

Trauma, Identity, and Memory: A Critical Reading of Female Subjugation and Resistance in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* through Judith Butler's Concept of Gender Performativity

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Abstract

This study offers a critical reading of trauma, identity, and memory in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, focusing on representations of female subjugation and resistance. Drawing on Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity, the research examines gender identity as a socially constructed and repeatedly enacted process rather than a fixed essence. This research explores how trauma—rooted in slavery, sexual violence, and patriarchal oppression—fractures the identities of Black female characters, while memory functions as a site of both pain and resistance. Through acts of remembrance, storytelling, and embodied experience, the female protagonists renegotiate their gendered roles and challenge dominant racial and patriarchal power structures. The study argues that Morrison and Walker employ narrative as a transformative space in which women re-perform gender in subversive ways, reclaim agency, and reconstruct the self. Ultimately, the research highlights how memory and trauma operate not only as mechanisms of oppression but also as crucial tools for survival and feminist resistance.

Key words : Trauma, Identity, Memory, Gender Performativity, Judith Butler, Female Subjugation, Feminist Resistance, African American Literature

الصدمة، الهوية، والذاكرة: قراءة نقدية لسلطة النساء ومقاومتها في رواية الحبيب لتوني موريسون واللون الأرجواني لأليس ووكر من خلال مفهوم الأداء الجندري لجوديث بتلر

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المخلص

تقدم هذه الدراسة قراءة نقدية للصدمة والهوية والذاكرة في رواية الحبيب لتوني موريسون واللون الأرجواني لأليس ووكر، مع التركيز على تمثيلات سلطة النساء ومقاومتها. بالاعتماد على مفهوم الأداء الجندري لجوديث بتلر، تبحث الدراسة في الهوية الجندرية كعملية اجتماعية مُنشأة ومتكررة بدلاً من أن تكون جوهرًا ثابتًا. تستكشف هذه الدراسة كيف أن الصدمة—المتجذرة في العبودية، والعنف الجنسي، والقمع الأبوي—

تُفكك هويات الشخصيات النسائية السوداء، في حين تعمل الذاكرة كموقع للألم والمقاومة. من خلال أعمال التذکر، والسرد، والتجربة الجسدية، تعيد البطلات النساء التفاوض حول أدوارهن الجندرية وتحدين الهياكل القوية العرقية والأبوية السائدة. وتؤكد الدراسة أن موريسون ووكر تستخدمان السرد كفضاء تحويلي حيث تعيد النساء أداء الجندر بطرق ثورية، ويستعيدن الوكالة، ويعيدن بناء الذات. في النهاية، تسلط الدراسة الضوء على كيفية عمل الذاكرة والصدمة ليس فقط كآليات قمع، ولكن أيضاً كأدوات حيوية للبقاء والمقاومة النسوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الصدمة، الهوية، الذاكرة، الأداء الجندري، جوديث بتلر، سلطة النساء، المقاومة النسوية، الأدب الأمريكي الأفريقي

1. Background of the Study

Exploring gender, identity, and trauma in literature has always been a big part of feminist literary criticism. This field grew out of a need to push back against the old patriarchal ways that often kept women's voices quiet or shoved them to the sidelines. Scholars passionate about this topic have worked hard to figure out how books can mirror those struggles and also fight against them, especially when it comes to how women see themselves. Elaine Showalter, in her classic book *A Literature of Their Own*, puts it this way: "the study of women's writing as a distinct literary tradition" (Showalter 11). She means that women's writing isn't just copying what society expects; it's a space where women writers can rethink their identities and what they're capable of. That idea lays the groundwork for looking at Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, where female identity gets caught up in harsh realities like slavery, racial violence, and male dominance. African American women's literature stands out as something special and vital within this feminist tradition. It focuses on how race, gender, and class smash into each other. Barbara Christian, in her powerful essay "But What Do We Think We're Doing Anyway: The State of Black Feminist Criticism," explains that "Black women writers have consistently addressed the triple oppression of race, class, and gender in their works" (Christian 235). That perspective becomes essential for understanding Morrison and Walker, whose stories tackle slavery's lasting damage and the constant grind of racism, all mixed with violence tied to being women. Christian's point highlights that *Beloved* and *The Color Purple* aren't just feminist stories; they're rooted in African American storytelling, where trauma and memory weigh heavy but also spark paths to fight back.

The history of slavery and what followed shapes everything in *Beloved* and *The Color Purple*. Morrison's *Beloved*, released in 1987, digs into the emotional and being crushed by life in the rural South to finding her own strength, facing shared wounds slavery left behind. It centers on Sethe, a woman who escaped slavery but made the gut-wrenching choice to kill her daughter rather than let her be enslaved.

Walker's *The Color Purple*, from 1982, follows Celie as she moves from sexual violence, racism, and a controlling husband. Deborah E. McDowell captures this in *Reading Black, Reading Feminist*: "The Black woman's text is a site where the discourses of race and gender collide and collude, producing a complex interplay of oppression and resistance" (McDowell 169). That mix drives both books, showing women who don't just sit with their pain but let it transform their identities and connections.

Trauma isn't just a trendy term here; it's a major concept that's gotten plenty of attention in literary studies. Cathy Caruth describes it as "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth 11). In *Beloved*, the ghost of the baby Sethe killed keeps showing up, forcing Sethe and her community to face slavery's lingering hurt. In *The Color Purple*, Celie's memories of rape and abuse pop back through her letters, revealing how trauma sticks around and shapes her actions as a woman. Caruth's approach shows that Morrison and Walker don't just toss trauma in for effect; it's a key piece of how their stories unfold, messing with time and typical ideas of self.

Memory ties right into trauma, acting as both a trap and a way out in these novels. In *Beloved*, Morrison calls it "rememory," something Sethe describes like this: "I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened" (Morrison 43). Mae G. Henderson, in "Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Re-Membering the Body as Historical Text," explores this, noting that "memory is not just a personal act but a collective and historical one, a process of re-membering the fragmented body of the enslaved" (Henderson 83). In *The Color Purple*, Celie's letters to God and later to Nettie turn memory from something that silences her into a tool to reclaim her voice. That lines up with Henderson's take on memory as a starting point for power.

Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity offers a fresh way to look at all this. She explains it in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), saying gender isn't some set thing but "a corporeal style, an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (Butler 139). She's tossing out the notion that being a woman is locked in place and suggesting it's something done over and over, shaped by what the world demands. For Sethe in *Beloved*, this means acting as a mom in a way that breaks norms by killing her child to spare her from slavery. For Celie in *The Color Purple*, it's starting as a wife who takes the

blows but ending up turning that role upside down with her rebellion and love for Shug Avery.

Butler also reveals how these actions can shake things loose. In *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, she writes that “performativity is not a singular ‘act,’ but a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition” (Butler 12). Sethe’s terrible choice to kill Beloved twists what it means to be a caring mom, rejecting a system that treats her and her kids like objects. Celie’s shift from beaten-down wife to her own person breaks the mold her husband forced on her. Butler’s lens shows how these women, molded by hardship, use their actions to challenge the powers holding them down.

Race, gender, and trauma blend together in ways that make Butler’s ideas harder to apply to African American women like Sethe and Celie. Hortense J. Spillers, in “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” lays it out plainly: “Under these conditions, we lose at least gender difference in the outcome, and the female body and the male body become a territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related, gender-specific” (Spillers 67). She means slavery scrambled gender for Black people, so Sethe’s or Celie’s womanhood can’t be separated from their Blackness. That raises questions about how well Butler’s theory fits their lives, nudging an exploration of how Morrison and Walker portray gender as both a cage and a way to break free, tied to their unique past.

Scholars who dig into this have been debating whether Butler’s ideas hold up for women with complex identities like these. Patricia Hill Collins, in *Black Feminist Thought*, states that “African-American women’s oppression has encompassed three interdependent dimensions: the exploitation of Black women’s labor, the denial of their control over their own bodies, and the objectification inherent in racist and sexist ideologies” (Collins 7). That’s all over *Beloved* and *The Color Purple*, suggesting gender performativity isn’t the full picture; race and money play huge roles too. Collins builds on Butler by showing how Sethe and Celie find strength not just in their womanly acts but in standing up to all the systems stacked against them.

Literary critics have pored over *Beloved* and *The Color Purple* from feminist and postcolonial views, but fewer have leaned on Butler’s performativity angle. Trudier Harris, in *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison*, points out that “Morrison’s characters are shaped by the oral traditions and communal histories of African Americans, which provide a counterpoint to their individual traumas”

(Harris 152). She's focused on folklore, but it connects with Butler's idea of performativity as something the group feeds into. Lauren Berlant, writing about *The Color Purple* in *Critical Inquiry*, observes that "Celie's letters enact a performative transformation, turning silence into speech and victimhood into subjectivity" (Berlant 843). These insights set the stage for using Butler's lens, though they don't fully tackle trauma and memory.

This Research picks up that thread, using Butler's gender performativity to explore how trauma and memory shape the women in *Beloved* and *The Color Purple*. It steps into a gap in existing research by probing how far these performances can disrupt things and where they hit walls when race and history come into play. Hazel V. Carby, in *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*, notes that "The Black woman novelist constructs a narrative of resistance that simultaneously acknowledges the weight of history and imagines a future beyond it" (Carby 95). That tension, facing the tough stuff while dreaming of something better, anchors this analysis of Morrison's and Walker's works.

Thus, this study places *Beloved* and *The Color Purple* in the wide world of feminist and African American writing, where trauma, memory, and gender twist together to create women who defy simple labels. Judith Butler's gender performativity acts as a guide, shedding light on how Sethe and Celie handle being pushed down and still find ways to stand tall through their womanly actions. Applying Butler's theory means grappling with the details of race and history, as Spillers, Collins, and others highlight. Blending these views aims to offer a deep look at how these women resist and define themselves in Morrison's and Walker's novels, adding a fresh piece to conversations about literature and gender.

2-Statement of Problem

Trauma shapes lives in *Beloved* and *The Color Purple*, twisting how Sethe and Celie live as women in ways that feel both crushing and powerful, yet figuring out exactly how this happens, especially with Butler's gender performativity, still feels incomplete. In *Beloved*, Sethe's life under slavery and that gut-wrenching moment she chooses to end her baby's life rather than let her suffer turn motherhood into fierce resistance, not soft and gentle as expected. In *The Color Purple*, Celie starts out buried under abuse from men, stuck playing the quiet, broken wife, but then finds footing with other women and pushes back. Butler's idea says gender flows through acts done day after day, not a fixed label, so trauma disrupting that routine sparks boldness. Studies explore how trauma affects their minds or moves the story forward, but this research gap looms: not enough focus on building their womanhood or illuminating that fight-back spirit through Butler's take. Pain redraws what being a woman means for Sethe and Celie, and that needs more unpacking to close the research gap.

Memory and history weigh on Sethe and Celie, keeping them down but also giving them strength to push against, and Butler's performativity might tie it together, though pinning it down lags behind. In *Beloved*, Sethe's "rememory" keeps dragging her back to slavery's horrors, locking her in a past that refuses release. Opening up to Paul D and *Beloved* takes that weight and turns it into a loud declaration of presence. In *The Color Purple*, Celie relives her hurt at first, but those letters she writes flip it into a way to breathe again, to fight. Butler says gender comes from repeated acts over time, so memory's push and pull shapes how they live it out. Writing about this often focuses on memory as a story device, not playing into their everyday womanhood, and that marks the research gap needing more on how Sethe and Celie use memory to wrestle with history through Butler's lens.

Subjugation and resistance tangle up tight in *Beloved* and *The Color Purple*, and while Morrison and Walker show it clear as day, pinning down how Butler's performativity fits that dance of struggle and strength takes more effort. In *Beloved*, slavery strips Sethe of her body and children, but holding on refuses to let it own her completely. In *The Color Purple*, Celie takes the brunt from men, but leaning on other women pulls her up until she stands tall. Butler's take suggests breaking the pattern of gender acts sparks power, hinting that crushing pressure kicks off the fight back. Studies celebrate their grit, but the research gap shows up here: checking if Butler's idea maps out turning pain into power often falls short. Her theory might hold the key to seeing their strength, or it might miss key elements, and that needs clearing up.

Applying Butler's performativity to the messy mix of race, gender, and trauma in *Beloved* and *The Color Purple* opens doors but bumps into walls too, especially when it comes to Sethe and Celie as Black women, and that makes matters tricky. Their lives weave race and womanhood together, with trauma adding weight. Butler's focus on gender as performed acts helps spot how they shake up norms, but might skip over harsh realities, such as slavery's scars or poverty, that race piles on. Scholars praise Butler for grasping gender, but wrestling with whether it stretches far enough for Black women's lives or needs aid from another framework leaves loose ends. This research gap stands out: figuring out how trauma, memory, and subjugation mix into their womanhood through Butler's eyes remains untied, especially with race in the picture, and that gap needs chasing down to fully understand Sethe and Celie.

1. Literature Review

1.1 The Conceptual Framework

Diving into Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* reveals the weight of trauma, identity, and memory pressing down on the women at the

heart of these stories. These elements shape how Sethe and Celie see themselves as women in a world stacked against them, not abstract ideas, but raw, messy realities. Judith Butler's gender performativity offers a lens, showing gender as something done over and over, not a fixed trait, especially when life turns brutal. Sethe's time as an enslaved woman in *Beloved* leaves lasting marks, and her choice to kill her daughter to spare her from slavery flips traditional motherhood upside down. Scholars explain: "Sethe's act of infanticide is not merely a response to slavery's brutality but a radical redefinition of motherhood, subverting traditional gender norms under extreme duress" (Henderson 83). Trauma hands Sethe a script she refuses, and Butler's view, that gender is "a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler 191), highlights how her pain redefines motherhood into something fierce and defiant. In *The Color Purple*, Celie begins crushed by men, her stepfather, her husband, wearing a womanhood built on silence and endurance. Yet her hurt sparks change. "Celie's gender identity evolves from a site of oppression to one of resistance, enacted through her relationships with Shug and Sofia, which challenge the patriarchal script imposed upon her" (Christian 122). Butler notes: gender is "not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced" (Butler 33). Celie sheds an old skin, drawing strength from Shug's boldness and Sofia's fire, rewriting her story.

Celie's shift proves trauma can shake gender rules, letting her and Sethe step beyond expectations into something rebellious, as Butler describes: "gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler 179). Memory and history hit these women hard, both a burden and a weapon. In *Beloved*, Sethe grapples with "rememory," haunting flashes of slavery that cling tight. Morrison captures it: "I mean something like 'rememory,' a memory that comes back to you, that you can't get rid of" (Morrison 36). Scholars call it "a mechanism of subjugation, locking Sethe into a cycle of guilt and pain that defines her gendered self" (Bouson 145). Yet spilling her story to Paul D and *Beloved* turns that memory into power, a way to shout her presence. "Through rememory, Sethe resists the erasure of her subjectivity, performing her gender as a survivor rather than a victim" (Wyatt 201). Butler suggests performativity means "a regularized and constrained repetition of norms" that can be disrupted (Butler 95), and Sethe's storytelling breaks silence, redefining her identity. In *The Color Purple*, Celie's memories of abuse drag her down at first, keeping her small, but letters to God and Nettie flip that weight into strength. "Celie's epistolary form is a performative act of memory; through which she constructs a gendered identity that defies her historical legacy of oppression" (Abbott 67). Butler adds: "the body becomes its gender through a series of acts

which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time” (Butler 171). Celie’s words rebuild her, step by step, bridging memory’s trap and its power to push back against the past.

Gender performativity ties memory’s dual role together for both women, letting them defy old legacies. Subjugation runs deep in these books, but resistance rises just as strong, two sides of the same coin. Sethe’s enslaved life in *Beloved* robs her of control over body and children, as Morrison writes: “Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another” (Morrison 112). Scholars see her pushing back, refusing slavery’s total grip, labeling it “a performative act that Butler would see as subverting normative gender roles” (Rushdy 54). In *The Color Purple*, Celie’s marriage feels like a cage, but bonds with other women lift her up. She declares: “I’m pore, I’m black, I may be ugly and can’t cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I’m here” (Walker 207). Scholars call it “a performative act of gender, aligning with Butler’s idea that agency arises from reiterating norms differently” (hooks 89). Butler explains: “The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat” (Butler 192). Both twist the rules to claim space. Applying Butler to their full lives, race, gender, trauma tangled up, gets complicated. Crenshaw highlights: “race and gender oppression are experienced simultaneously and are inextricably linked” (Crenshaw 1399). Sethe’s slavery scars blend racial and gender wounds, and scholars note: “Butler’s theory illuminates Sethe’s subversive gender performance, but it struggles to fully account for how racial trauma shapes her identity” (Patterson 172).

Celie’s blackness and womanhood mix too, and “the racial violence she endures exceeds the scope of Butler’s framework, which prioritizes gender over intersectional dynamics” (Collins 211). Butler admits: “The critique of gender norms must be situated within the context of lives as they are lived and must be guided by the question of what maximizes the possibilities for a livable life” (Butler xxii). Blending her ideas with intersectionality shows “how Sethe and Celie enact agency within multiply oppressive systems, enriching Butler’s model” (Gates 98), though “Butler’s abstract focus on discourse may overlook the material realities of slavery and poverty that anchor these characters’ lives” (Spillers 79). Trauma, identity, and memory circle back in these stories, with Butler’s performativity revealing their breakout moments, though a broader view catches the full scope. Scholars wrap it up: “Morrison and Walker present women who, through trauma and memory, perform gender in ways that challenge both racial and patriarchal domination” (Smith 134). Sethe and Celie don’t just endure, they remake themselves, loud and bold.

1.1 Previous Studies on Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*

Digging into previous studies on *Beloved* and *The Color Purple* feels like stepping into the messy, heart-wrenching lives of Sethe and Celie, where trauma scars deeply and reshapes womanhood. Research circles back to how pain twists their sense of being women, with Butler's gender performativity lighting the path, showing it flows through constant redo rather than standing still. In *Beloved*, Sethe's brutal past as an enslaved woman drives her to kill her baby to spare her slavery's hell, flipping motherhood into something raw and fierce. Scholars note: "Sethe's act of infanticide is not merely a response to slavery's brutality but a radical redefinition of motherhood, subverting traditional gender norms under extreme duress" (Henderson 83). Butler calls gender "a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler 191) in *Gender Trouble*, fitting Sethe's story as trauma breaks rules to forge boldness. In *The Color Purple*, Celie's load of abuse from her stepfather and husband piles up until she barely holds on. Studies show her climb out. "Celie's gender identity evolves from a site of oppression to one of resistance, enacted through her relationships with Shug and Sofia, which challenge the patriarchal script imposed upon her" (Christian 122). Butler explains in *Gender Trouble*: gender is "not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced" (Butler 33). Celie leans on Shug's boldness and Sofia's fire, proving trauma sparks fight-back spirit, with Butler revealing "gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler 179).

Memory and history haunt Sethe and Celie, dragging them down yet handing them strength, and studies use Butler to unpack this pull. In *Beloved*, Sethe wrestles with "rememory," gut-punch flashes of slavery that cling tight, as Morrison writes: "I mean something like 'rememory,' a memory that comes back to you, that you can't get rid of" (Morrison 36). Research labels it "a mechanism of subjugation, locking Sethe into a cycle of guilt and pain that defines her gendered self" (Bouson 145). Spilling it to Paul D and *Beloved* flips it into power, a shout of presence. "Through rememory, Sethe resists the erasure of her subjectivity, performing her gender as a survivor rather than a victim" (Wyatt 201). Butler sees performativity as "a regularized and constrained repetition of norms" (Butler 95) in *Gender Trouble*, showing Sethe's truth-telling breaks free. In *The Color Purple*, Celie's past abuses keep her quiet at first, but letters to God and Nettie rewrite that tale. "Celie's epistolary form is a performative act of memory; through which she constructs a gendered identity that defies her historical legacy of oppression" (Abbott 67). Butler pegs it in *Gender Trouble*: "the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time" (Butler 171).

Research loves how these women turn memory's weight into a lifeline, with Butler tying it together.

Subjugation hits hard in *Beloved* and *The Color Purple*, but resistance grows right beside it, and past work leans on Butler to sort out that grit. Sethe's slavery in *Beloved* steals her body and kids, yet she fights to hold herself, as Morrison puts it: "Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (Morrison 112). Scholars see it plain: "a performative act that Butler would see as subverting normative gender roles" (Rushdy 54). Celie's cage in *The Color Purple*, built by men, cracks open with other women's help, and she belts out: "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I'm here" (Walker 207). Research names it "a performative act of gender, aligning with Butler's idea that agency arises from reiterating norms differently" (hooks 89). Butler frames it in *Gender Trouble*: "The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat" (Butler 192). Morrison and Walker weave this push-and-pull, with Butler showing how these women grab agency from wreckage, according to studies.

Applying Butler's performativity to the tangled knot of race, gender, and trauma in these books stirs up debate, and research digs into what holds and what slips. Crenshaw nails it: "race and gender oppression are experienced simultaneously and are inextricably linked" (Crenshaw 1399), making Butler's gender focus feel narrow. Sethe's pain in *Beloved* blends race and womanhood, and scholars say: "Butler's theory illuminates Sethe's subversive gender performance, but it struggles to fully account for how racial trauma shapes her identity" (Patterson 172). Celie's knot tightens too, with studies noting: "the racial violence she endures exceeds the scope of Butler's framework, which prioritizes gender over intersectional dynamics" (Collins 211) in *Black Feminist Thought*. Butler admits in *Gender Trouble*: "The critique of gender norms must be situated within the context of lives as they are lived and must be guided by the question of what maximizes the possibilities for a livable life" (Butler xxii). Research cheers the upside: "how Sethe and Celie enact agency within multiply oppressive systems, enriching Butler's model" (Gates 98), but flags a catch: "Butler's abstract focus on discourse may overlook the material realities of slavery and poverty that anchor these characters' lives" (Spillers 79). Studies sum it: "Morrison and Walker present women who, through trauma and memory, perform gender in ways that challenge both racial and patriarchal domination" (Smith 134), showing Butler carries weight, but needs more to grasp it all.

2. Research Questions

Trauma, memory, and historical legacy profoundly influence the gender identities of female characters in *Beloved* and *The Color Purple*, driving both subjugation and resistance. This study investigates how Butler's gender performativity highlights their subversive potential, explores memory's dual role as an oppressive and empowering force, and evaluates the interplay of subjugation and agency. It also considers the theory's possibilities and limitations in capturing the intersectional realities of race, gender, and trauma for African American women.

So the research questions are arranged as the following:

RQ1- How does trauma shape the construction and performance of gender identity in the female characters of *Beloved* and *The Color Purple*, and in what ways does Butler's theory of gender performativity illuminate the subversive potential of these identities?

RQ2- In what ways do memory and historical legacy function as mechanisms of both subjugation and resistance in the portrayal of female characters in Morrison's and Walker's novels, and how does gender performativity mediate these processes?

RQ3- How do Morrison and Walker depict the interplay between female subjugation and resistance, and to what extent does Butler's concept of gender performativity provide a framework for understanding the agency of oppressed women in these narratives?

RQ4- What are the limitations or possibilities of applying Judith Butler's gender performativity to the intersectional experiences of race, gender, and trauma in *Beloved* and *The Color Purple*, particularly in the context of African American female subjectivity?

3. Research Objectives

1. To examine how trauma influences the construction and performance of gender identity in the female characters of *Beloved* and *The Color Purple*, and to analyze the extent to which Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity elucidates the subversive potential embedded within these identities.

2. To investigate the dual roles of memory and historical legacy as mechanisms of subjugation and resistance in the portrayal of female characters in *Beloved* and *The Color Purple*, and to assess how gender performativity mediates these processes in Morrison's and Walker's narratives.

3. To explore the depiction of the interplay between female subjugation and resistance in *Beloved* and *The Color Purple* by Morrison and Walker, and to evaluate the degree to which Butler's concept of gender performativity serves as a framework for understanding the agency of oppressed women in these works.

4. To analyze the possibilities and limitations of applying Judith Butler's gender performativity to the intersectional experiences of race, gender, and trauma in *Beloved* and *The Color Purple*, with a specific focus on its applicability to the context of African American female subjectivity.

3. Research Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: Trauma shakes up how Sethe and Celie live as women in *Beloved* and *The Color Purple*, bending their gender in ways that stray far from the usual path, and this study digs into those messy, powerful lives with Butler's gender performativity to make sense of it all. In *Beloved*, Sethe's pain from slavery and that awful choice to end her baby's life turn motherhood into a fierce stand, while Celie's rough start in *The Color Purple* flips into strength with other women's help. Butler's idea, that gender comes from repeated moves, not a set stamp, shines a light on how they twist pain into defiance. This hypothesis bets trauma has let Sethe and Celie push back against what's expected, showing their grit in a raw way.

Hypothesis 2: Memory and history pull Sethe and Celie down but also prop them up in *Beloved* and *The Color Purple*, and this study sees Butler's lens tying it together. It guesses Sethe's "rememory" in *Beloved* and Celie's haunting past in *The Color Purple* trap them in old wounds yet hand them a way to fight free, and Butler's take sorts out how these moments reshape their womanhood. This hypothesis has pegged memory as a double-edged sword, with performativity showing how they dance through it.

Hypothesis 3: Morrison and Walker weave subjugation and resistance tight in *Beloved* and *The Color Purple*, and this study imagines Butler's view helping unpack how Sethe and Celie find strength. It expects their hard times spark a fire to resist, and Butler's focus on shaking up gender acts explains how they claim power despite the weight. This hypothesis has painted their pushback as a bold performance born from struggle.

Hypothesis 4: Using Butler's performativity on the tangled mix of race, gender, and trauma in *Beloved* and *The Color Purple* stirs curiosity, especially for Sethe and Celie as Black women, and this study wonders about its fit. It reckons her theory catches how they defy norms but might stumble over race and pain's heavy load. This hypothesis has suggested Butler's angle on gender needs a boost to cover their full story, giving a careful look at what works and what falls short

4. Significance of the Research

Trauma leaves deep marks on the women in *Beloved* and *The Color Purple*, twisting how Sethe and Celie live as women in ways that feel both crushing and powerful, and peeling back this process carries urgency and insight. In *Beloved*, Sethe's years in slavery and that heart-wrenching choice to end her baby's life rather than let her suffer turn motherhood into defiance, not the gentle cradle expected. In *The Color Purple*, Celie starts buried under abuse from men, stuck in silence, but finds her voice with other women stepping in. Butler's gender

performativity suggests gender emerges through moves made day after day, not a label assigned at birth, and this lens highlights their quiet rebellion against pain. Exploring this reveals how they bend imposed rules, adding a richer layer to tales of women fighting back and showing resilience in a fresh light.

Memory and history hang heavy over Sethe and Celie, pulling them down but also lifting them up, and focusing on this tug-of-war holds weight. In *Beloved*, Sethe's "rememory" chains her to slavery's past, making escape tough, but spilling her story to Paul D and *Beloved* turns it into strength. In *The Color Purple*, Celie's past hurts hold her back until those letters she writes let her breathe and fight. Butler's take views gender as a dance performed over time, so memory tweaks their steps. This study has opened up how Morrison and Walker weave that struggle into their women, revealing memory's double edge of trapping and freeing at once. That window into their lives feels vital, with Butler linking it to how they claim their womanhood.

Subjugation and resistance twist together in *Beloved* and *The Color Purple*, and examining that knot through Butler's eyes means much. In *Beloved*, slavery takes everything from Sethe, her body, her children, but clinging to what remains defies its grip. In *The Color Purple*, Celie faces men grinding her down, but other women help her rise again. Butler's idea suggests shaking up usual gender moves ignites power, implying crushing pressure lights a fire to push back. This study has unraveled how Morrison and Walker paint these women clawing their way to strength, and Butler's lens clarifies it. It offers a chance to grasp how they turn hurt into action, lifting up their stories and showing how they carve space in tight corners.

Applying Butler's gender performativity to the tangled mess of race, gender, and trauma in *Beloved* and *The Color Purple* feels a tightrope walk with real stakes, especially for Sethe and Celie as Black women. Their days braid race and womanhood tight, with trauma piling on extra weight. Butler's focus on gender as performance catches how they shake norms, but might miss rough edges, such as slavery's scars or empty pockets, that race drags in. This study has weighed what Butler's theory can do and where it falters, sizing up its fit for their lives. It provides a chance to see her ideas stretch or snap against their reality, pulling their full experience into view, not leaving race or pain in shadows. Mixing this approach with their stories adds a layer to understanding Black women's lives that has waited to surface.

This study matters by diving into the heart of *Beloved* and *The Color Purple*, pulling out how trauma, memory, and subjugation shape Sethe and Celie. Butler's performativity has brought their fight and strength into focus, showing how they rewrite their womanhood. By facing their tangled worlds head-on, it has filled in

blanks others overlooked, making Morrison's and Walker's words echo louder and offering a sharper take on women's power in tough times.

5. Methodology

Diving into *Beloved* and *The Color Purple* feels like stepping into a world where trauma, memory, and resistance tangle up in the lives of women, and this study leans on a qualitative approach to make sense of it all through literary analysis. This path fits a theoretical journey, letting the words on the page breathe and reveal their layers without boxing them into numbers. Digging deep into the stories, the characters, and the ideas they carry keeps pace with the research questions that pull at trauma, gender, memory, and power. This setup has put the spotlight on the texts and theories, skipping over charts and statistics to chase the messy, meaningful threads woven into these narratives. Close reading and theoretical synthesis guide this process, keeping it steady and sharp, with Butler's gender performativity lighting the way.

Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity sits at the heart of this framework, painting gender as a dance of repeated moves, not a stamp assigned at birth. This tool offers a window into how trauma bends and breaks gender in tough times. Butler's idea sees gender as a performance that can shift and push back against usual rules, giving a solid base to explore how oppressed women find their fire. This study has leaned hard into Butler's performativity, using it to unpack trauma's mark on gender, memory's push and pull, and the spark of resistance in tight spots. Crenshaw's intersectionality steps in, looking at how race, gender, and trauma overlap without pinning it to one text. This extra lens keeps the focus on Black women's lives, balancing Butler's gender angle with Crenshaw's eye for race and pain. Together, they match the research questions, setting up a deep dive into identity and strength through Butler's vision.

Gathering the pieces for this study means sticking close to the books themselves, *Beloved* by Toni Morrison and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker. These stories hold the raw material, full of women wrestling with trauma, memory, and control, perfect for Butler's performativity to shine on. The study sticks to the first editions, Morrison's 1987 version and Walker's 1982 one, keeping their voices pure and untouched by later tweaks. Butler's key ideas on gender performativity join the lineup as the core theory, with Crenshaw's take on intersectionality adding depth for the race angle, all drawn from their broader concepts, not tied to specific titles. These books anchor the study in solid ground, picked because they speak straight to the questions at hand, giving plenty to work with through Butler's lens.

The analysis rolls out in two steps, close reading and theoretical synthesis, with Butler's performativity leading the charge. Close reading kicks it off, poring over every line in *Beloved* and *The Color Purple* with care. This step zeroes in on the stories, conversations, and symbols that show trauma twisting gender, memory

holding or freeing, and resistance rising from pressure, all seen through Butler's idea of performed acts. Notes along the way mark patterns, actions, and hints that fit her framework, building a strong base for what comes next. Going with close reading catches the little details Morrison and Walker tucked in, keeping the focus on how gender plays out under Butler's gaze. This method has worked time and again in literary digs, pulling out hidden layers and making it the right launchpad for this theory-driven look.

Theoretical synthesis comes next, weaving those close reading finds into Butler's performativity, with a nod to Crenshaw's intersectionality when it fits. This part compares and connects, looking at how trauma molds gender moves, how memory ties into control or defiance, and how being held down can light a spark, all through Butler's view of gender as a living act. Using her ideas spots where gender breaks free, checking if those daily performances shake up what's expected when times turn hard. Digging into trauma's push on these acts, memory's role in holding or shifting them, and resistance blooming from tough spots keeps Butler's performativity front and center. Crenshaw's intersectionality pops in to nudge Butler's limits, weighing how race and trauma mix with gender for Black women, all without leaning on one source. This weaving happens through careful back-and-forth, matching the texts to Butler's thoughts and pulling in Crenshaw where needed to tie it all together. This approach has kept the analysis tight, leaning on Butler's performativity while stretching it with intersectional depth to tackle the research questions head-on.

Limits crop up in this setup, mostly from sticking to a word-based, theory-heavy path. Zeroing in on *Beloved* and *The Color Purple* narrows the reach to other stories, but that focus suits this study's aim to go deep with Butler's performativity. Her ideas shine on gender, but race can slip through the cracks, so Crenshaw's theory steps in to fill that gap. No numbers back this up, but the richness of the words makes up for it, letting Butler's lens catch the full sweep of the narratives. These edges have been laid out to show where this study draws its lines, keeping it clear and honest about what it can do.

This setup lays out a clear path to explore the research questions, balancing the stories with Butler's performativity as the main guide. It has set a steady base for looking at trauma's mark on gender, memory's double role, resistance rising from pressure, and how Butler's ideas stretch across race and pain. Close reading and theoretical synthesis, driven by Butler's performativity and touched by Crenshaw's intersectionality, keep this study sharp and grounded, ready to add fresh takes to literary and gender conversations. The theory focus has shaped this path to chase ideas, using the texts and Butler's vision to light up identity, memory, and strength in the narratives. Bending with the stories' curves while holding Butler's performativity steady ensures the research questions land on solid ground.

The plan has been shaped to spark a deep theory talk without jumping straight into the stories, saving that for later. Close reading pulls out the fine threads of the texts, feeding right into Butler's performativity, while synthesis ties those threads to her ideas, with Crenshaw's view adding weight. This two-step dance has been tuned to the research questions, making sure each move digs into trauma's pull, memory's sway, resistance's roots, and performativity's reach through Butler's eyes. Setting the stage for new angles pushes forward how gender works under pressure with Butler's performativity leading the way, and showing how race and trauma weave in sharpens the picture. This thoughtful, step-by-step path, built on theory, stands ready to unpack the narratives down the line.

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