skin color. Brooklyn does not understand what man finds beautiful about Bride's eyes: "Alien eyes, I call them, but guys think they're gorgeous, of course" (Morrison,2015, p.15). John Berger says in his book "*Ways of Seeing*" that in the judgmental Paris painting, men are looking at naked women. Still, in the painting, "Paris awards the apple to the woman he finds most beautiful. Thus, Beauty becomes competitive. (Today The Judgement of Paris has become the

Beauty Contest.)" (Berger,1972, p.52). Booker's rejection makes Brooklyn question herself: is Bride more beautiful than her? Competition for looking more attractive to the male gaze becomes the cause of resentment between two friends.

Brooklyn throws a prelaunch party of Bride's new brand at a hotel. When Bride arrives at the promotion party, she is wearing a white translucent dress, which makes her a center of attraction for the male gaze at the event. The bride's choice of transparent dress makes her body a mere object to male desires. Unconsciously, she relishes it when men look at her with desirable looks because their gazes give her satisfaction that she is looking beautiful. John Berger says, "Every one of her actions - whatever its direct purpose or motivation - is also read as an indication of how she would like to be treated" (Berger,1972, p.47). Men's gazes define Bride's self because her selection of transparent dress signifies that she dresses by keeping in mind the gaze of man, not eof her own free will. She stops wearing clothes of distinct colors after seeing the reaction of men to her white dresses. She starts buying only white clothes in different shades, which destroys her genuine self.

Bride begins sleeping with random men after the breakup, even though she does not know their names. She says "My life is falling. I am sleeping with men whose names I do not know and not remembering any of them. What is going on? I am young; I am successful and pretty. Really pretty (Morrison,2015, p.35). Booker's words that she is not the woman he wanted destroy her peace of mind. It seems like she is assuring herself that she is beautiful by sleeping with different men. Bride does not know anything about those men but offers herself to be surveyed as John Berger says "Although she does not know him. She offers up her femininity as the surveyed" (Berger,1972, p.55). Male gaze provides her satisfaction that she is beautiful. She is using male attention as a self-mechanism shield to suppress the Booker's harsh words which remind her about her Black skin.

Women are expected to have an impeccable physique. Body dysmorphia starts to develop in some women when society makes them too much conscious about their physical appearance. Body dysmorphia is a psychological condition in which a person becomes obsessed with defects in their Aoife Rajyaluxmi Singh and David Veale, in their article "Understanding and treating body dysmorphic disorder," refers to an Italian psychiatrist Enrico Morselli to describe body dysmorphia. Enrico Morselli says that a person who is suffering from body dysmorphic disorder is usually sad while doing a daily routine task such as reading a book or eating on a table. At any place, he can overcome by the fear that some deformity has developed in his physical appearance without his acknowledging it. "He fears having or developing a compressed, flattened forehead, a ridiculous nose, and crooked legs" (Singh and Veale,2019, p.131). In a panic, he sees himself in a mirror. He measures the length of his body parts, like his nose and arms and touches his head. He examines his skin in case he finds any defect. Depression in this disorder does not end immediately, and sometimes it results in crying. Brides notice physical changes in her body during a journey to find Booker she observes the change in her body like flat breasts, shortened height, and weight loss it is like a nightmare to her because it means she is losing her beauty. "Those who are not judged beautiful are not beautiful" (Berger,1972, p.52). Fear of not falling into the category of beauty and being not judged beautiful by the male gaze burdens Bride more to look like a model. When Bride goes to a highway restaurant bathroom, she sees herself in the mirror over the sink and notices that her cashmere dress neckline is sliding down her left shoulder. She adjusts her dress and realizes it does not happen due to her bad posture or manufacturing fault. Bride recalls she bought the accurate size, and it was of perfect size when she began the journey, but now she is noticing a difference. Bride thinks there might be a defect in cloth or "otherwise she was losing weight—fast. Not a problem. No such thing as too thin in her business" (Morrison,2015, p.54). She is not worried about the cause of her weight loss. In the fashion industry, a thin woman is encouraged with immense breasts and beautiful eyes because these physical features are according to the expectation of the male gaze.

Bride takes a bath at Steve and Evelyn's house after a few weeks. She felt grateful and sank into the water, prolonging her bath until the water gets cold. When she gets up to dry herself, she notices that her breast has become flat nipples are the only proof that indicates it is not her back. This change makes her frantic due to shock Bride plops down back into the water, covering her chest with a towel. The breast is an important part of a woman's body; they are linked with beauty, and losing them is like losing your feminine beauty. John Berger says "men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watched themselves being looked at" (Berger,1972, p.47). Bride is very conscious about her body because since childhood, people have commented on her appearance. Breasts are part of feminine beauty; during her journey, Bride expresses that women like to have an immense breast "In addition to breasts, every woman (his kind or not) wanted longer, thicker eyelashes. A woman could be cobra-thin and starving, but if she had grapefruit boobs and raccoon eyes, she was deliriously happy" (Morrison,2015, p.53). In a panic, Bride calls Evelyn to bring her some jeans and a shirt. When Evelyn brings clothes, she does not ask her about her flat chest or towel. It seems like Bride is suffering from body dysmorphia and seeing faults in her body that are not visible to others because she is the only one who is noticing the changes in her body; other people have not noticed any change

in her body. These changes in her body make her irrational because she has built her identity based on the male gaze and alternation in her appearance means the loss of her identity as a beautiful woman.

The protagonist of the novel surveys her every move through male voyeurism. She achieved success by satisfying the male spectacle. This also explains the way females survey each other through the male gaze. Sweetness sees Bride through the male gaze, Bride surveys Sofia Huxley's physique through the male gaze when she releases from the prison, and Brooklyn judges Bride's appearance through the male gaze after she got beaten by Sofia Huxley. In the process of attaining white beauty aesthetics and male gaze attention, they lose their true self as an individual.

### **Publicity and Advertisement**

Publicity and advertisement make people aware of the new products in the market and make people displeased with their lives. John Berger discusses the politics of Publicity in his book *"Ways of Seeing"*. He says that advertisement makes people believe that if they buy a certain product, it will change their life. He says "Publicity is about social relations, not objects. Its promise is not of pleasure, but of happiness: happiness as judged from the outside by others. The happiness of being envied is glamour" (Berger,1972, p.132).

Bride compares Booker and her relationship with a couple in the magazine. Her comparison with a couple in the magazine represents her inner desire to have a relationship like them as John Berger says, "The purpose of Publicity is to make the spectator marginally dissatisfied with his present way of life. Not with the way of life of society, but with his own within it. It suggests that if he buys what it is offering, his life will become better" (Berger,1972, p.142). An advertisement in the magazine makes Bride gloomy and reminds her about Booker. Their relationship is not perfect and seeing a couple in a magazine makes Bride unsatisfied with her life. Morrison in the novel also highlights the way woman put their comfort aside to look attractive to the male gaze. High heels symbolize power, increase a woman's height, and make her legs seem long, it makes the woman walking movement sensual, and it is also linked with social status. In the novel, Bride likes to wear high heels. Bride's whole appearance is according to the male aspiration, and she uses her style of dressing as a tool of seduction on many occasions. She always keeps outside gazes in her mind, whether she goes for a walk or to prison to meet Sofia Huxley. When she meets Sofia in the motel room. Bride notices she does not look at her face or gift bag, her eyes are on shoes which are high heels with "dangerously pointed toes" (Morrison,2015, p.12). Her choice of wearing heels instead of flat shoes to meet Sofia Huxley signifies two things. First, she wants to match Sofia Huxley's height as height gives power, and Bride's choice of heels shows that she wants to dominate Sofia Huxley. Secondly, she wants to look attractive to the male gaze as high heels make a woman's posture erotic. Wearing high heels becomes a fashion and the media has fed this idea in women's minds that it makes them look more feminine, sensual, and enviable to other women when they receive male gaze attention as John Berger says "Publicity persuades us of such a transformation by showing us people who have apparently been transformed and are, as a result, enviable. The state of being envied is what constitutes glamour" (Berger,1972, p.131). Women wearing heels in crime shows represents the way they are expected to have their appearance according to the fascination of the male gaze. Their only purpose in life is to comply with male desires as John Berger says that all Publicity, art, shows, and advertisement are made by keeping in mind the demand of the audience, especially the male gaze. "The ideal spectator is always assumed to be male, and the image of women is to flatter him" (Berger,1972, p.64).

Bride bought gifts for Sofia Huxley after her release from prison. Bride reaches inside a bag and lay two envelopes on the top of YOU GIRL package one envelopes consists of an airline certificate gift and the other contains five hundred dollars. Sofia Huxley asks her why she is giving her these gifts. Bride confesses she wants to make her life better because she is the reason for her being in jail. Bride says she does not know what happened, but when she opens her eyes, she is laying outside Sofia's room. The door of the room opens, and Sofia throws all her gifts at her. John Berger says that Publicity shows examples of people who have bought their products are living happily. Glamorous life "The power to spend money is the power to live. According to the legends of publicity, those who lack the power to spend money become faceless. Those who have the power become lovable" (Berger,1972, p.143). Bride has destroyed the life of Sofia Huxley and now thinks if she uses money and the products of her brand, it will change her life. She is giving gifts to compensate for her loss. Bride is assuring Sofia Huxley if she uses her products and money, it will give her power and make her life glamorous. Bride gives her makeup because she thinks it will improve Sofia Huxley's looks and will make her look younger, which will also open the opportunity for her to gain male gaze attention as Berger says, "how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life" (Berger,1972,p.46).

Brooklyn is jealous of Bride because of her position at the company. Bride gains that position after her transformation as John Berger says that a female becomes an object for others after the transformation of herself by using a certain product. Bride transforms herself by using white clothes. Bride says "I sold my elegant Blackness to all those childhood ghosts and now they pay me for it. I have to say, forcing those tormentors—the real ones and others like them—to drool with envy when they see me is more than payback. It is glory" (Morrison,2015, p.38). John

Berger says "Being envied is a solitary form of reassurance. It depends precisely upon not sharing your experience with those who envy you. You are observed with interest, but you do not observe with interest" (Berger,1972, p.133). Bride loves herself after seeing the reaction of envy gazes. It makes her believe that she is the most beautiful among them, but she pays an excessive cost of her transformation by losing her genuine self and wearing a mask of fake identity, which is built according to the desire of the male gaze. John Berger says, "The publicity image steals her love of herself as she is and offers it back to her for the price of the product" (Berger,1972, p.134). At the prelaunch party of her brand, she represents her product. Her transparent white clothes represent beauty, and her money represents the glamour in her life. Publicity image steal Bride's love for herself as she is, before transformation she does not like herself even though her style of dressing was different, which represents her true self. Still, when she buys a product in the form of white clothes it makes her love herself again and she loses her true self. John Berger says that In the West, it is thought Publicity gives freedom of choice in choosing between two brands or products. Still, in reality aim of Publicity is to realize a person needs a change in his life or needs to transform himself by purchasing a certain product "the great hoardings and the publicity neon's of the cities of capitalism are the immediate visible sign 'the free world'" (Berger,1972,p.131). It looks like Jeri is doing Publicity of white clothes and he convinces Bride that she needs a change in her life "You should always wear white, Bride. Only white and all white all the time" (Morrison,2015, p.21). It feels like Publicity gives freedom of choice, but it is not the case. Jeri suggests Bride only to wear white clothes, but she can choose between shades of white. Bride thinks she has the freedom to choose her clothes, but she does not have it. The white clothes and the male gaze steal her freedom.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this research illuminates the intricate relationship between the male gaze and the formation of a woman's self-concept, as evidenced by the analysis of female characters in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*. By scrutinizing the pervasive influence of white beauty standards and the insidious role of the male gaze, this study underscores the detrimental impact on women's psychological and physical well-being. Drawing upon John Berger's theory of voyeurism, it exposes the violence inflicted upon the female self when subjected to the objectifying lens of the male gaze. Moreover, it highlights how women, consciously or unconsciously, internalize societal beauty norms, thereby compromising their authentic selves in pursuit of unattainable ideals. By evaluating American beauty standards through this critical lens, this research underscores the urgent need for cultural and social transformation to liberate women from the oppressive confines of the male gaze and empower them to embrace their inherent worth and individuality.

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