



RESEARCH PAPER

The Search for Selfhood: An Existential Feminist Exploration of Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half*

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ABSTRACT

The research is an existential feminist analysis of Brit Bennett's *Vanishing Half* (2020). Stella's racial passing through material things shows that fragmented identity and psychological alienation comes from self-denial, while Desiree accepting her past shows that one can exist authentically and retain moral integrity even when one fails to be deemed a failure by society. By applying Simone De Beauvoir's existential feminist framework on the life of twin sisters, the study investigates how women negotiate the tension between facticity the social racial and gender limitations imposed at birth and transcendence, the act of consciously choosing one's own existence by exploring different paths of the protagonists. Furthermore, the study extends this framework to secondary characters Jude and Reese, showing how body politics and gender transitioning further de-essentialize the binaries. This paper ultimately argues that the Bennett narrative displays the existentialist view that existence is defined through the acceptance of one's identity.

Keywords: Existential Feminism, Transcendence, Immanence, Self-Denial, Identity

Introduction

The *Vanishing Half* (2020) is Brit Bennett's touching novel that contains themes of identity, race, gender, and selfhood as seen through the life of twin sisters, Stella and Desiree Vignes. Taking place in America in the twentieth century, the novel narrates the story of women who struggle to find their authenticity while being weighed against society. Women are seen navigating global forces of racial and sexual oppression. "The twins flee their small, light-skinned community to New Orleans, eventually splitting their lives" (Bennett, 2020, p.11).

Right from the first line of the novel, we find an atmosphere of exit. The disappearance of Stella is not just a geographical but an existential phenomenon. It is a way of refusing to be identified as a poor, light-skinned Black woman in the segregated America. Stella "passes" for white in order to take control of her life. Simone de Beauvoir describes this 'transcendence' of self as the project to escape the limitations we are given by the very structure of society itself. "But even here, where nobody married dark, you were still colored, and that meant that white men could kill you for refusing to die" (Bennett, 2020, p35).

The essence of an existential crisis that defines Bennett's novel is being expressed in this sentence. Stella's effort to leave her racial identity behind reflects the situation that Beauvoir describes, the struggle between freedom and facticity, the positive relationship between wanting to choose oneself and wanting to choose who you are born to be. In existential feminism, women are oppressed as they are reduced to the Other. This means that they are defined in relation to man and race or society rather than by their own.

Stella goes to Mallard with her dark-skinned daughter, Jude, and the social consequences of her choice. She made the advised decision to live honestly. Although painful, her decision is in keeping with the existential standard of authenticity. This is the courage to face one's own reality and not to try to escape it. Desiree's life shows that achieving one's existential freedom does not happen through escaping the conditions of existence. "You could escape a town, but you could not escape the blood" (Bennett, 2020, p.162).

This line symbolizes existential ideas and states that one cannot erase their past. According to Beauvoir, authenticity does not consist in escaping one's facticity but rather in acknowledging the tension between one's facticity and one's transcendence, in other words, one's freedom. Bennett's male and female characters embody this struggle, with Stella denying her facticity and thus living an inauthentic life while Desiree accepts it and thus achieves a form of integrity.

In addition, *Vanishing Half* brings out how gender boundaries restrain women's freedom and finding themselves. The life of the suburban housewife Stella shows how patriarchal domesticity is oppressive. Just because she gets material comfort and social privilege, it does not mean she gets to 'be' other than 'wife' and 'mother'. She is not a genuine 'subject'. As evident, Stella has become a woman — a sentiment echoed by Beauvoir's almost clichéd assertion, one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.

On the other hand, Desiree goes through economic hardship but is existentially strong by resisting racial and gender conformity. Her journey to recover her identity and to raise her daughter by herself shows that existence comes before essence, which means that, no matter how big or small, we have to first do something to give our life meaning, without waiting for others to define who we are. Bennett's story makes being a mother and a woman an act of revolt against existence.

The daughters, Jude and Kennedy, inherit their mothers' existence. The burden is passed on that reflects the much similar sentiment. Jude, a dark-skinned female, suffers from colorism and exclusion and must find her identity now. By being in a relationship with a transgender man, Reese, her life further subverts the conventional binary of gender. It is evident that freedom from existence goes beyond the social imposition of categories of gender and race through her work. Kennedy, in the other hand, is representing "In the dark, you could never be too black. In the dark, everyone was the same color" (Bennett, 2020, p.107).

It refers to how, in intimate or obscured settings, the obsession with skin tone ("too black") becomes irrelevant. It reflects the experiences of characters in the town of Mallard, who are forced to navigate the social implications of their skin color. The description of Mallard functions as a metaphor for human existence — the society built on denial and illusion. In flight from complexity and ambivalence, the town is obsessed with whiteness and purity. According to Beauvoir, when people do this they oppress others by refusing to acknowledge their own ambiguity and therefore denying themselves as both of facticity and freedom — they are causing oppression in bad faith, so to speak. The people of Mallard live in bad faith. They construct an identity based on what they are not.

Bennett's way of writing helps us see that life is worth fighting for. The uncertain concept of identity generates a confusing feeling of reality. Rewrite this sentence to have a professional tone: "The novel suggests time is circular; that constant and unstoppable change must always compete with one's self-development." In short, freedom, or living life your own way, and authenticity are powerful individual goals beating universally humans are striving for them.

A *Vanishing Half* demonstrates how external forces oppress black people while internal self-deception harms women. When society evaluates you and assigns a price tag to your colour, gender and other ways of being, what do you understand by living truthfully? The novel question lives outside of the racial and historical circumstances in which it was produced. It basically asks, how does one, especially a woman, live authentically in an inauthentic world?

To sum up, the *Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett powerfully reflects the products of existential feminism. Via Stella and Desiree, Bennett has said that true freedom lies not in escaping one's realities but in confronting one's realities with the courage to choose oneself irrespective of the consequences. The novel shows that authenticity is possible only by accepting all of a person's limitations and possibilities. Stella depicts inauthentic freedom. Desiree depicts life before the power of that freedom.

Literature Review

Marzolla (2023) takes note of how identity in *The Vanishing Half* is constantly performed and negotiated through a variety of acts of passing, gender expression and self-reinvention. According to her, in the novel, passing is not only a racial act but also a performance of self, one that is a product of internal and external pressures to conform. Marzolla shows how characters create multiple identities. This reveals how fluid and unstable identity is in modern American culture. The research underlines that individuals learn how to perform, resist, and/or reshape in accordance with circumstances by gender and race. This writing is necessary to my research as it demonstrates how Bennett's characters navigate their selfhood through endless performances. This is very similar to how the themes of authenticity, freedom and the search for a stable identity plays out in *The Vanishing Half*.

The phrasing "essentialist binaries of race and gender" is very theoretical, but in fact the characters are often overcoming barriers that are very real, physical, economic, etc. and not always entirely conscious or ideological.

Lertlaksanaporn (2025) uses the concept of difference to show how characters such as Stella and Reese reveal the instability of categories of identity. Moreover, the article links racial passing with gender transition. That is, Reese's journey of "becoming" is like the act of passing to disassemble biological essentialism as Stella's act of passing does for racial essentialism. This source is useful to my research as it accommodates a theoretical lens that sees selfhood as a performance instead of something inherent, which allows my existential feminist argument that the characters are required to actively construct their identities since there is no inherent meaning behind anything.

Mikić (2025) In her analysis of the novel through an "emotion-race-space framework," Marijana Mikić argues that the quest for selfhood is linked to the shame and guilt. As Mikić says, this text represents a neo-passing narrative devoid of the black/white binary. Instead, it is a story of two intersectional identities. Mikić proposes that the essence of shame is a negative evaluation of the global self by the other. It is instigated by the othering gaze of dominant groups. The diverse community of Los Angeles enables the 'unmaking of shame' and healing. This article is relevant to my research because it spatially locates existential struggle. It thus shows how the 'selfhood' in my thesis has to take into account external pressures found in racialized spaces and internal emotional labor needed to liberate the female self from shame.

Lee (2025) provides a phenomenological reading of the text to argue that, for Bennett, belonging ought to be understood as "not losing touch" and precisely this turns Bennett away from the visual. Lee believes that even if our characters were to wash themselves clean so they might pass visually, the "tactile" remains the essential

epistemological tool for knowing the self and the other, for touch crosses over the boundaries of time and space that vision cannot. This study looks at Stella trying to lose touch with her past, while Jude and Reese touch one another. For them, touching one another (the "skin and skin and cotton") proves of a real existence and acceptance. This article is vital to my research because it roots the abstract quest for selfhood in the body. This enables me to show that an existential feminist reading must give priority to the "felt" experience of the body rather than the deceptiveness of the "male" or "white" gaze.

In their 2025 article, Rabia Saleem, Samina Yasmin, and Sumaira Yasmeen use Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* to understand the "ethnic identity crisis" and the psychological effects of systemic racism on the Vignes twins. Stella, the author argues, passes to protect herself which is ultimately an attempt to pursue whiteness as an ideal. However, this leaves her with a fractured psyche that is full of "loneliness and anxiety" as she represses her real self. On the other hand, the case study shows Desiree's development as a good example of "race appreciation." This article matters to my research because it uses Fanon's psychoanalysis to differentiate between 'bad faith' (assimilation) and 'authenticity' (acceptance). This is useful to examine the existential choices afforded to Black women in the novel.

The research suggests an existential feminist reading that combines some of Beauvoir's theories and Bennett's literary world. It examines how women create identity (self-hood) in racialized settings (ranging from authentic selfhood to experiencing discrimination). As such, it contributes to feminist literary criticism and existential criticism.

To sum up, *The Vanishing Half* looks into various themes of race and identity but this proposed study tries to fill the gap in theory by introducing existential feminism. The analysis will show the accord between the struggles of characters for their freedom and authenticity in their quest with that of woman as subject and Other who asserts meaning in a world of limits.

Material and Methods

For this study, a valid theoretical framework should explain clearly what the theoretical frameworks are, relate the frameworks to the primary text, why they are appropriate in this regard and what this study seeks to reveal through the use of these frameworks. This study follows Simone de Beauvoir's thinking on womanhood, freedom, selfhood and authenticity, mainly existential feminism. The characters of *The Vanishing Half* can be understood as not only racial subjects but also existential subjects. They aim to define themselves in a world which tries to define them by his race.

Existential feminism comes from existentialist philosophy, especially the writings of Simone de Beauvoir. In this way, existence precedes essence. Pooventhan is of the opinion that a woman is not born but the culture, social role, and lived experience makes her a woman. Existential feminism suggests every woman has the ability to transcend. In other words, every woman can become the self she chooses through conscious choice and authentic action. At the center of the theory lies the role of freedom, selfhood, authenticity, bad faith, and the battle between being and becoming. The self is fluid and does not remain the same. Our sense of self is shaped by the freedom we assert and the limitations placed upon us by things such as patriarchy, racism, the family, etc. This idea allows the researcher to see the character as an agent that struggles to claim self rather than as a victim of society.

The Vanishing Half is a Brit Bennett novel that is concerned with identity formation, self-invention, and the social constraints which limit women's choices. Each main character stands for a different existential condition. Stella decides to pass as a white person, which is something the writer Simone de Beauvoir would call a life lived in bad faith, one lived in bad faith. Her freedom becomes a burden when she creates a life which looks amazing from the

outside, but is broken and riddled with anxiety and alienation within. Unlike this, Desiree chooses to stay connected to her black identity. The first time she rejoins Mallard, though it doesn't mean much for her authenticity, it is a definite attempt for all that. The challenges Jude faces with colorism and his social rejection is the struggle to create a selfhood in a world that perpetually calls her lesser. The state of being confused and unstable in her identity Kennedy mirrored the damages of a life lived in falsehood as caused by the choice of her mother. Using existential feminism, the participants can search how these women shape their own meanings, existences, and truths within a racialized gendered society.

According to the authors of "Existentialism and Feminism," existential feminism addresses women's concerns through an existential lens. Jacqueline Bobo argues for a black feminist sociology that encompasses identity, race and class. Since *The Vanishing Half* is not only about race, a black existential framework is necessary. Women who are always on the divide of who they are and who are supposed to be are the focus of the novel. The characters suffer internal battles between their wish to stay true to themselves and the pressure to conform, fear of social sanction, the burden of choice and the need to define themselves are basic issues they have to face. They are also the founding problems in existential feminist theory. The same dimensions that existential feminism seeks to understand— selfhood, discrimination, freedom, and identity – also dominate the novel.

To end, this study, using existential feminism, aims to unveil how the female characters in *The Vanishing Half* search for their authentic identity against racial discrimination and gender expectations. The framework also suggests how Bennett represents identity as a process rather than a state. The paper demonstrates through existential feminism that there is a philosophical dimension to Bennett's narrative; she shows how her characters experience a constant struggle between the desire for freedom and the fear of losing belonging, authenticity and survival, social identity and personal truth.

This study uses a research method because it looks at what things mean who people are and what happens to them in Brit Bennetts *The Vanishing Half*. I am using this method because I do not need numbers to understand the story. Instead I want to see how ideas like freedom, identity, choice, bad faith and being true to oneself appear in the characters the way the story is told and the language used. The study wants to find out how ideas about women and existence are part of the way the novel shows what it is like to be a woman. The novel, *The Vanishing Half* is really good, for this because it has a lot to say about subjectivity and I want to explore that. The research is done in a way that describes and analyzes things. It describes what happens in the story how the characters change and what themes are related to who people're their race and if they are a man or a woman. Then it analyzes these things using the ideas of feminism, which is mostly based on what Simone de Beauvoir said about being free being responsible being dishonest with oneself and being true to oneself. By doing it this way the study can say what is in the text and also how and why these things are important, in the context of feminism. The research uses feminism to understand these things.

Existential feminism helps the study explain things. The main information for this study comes from Brit Bennetts novel *The Vanishing Half*. We looked closely at *The Vanishing Half* to understand it better. This means we examined the characters in *The Vanishing Half* the conversations between them the way the story moves back and forth and the symbols used in *The Vanishing Half*. We did not use any information like interviews or surveys for this study. The reason is that this study is, about *The Vanishing Half* and what it says so we just focused on *The Vanishing Half* itself. When we look at the stories about Desiree and Stella we see that they make different life choices. This is interesting because it shows us what they think is important. We need to pay attention to what they say and do so we can understand what they are going through. We want to know how they figure out who they are and how they deal with the fact that they are treated differently because of the color of their skin. We also want to know how they feel about the rules that society has for women.

To do this we pick out parts of the story and organize them in a way that helps us answer our questions.

We use what Desiree and Stella say and do to help us understand the issues, like how they see themselves and how they navigate the world around them. The text uses a way of choosing what to look at. It only looks at the parts of the story like scenes and chapters and what the characters go through that show existential feminist themes like being true to yourself being free and deciding who you are. This way the information we get is about what we want to know and helps answer the questions we are asking about feminist themes and existential feminist themes, in the story. The data analysis is done in a few ways. We look at the themes that keep coming up like when people're trying to figure out who they are or when they want to be free or when they feel like they do not belong or when they try to resist. We also take a look at the characters, especially Desiree and Stella to see how the different choices they make show us what it means to be true, to ourselves or to be pretending to be something we are not. Theoretical analysis is used to understand the ideas of feminist concepts and how they affect the characters minds and the society they live in.

By doing it this way the study shows us how Brit Bennett constructs identity as something that is shaped by the freedom we have the responsibility we take and the rules that society puts on us. The collected textual data is looked at in a ways: Thematic Analysis: Identifying major themes such as racial passing, identity fragmentation, memory, body politics, and trauma. Narrative Analysis: Studying narrative voice, story structure, and shifting timelines. Character Analysis: Interpreting the psychological journeys of Stella, Desiree, Jude, and others.

Theoretical Interpretation: Applying the selected theory (e.g., feminist theory, psychoanalysis, trauma theory, racial identity theory) to explain hidden meanings and symbolic representations. The analysis focuses on how Brit Bennett constructs identity and how personal choices are shaped by social, cultural, and racial pressures.

Results and Discussion

The *Vanishing Half* is studied through existential feminism which focuses on the female negotiation with freedom, choice, identity and responsibility in the face of rigid racial, gendered and social structures. The novelist draws upon Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminist thought to show that women are not born but rather become, and that such becoming is severely limited by the social. In a world created by Brit Bennett, women face an unending choice of whether to live authentically or in bad faith. Each choice has far ranging psychological, emotional and social implications.

The twin sisters, Desiree and Stella, represent two different ways to respond to oppressive situations. Bennett, however, goes beyond the twins to depict identity as an ongoing process that spans generations. The way the story is built shows that life is unstable, which is what the narrative shows. Identity isn't fixed in the novel; it is continually made and remade through choice, circumstance, and social pressure.

Being identified with something is like a burden

According to existential feminism, identity is imposed by society on women and not born with women. The character of Stella in the novel repeatedly stated how her choice was not actually a choice but simply an avoidance of the restrictions placed on her due to being a black woman. Stella's life represents the feminist existentialist bad faith with the person denying their freedom and denying their responsibility by adhering to what someone imposes on them. As a result of her decision to pass as white, Stella escapes oppression based on race but gives up her true self. Existential feminists argue over such denial they are not without choice, but rather choose to disregard it. Through the conscious

construction of a false self true to the dominant racialised and patriarchal order, Stella relinquishes agency. Her marriage, mothering, and place in society are defined by hiding and fear, not self-definition. As a result, Stella becomes psychology anxious, *dédoublement d'identité* and emotionally isolated. Thus, the survival achieved through *mauvaise foi* leads to an empty existence not a fulfilled one.

In contrast, Desiree represents authentic existence, a key tenet of existential feminism that emphasizes living truthfully despite suffering. Desiree will not deny her racial identity and directly confronts racial discrimination and patriarchal violence. The act of returning to Mallard suggests rather than fleeing from her past, she accepts it. In existential feminism, it is a courageous act to accept one's freedom and responsibility. Despite living a life defined by economic disadvantage, social marginalization, and emotional complication, Desiree has inner integrity, self-awareness, and a coherent sense of self. Her authenticity enables her to sustain meaningful relationships and a down-to-earth identity, proving that having suffered is not to lack existential agency.

Survival and Trauma as passing

The narrative arc involving Stella's choice of "passing" as a white woman is arguably one of the most important ones in the novel. Bennett does not present passing as a mere practical solution, but instead, she presents it as an internal and existential change. Stella experiences an internal conflict which is conveyed through her hyper-awareness of her body, her fear of being recognized and her emotional distance from her family.

Stella's life is an illustration of the point Bennett makes throughout the novel: passing isn't freedom; it's another trap. Stella's fractured identity is on display in moments where she sees Black people and longs and shrinks. Bennett uses close psychological narration in these scenes to illustrate Stella's emotional exile from her true self.

Desiree as a Counter-Narrative to Stella

Desiree, unlike Stella, will be the novel's counter-narrative of defiance rather than disappearance. Where Stella represents the erasure and invisibility of identity, Desiree will choose visibility over flight. Bennett's portrayal of her depicts a more emotionally grounded woman amidst all her struggles and hardships. Her return to Mallard, rather than a defeated surrender, is always framed as an act of reclamation, away from an abusive marriage.

Desiree's encounters with the Mallardians peerages in scene after scene of i-porn helps demonstrate her refusal to internalize the colorist ideology of Mallard. Through Desiree, Bennett makes a significant critique of the systems that privilege lightness over darkness. By her, Through Jude's experiences in Mallard and later in Los Angeles the narrative most fully explores embodied racial identity. The mallard embarrassment and exclusion based on color. In contrast, a Los Angeles trainer regains control over her body and its looks. To put it another way, Bennett's use of Jude's perspective reframes the novel away from hierarchy and towards empowerment.

Murray highlights two analytical points relating to Jude. The first argument suggests that Jude's physical distancing from Mallard indicates a psychological movement towards self-acceptance. Murray points out Bennett's strategy with his second act. He compares the shame Jude experienced as a child to the confidence and ability he has as an adult.

Reese, Jude's partner, is a transgender man. In Nicole Dennis-Bennett's *Passing*, he is arguably one of the best narrative choices. He adds a layer of content to the storyline of this book. One of the most intriguing things about this article is that it connects racial passing with gender transitioning. The identity of him and that of the twins do not equate. Be that as it may, Bennett employs this link to signify the desire to be oneself.

Reese is having difficulty with his body and his ability to get a job or ID. The message and question from the book are very similar. To whom does the power and access belong? In other words – who has the right to define us? His identity gets created along the lines of the twins.

When Bennett incorporates these narratives, she suggests that an identity whether it be racial or gendered has an element that is true and another that is socially compromised. Reese's story helps the philosophical debate of "Passing". Identity is not an absolute quality or trait.

Bennett incorporates memory as a structural device in the novel. Memories do not inform our characters; on the contrary, their pasts do catch up on them. Memory is neither relief nor escapist fantasy. It helps you connect with the present and with your action or inaction. Desiree's memory of Stella that never bleeds; for her that wounding never closes. Stella has a memory that she tries to take apart but which comes back to her after some time. According to Jude, Stella is not a psychic being, somebody to 'mask' or 'make up to' and then eventually 'get to know'.

Bennett invokes the strength of memories to show evolution of things as a part of our world, not separate. The non-linear choreography of the narration further forwards this by shifting timelines and taking on different moments to illustrate how one's identity is an always response to already being.

The book illustrates how gender complicates the quest for racial identity. Existential feminists believe women must fight against not just social oppression imposed on her, but also against the definition of a "woman" set by patriarchy. Think about Desiree and her relationship with Sam. At first, she is silent the verbal and physical abuse. Men like Sam can get away with this; it seems every woman must countenance the behavior of "her" man. For Desiree, abandoning Sam is a feminist act of self-liberation; she opts for freedom. Overall, the marriage between Stella and Blake illustrates a more understated version of patriarchy. Stella becomes an exemplary Southern suburban housewife although Blake is not a bad man. She is living as someone whom she is not; denying her own desires and opinions for the illusion of identity. According to Beauvoir, women are often told to live an "inessential" life. They play the role rather than be themselves. As such, the struggle for identity is inseparable from the struggle against gender oppression or gender deprivation.

Bennett's fiction endorses the existential feminist idea that there is an essentialist tendency within categories like race, which in any case affect experience and constrain freedom. Likewise, Mallard is a sort of material instantiation. A town that's obsessed with lightness too dark a shade than cream is not appreciated. In other words, British-born author and broadcaster blacks to escape rather than embrace.

Similarly, the passing of Desiree highlights the way race can be both unreal and real. The fiction can be unreal because Stella can leave the fiction due to its non-existence, but it can be real as she has to deny this reality every day because it is her reality. In a manner, her whole self is a performance. As she was once confined in darkness, she is now confined in whiteness. This novel uncovers the absurdity of race; it is fiction because Stella passes so easily. Conversely, Stella's death reveals the psychological or emotional violence it takes to keep her lie going.

Desiree, Jude Reject Mallard's Colorist Belief I Earth 7 Jude rejects Mallard's light-skinned-ideal. Despite being an outsider in Mallard due to her dark skin, Jude finds confidence through her education, her relationship with Reese, and her refusal to allow this community to define her beauty. In the end Jude depicts a new.

In challenging feminism, trauma, adoption, and maternal inheritance are passed down to females. For example, witnessing the public lynching of their father causes the Vignes twins different resolution. Desiree becomes a strong, popular, and assertive person, while Stella becomes a timid, quiet one. Twins' daughters of any kind.

Jude learns growing up that society thinks less of her looks. Kennedy lives in a materially rich world but realizes her mother is emotionally absent. Their brief connection can help to heal or address generational trauma.

The novel indicates that trauma is not only historical; rather, it has become one's way of being. The characters try to escape, but the past consistently haunts the present.

The Body is the Site of Struggle

According to existential feminists, women's bodies are political. This is portrayed by Bennett.

Color prejudice in Mallard.
Sam's violence against Desiree.
Stella's physique being a tool for deception.
Jude's muscular physique gives him confidence.

Reese's transgender journey depicting the fight to align the physical body with the real soul.

Reese is important because his own transition reflects an existential freedom the right to be able to determine almost anything. In some ways, his journey is like Stella's journey, but unlike Stella, Reese lives openly, not in hiding.

Our Choices Will The Consequences of "Becoming"
Every major character representing a choice and its consequences.

By choosing whiteness, Stella gains access to privilege but loses her family and her sense of self.

Desiree chooses truth and returns to Mallard.
Jude picks ambition; she escapes Mallard's beauty standards.
Kennedy's choice is detachment to avoid her emotional truth.
Reese has the courage to change

The novel suggests that process of becoming oneself is continuous and painful. There's freedom provided responsibility and going within.

The Reunion as a Symbol of Existential Closure

According to existentialists, the momentary re-encounter where Stella extends Desiree a ride home embodies a confrontation with the self. Facing yourself is about coming back to the you that you left behind. In order to achieve this such is the desire of the author that the child she gave up, family life she renounced and lie she pretends to be. The scene of their interaction is filled with tensions and a lack of fullness, has splintering and distortion all over, even in the language. However, it reveals how a reconciliation is possible, even if not certain.

Through Desiree, we get to see how easy forgiveness can be while Stella struggles with accepting herself. The ability to just accept whatever happens in life and move. This is a sign of emotional maturity. Likewise, Jude and Kennedy

To sum up, *The Vanishing Half* confirms the saying of Simone de Beauvoir that “existence precedes essence.” No woman in the novel’s world is defined by biology or tradition but by her choices. By the characters and design of the narrative, the novel reveals the cost of the denial of freedom and the strength of the embracing of authenticity. It is clear from this discussion that Bennett’s text is not a racial or passing novel, but instead an existential feminist text about how women strive to exist meaningfully within, while at the same time living outside the frameworks that wish to define them.

Social constructions like race, patriarchy, class and history are represented as restraints through the work. Nevertheless, the existential feminist framework shows us that they do not make powerless the individual. To be more specific, Bennett offers a story that shows not freedomlessness, but negotiation of limited freedom. Agents choosing bad faith find temporary security but pay a long-term price in alienation. Nevertheless, the agents of the authentic kind face hardships but retain their selfhood and meaningfulness.

The argument validates that “becoming” is the right novel for the existential feminist scholarship. In other words, it functions as a criticism of how women “become.” It is also an audit of social constructions that position these limits.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the paper analyzing *The Vanishing Half* of Brit Bennett in the backdrop of existential feminist theory seeks to explore how the identity of the female is defined by her freedom, choice and responsibility even when confronted with narrow racist and patriarchal structures. The analysis reveals that the novel depicts womanhood as a process of becoming complimenting Simone de Beauvoir’s argument that identity is socially constructed and not biologically inherent. The novel through its multi-generational story tells how women negotiate their existence within the socially limited world they live in and suffer psychologically and morally for their decisions.

The Brit Bennett study finds the contrast between bad faith and authentic existence through characters of Desiree and Stella. Stella’s rejection of her real identity for the sake of having a better position socially is bad faith that is psychologically alienating leading her to be scared as well as being fragmented with regard to identity. Unlike her, Desiree accepts herself despite her suffering, which makes her existence more authentic; this results in self-knowledge, moral integrity, and connection with others. Other characters’ experiences, such as those of Jude and Reese, further build on the existential feminist argument by illustrating how race, gender, and body politics complicate self-definition. In sum, these findings indicate that the novel depicts freedom as inexorable and stresses how every existential choice has an enduring impact.

Recommendations

For future recommendations, this research may study *The Vanishing Half* from a perspective of intersectional feminist theory to study the simultaneous working of race, gender, and class in the shaping of female identity. Comparative studies might also involve reading Brit Bennett alongside one or more contemporary feminist writings on identity, passing, and selfhood. Also, future studies may apply existential feminism to the other marginalized identities in the novel, including transgender existence and generational trauma, to widen the scope of existentialist feminist critique. Studies such as these would help readers understand women’s attempts at an authentic existence in a complex social world as presented in modern literature.

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