



Navigating Hybrid Identities: A Comparative Analysis of The Vanishing Half and Passing

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Abstract:

*Hybrid identities can develop in reaction to racial discrimination, as people move between various cultural or racial backgrounds to reduce discrimination or receive social approval. These hybrid areas, situated amidst racial divides, serve as battlegrounds where individuals navigate their identities to sidestep discrimination or seize opportunities. Racial discrimination has the power to influence the development of hybrid identities, leading people to blend racial boundaries or pretend to be a different race to avoid discrimination or access societal advantages. The theme of racial discrimination is also visible in the selected texts *The Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett and *Passing* by Nella Larsen and have not been explored from the perspective of the creation of hybrid identities and the formation of hybrid spaces through social norms. The study utilizes Bhabha's (1994) *Theory of Hybridity* and Stanton's (1965) character analysis model. The study investigates the role of social norms in creating hybrid spaces for protagonists and the role of Mimicry in the formation of hybrid identities of protagonists relating it to their sense of belonging. The research concludes that social norms and perception are responsible for creation of hybrid spaces of marginalized community and after gaining dual identity people suffer from isolation and loss of sense of self within themselves.*

Keywords: *Mimicry; Hybrid Identities; Hybrid Spaces; Social Norms; Passing; Sense of Belonging*



Introduction

Social norms are implicit guidelines governing acceptable behaviour within a society. They are rules “of behaviour that people in a group conform to because they believe: (a) most other people in the group do conform to it; and (b) most other people in the group believe they ought to conform to it” (Alexander-Scott et al., 2016, p. 9). They prescribe appropriate conduct based on societal values and expectations, ensuring social order and cohesion. Acquired through socialization, these norms differ across cultures and communities and entail consequences for non-conformity, emphasizing the significance of adherence. Colonialism can instill a sense of inferiority among the colonized, leading them to perceive themselves as belonging to a lesser race. To integrate into Western societies and overcome colonial subjugation, individuals from non-Western backgrounds may adopt Western customs and traditions. According to Fanon (1952), people from the black and brown communities feel inferior due to the inferiority complex which is cultivated among them by the white; white supremacy makes them feel inferior towards their own race. This adaptation often results in feelings of marginalization within Western communities, exacerbating their sense of inferiority.

African Americans, a group of enormous strength, have persevered through hundreds of years of persecution and difficulty, yet their souls stay faithful. From the profundities of slavery to the levels of social liberties and activism, their commitments to American culture are obvious. They have a rich social legacy, incorporating music and writing. Their steadfast quest for equity keeps on motivating the ages. The works of African Americans were initiated in the final part of the eighteenth century, frequently concentrating on fairness and equity. Eighteenth-century creators were trailblazers of African-American writing, including Boston Ruler and David George. African-American writers addressed enormous amounts of American writing, adding to various works. African American scholars acquaint perusers with race and identity by uncovering their secret history, targeting their focus on slave obstruction, prejudice and racialism, persecution, and differentiation.

Hybrid identities are a combination of numerous social and cultural foundations, making a new and diverse identity. They challenge conventional thoughts of character, displaying the fluidity of human experiences. Embracing hybrid identities is pivotal for cultivating a more rich and diverse society. Hybrid identity arises as an important topic in writing, mirroring the



flexibility and intricacy of human experiences in a globalized world. By investigating the convergence of various societies and social foundations, hybrid identities challenge conventional thoughts of character and widen the perspective of interpreting the human condition. Literature gives a strong stage to investigate the intricacies of hybrid identities, offering a glimpse of the experiences and sufferings of people of multicultural societies.

Statement of the Problem

In the post-colonial era, when strong colonizers held influence, people's characters were essentially molded by pioneer rulers, frequently developing new social standards. Those with blended foundations experienced tension and anxiety because of inconsistent treatment and the gamble of segregation. For African Americans living under the authority of white colonizers, racial bias prompted precise segregation and detachment. Thus, a few African Americans decided to pass as white to get the privilege and acknowledgement concurred to the white populace. The same issues of hybrid identities are discussed in the books *The Vanishing Half* and *Passing*. In these novels, the characters' encounters with exploring various racial personalities strikingly delineate how cultural discernments, standards, and racial predispositions assumed a vital part in shaping their lives. It can be seen that the issues of racism, identity crisis, identity distortion and passing in these two novels have been explored. These novels have not been explored before through the lens of hybrid identity and its probable impact on the sense of belonging of characters. The study examines these hybridized personalities, uncovering how they compelled the primary characters to move away from their social roots and personalities, providing insights into the complex elements of belonging in a society, profoundly due to hybridity.

Research Objectives

- To investigate the role social norms, play in crafting the experiences of hybrid spaces for characters who choose to pass as a different race in both novels.
- To investigate the construction of hybrid identities through 'Mimicry', relating it to the characters' sense of belonging.
- To compare the societal and individual construct of hybrid spaces in the characters of *The Vanishing Half* and *Passing*



Research Questions /Hypothesis

1. What role do societal norms play in crafting the experiences of hybrid spaces for characters who choose to pass as a different race in both novels?
2. What role does the concept of 'Mimicry' play in constructing hybrid identities, relating it to the characters' sense of belonging?
3. What is the comparison of the societal and individual construct of hybrid spaces in the characters of *The Vanishing Half* and *Passing*?

Significance of the Research

The findings of the research are expected to generate a debate at various scholastic gatherings, academic discussions, scholarly publications, literary societies and establishments like digital and social platforms. It is hoped that the findings will create awareness in masses related to hybrid identities. Furthermore, the finding of the study may contribute towards the solutions of the problems related to hybrid identities in society at individual and social level.

Literature Review

Hybrid identities

Hybrid identities result from blending diverse cultural influences, shaping unique senses of self that surpass conventional categorizations, emerging from multicultural interactions, and reflecting dynamic combinations of language, customs, beliefs, and lifestyles. Hybrid identity emerges when identity challenges the rightness of the culture or identity (Meredith, 1998). Identity and hybridity emerge as pivotal themes in postcolonial literature, evolving alongside the advent of colonization and persisting as integral elements within this literary discourse. As stated by Aschoft hybridity refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonialization. (Aschroft, 2007). It can arise due to various reasons such as racism, migration, and diaspora.

Hybrid Identity and Racism

The topic of identity and feeling of distancing is crucial for socially dislodged individuals. The objective of the Diaspora works is to investigate the development of new identities in diverse cultures and the excruciating encounters of people with those cultures. Nisar, (2021) investigates the issue of identity and racism in chosen fictitious works, *Season of the Rainbirds* (1993) and *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) by Aslam. For this reason, Bhabha's 'The Location of Culture (1993) and Fanon's



Dark Skin, White Mask (1952) are utilized as hypothetical frameworks to investigate the chosen books. The exploration is descriptive, and put inside the interpretive worldview. The information for the current review is extracted from the text paragraph, which is taken from the chosen books and is gathered through purposive sampling. Discoveries of the research uncovered that hybrid identities of minorities and displaced are coming about because they are minimized by the larger part of the class and are exposed to racist and stereotyped mentalities, which leads to hybridization.

Hybrid Identity and Diaspora

Sumra, Taseer, Afzal, & Sadaf, (2021) delve into the themes of cultural hybridity and diaspora compromise in Mendelson's novel *Almost English* (2013). It examines how the diasporic community grapples with cultural diversity and ambivalence, emphasizing the role of cultural choices in identity formation. The research explores Mendelson's portrayal of a hybrid world where no culture or identity remains pure. Drawing on Homi K. Bhabha's critical theories, particularly cultural hybridity and ambivalence, it provides a theoretical framework for analysis. The study highlights Mendelson's challenge to cultural fixity, promotion of cultural awareness, and contestation of cultural hierarchies. Ultimately, it reveals how diasporic communities navigate identity and language struggles in a hybrid world. Despite the notion of a "third space," they confront complexities that lead to a reassessment of their identities and societal positions. Through this exploration, the research sheds light on the nuanced experiences of diasporic communities amidst cultural diversity and ambivalence.

Hybrid Identity and Migration

Bashir, Rahman, & Abid, (2022). delves into a South Asian diasporic work, exploring the concept of hybrid identity amidst migration. Departing from their homeland in pursuit of better opportunities, migrants often encounter identity crises in their new host lands. The transition to foreign environments introduces various obstacles, including social segregation and workplace disparities, which contribute to feelings of fragmentation and dislocation. Through a qualitative approach, this research employs the theoretical framework of hybridity, a central concept in postcolonial discourse, to analyze the selected text. The findings underscore the burdens carried by diasporic communities, as they navigate between their native culture and the realities of their adopted homes. Moreover, the study reveals that these individuals grapple with a profound sense



of nostalgia and cultural displacement, ultimately shaping their hybrid identities. By shedding light on these complexities, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of identity formation within diasporic contexts.

Research Gap

The novels *The Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett and *Passing* by Nella Larsen have been previously examined for themes such as racism, identity crisis, gender roles, stereotyping, racial passing, and feminist perspective. However, their exploration through the lens of hybrid identity, its potential impact on characters' sense of belonging, and the role of social norms in the construction of hybrid spaces remains unexplored. This study aims to address this gap by analyzing how hybrid identity is portrayed in these works. By investigating this aspect, the aim is to offer new insights into these literary works and contribute to the ongoing discourse on identity in literature.

Research Methodology

This research utilizes a qualitative approach, which aims to understand and interpret the subjective experiences, perspectives, and interpretations of individuals or groups being studied. This research uses the Theory of Hybrid identity by Homi. K Bhabha (1994) as the theoretical framework to analyze the role of social norms and 'Mimicry' in the formation of hybrid identities of protagonists and analyzing its effect on the protagonists' sense of belonging in the selected texts i.e. *The Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett and *Passing* by Nella Larsen.

Theoretical framework

Homi. K Bhabha proposed the theory of hybridisation in his book *The Location of Culture* in 1994. It remains one of the most influential books in the study of postcolonial literature. Bhabha explains hybridity as Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of authority). (Bhabha, 1994, p.160). Hybridity begins when the constraints of a system or culture are flexed, so that clarity and firmness about things that can or cannot be done undergo blurring. Bhabha noted that a separate 'hybrid' system is a metaphor for describing the joining of two forms that give rise to certain properties of each form, as well as negating certain properties that belong to both in a hybrid space. According to Bhabha, it is the "in between space that carries the burden of meaning of culture" (Bhabha, 1994, p.38). Hybridity does not only mean fusing two different



cultures, but is also seen as retrospective construction through the historical process (Huddart 2007: 21). Cultural hybridity is, therefore, not something absolutely general: it may appear to go all the way down, in all culture, but that would indeed blur all differences into indifferences. Hybrid cultures are not bounded and self-present cultures that at a later date became hybrid; (Huddart 2007: 42). Bhaba (1994) refers to hybridity as an “in-between” space that gives birth to new signs of identity through negotiation of differences (Bhabha, 1994, p.1-2). Hybridity expresses a state of ‘in-betweenness,’ as a person who stands between two cultures (Habib 2005: 166; Loomba 2000: 173). Bhabha insists that hybridity is an ongoing process. In fact, for Bhabha, there are no cultures that come together leading to hybrid forms; instead, cultures are the consequence of attempts to still the flux of cultural hybridity (Huddart 2006: 4).

Following are the three major concepts of Bhabha’s theory of hybridity

1. Ambivalence
2. Mimicry
3. Third Space

Ambivalence.

Ambivalence is anything of a contradictory nature or a situation that is characterized by contradiction. Mimicry is due to the ambivalent relationship between the colonizers and the colonized. Furthermore, Bhabha also reveals that the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between presenting itself as authentic and authoritative, with its articulation showing repetitions and differences. In other words, the colonial identity is unstable, dubious, and always divided (cited by Loomba 2000: 229-230).

Mimicry.

Hybridity also leads to mimicry. Bhabha uses the term mimicry to talk about the way the colonial subject mirrors their colonial masters in cultural values, characteristics, and language. Bhabha states colonial mimicry is “the desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite”. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86). According to Bhabha (cited by Foulcer 2008: 105), mimicry is a mottled reproduction of European subjectivity in an “impure” colonial environment, displaced from its origins and reconfigured in the light of special sensibilities and the restlessness of colonialism. Mimicry is closer to mockery. Resistance can be mimicry that will create mockery and this creates an ambivalence in the relationship between the



colonizer and the colonized. Bhabha expresses, The menace of mimicry is its double vision which disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourses also disrupts its authority. It is a double vision that is a result of what I've described as the partial representation/recognition of the colonial object (Bhabha, 1994, p.88).

Third Space.

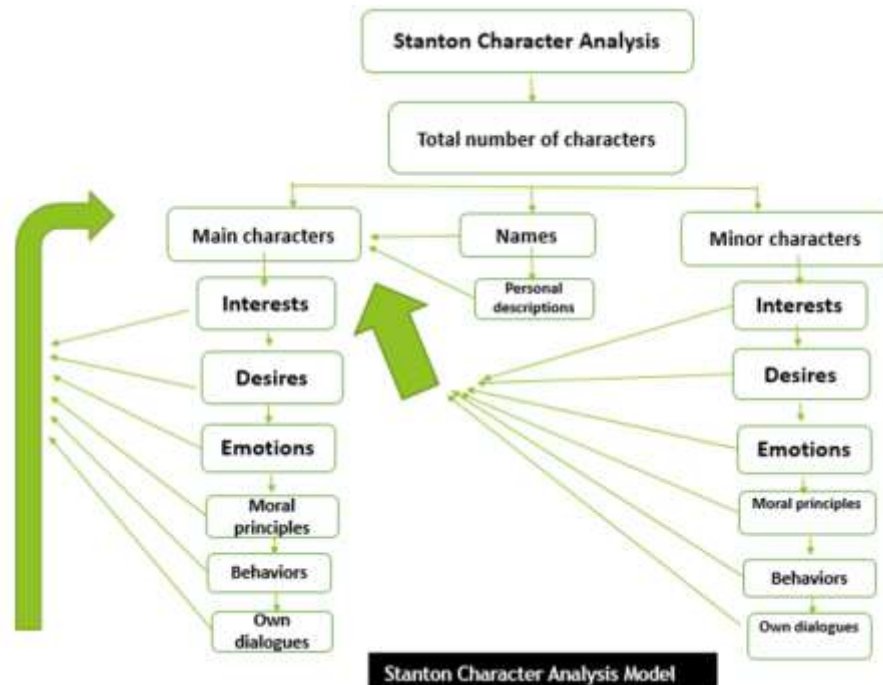
Bhabha contends that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in a space that he calls “The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code” (Bhabha, 1994, p.37). Cultural identity always emerges in this contradictory and ambivalent space, which for Bhabha makes the claim to a hierarchical ‘purity’ of cultures untenable. For him, the recognition of this ambivalent space of cultural identity may help us to overcome the exoticism of cultural diversity in favour of the recognition of an empowering hybridity within which cultural difference may operate.

Method of Analysis

The method used in this research is a qualitative descriptive method that presents data in the form of words, and sentences, not in the form of numbers as the result of statistical calculations (Sulastri et al., 2021). This study employs character analysis as its selected method. Character analysis reveals themes, social dynamics, and cultural nuances in narratives, offering insights into human behaviour and societal issues. Exploring character complexities provides a valuable understanding of identity, relationships, and the human condition. “Characters in fiction can be major and minor, static, and dynamic characters. A major character is an actual figure at the centre of the story. The major character (protagonist) is a figure whose conflict with an antagonist may spark the story's conflict. Supporting the protagonist is one or more secondary or minor character(s) whose function partly illuminates the major character(s). Minor characters are often static or unchanging, and they remain the same from the beginning of a work to the end. On the other hand, dynamic characters exhibit some kind of change—of attitude, purpose, behaviour, as the story progresses” (Ferdinal, Seswita, & Sandika, 2020, p.67). In this research, character analysis of four major characters- the protagonists of *The Vanishing Half* (Desiree and Stella) and

Passing (Clare and Irene)- is done using Stanton's (1965) character analysis model by analyzing the dialogues and actions depicted via the speech of the four major characters.

Figure 3.2 Murphy's Character Analysis Model



Character can be defined by two meanings. The first one is individuals who appear in the story and the second one is how the person or the character acts in the story. Character traits and appearance can be described directly by the author or indirectly by other characters. This is referred to as characterization. "The blend of interests, wants, emotions, and moral beliefs that makes up each of these individuals" (Stanton, 1965: 17).

The analysis of texts is ordered in the following way.

1. Societal norms and Hybrid space
2. Role of 'Mimicry' and Hybrid identities
3. Hybrid identities construct comparison

Data Analysis

Context

Despite being published at different times, *The Vanishing Half* and *Passing* both explore the theme of racial passing. The protagonists Desire and Stella in *The Vanishing Half* and Irene and Clare in *Passing* encounter comparable challenges in defining their social roles as African Americans. They grapple



with the complexities of racial passing, navigating societal expectations and struggles with identity. This study illuminates the shared social constraints Afro-Americans have faced, prompting them to adopt hybrid identities and pass as white. Through these narratives, parallels emerge, shedding light on the enduring societal pressures surrounding racial identity.

Artfully depicting the significant influence of hybrid identity formation on the sense of belonging and experiences of their female protagonists, *The Vanishing Half* and *Passing* offer engaging literary examinations of the Afro-American journey. Bhabha's (1994) Theory of Hybrid Identity and Stanton's (1965) character analysis model furnish invaluable frameworks for understanding how societal pressures and norms mould their existence. This research delves into the complexities of racial passing, exploring the tension between societal expectations and personal authenticity. Through nuanced narratives, the novels illuminate broader themes of identity, belonging, and the search for selfhood, offering profound reflections on identity formation in a racially stratified society.

Sections of Analysis

The examination delves into the complexities of hybrid identities, revealing their ongoing influence on the practice of racial passing within the Afro-American community. Grounded in Bhabha's (1994) Theory of Hybrid Identity, the analysis dissects distinct elements of this theoretical framework. Utilizing this perspective, the analysis sections are meticulously constructed, revealing the nuanced nature of hybrid identities and their profound impact on individuals navigating racial boundaries.

The analysis of texts is ordered in the following way.

1. Societal norms and hybrid space
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Societal norms and Hybrid space

The research intricately examines the struggle between conformity and authenticity, illuminating the societal norms and pressures that influence individuals' encounters with race and identity in hybrid environments. Through their narratives, the study delves into the dynamic nature of racial identity and societal expectations marked by racial division. The description of the town in *The Vanishing Half* serves as a backdrop for Alphonse Decuir's



reflections on growing up with a light skin tone and the challenges he faced due to societal perceptions of race. His recollections include his mother's efforts to darken his skin during his childhood, which underscore the prevalence of internalized racism within their community and the weight of societal expectations. These experiences prompt Alphonse to consider the possibility of establishing a community for individuals like himself who defy traditional racial categorizations—a "third place" where they can forge a sense of acceptance and belonging.

In the first evidence taken from Brit Bennett's novel *The Vanishing Half*, themes of racial identity, societal norms, and the complexities of assimilation are deftly explored. It delves into a pivotal passage where the protagonist contemplates the inheritance of "lightness" and its implications for future generations. It illuminates the intricate dynamics of identity formation within marginalised communities, highlighting the tension between cultural authenticity and societal expectations. A town for men like him, who would never be accepted as white but refused to be treated like Negroes. A third place. His mother, rest her soul, had hated his lightness; when he was a boy, she'd shoved him under the sun, begging him to darken. Maybe that's what made him first dream of the town. Lightness, like anything inherited at a great cost, was a lonely gift. He'd married a mulatto even lighter than himself. She was pregnant with their first child, and he imagines his children's children, lighter still, like a cup of coffee steadily diluted with cream. A more perfect Negro. Each generation lighter than the one before. (Bennett, 2020, p.5-6). This quote intricately explores the dynamics of racial identity and the perpetuation of societal norms. The protagonist's contemplation on the inheritance of "lightness" underscores the societal pressures and sacrifices associated with conforming to prevailing norms. As stated by Bhabha

Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of authority). (Bhabha, 1994, p.112). The description of the noun "lightness" as a "lonely gift" suggests a poignant isolation and alienation experienced by individuals navigating the pursuit of assimilation into dominant cultures, revealing the emotional toll of this endeavour. The protagonist's choice to marry a mulatto woman even lighter than himself exemplifies the internalized biases and aspirations within marginalized communities to attain social



acceptance and upward mobility through alignment with whiteness. This decision reinforces societal norms that prioritize lightness as a symbol of beauty and status, perpetuating the cycle of colourism within the community. The imagery of their future offspring becoming "lighter still" parallels the metaphor of coffee diluted with cream, symbolising the gradual erosion of cultural heritage and assimilation into dominant cultural paradigms.

Furthermore, this passage delves into the complications of hybrid identity and the negotiation of belonging within marginalized communities. The protagonist's contemplation of their descendants becoming "a more perfect Negro" reflects the internal struggle between preserving cultural authenticity and conforming to societal expectations. Through the lens of hybridity, we witness individuals navigating the ambiguous spaces between dominant and marginalized cultures, grappling with the dichotomy of authenticity versus assimilation. Ultimately, this quote offers a profound discussion on the enduring influence of societal norms and the intricate nature of identity formation in a society characterized by systemic inequalities. The analysis discloses that in *The Vanishing Half*, societal norms heavily influence the characters' decisions to pass and their subsequent encounters within hybrid spaces. These norms perpetuate standards of beauty and social acceptance that prioritize whiteness, compelling characters to navigate the complexities of assimilation and concealment of their true racial identities.

Through the protagonists' contemplations on the consequences of passing, such as the "lonely gift" of lightness in Bennett's work and the anticipation of lighter generations in Larsen's narrative, the pervasive influence of societal expectations on the formation of hybrid identities becomes evident. Thus, societal norms play a significant role in shaping characters' experiences within these hybrid spaces, emphasising the tensions between cultural authenticity and the pressures of assimilation. In *Passing*, the prevailing social pressures and racial divisions become apparent as Clare, who has successfully passed as white, broaches the subject of her African American ancestry with her husband. His reaction and words starkly depict the societal aversion towards individuals of African descent. Bellew put out his hand in a repudiating fling, definite and final. "Oh, no. Nig," he declared, "nothing like that with me. I know you're no nigger, so it's all right. You can get as black as you please as far as I'm concerned, since I know you're



no nigger. I draw the line at that. No niggers in my family. Never have been and never will be. (Larsen, 1929, p.68)

In this quote from *Passing* by Nella Larsen, Bellew's refusal to accept the term "nigger" highlights the widespread racial prejudices and cultural standards of the early 1900s. His claim that Clare referred to as "Nig," does not fit his criteria for being a "nigger," highlights the unjust and biased way in which racial classifications are made. Bellew's use of disrespectful words and his assertion of racial dominance demonstrate the strict social structure that determines inclusion and fitting in. Furthermore, Bellew's decision to exclude "niggers" from his family reinforces deep-seated racial biases, continuing the cycle of segregation and discrimination. In this environment, managing a hybrid identity is a complex challenge as people navigate societal norms while also trying to maintain their cultural heritage. The protagonist's experience of passing as white while being of mixed heritage further highlights the fluidity and ambiguity of racial identity. Bellew's refusal to acknowledge the protagonist's racial background exposes the superficiality of racial classifications and illuminates the tensions between outward appearance and authentic identity. As acclaimed by Bhabha; "all forms of culture are continually in the process of hybridity" (Bhabha, 1994, p.211; Khan, Ullah, Usman, Malik, Khan, 2020).

This dynamic underscores the intricate challenges individuals face in reconciling societal expectations with their true selves. Ultimately, this excerpt offers a poignant commentary on the enduring influence of social conventions and the difficulties of hybrid identity within a society deeply divided along racial lines. To sum up, this excerpt from *Passing* offers insight into the widespread racial prejudices and cultural expectations of the early 1900s. Bellew's refusal to use the word "nigger" and his belief in racial superiority demonstrate the profound biases that dictate ideas of inclusion and acceptance. The protagonist's journey of passing and the resulting conflicts between looks and the self, highlight the challenges of managing a mixed identity in a racially divided society. Larsen's novel delves deeply into the lasting influence of societal expectations on personal identity and sense of belonging, seen through Bellew's position and the main character's quest. The aforementioned quote from *Passing* vividly illustrates how societal traditions shape the experiences of the protagonist passing as a different race. Bellew's vehement rejection of the term "nigger" and insistence on racial superiority underscore the deeply ingrained biases of the time. His refusal to acknowledge the protagonist's true identity



reflects the pressure to conform to societal expectations and the rigid boundaries imposed by social norms. Ultimately, Bellew's stance highlights the challenges of navigating hybrid spaces within a racially stratified society.

Role of 'Mimicry' and Hybrid Identities

The text examines how mimicry plays a part in adjusting to various cultures, especially in colonial and post-colonial environments, by drawing upon theories such as Homi K. Bhabha's idea of mimicry. When Stella passes as white, she is called Miss Vignes at the office while Desiree calls her Stella at home. The conflict between Stella and Miss Vignes is mentioned as "Each evening, she went through the process in reverse. Miss Vignes climbed onto the streetcar where she became, again, Stella." (Bennett, 2020, p.180). In *The Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett, the contrast between these quotes highlights the concept of mimicry and its impact on the characters' sense of belonging. The initial quote shows Stella's routine of discarding her Black identity every night and transforming into her white alter ego, Miss Vignes. This transformation highlights the idea of mimicry, as Stella deliberately imitates the white world's mannerisms, behaviours, and appearance to navigate the racial hierarchy and be accepted. Stella tries to separate herself from her Black roots and the constraints of societal norms by blending in with the white community, showing the intricate nature of hybridity in a racially divided society.

On the other hand, the second statement shows Stella embracing her Black identity again as she gets on the streetcar and reclaims her role as Stella. This inversion of the imitation procedure emphasizes how identity is flexible and uncertain in hybrid environments. Even though Stella tries to blend in as white and fit in with the prevailing culture, her Black identity is still a crucial aspect of her self-perception. Yet, her capacity to completely accept this identity is hindered by the societal expectations and repercussions linked to being Black in a community divided by race. Therefore, even though Stella may act under the norms of the white society, her feeling of fitting in is constantly tested by the conflict between her Black roots and her wish to be embraced by the white group. Furthermore, the concept of hybrid identities further complicates the process of mimicry and its influence on the characters' sense of belonging. Stella's presence as both Miss Vignes and Stella demonstrates the hybrid identity found in the novel. While manoeuvring between these two identities, Stella struggles with the clashing expectations of society and her identity. As Bhabha states, The menace of mimicry is its double



vision which disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourses also disrupts its authority. It is a double vision that is a result of what I've described as the partial representation/recognition of the colonial object (Bhabha, 1994, p.88).

The ongoing effort needed to uphold her white identity highlights the mental burden of existing in a constant state of conflict, where being true to oneself and fitting in are forsaken to be accepted and survive. In the end, the quotes in *The Vanishing Half* provide a detailed examination of mimicry, hybrid identities, and their impact on the characters' feeling of fitting in. Stella's evening change emphasizes the intricate processes of identity negotiations in mixed environments, where people tackle issues of race, class, and identity to seek acceptance and connection. Yet, the natural unpredictability of mimicry and the difficulties of upholding numerous personas highlight the constraints of fitting in a society that upholds strict racial barriers. Bennett uses Stella's experiences to prompt readers to navigate the forming of a hybrid identity and the lasting influence of societal norms on personal feelings of belonging in a society divided on the basis of race. In *Passing*, the protagonist Irene who temporarily passes as white to enjoy the privileges of white people converses with Zulena while saying "It's funny about 'Passing'. We disapprove of it and at the same time condone it. It excites our contempt and yet we rather admire it. We shy away from it with an odd kind of revulsion, but we protect it" (Larsen, 1929, p.97-98)

This quote in illustrates the nuanced perspectives of Irene's mixed feelings towards passing, representing the conflicting and complex reactions to people who move through the unclear borders of racial identity. Passing is frowned upon because it challenges existing norms and upsets the racial hierarchy. It is viewed as a dishonest act and diminishes the authenticity of racial classifications, resulting in distance from individuals who value purity and genuineness. Nevertheless, even though it is not approved of, passing is also silently respected and safeguarded in society. The capacity to appear as a different race offers a type of social advancement and freedom from the limitations of one's racial background. In a society that values whiteness and gives privileges to those who are white, passing allows Black individuals to access opportunities and privileges that they would not otherwise have. This contradictory admiration arises from acknowledging it as a means of survival in a society full of racial bias and



discrimination, underscoring the intricacies of negotiating identity and the longing for acceptance and fitting in.

Additionally, the quotation discusses the inner struggle felt by Irene who can blend in, dealing with the conflict between being true to herself and fitting in. Passing involves individuals taking on behaviours, mannerisms, and appearances linked to the dominant culture, which blurs the line between self and performance. As Bhabha states. The menace of mimicry is its double vision which disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourses also disrupts its authority. It is a double vision that is a result of what I've described as the partial representation/recognition of the colonial object (Bhabha, 1994, p.88). Irene's continual act of presenting herself in a certain way weakens her feeling of fitting in and being genuine, resulting in a deep sense of isolation and detachment from her true identity and community.

Moreover, the guarantee of social security in inheritance highlights the continuation of racial structures and the maintenance of white advantage. Although, passing provides a temporary break from racial discrimination, it ultimately strengthens the racial divide and continues the marginalization of Black individuals. The social hesitance to address the intricacies of passing mirrors a widespread hesitance to question the current state of affairs and dismantle the structures of power and privilege that support racial inequality. In this examination, Larsen delves into the complex connections between mimicry, hybrid identities, and belonging in a society defined by racial conflicts, encouraging readers to examine the role of mimicry and discrimination in the sense of belonging of the protagonist.

The analysis indicates mimicry plays a significant role in forming hybrid identities and influencing characters' feelings of belonging in societies divided by race. In the initial quote, Bennett shows Stella's routine of transitioning between her Black and white identities, demonstrating the performative aspect of mimicry. Stella successfully imitates the behaviours, mannerisms, and appearance of the white community by taking on the persona of Miss Vignes, causing a blur between her authentic self and the act of identity. This continual display of selfhood exemplifies the need to fit into the predominant culture and be embraced, underscoring the intricate navigation of belonging in mixed environments. Likewise, in *Passing*, the second quote explains Irene's contradictory feelings towards passing and the idea of mimicry. Even though passing is seen as both unacceptable and accepted, it is ultimately



permitted in society, showing that it is acknowledged as a way to survive in a world with racial divisions. This conflicting attitude towards passing highlights the mixed reactions towards people who manage dual identities through mimicry. Passing is controversial because it confronts racial norms and generates both scorn and admiration for its ability to grant advantages to Black people.

Moreover, both quotes emphasize the natural conflict between staying true to oneself and adapting to new cultures in hybrid identities. Both the protagonists struggle with the emotional impact of always having to act a certain way to understand the challenges of race and blending in. The transformation of Stella and Irene pretending to be white shows the inner struggle felt by people who have to hide parts of their true identity to fit in with societal norms. This dispute diminishes their feeling of fitting in and genuineness, resulting in emotions of isolation and detachment from their genuine selves and communities.

Hybrid Identities Construct comparison

This section examines the consequences of these comparative studies for comprehending the ever-changing aspect of hybrid identity and how individuals manage various social impacts to form their identity. When Stella joins office, she passes as white to gain the privileges of white people; in that phase of life, she suffers from the process of hybridity. She wanted Desiree to see how convincingly she played her role, but she was living a performance where there could be no audience. Only a person who knew her real identity would appreciate her acting, and nobody at work could ever know. At the same time, Desiree could never meet Miss Vignes. Stella could only be her when Desiree was not around. In the morning, during her ride to Maison Blanche, she closed her eyes and slowly became her. (Bennett, 2020, p.178)

In *The Vanishing Half*, this statement captures the intricate nature of social constructs, hybrid identities, and diverse environments presented in the story. Stella wants Desiree to witness how effectively she portrays her character, exposing the performative aspect of identity and the societal pressure to adhere to certain norms. Even though Stella is successful at appearing white outwardly, she is limited by the need to keep her real identity a secret. The conflict between being genuine and achieving success mirrors the complexities of societal anticipations, requiring individuals to balance various facets of their identity to conform to social standards. Additionally, the quote clarifies the concept of hybrid identities as Stella



moves back and forth between her Black and white personas. Stella's need for compartmentalization arises from her dual existence, forcing her to navigate between her authentic self and the facade she shows to others in a hybrid space. As mentioned by Bhabha (1994),

The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code. (Bhabha, 1994, p.37). The fact that Desiree cannot meet Miss Vignes highlights Stella's hybrid identity constraints, preventing her from integrating both aspects of herself simultaneously. This dual nature demonstrates the intricacies of forming one's identity and the obstacles of adapting to a society divided by race. Additionally, the quote addresses the idea of hybrid spaces, in which Stella resides in a transitional area between her Black background and her white persona. Stella's performance, being devoid of an audience, emphasizes the loneliness felt by characters dealing with hybrid identities. Stella's struggle to fully merge her multiple personas into her daily routine leads to a feeling of being out of place and disconnected from each community. This relocation highlights the conflicts that exist in hybrid spaces, where people have to navigate their feelings of fitting in with various societal norms.

In the end, this quote from *The Vanishing Half* investigates the societal construct of identity and explores integrated personas and spaces in the story. Stella's situation illustrates the wider societal conflicts related to race, identity, and a sense of association. Bennett uses Stella's journey to prompt readers to examine how identity is formed and how societal norms impact belonging in a racially unequal society. Irene's construct of hybrid identity is depicted in her discussion with Clare who mentions her dissatisfaction and suffering while temporarily passing as white. I don't believe I've ever gone native in my life except for the sake of convenience, restaurants, theatre tickets, and things like that. Never socially I mean, except once. You've just passed the only person that I've ever met disguised as a white woman. (Larsen, 1929, p.184).

Similar to Stella, Irene's statement also explores the complex relationships between social constructs, mixed identities, and integrated spaces in the story. She claims that she has never fully assimilated socially unless it was convenient, demonstrating how identity is



performed and the expectation to adhere to societal norms. Her acknowledgement that she has only come across one individual pretending to be a white woman highlights the infrequency and intricacy of passing in the social setting of the book. This uncommon occurrence highlights how social constructs are intricate and how people adapt between various parts of their identity to conform to societal expectations. Additionally, the quote sheds light on hybrid identities when the protagonist recounts interactions with people who present themselves as white. The protagonist recognizing someone disguised as a white woman indicates an understanding of how racial identity can be multifaceted and changeable. The meeting presents difficulties for the protagonist's understanding of social norms and pushes her to address the intricacies of forming one's identity in a society with racial divisions. This is also stated by Bhabha (1994) as this third space is “in between space that carries the burden of meaning of culture” (Bhabha, 1994, p.38).

This reflection emphasizes the conflict between being genuine and putting on a facade when dealing with hybrid spaces, where individuals struggle to balance societal norms with their real self's. Moreover, the quote discusses the concept of hybrid spaces in the story, where characters live in transitional spaces between various racial identities. Meeting someone who appears to be white challenges traditional ideas of race and complicates societal norms. This interruption leads to the creation of hybrid spaces where people have to balance various parts of their identity and address the fragilities of belonging and identity. Irene's meeting prompts them to reflect on their interpretation of racial identity and emphasizes the flexibility of identity formation in the book's societal setting.

In the end, this quote from *Passing* inquires in detail into the social constructions of individuals, mixed identities, and mixed spaces in the story. Irene's contemplation on interactions with people who appear as white highlights the complexities of forming an identity and how individuals adapt to societal expectations by moving between various social norms. Larsen's protagonists offer insights that prompt readers to examine how societal norms are responsible for hybridity in a racially divided society through personal experiences. The analysis emphasizes the concept of hybrid environments and the societal norms present in *The Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett and *Passing* by Nella Larsen. In the novel *The Vanishing Half*, Stella's story demonstrates how she has to separate her identity to move between her Black roots and her



appearance as a white person. The statement demonstrates Stella's solitude and lack of companionship as she portrays different roles in her daily life without any spectators. In *Passing*, Irene and Clare exist in a dual space where they balance their true race with pretending to be white. The statement highlights the loneliness felt by characters performing the act of whiteness, as they have to hide their real selves from others.

Additionally, both quotes emphasize the influence of societal constructs on the characters' experiences in these hybrid spaces. In *The Vanishing Half*, Stella portrays whiteness to align with the societal norms and standards of white femininity. The statement emphasizes how individuals must present themselves as white to access the advantages in a society structured by race. In the same way, in the novel *Passing*, Irene's words demonstrate the societal norms that shape racial identity, requiring characters to maneuver within the strict confines of race to conform to social expectations. In general, these quotes discuss the societal constructs of individuals and hybrid spaces in *The Vanishing Half* and *Passing*. Both novels delve into the intricacies of building one's identity and how people maneuver between various parts of themselves to conform to societal norms. Bennett and Larsen urge readers to examine how societal conventions effect attachment in racially polarized societies by exploring the lives of characters such as Stella, Desiree, Irene, and Clare.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, it can be said that social norms wield a profound influence in shaping the experiences of characters navigating hybrid spaces which leads them to pass as a different race in novels. The characters Stella, Desiree, Irene, and Clare struggle with the societal expectations of fitting in and the desire to find a place where they belong in mixed environments. All four characters experience self-hatred, internal conflict, and low self-esteem as they struggle to reconcile conflicting aspects of their identity and navigate societal expectations. Societal discrimination and prejudice persuade Stella, Clare, and Irene to conform to social norms by passing as white resulting in identity distortion and inner dissatisfaction. Moreover, Mimicry is a technique overwhelmingly used by the characters to form hybrid identities and their sense of belonging as it is used by Clare, Irene, and Stella to cope with the challenges of race, identity, and societal norms.



The resulting hybridization through the use of mimicry though created feelings of loss of sense of self, social isolation, and displacement, fostering ambivalence as characters try to merge their assumed identities with their true selves. Additionally, they grapple with psychological distress stemming from persistent anxiety and the fear of being exposed. Additionally, characters in both novels struggle with racial identity and the societal pressures to conform to racial norms. the societal construct of hybrid spaces reveals that Irene, Clare, and Stella pass as white due to racial discrimination and eventually suffer from cultural disconnection and loss of community support. Conversely, Desiree and Jude resist societal norms and refrain from passing as white, facing social segregation and marginalization. The evidence of the individual construct of hybrid spaces for Irene, Clare, and Stella reflects on their internal conflict, loss of sense of self, identity confusion, psychological distress, vulnerability to exposure, family conflicts, and feelings of isolation. In the light of findings, it is recommended to execute the policies within the realms of law, education, and social welfare while emphasizing the challenges faced by individuals with hybrid identities or those residing in hybrid spaces. Also, it is suggested to launch educational initiatives on various social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube to cultivate a conducive atmosphere for the effective enactment of promoting equality among individuals of diverse racial backgrounds.

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