Slave Relationships and Their Manipulation of Ethnic Identity

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The general focus of this paper pertains to slave relationships within the Southeastern region of the United States and their influence on ethnic identity. More specifically, the paper utilizes Harry Sullivan's Interpersonal theory to analyze how these prominent relationships generated an effect on slave's ethnic identity. The principal sections of the paper focus on the significant slave relationships and certain intricacies that are often overlooked. The significant relationships include those between the owner and slave, the overseer and slave, and relationships within the slave community. The paper then concludes with a discussion pertaining to the idea that the social implications of each relationship resulted in the constant manipulation of slave's ethnic identity.

While the practice of slavery was notorious in general, particularly the southeastern region of the United States receives the brunt of the criticism. Such criticism has been based on the extreme nature of the physical and mental abuse that the slave's endured. However, there were less negative aspects that coincided with the relationships slave's held. The relationships that revolved around such treatment are perplexing and require analysis to determine the characteristics that a slave would still hold central to his or her ethnic identity despite being stripped of their freedom. Each relationship yields its unique qualities and authority, and it must be remembered that with each relationship and circumstance there is an exception. With contradictory evidence in reference to slave life, extrapolating the correct information can be somewhat difficult. In one area there are slave narratives which some argue should be taken with

a grain of salt. While in another area there are court documents that pertain to slavery or interviews taken by individuals of a different race that are argued to be reliable. However, these records often diminish several of the hard hitting aspects of slavery. Despite difficulties, the relationships and analysis are based on well established information and tend to speak for the majority because there can never be an absolute for an entire race of people.

As mentioned earlier, relationships that would expectedly play the most prominent roles in a slave's life would be those between the slave and his or her owner, slaves and overseers, and relationships within the slave community. While each relationship offered different experiences, the dominant relationship between the owner and the slave had a tendency to shape different facets of the rest. For instance, the master, southern slave holders preferred name (Berlin, Favreau, and Miller 3), determined whether his children saw the slaves that tended to them as more than mere chattel. The master also controlled the magnitude of force dealt by the overseer relating to punishments. Whether to distinguish a difference in treatment between house slaves and field slaves was also completely up to the master. Yet, even the master's power had its limits concerning various aspects of the inner workings of the slave community.

The relationship between slave and owner drums up a considerable amount of variation in certain aspects. It was by pure luck as to whether the relationship maintained between owner and slave could be considered simply a means of economic stability or familial. Slaves as economic stability simply refer to the amount of profit they brought into the plantation and the amount they may cost the plantation. Frankly, the life of this slave only revolved around money. On the other side of the spectrum, slaves as familial companions refer to a slave being perceived as a confidante or really as a member of the family. Granted, these slaves were fewer in number if for no other reason than simply because slavery was a business first and foremost and allowing

feelings into business was seemingly a recipe for disaster in this type of business venture. Regardless of whether the relationship was based on economics or companionship, the relationship would have been chosen by the master. The reasons behind such a choice will be explored throughout the discussion of this relationship.

According to Scarborough, the master and slave relationship consisted of the, "Principal task of the elite slaveholders to keep their servants relatively contented with their inferior status while at the same time extracting the maximum amount of labor from them" (176). Notice Scarborough's distinction of an elite slaveholder who knew the meaning of slavery as an economic endeavor as opposed to the economically challenged planters. When referring to keeping a slave relatively content it included the owner's responsibilities of keeping their slaves fed, clothed, housed, and in relatively good health (Patterson 34). Most slaveholders found it most profitable to keep their slaves content by providing modest comforts, such as giving the strict rules a rest from time to time (Berlin, Favreau, Miller 4).This approach was an effort to inspire the slaves to work harder and cause less trouble, simply put, a method of positive reinforcement. Not to mention that these owners understood that if a slave was busy healing from a whipping he or she was not working, and for elite slaveholders that was a loss they would rather not take. After all, if owners crippled the mind while keeping the body strong they would have the perfect slave, and elite slaveholders knew their business well enough to achieve such a slave. Though these owners crippled the mind in the sense of convincing slaves that this was the best life they would ever have, effect is still the same. Yet, for the owners who treated their slaves with adequate living conditions, there were others who employed deplorable living habits simply because he or she could.

Owner's who habitually chose a much harsher approach to elicit compliance may have inspired obedience, but at the same time they encouraged rebellion. Owners who embraced these practices are the ones that have become synonymous with Southern culture. It was masters or mistresses such as this who also frequently had problems with thievery and runaways. Some owners barely kept their slaves fed and yet when the slaves stole food to survive they were severely punished. Sometimes owners of this mindset found it necessary to treat such a transgression with an extremity like death. Berlin, Favreau, and Miller recounted the story of a 10 year old slave girl who stole a biscuit and in return the mistress had the overseer whip the child and then put salt into her wounds (31). Pouring salt into the wounds of this girl was undoubtedly an attempt to solidify that the lesson had been learned. In order to minimize runaway attempts, upon catching a runaway slave they would be stripped (28) and receive a whipping which was meant to serve as a warning to other possible insubordinates. The stripping of a slave for this process was just a further means of degradation. In addition to thievery and runaways the harsh slave master or mistress was also concerned with breaking the spirit of the stubborn slave. When whippings became only marginally effective for a non-submissive slave, owners found more creative ways to break their stubborn streak. Former slave Vinnie Busby recalled the harshest punishment she ever witnessed in a master's effort to punish his stubborn slave (15). Vinnie's former master took it upon himself to force this slave to hitch himself up to a plow and plow the fields, like an animal, day after day until he died (15-16). Methods such as these led former slave Delia Garlic to believe that a slave's master owned both their body and soul (8).

Regardless of whether the owner identified himself as lenient or harsh the slaves had a very clear outlook on what separated a good master or mistress from a bad one. Slaves deemed a

good owner as one who was light on punishment, if he or she found it necessary to punish at all. Slaves also thought a good owner would keep their families together. Taking the initiative to keep a slave family together meant that they were being thought of as more than just a commodity, which of coarse was a comforting thought when ones life revolved around the business of slavery. A good owner would provide his slaves with sufficient food, clothing, living quarters, and medical care as the law required, but did not always enforce. Allowing slaves to visit their relatives, attend church, and focus on their own responsibilities during their "free" time also qualified an owner as a good master or mistress (Berlin, Favreau, and Miller 11). Needless to say, a bad owner did none of these things. Even with distinctions between good and bad owners it is important to remember that, "From the slave's standpoint the best owner was none at all" (11). In light of that fact, whether a good or a bad owner this relationship seemed as though it would breed resentment and despair.

It must also be noted that the relationship that the master or mistress shared with his or her favored slaves may not have been the same one that he or she maintained with the rest of the slaves. The simplest way to become a favored slave was to prove oneself as an honorable and faithful servant. If they could, owners were eager to acquire slave informants. Obviously, informants were the easiest way of being aware of what was happening with the slaves on the plantation. Though the role of informant could work both ways and sometimes backfired on the owner due to loyalty to the slave community. Even though it was not always the case, if an owner was kind, the slaves who worked in the house were usually perceived as favored by those who worked in the fields. Due to the fact that there were only a handful of slaves that maintained all of the duties in the house (Vlach 18), such close proximity for such a long period of time occasionally allowed the owner to form a significant bond. Slaves who were most likely to be

chosen to work in the house were those who were perceived as good workers and very neat and clean (Berlin, Favreau, and Miller 43). If it was a child who possessed such characteristics then they may be allowed to associate with the children of the owner. Certain slaves could also be favored for reasons such as having a special skill that proved economically advantageous, perhaps being a childhood playmate, or even being a blood relative which will be explored more a bit later (48). While this favored status allowed for a slightly more privileged existence for obvious reasons it also caused resentment among the rest of the slaves. So while these slaves made an effort to strengthen the relationship with their owners, their hard work served as a double edged sword weakening their relationships within the slave community.

An additional feature of the master and slave relationship brings about a far more taboo subject matter than what has been previously discussed. The sexual relationship that occurred between masters and slaves was one that, "Bore the complexity of all relations between men and women residing in close contact but with unequal power and conflicting interests and aspirations" (Berlin, Favreau, and Miller 3-4). It is speculated that the beginnings of these forbidden affairs were inspired by the shortage of European women in sparsely populated rural areas (Russell, Wilson, and Hall 15). Yet, after closer examinations of such encounters it seemed to be a bit more than simply a game of numbers. Granted there were a fair share of rapes, because rape was just as much a part of plantation life as work. While these encounters gave masters the physical fulfillment which was needed, they were not the only sexually oriented interactions that occurred on plantations.

There were also cases that involved the taking of a concubine for the remainder of an owner's life. In other words, there were at times genuine efforts put into these relationships from both owner and slave. There can be no comprehensive answer as to why owner's decided to

create these long term relationships, but the conjectures vary. These inferences vary due to the fact that when the relationships were discovered the results varied in regards to what happened to the slave carrying on the affair. Both the social and legal risks were abundant. While these affairs were not unheard of by any means, they were still looked down upon if discovered. When the thought of an intimate relationship between black and white became a reality, society could be very unforgiving. The legal aspect supplied a wide variety of risks depending on the state's legislations regarding intercourse with "Negroes". Even more dangerous was the risk of the wives of the owners becoming aware of their infidelity. When wives became aware of these affairs it usually ran a great danger to the concubine's wellbeing. In some cases these owners sold the slaves and the children that came along with them, and in other cases they went as far as to leave land to their "other" family as an inheritance. Still, as unlikely as it may sound, there were some wives who accepted the fact that they had unfaithful husbands and others who dared to implore their slaves to become sexually involved with their husbands (Russell, Wilson, and Hall 22). The logic was that as long as their husbands had taken a black lover they had not taken a white one (22), so all was well. These relationships classically culminated in mulattoes, offspring of a white and black parent, thus transforming the relationship from carnal pleasure and sometimes more than that to parenthood. This relationship became so progressive that before 1860 approximately 10 percent of the more than 400,000 slaves in the South had some measure of white blood (17-18).

As surprising as it may sound, men were not the only ones partaking in sexual escapades with slaves. The wives and daughters of some slave owners regularly entertained sexual relationships with male slaves. Unknown to many, a few of these women even abandoned their husbands for their slave companion (Russell, Wilson, and Hall 22). There were some white

women who even dared to parade these affairs and openly brag about the sexual prowess of the

male slave (22). This is perplexing both because of the requirements of female etiquette and

society's general perception of such encounters. When referring to white women who

participated in these encounters it does not solely pertain to poor planters but includes daughters

and wives of some of the finest white families (22). However, wives who embarked in such risky

business were subject to punishment of both social and legal implications far worse than their

male counterparts. If a white woman was married and was caught carrying on such an

extramarital affair her husband almost always filed for divorce (22). When children came into

the picture the situation became even more complicated. According to Russell, Wilson, and Hall,

"Because of the one-drop rule [1]the child was considered black, but because the law defined a

child's status as that of its mother, the child was also free" (22). So while a man's mulatto

children, an economic asset, would reside in the slave quarters, a woman's mulatto children

could reside in the Big House which only caused havoc and shame (22). If a white woman was

single when she produced a mulatto child she had few options. These options included: sending

her child away to be raised by someone else, usually in the north; giving her child to a local slave

family; leaving her family and joining a black community; or moving to the frontier and raising

her child there (22). While the punishments for white women were quite harsh the punishment

for their lovers was even worse. Normally, a male slave had to be careful when even looking at a

white woman for risk of a spontaneous lynching, so when the physical boundaries were crossed

the punishments included whippings, castration, or murder (22-23).

       Moving along to another considerable relationship, the rapport between the overseer and

slave leaves evidence well worth discussion. For the most part, the common perception that the

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[1] The "one-drop rule" refers to a legislation that forced any person with as much as a drop of black blood to abide by the same legal functions as any pure African (14).

overseer was generally free to do as he pleased with the slaves in regards to discipline is false. The overseer resided as the middle man between master and slaves and maintaining such a position required him to walk a fine line. Author William Wiethoff described the complexity of the overseer and slave relationship by stating, "Their close working relationships with slaves in the colonial and antebellum South generated images of overseers as taskmasters, scoundrels, or rivals" (1). Such noteworthy distinctions leave room for analysis of a relationship that is repeatedly oversimplified.

Despite the fact that at times overseers could subject slaves to violence based on their sheer will, they were sometimes given motivation by the owners. Owners usually saw fit to compensate their overseers with a portion of their tobacco, corn, and bean crops which in turn motivated the overseer to overwork the slaves (Wiethoff 4). The overseers were no longer managing the work of the master's crops alone, but they were also trying to capitalize on their own. Tactics like this solidified the overseer's image as taskmaster. The slaves were not completely without relief. There were laws that protected slaves from excessive work, but in the Deep South the consequence of a slight fine was a small deterrent to discourage breaking the law (15). When meant with what the overseer viewed as resistance he would turn to violence of both mental and physical aspects. This was the element of the overseer's job that is the most familiar to the masses, mostly because slave narratives were filled with the memories of this treatment.

The most considerable form of mental abuse other than cursing at the slaves was threatening to sell the slaves if the desired improvement was not made. While the most well known form of discipline was a whipping, the methods varied in creativity. Some of the most aggressive methods ranged from forcing a slave to strip and sit on an ant hill (Wiethoff 30) to a crucifixion (22). No slave no matter what their condition was immune to punishment. This lack

of immunity includes pregnant slaves, regardless of the fact that they were providing future

income to their owner. There are accounts of pregnant slaves having to dig holes for their

abdomens in order to lie down and be whipped (22). At times methods became even too

grotesque for the masters and mistresses. Masters and mistresses were justified in their disgust if

for no other reason than the fear of slave uprisings, which usually resulted in either the death of

the overseer or the slave (10). While the slave's were not typically interested in asserting their

human rights they were interested in staying alive, and at times an uprising seemed the only

possibility in achieving that reality (8). It was overseers who aroused these types of

circumstances who were also typically remembered through slave narratives. A possible

explanation for this particular image of the overseer being so prevalent through time is because

public opinion was more inclined to identify the "taskmaster's cruelty as a 'necessary' evil" (20).

In other words, the taskmaster was just doing his job by any means necessary.

      Much like slaves, overseers were under the authority of the owner and obedience was

essential in order to keep ones job. So certain actions that are considered synonymous with

overseers were sometimes at the request of the owner. For instance, it was usually standard that

the owner forbade fraternizing between overseers and slaves (Wiethoff 4). This practice helped

to maintain the hierarchy of plantation life. If the slaves felt too comfortable with the overseer it

could cause conflict when they were supposed to insight fear or at least be seen as an authority

figure. When the overseer challenged his master's wishes there were consequences for him that

could be just as daunting as those for the slaves. This applies to both the owner perceiving

punishments as too harsh on the slaves and not harsh enough. A particular problem that is not as

amply documented is that of the overseer identifying with the plight of the slaves. As mentioned

before, maintaining the hierarchy of plantation life was detrimental to keeping the peace. At least

one eighteenth century overseer made the mistake of upsetting this delicate balance. Raynard Potts, a German immigrant, refrained from whipping the slaves whom he oversaw because, "He believed the black men and women who bent their backs in slavish toil were human beings and he treated them accordingly" (7). Though the slaves undoubtedly appreciated this approach the owners were quite displeased. In an ironic twist the owners threatened to whip Potts if he refused to whip the slaves, and he was eventually dismissed. So regardless of whether or not the overseer was getting the job done if he was not doing it under the parameters set by the owner then he might as well not do it at all.

The relationship between the overseer and the slave did not always culminate at the end of the workday. It is when that relationship carried on into the night that transformed the overseer's image into that of a scoundrel (Wiethoff 32), thus adding a more detestable aspect to the relationship. Considering there was no law against raping a slave (33), overseers took advantage of their position far too nonchalantly. This undoubtedly left the husbands of these slaves feeling symbolically castrated. While there were some plantation management books that pertained to plantation etiquette such as Plowden Weston's "Management of a Southern Plantation" (36), it was the owner who was responsible to appoint the regulations regarding sexual promiscuity among overseers. Despite the regulations the owner may choose the overseers participated in sexual abuse just as much as certain owners would, because that was part of plantation life. Similar to refusing the overseer's wishes during the workday, refusing his advances afterward was detrimental to a slave's wellbeing. If a slave spurned a sexual advance they could often find themselves being whipped (34).

Though sexual exploitation was one of the most deplorable actions an overseer could partake in there were other incidents that caused the image of a scoundrel to be associated with

the overseer. At times overseers were imbued with the authority to dictate what a slave did with his livestock (Wiethoff 44). The quality of a slave's life could be severely impacted depending on whether or not his overseer was obliged to keep the slave's best interest in mind. Overseer's also maintained control over slave's lack of literacy to avoid their minds from being filled with abolitionist banter. The overseer's authority was even extended to prevent slave's religious gatherings (47). For fear that religious gatherings would insight rebellion they were frowned upon and overseers could be rewarded for quelling matters of that sort. A Tennessee preacher elaborated on the perceived fear by explaining, "Slaves…tended to lose sight of the simplicity of the gospel, and to turn the church organization from its purely spiritual ends to a social ones" (47). While it will be discussed later, it turned out that the fear of finding something deeper in scripture was warranted, because it did have a rather considerable effect on the minds of slaves.

While the overseers were in authority of slaves they often viewed them as responsible for their unfortunate economic plight, thus creating an unsettling rivalry (Weithoff 54). With the exception of a slave no one found the life of an overseer the least bit alluring. Though, in many circumstances not even slaves lusted after the life of an overseer. He did not lead the life of an elite slaveholder and was by no means a southern gentleman. An overseer usually had as much education as a slave did, which was the majority of the time very little. The rivalry became especially poignant when the position of overseer was not solely designated for whites. Overseer's tactics to make slaves work harder, faster, and be faithful to their owner seemingly had an adverse effect. Slaves who would have previously been without the knowledge of overseeing became equipped with the qualifications to supervise. Then there were the few owners who never saw fit to have an overseer, either for lack of resources or trustworthy slaves. In an effort to keep the field hands disciplined, slave drivers, also known as black overseers or

foremen, were normally employed on large plantations (Berlin, Favreau, and Miller 26). When an owner could obtain a superior crop for far less than salaries required of white overseers many would jump at the chance. Interestingly enough, white overseers were commonly replaced with slaves during the war between the North and South (Wiethoff 57). Owner Charles Pettigrew elaborated on his idea regarding distinguishing between white and black overseers when he stated, "He saw little difference between white overseers and black slaves as our natural partiality for the former would persuade us" (57). It was opinions such as these and the fact that the owner's frequently took the advice of foremen that made the white overseer feel obsolete.

The resentment of the overseer also grew whenever the owner would partake in elaborate mourning over the death of a faithful foreman, preferred name of a black overseer (Wiethoff 56-57). Even when the owner was simply mourning the loss of a slave because they were well versed in many skills, which meant an economic loss, it was still a display of emotion. This jealousy stemmed from the idea that the death of a white overseer had much less of an affect on the owner (57). While owners saw fit to employ a slave as an overseer at times they had to ensure that the slave would enforce punishment just as efficiently as a white overseer. So despite the assumption that black overseers were automatically more gracious it turns out that at times some could be just as cruel if not harsher. Apparently, the racial mixing pertaining to employment became so prevalent that, "There were no 'racially' exclusive jobs at the lower echelons of the labor force in any southern city" (61). This indifference gave white overseers reason to support abolitionist if it meant that they could no longer be threatened by the appeal of free slave labor (62). In an effort to illustrate their importance some overseers went to the extreme of essentially doing "all" of the work therefore leaving the slaves with "nothing" to do (66). One analyst summed up the rivalry between the overseer and the slave with a bit of irony

by stating, "Too many slaves were acting like free men, too many free men were burdened like slaves" (61). This irony was neither lost on the overseers nor the slaves.

Throughout the examination of the images portrayed in the relationship between overseer and slave it is clear that the relationship is reduced to bare bones far too often. The relationship did not simply revolve around the overseer doing his job of enforcing discipline on the slaves. Instead, the relationship revolved around the overseer doing whatever he deemed necessary to remain a figure that was both relevant to the owner and feared by the slave. Granted there are exceptions to every rule, but it is clear through slave narratives and court records that the majority upheld those ambitions. When examining the experience between the overseer and the slave the similarities they shared are apparent. Both the overseer and the slave had to answer to the owner of the plantation. Neither overseers nor slaves were particularly educated, and both knew that rising above their station was more than likely not an option. At times even their employment became interchangeable. This relationship yielded a nonstop struggle on both sides, and permitted the shared feeling of wanting more for oneself while still being a victim of one's circumstances.

One of the more overlooked slave relationships is strangely enough the relationships within the slave community. So much attention has been garnered relating to how the master treated his slaves or how the overseer disciplined them that the questions concerning how the slaves treated one another are forgotten. However, the inner workings of the slave community was layered with subtleties left unnoticed to the outside world and worthy of examination. When probing into this relationship it is imperative to understand just how intertwined the domestic life of the owner and slave was. The responsibilities of the owner to his land and family were in large part reflected in the relationships that were able to form throughout the slave community. The

reliance on the owner's choices had interesting effects on those within the slave community. Though such unpredictability created obvious rifts, from those rifts unnoticed bonds were also formed. Despite the endeavors of plantations owners which more often than not tore families apart, the slave community was resilient and provided a safe haven for those who embraced it. Nevertheless, for the slaves who refused to live their life within the resources of the community, for reasons of color or class, that left strain on certain relationships within the community. Thus, shattering the misconception that black kinship was universal and automatic.

The family dynamics created an environment that yielded a lack of stability, credited to the constant rearranging of family members. This rearranging occurred because of slaves being sold, married, dying, and so forth. It should be known that when referring to death that does include self inflicted deaths. Slaves sometimes avoided being sold through suicide. Despite the fact that suicide still resulted in a slave leaving his or her family it meant that they were leaving on their own terms (Stevenson 206). Apparently doing something on your own terms when you were a slave was of such great importance that even if it meant all you could was decide when you died then that is what you did. Another less obvious threat to the domestic life of slaves involved the death of the owner. Upon the owners death his or her slaves could be sold to settle a debt or even more commonly distributed as part of an inheritance to their heirs (213). When slaves were not preoccupied abiding by their own terms, being sold, or inherited their family structure was determined by the type of plantation on which they resided. The size of the plantation, the nature of the work that was expected, and where this work was to be done all factored in to determining the setup of the slave's household (207). These circumstances also factored into the availability of marriage partners. Due to all of these elements, the idea of the nuclear family was obviously not one that frequently pertained to the structure of slaves.

However, "Slaves continued to develop love for one another despite the circumscribed conditions imposed by slavery" (Brown 10). Assumedly a slave would have rather been separated from a family member along the way than never know the love of a family, for slavery was an institution that was not one to be faced alone.

The complexities of the average marriage were multiplied all the more when one was a slave. Slaves often found that they were being paired with their significant others through the desire of their owner to breed more slaves. The owner would look for a healthy girl that looked like she could produce children, disregarding whether or not she was attractive (Stevenson 232). This practice allowed for the owner to lay claim to the children produced through the cohabitation, which was always more than the children yielded from abroad marriages (232). This meant that many slaves gave up on the idea of picking a husband or wife for themselves because they had no other choice.

For slaves who were fortunate enough to choose for themselves, they took the process of choosing a significant other very seriously. While typical individuals had time to court one another, a limited amount of leisure time made the pursuit of a partner very difficult. Slaves had to utilize time during 'frolics', socials held on Saturday nights celebrating the end of the work week, cornshuckings, church, and even baptisms (Brown 3). Even with all of the obstacles slaves faced in obtaining enough time to court they were not too quick to choose a partner. The majority of slaves held the sacredness of marriage with very high regard and required that their unions be sanctified with a ceremony (3). Dissimilar to popular opinion, slaves often maintained their fidelity to their significant other in unfavorable circumstances (3). However, maintaining fidelity was no easy circumstance and required calling on creativity at times. In situations that involved separation some slaves went the route of celibacy while others took their loved one and ran

away. Many slaves devised imaginative plans to maintain their relationships in spite of their plight. Imaginative plans included convincing one's master to hire them out to the location where their significant other resided (6). Some owners tried to swap slaves to remedy the situation and when that did not work some even allowed their slaves to work all day on their plantation and then spend their nights with their significant other on their plantation (Berlin, Favreau, and Miller 65).However, there was the minority of slaves who resigned themselves from forming inventive plans, partaking in celibacy, or running away. It was these slaves who choose to move to other options. These slaves usually engaged in adulterous affairs while still married to their spouse or they moved on all together and married another. Whether faithful or unfaithful, once the relationships had been consummated it created an even bigger complication of maintaining the relationship once it grew beyond a couple and became a family.

Some of the most prevalent family types included abroad marriages and matrifocality[2] (Stevenson 209). Abroad marriages allowed for women to have a greater domestic power when raising their children and less responsibility both emotionally and physically to their husbands. This arrangement also freed the father from having to witness his wife and children's daily abuse, thus leaving his "manhood" in tact. The abroad marriage offered a social aspect for the husband as well (231). Getting a pass to go and visit your wife who was on another plantation meant extended social connections on that plantation. The physical and psychological rest that the husbands received during times away from their plantation provided them a much appreciated break. While the matrifocal slave families may seem to be more challenging due to a more significant lack of a father that does not mean that children were without a father figure. This relationship still allowed for uncles, older brothers, grandfathers, step-fathers and male

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[2] Matrifocality denotes the presence of a slave mother and her children in a single slave household either with no identifiable father present or an identifiable father who appeared in the household only occasionally.

cousins to take on the responsibilities such as social etiquette, protection, discipline, and emotional support. It has been speculated that this relationship was also a way of retaining some of the slave's African roots (223). More specifically, it has been suggested that this domestic structure was familiar to Africans which in turn assisted African Americans in adjusting to this configuration more easily. According to Brown, "Although the environment of slavery was not conducive to strengthening traditional family ties, blacks were insistent upon forming familial relationships" (10).

Yet, where there are those who were insistent on creating new relationships despite a lack of certain family members there were others who rather not. As a result of the slave trade there came to be a population of slave orphans (Stevenson 224). At times these children had either been sold or abandoned at such a young age that they were not even familiar with the concept of parents. They had to fend for themselves in their new surroundings even as children. On the rare occasion of an orphaned child being reunited with his family because the relationship had been severed before becoming solidified in memory they had a great deal of trouble adjusting to familial circumstances (224). These individual's especially had trouble acclimating to the idea of trusting these individuals who were supposed to care for them. The dissimilarity pertaining to the importance of surrogate family relationships only solidifies the fact that relationships within the slave community were far from simplistic.

Another aspect of the slave community relationship is the distinctions that slaves made amongst themselves. Contrary to traditional belief, the slave population's levels of acceptance fluctuated for all who suffered from this plight due to various reasons. For example, due to the dichotomy in lifestyle between the domestic and field slave prejudice could often be exhibited as a result. The daily responsibilities alone made a clear distinction because a field slave essentially

tended to the crops and livestock where as domestic slaves ranged from nurses, cooks, body servants[3], butlers and so forth (Harper 123). Former slave Henry Bibb alluded to some of the prejudices that worked within the slave community when stating, "The distinction among slaves is as marked as the classes of society are in any aristocratic community" (123). Some of the distinctions that slaves made amongst themselves included point of character, color, condition, or the superior importance of their respective masters (123). Based on such prejudices some slaves even refused to associate with others whom they deemed beneath them in any of these aspects.

As alluded to earlier, one of the deciding elements in how one was treated within the slave community was based on the whether they worked as a field hand or whether they worked in a domestic capacity. As a field hand it was assumed that you were ignorant and that your life would be quite burdensome and monotonous (Harper 123). Therefore, the domestic slaves typically found themselves looking down on the lives of the field hand. The daily life of a field hand included rising before dawn to prepare their meals, feed the livestock, and make sure they were at the fields before sunrise (Blassingame 250). Typically, after working in the fields until sunset the slaves had to return to tend to the livestock, put away tools, and cook their own meals before the horn sounded for bedtime (250). However, if a slave had the misfortunate of working on a sugar cane plantation their work carried on late into the night, often creating an eighteen hour workday during the harvest season (250). Considering the average slave was working part-time by the age of eight and toiling like any other adult by the age of thirteen (Berlin, Favreau, and Miller 71) it is easy to understand how with day after day of this type of grueling labor a field hand's body could be broken at a relatively young age.

The domestic slave's superiority complex was supported by the owner's idea that they were smarter, better kept, "more sprightly" (Harper 123), and better users of language. Close

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[3] A body servant refers to a personal maid.

proximity with the master or mistress also aided the domestic slaves in their perception of superiority. In fact, domestic slaves were usually only sent to work in the fields as punishment, because they were viewed as semi family members and you would not want a family member toiling with the field hands (128). The personal interest that resulted from the time the domestic slaves spent with their owner was seen as enabling the Negro to be more like the civilized man (124). In order to enable this transition the owner's who saw their domestic slaves as family members took it upon themselves to educate them as he would his white family. Owners would often dress their domestic slaves better by giving them their hand me downs (Blassingame 251). Domestic slaves also found themselves eating better than field hands because they were able to eat the owner's leftovers. It was slaves such as these who found themselves content with staying on with their master's family after the war between the North and South had come to an end (Harper 135). Nevertheless, a domestic slave was still a slave and their lives also had their difficulties. Unlike field slaves, domestic slaves did not have set hours to work. Domestic slaves were at the beck and call of their owner day or night. These circumstances also meant domestic slaves spent very little of their time not under the watchful eye of their owner which meant being flogged for insignificant mistakes, disrespectful behavior, or the owner simply being in a bad mood (Blassingame 251). So despite the domestic slave's superiority complex it did not suffice for raising them above the treatment of a slave.

Division within the slave community did not stop with where one worked. Instead the rift was increased by the color barrier between mulattoes and pure blacks. It was common knowledge that both whites and blacks assumed that mulattoes were more intelligent than pure blacks (Harper 126). Even on the auction block the division was clear as mulattoes were sold at the highest prices and referred to as "fancy girls" or "fancy boys" (Russell, Wilson, and Hall 18).

With the "gift" of white blood running through their veins it was only appropriate that mulattoes were shown favor. Being favored included the master saving domestic positions for mulatto slaves (Harper 126). Some mulatto slaves used the excuse that hoeing in the fields was too hard for them on account of their color (126) which was assumedly linked to the opinion that pure blacks were better equipped to handle the sun. Mulattoes also found themselves passing as white when circumstances permitted and in certain areas they were even allowed to apply for legal standing as "White" (Russell, Wilson, and Hall 15). Needless to say this caused a certain tension between pure black and mulatto slaves. This bias left pure blacks being portrayed as the bottom of the barrel while mulattoes were perceived as elevators of their race.

Slavery may have dictated many of a slave's actions but within the community it could not control all of them. The various aspects of this relationship illustrate some of the most shocking and intriguing struggles within the slave community. Despite such instability within family life one can witness their perseverance to stay together in many circumstances. The accessibility of prejudice within one's own community, when you were already at the mercy of white America, annihilates the overly simplistic assumption that slaves were one big happy family. Not to mention the occasionally refusing to care for slave children when they had been sold into a new community. Yet, even with these actions it would be foolish to believe that the divisions within the slave community were too significant to hinder the community from coming together when needed. For instance, if a domestic or mulatto slave was whipped a field or pure black slave would not find delight in that. Most likely they would both be praying for their owner's quick demise. Most importantly, by showing both slave's perseverance and prejudice, this relationship reveals some of the personalities that are so rarely examined despite perceptibly residing within the slave community.

First and foremost it is important to realize that this is not the forum to give the true attention deserved to the formation of ethnic identity through Southern slavery. This is a mere attempt to skim the surface in an effort to initiate the arduous process. Reflecting on all of the relationships and the levels within the relationships leaves much room for analysis on their affect regarding formation of ethnic identity. The question of what kind of identity a slave could form almost seems like an oxymoron. The exterior examination provides an overview of a life that consisted of a detrimental lack of authority. Yet, when delving deeper into the complexities of the various aspects of each relationship it is obvious that despite the oxymoronic theme ethnic identity was formed in the shadow of slavery.

When beginning the analysis the central idea revolved around a specific set of characteristics or behaviors that made up ethnic identity. Yet, as the observation evolved it became clear that social implications were quite relevant when forming ethnic identity. The perception of ethnic identity progressed into the idea that there was not a single set of characteristics or behaviors relating to ethnic identity but instead several sets depending on one's experiences in social circumstances. For reasons such as these a psychological theory like Harry Sullivan's interpersonal theory is particularly useful. The organizing principle behind Sullivan's theory revolves around the effects of human experience (Evans 63), socially and culturally, on the inner self. Not to mention, interpersonal behavior typically revolves around the, "dominant-submissive, hate-love axis" (Blassingame 285), which melds seamlessly into the realm of slavery. In light of these factors as well as others which will be discussed later, myself and other authors such as John Blassingame find it not only useful but appropriate to employ Sullivan's theory in the analysis of slave behavior.

The beginnings of ethnic identity stem from the individuals and groups decisions or behaviors as well as the influences of the others around them. There are also implications from language, religion, appearance, ancestry and so forth on the formation of ethnic identity. More specifically, Harry Stack Sullivan proposed the "interpersonal theory" which expounds on slave behavior (Blassingame 284). Sullivan's interpersonal theory goes on to state, "Significant others, or persons with more power to reward and punish, are primarily responsible for the way people behave" (284). When contemplating the configuration of a slave's ethnic identity under this theory it is simple to see how easy it would actually be with the abundance of authority influencing so many of their actions. If at the moment society was not reiterating a slaves place his owner would and if not the owner there was always the overseer. However, do not let it be assumed that due to all of these circumstances that slaves were not taking an active role in creating their own ethnic identity. While the social effect was substantial that does not take away from the effects that the slave's parentage or significant others would have bestowed. It became clear, "Slaves not only retained personality initiative, but that they were able to endure the vicissitudes of slavery precisely because of their ability to construct a viable black community within the confines of the 'peculiar institution'" (Brown 1-2). According to Joane Nagel, research has even gone on to confirm that people's conception of themselves along ethnic lines, particularly their ethnic identity, is both situational and changeable (154). Therefore, through each relationship the alteration, large or small, in the slave's ethnic identity was warranted since the conditions of their surroundings could differ so drastically. Thus, the research supports and provides enlightenment regarding the obvious changes in a slave's personality.

According to Sullivan, "Interpersonal theorists argue that behavioral patterns are determined by the characteristics of the situations, how the person perceives them, and his

behavioral dispositions at the time" (Blassingame 285). In light of that, it is appropriate to begin

with the analysis of the concept of the Southern slave's subjugation to the total institution that

was slavery (289). The total institution refers to an organization that pertains to the determination

of permanent and semi-permanent relationships in regards to demands, rules, objectives of the

organization, institutional roles, rewards, and punishments (289). The institution also explicitly

distinguished members from non-members. When looking at plantation life from this perspective

it illuminates the fact that the personality of slaves was intimately tied up with coercive power

the master enforced. Comprehending the profundity of plantation life as being equivalent to a

battlefield is integral. The slaves were in a fight against masters for both their physical and

psychological survival. During this battle establishing one's self-esteem was the most important

component of personality according to the interpersonal theory (285). Establishing self-esteem

became so vital because it can extensively shape one's experiences due to perception of self and

in turn manipulate their ethnic identity. With such a battle raging as previously mentioned

achieving this essential component could naturally be thought of as impossible but as will be

discussed it was by no means unattainable. Self esteem could still be achieved within the slave

community, and more specifically within one's family. Unlike what many owners may have

thought slaves did not have to seek out their endorsement for personal validation. In fact,

members of large groups that revolve around manufacturing organizations have a tendency to

identify with their superior on a relatively shallow level (286). Psychologists go on to pronounce

that they have found that coercive relationships in general often yield this effect (287).

Individuals find themselves exhibiting compliant obedience while not internalizing their

superior's regulations despite their superior's relentless reliance on various tactics to ensure such

internalization.

Preserving inner autonomy became the slave's method of coping with the existence that had been bestowed upon them. As a slave constantly exhibited a behavior that was not true to his or her character due to their social setting the action was of little consequence to their psychological state (Blassingame 288-289). Slave's relationships with various masters, thanks to the slave trade, provided them with a very conscious nature of white owners. It was as if slaves partook in a lifelong lesson of examining the white man's and in some cases women's moods, ideas and actions (303). Therefore, they could manipulate their behavior and personality to fit the situational circumstances. Despite the slaveholder's supposed knowledge of the Negro their misconceptions were unmistakably immense. According to Blassingame, "The docility of the slave was a sham, a mask to hide his true feelings and personality traits" (305). For instance, the more a slave's passion grew for freedom the more he acted as if it was of no consequence (314). In a way these behaviors were just another demonstration of the slave's efforts to persevere. These falsified behaviors also exhibited a slave's deployment of interpersonal relations as a means to express various personalities. As a matter of fact, the exploitation of these interpersonal relationships was the part of the slave's life that helped them psychologically stay afloat. Not to mention, slaves did not have to employ these falsified behaviors all of the time because their owners could not observe them at all times. As long as a slave had interpersonal relationships he or she could find solace, independence, self-esteem, and whatever else needed. Apparently these interpersonal relationships were so fulfilling that in spite of the psychological traumas the slaves suffered they only accounted for 14.2 percent of the insane or idiotic in the South though they made up 32 percent of the total population (302). However, it should be mentioned that while the majority of slaves found solace in interpersonal relationships there were always those who had completely resigned themselves to their fate. Individuals such as these were brutally realistic,

leaving them unable to find solace in anything and simply wishing that their life which had been

engulfed in anguish would come to a quick end.

While the setup of Southern society conspired to instill the feeling of inferiority among

the slaves it also instilled the idea for many slaves that they could not be inferior to whites

because poor whites were mostly ignorant and illiterate (Blassingame 306). When a poor white

went in front of his wealthy employer he had just as much fear in his heart as that of a slave.

Slaves even went as far as to treat other slaves who associated with poor whites as outcasts

(307). However, the examination of poor whites was not the only eye opening experience to

falsify the claim of white supremacy. At times slaves realized their lack of inferiority through

their owner's actions. For instance, one slave realized his, "Pride of conscious superiority" after

carrying in his drunken master home time and time again (307). Slave could also use the constant

chasing of slave women as an eye opener in regards to a lack of inferiority. If owner's, overseers,

and others of the white population dared to desire a black woman when they had the option of a

white woman then there had to be something more to that. These realizations helped to facilitate

the inner autonomy which was so desperately needed in the life of a slave, and also assisted in

boosting the all important self-esteem. While their social circumstances were often emotionally

debilitating a simple change in perspective altered their perception of social circumstances and in

turn modified their personality. Another change in perspective coincided with the slave's

religious practices and life inside slave quarters. Religion provided a type of independence of the

mind that may insight more fear of his or her creator than his or her owner. Frankly, religion was

another means of safeguarding the slave's mental health. An additional change in perspective

came from the interpersonal relationships that corresponded with life in the slave quarters. In the

quarters a male slave could actually feel like a man, express his true feelings, gain respect or

sympathy from his family, and enjoy the other gratifications that would be denied him on the outside (311).

For many slaves, the lack of an inferiority complex soon turned to hate and suspicion of whites. These slaves began associating the majority of whites with the enemy, and began raising their children with under the same proposal (Blassingame 314). While it has been mentioned that the there was by no means an automatic kinship among slaves that does not discount the relationships formed within their quarters. Though slaves may not have conducted themselves according to white standards their statements eloquently express a code of behavior to which they adhered (Brown 10). The slave quarters were a seemingly safe haven and slaves utilized that space to remove their mask of docility. The quarters provided a setting for slave's true feelings and personalities to flourish. It was in these quarters that the slave was actually able to express language that contradicted his or her circumstances due to a type of group solidarity. Granted, this group solidarity referred to slave's who embraced the slave community not those who looked down upon it, like many mulattoes. For example, for the mulattoes that severed their relationships with the slave community to further their relationships with whites this does not apply. Yet, the sanctity of slave quarters for those who held close to the community was so respected that even some elite slaves, domestics and drivers, altered their own agendas on occasion to ensure that they did not become outcasts. Domestic servants often found themselves being the easiest access into the owner's psyche, and drivers though forced to flog fellow slaves could manipulate the whip into making more sound than pain (Blassingame 316). So even for the favored slaves, when the occasion presented itself, changes in their personality could be expected. However, slave quarters were not the ultimate fix for creating an outlet and on occasion a slave's temporary anger would overcome his or her customary caution.

The slave's ethnic identity seemed to embody inner autonomy regarding relationships outside of their community and outward autonomy within their community. With the extreme dichotomies that engulfed the slave's life it was no wonder that their ethnic identity would be constructed around issues of autonomy. James McCune Smith flawlessly illustrated what went on behind the impenetrable mask of a slave:

> Blows and insults he bore, at the moment, without resentment; deep but suppressed emotion, rendered him insensible of their sting; but it was afterward, when the memory of them went seething through his brain, breeding a fiery indignation at his injured self-hood, that the resolve came to resist, and the time fixed to resist, and the plot laid, how to resist; and he always kept his self-pledged word. In what he undertook, in this line, he looked fate in the face, and had a cool, keen look at the relation of means to ends. (Blassingame 284)

When compiling all of the social implications that factor into the formation of slave's ethnic identity one encounters a sheer lack of simplicity. It becomes clear that because of the relationships that slave's encountered throughout their life that many implications were made. At times the slave's ethnic identity revolved around inferiority while at other times embodied perseverance. One must consider the boundaries that are closely associated with ethnic identity (Nagel 154). The constant manipulation of social circumstances provides too many variables to generalize, without a shadow of a doubt, exactly what slave identity entailed at all times just like it would for any other population. However, through the examination of various relationships it is appropriate to point out the elements of slave's personality and behavior that applied to their ethnic identity most frequently. Resourcefulness, strength of body and of mind, anger, and despair are only but a few components of slave's ethnic identity. Yet, they are the components that have been most prevalent throughout the relationships that have been discussed thus far. If nothing else this analysis should have broadened the perspective on the complexities of slave relationships in general. The analysis should have also magnified the idea that in spite of

everything the slave was not only able to solidify an ethnic identity but one that was not simply

made up of what others would have influenced them to believe about themselves. Instead there is

a rich and dynamic ethnic identity that deserves far more credit and research.

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