

Resilience and Resistance of Afro Americans in *Beloved* by Toni Morrison

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Abstract

Beloved by Toni Morrison provides a searing portrayal of the struggles faced by African Americans in the aftermath of slavery. Through the experiences of characters like Sethe, Morrison illuminates the psychological, emotional, and societal barriers that African Americans have had to overcome in their quest for freedom, dignity, and self-determination. “Beloved” stands as a testament to the resilience and humanity of those who have endured oppression and injustice, and serves as a powerful reminder of the ongoing struggle for equality and justice in America. One of the central struggles depicted in *Beloved* is the psychological and emotional trauma inflicted by slavery. Characters like Sethe, who endured unspeakable horrors at the hands of slave owners, are haunted by memories of their pasts, which manifest as psychological scars that continue to shape their lives long after they have gained their freedom. Sethe’s decision to kill her infant daughter rather than allow her to be returned to slavery illustrates the extreme lengths to which enslaved individuals would go to protect themselves and their loved ones from the dehumanizing institution of slavery. Across generations, African Americans have demonstrated remarkable strength and perseverance in the face of systemic oppression, discrimination, and violence. Their resilience and resistance have taken many forms, from acts of everyday defiance to organized movements for social change. Through Social Cognitive Theory by Albert Bandura the behaviours and experiences of characters in *Beloved* by Toni Morrison can be analysed.

Resilience and Resistance of Africans

Beloved by Toni Morrison is a profound exploration of resistance and resilience in the face of trauma and oppression. Set in the aftermath of slavery in America, the novel delves into the lives of African American characters who struggle to navigate the complexities of freedom, identity, and memory. Through the experiences of Sethe, a former slave haunted by the ghost

of her deceased daughter, and other characters, Morrison illuminates the ways in which resistance and resilience manifest in various forms, shaping individual and collective narratives of survival.

Societal oppression

Resistance is a central theme in *Beloved* as characters confront and challenge the systems of power and oppression that have defined their lives. Sethe's act of killing her infant daughter, known as Beloved, rather than allowing her to be returned to slavery, is a powerful act of resistance against the dehumanizing institution of slavery. Sethe's defiance in the face of unimaginable suffering reflects the strength and determination of enslaved individuals who fought against their oppressors, even at great personal cost. Additionally, characters like Baby Suggs and Denver engage in acts of resistance through their efforts to reclaim their humanity and assert their agency in a society that seeks to diminish their worth.

Trauma of Slavery

Resilience is another prominent theme in *Beloved* as characters grapple with the legacy of slavery and strive to rebuild their lives in the wake of profound trauma. Despite enduring unspeakable horrors, characters like Sethe and Denver demonstrate remarkable resilience as they navigate the challenges of freedom and seek to forge a new sense of identity and belonging. Morrison portrays resilience not as a passive acceptance of one's circumstances, but as an active and ongoing process of healing and self-discovery. Through the relationships and connections forged between characters, Morrison illustrates the transformative power of resilience in the face of adversity, as individuals draw strength from their bonds with others and find solace in the shared experiences of survival.

Family and hardships

Sethe's relationship with her daughter Denver exemplifies the ways in which resilience can emerge from the bonds of family and community. Despite the trauma that has fractured their family, Sethe and Denver find solace and support in each other, forging a deep and enduring connection that sustains them through even the darkest moments. Denver's unwavering loyalty to her mother and her determination to protect their family home symbolize the resilience of the human spirit in the face of unimaginable hardship.

Past as a influence on present

Moreover, the character of Beloved herself serves as a powerful symbol of both resistance and resilience. As the embodiment of Sethe's guilt and trauma, Beloved represents the lingering legacy of slavery and the ways in which the past continues to exert its influence on the present. However, Beloved's presence also catalyses a process of healing and reconciliation for Sethe and the other characters, as they confront the ghosts of their past and strive to make sense of their shared history. In this way, Morrison illustrates the transformative potential of resilience, as characters grapple with their past traumas and strive to forge a path toward healing and redemption.

Beloved by Toni Morrison is a haunting and powerful exploration of resistance and resilience in the face of trauma and oppression. Through the experiences of Sethe, Denver, and other characters, Morrison illuminates the ways in which individuals confront and challenge the legacies of slavery, while also demonstrating the transformative power of resilience in the process of healing and reconciliation. By weaving together themes of trauma, memory, and identity, Morrison creates a rich and nuanced portrait of the African American experience, inviting readers to bear witness to the enduring strength and resilience of the human spirit.

Aftermath of slavery

In *Beloved* characters like Sethe, Denver, and Baby Suggs embody the resilience and resistance of African Americans in the face of slavery and its aftermath. Sethe's decision to kill her infant daughter rather than allow her to be returned to slavery is an act of resistance against the dehumanizing institution of slavery, while her determination to rebuild her life after escaping from bondage reflects her resilience in the face of trauma. Similarly, Denver's efforts to protect her family and assert her agency in a society that seeks to diminish her worth demonstrate her resilience and resistance.

Social Cognitive Theory implications

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* provides a rich tapestry for exploring various psychological and sociological theories, including social cognitive theory. Social cognitive theory, developed by psychologist Albert Bandura, emphasizes the role of observational learning, modelling, and cognitive processes in shaping behaviour. In the context of *Beloved* social cognitive theory can be applied to analyse the characters' behaviours, interactions, and the ways in which they navigate their social environment.

Behavioural traits

One aspect of social cognitive theory is the concept of observational learning, which suggests that individuals learn by observing the behaviour of others and the consequences of those behaviours. In *Beloved* characters like Sethe and Denver serve as both observers and models for each other. Sethe's actions, such as her decision to kill her infant daughter rather than allow her to be returned to slavery, have profound consequences that shape Denver's perceptions and behaviours. Denver, in turn, observes and learns from Sethe's experiences, shaping her own understanding of the world and influencing her subsequent actions.

Shaping of behaviour

Additionally, social cognitive theory emphasizes the importance of self-efficacy, or one's belief in their ability to achieve goals and exert control over their environment. Throughout *Beloved* characters grapple with feelings of powerlessness and uncertainty in the wake of trauma and oppression. Sethe's guilt over her past actions and Beloved's haunting presence serve as barriers to her sense of self-efficacy, while characters like Baby Suggs and Denver demonstrate resilience and agency as they assert their autonomy and seek to create a better future for themselves.

Furthermore, Social Cognitive Theory highlights the role of cognitive processes, such as attention, memory, and self-regulation, in shaping behaviour. In *Beloved* character's perceptions and interpretations of their experiences are influenced by their cognitive processes, which in turn influence their emotions and behaviours. For example, Sethe's memories of slavery and the trauma she endured inform her sense of identity and self-worth, shaping her interactions with others and influencing her decisions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Social Cognitive Theory offers a valuable framework for understanding the behaviours and experiences of characters in *Beloved* by Toni Morrison. By analysing the ways in which characters observe, model, and interpret their social environment, readers can gain insights into the psychological and sociological dynamics at play in the novel. Through the lens of social cognitive theory, *Beloved* invites readers to explore themes of agency, resilience, and the complexities of human behaviour in the face of trauma and oppression.

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