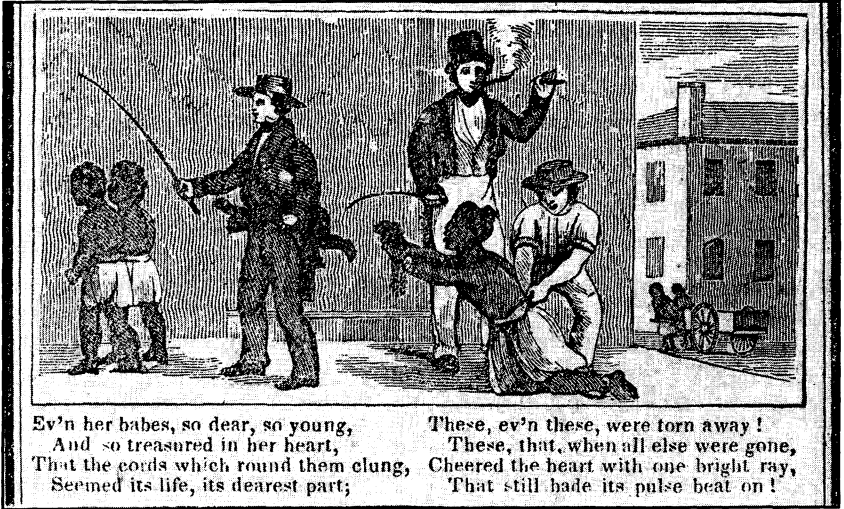


Gender-Related Difference in the Slave Narratives of Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass

Winifred Morgan

Since the late 1960s, ante-bellum slave narratives have experienced a renaissance as dozens of the thousands still extant have been reprinted and as scholars have published major works on the sources, art, and development of the narratives; the people who produced them; and their on-going influence on later work. Drawing upon slave narratives as well among other sources, John Blasingame's *The Slave Community* (1972), for example, drew attention to the complex social interactions developed in antebellum slave culture. Examining the milieu that spawned the narratives and their development, and providing insights into what the narratives can tell about slavery as well as what they omit, Frances Smith Foster's *Witnessing Slavery* (1979) gave readers a book-length analysis of the genre. Robert B. Stepto's *From Behind the Veil* (1979) situated slave narratives at the center of African-American written narrative. John Sekora and Darwin Turner's collection of essays, *The Art of the Slave Narrative* (1982), focused closer attention on how the narratives achieved their rhetorical effects. In *The Slave's Narrative* (1985), Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. gathered excerpts from some of the best-known narratives and essays about the narratives as history and autobiographical literature. William L. Andrews's *To Tell a Free Story* (1987) examined the narratives as public autobiographies, at once exploring and demanding freedom. Today, hardly a book is published on American autobiography without a chapter on slave narratives. Not only do scholars writing about African-American literature often refer to the slave



Mother and children being separated after purchase by different owners. Wood engraving from the American Anti-slavery Almanac for 1838. Courtesy of State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

narratives' on-going influence on the fiction and autobiography, some of the novelists themselves mention their debt to the narratives. Toni Morrison, for instance, has often referred to the fact that previous to writing *Beloved*, she read hundreds of the narratives.

Studies of the slave narrative have explored numerous themes. Much of the work concentrates on the subtext beneath the stories. In the narratives, fugitives and ex-slaves appealed to the humanity they shared with their readers. The genre's themes flow from its assertion of the slaves' humanity. Slave narratives show that slaves suffered physically, emotionally, and spiritually under slavery; that slaves yearned for freedom and resisted slavery in every way possible way; that slavery was a pernicious system ultimately destroying masters as well as slaves; that the narrators were telling the truth about their own experiences; and that each narrator was a "reliable transcriber of the experience and character of black folk."¹ In addition to showing how these themes recur in the narratives, scholars have demonstrated that while early slave narratives written during the eighteenth century drew their themes from earlier narrative forms,² in the last three decades before the American Civil War, the slave narrative moved beyond the captivity narrative's emphasis on physical enslavement and the spiritual autobiography's focus on introspection to confront the moral bankruptcy of slavery itself. Unfortunately, few scholars have systematically examined the role of gender-related differences in these themes. However, given the pervasive impact of the "social organization of the relationship between sexes,"³ gender influenced even the way in which bondage was experienced; men and women experienced it in different ways.

In *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, Deborah Gray White outlines a series of ways in which slave women's lives differed from those of men. White discusses the networks women slaves developed among themselves. She details, for example, the ways that being a woman added burdens to a slave's life but also furthered the "cooperation and interdependence"⁴ necessary for a woman's survival. For example, women and children were not shackled below decks during the middle passage to America; however, being above deck also left them "more easily accessible to the criminal whims and sexual desires of seamen" (63). Women had less mobility, and thus fewer opportunities to flee, than men (75). When they joined the men in field work, they still had to finish their own domestic work at home while the men rested (122). The women's shared work, however, often offered them opportunities for camaraderie. Laundry work, for example, gave them an opportunity to talk among themselves, to share joys and sorrows; so did prayer meetings (123). Slave women passed work skills on to one another (129). Even more crucially, slave women depended on one another in all that had to do with childbirth and child-rearing. For health care they depended on midwives and "doctor women" (124), for child care they depended on elderly slave women, and sometimes they used the services of a conjure woman (135). As a consequence of these different experiences, men and women slave narrators tell different stories of resistance to their enforced servitude.

As noted above, twentieth-century scholars of the slave narrative genre have often neglected apparently gender-related distinctions between the narratives of men and women. For example, critics have almost invariably cited the hunger for literacy as one of the most prominent themes found in slave narratives; scholars repeat as a truism that the narratives stress the importance of learning to read and write. In their introduction to *The Slave's Narrative*, for example, Charles Davis and Henry Louis Gates base their explanation for several common strategies encountered in the narratives on a preoccupation with literacy presumably found in all slave narratives. Gates and Davis generalize that in their concern about their writing, narrators depict vivid scenes describing their learning to read and write, underscore the dominant culture's strictures against African-American literacy, and intertwine an "ironic apologia" for their literary limitations with denunciations of the system that has refused the slave "development of his capacities" (emphasis added).⁵ Their characterization accurately describes male narratives. In another essay in the same book, James Olney lists among seven characteristics that a reader typically encounters in any slave narrative a "record of the barriers raise[d] against slave literacy and the overwhelming difficulties encountered in learning to read and write" (153).⁶

Discussing the autobiographies of Douglass, Lucinda MacKethan ("From Fugitive") also assumes the centrality of the quest for literacy in slave narratives. MacKethan explores connections between the strategies of earlier conversion/captivity narratives and Douglass's *Narrative* and then Douglass's use of these strategies to validate his role as a "fugitive American slave narrator. . . seeking in

a written document to prove that” he has successfully appropriated through language the free territory he claims.⁷ MacKethan notes as well the close connection for Douglass between the acquisition of literacy and personal autonomy (57). MacKethan probes both the role literacy played for Douglass, establishing him as a man worthy of freedom, and—by implication—its significance to other slave narrators. However, such a generalization does not extend to slave narratives written by women.

Male narrators do stress the importance of reading and writing. Thus, for example, Olaudah Equinno, James Pennington, and William Craft (the actual narrative voice of *Running a Thousand Miles*) stress how illiteracy disabled them while they were slaves and how they felt the need, once they slipped their bonds as slaves, to satisfy as soon as possible, their hunger for education.⁸ However, the drive to become literate appears to be gender-based; unlike the narratives written by men, women’s narratives do not emphasize this factor. While male narrators accentuate the role of literacy, females stress the importance of relationships. Given the importance of relationships in the lives of most women, this is hardly surprising. Through their narratives, both male and female fugitives and ex-slaves strove to counter the racial stereotypes that bound them even in “free” societies. Black men and women, however, faced different stereotypes. Black men combated the stereotype that they were “boys” while black women contested the idea that they were either helpless victims or whores. For a male fugitive, public discourse served to claim his place among men; for a female her relationships—as a daughter, sister, wife, mother, and friend—demonstrated her womanliness and her shared roles with women readers.

Two of the most widely read American slave narratives, Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative of the Life of F D* (1845) and Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) provide useful representative texts with which to examine gender-specific differences in both the narratives and the lives of slaves. The slave narratives of Jacobs and Douglass suggest that, while they were responding to their place and period’s significant themes—among them, individualism, community, resisting oppression, and striving for freedom—strategies of coping and resistance differed by gender. In common with most male narrators, Douglass emphasizes his ability to speak in public as well as to read and write. Through their use of language, male narrators strove to demonstrate their place as men among men, that they had a *right* to autonomy in a political democracy based on a voter’s ability to understand and debate the issues. On the other hand, in common with other women narrators, Jacobs emphasizes her womanliness. Women narrators related to feminine culture of their time, and that involved telling their stories in terms of relationships.

Douglass’s Autobiographies

Aside from gender-related differences such as their distinct emphases on the

importance of literacy and relationships, narratives written by men and women share many common characteristics. In all slave narratives, the fugitive or former slaves relate their trials as slaves, their flight to freedom, and, finally, their dedication to helping others flee slavery.⁹ As in other slave narratives, Douglass's *Narrative* makes this pattern explicit; but in addition, Douglass further organizes his narrative around the theme of increasing control over his life as a path toward personal independence. A major instrument in his quest is language, and in particular, literacy. Perhaps the paramount virtue in his *Narrative* is the individual's courage, and the crucial weapon—in a struggle where armed conflict would be suicidal—is the word.

Throughout his career, Douglass was preoccupied with language, and the preeminence he gives language and especially literacy in the *Narrative* reflects this preoccupation. Douglass first gained a reputation in the North as an orator. William Lloyd Garrison's and Wendell Phillips's prefatory letters to the *Narrative* establish Douglass as someone who has witnessed effectively at abolitionist meetings. In fact, according to one editor of his works, contemporary reports noted that Douglass "charmed his audiences with his style."¹⁰ Nonetheless, Douglass seems to have understood even during his early days as a public speaker that until he recorded his experiences and crafted them in his own literary style, they would remain ephemera, and under the control of others. Douglass's recollections closely identify slavery with ignorance and lack of access to the written word. Thus, for example, the first paragraph of his *Narrative* notes that he had never seen "any authentic record" (47) of his birth. Had he not grabbed at freedom and gained the skill to write his *Narrative*, we might never have learned of his existence. Literacy gave Douglass the power to assert his existence as well as his freedom from those who would keep him ignorant and a slave.

When Sophia Auld first taught him to read and then when Hugh Auld showed him—by objecting to his lessons—the importance of literacy, Douglas began on his road to freedom. Even as a young child, Douglass realized that knowledge represented power. Words provide access to the power of communication, and the route to long-term control of the message is through literacy. As an adult Douglass, writing his *Narrative*, had literate and articulate language at his command. He used his command of language to reflect on the presumably inchoate insights of the barely lettered child he once was. Douglass's musings make his readers aware of the contrast between his polished adult abilities and his preliterate juvenile state when he listened to Hugh Auld's comments to his wife Sophia:

It was a new and special revelation, explaining dark and mysterious things, with which my youthful understanding had struggled, but struggled in vain. I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty—to wit, the white man's power to enslave the black man. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it highly. From that moment, I understood *the pathway from*



Man on horseback beating slaves. Wood engraving from American Anti-slavery Almanac for 1838. Courtesy of State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

slavery to freedom. . . . Though conscious of the difficulty of learning without a teacher, I set out with high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, *to learn how to read* (78) (emphasis added).

Throughout his life Douglass demonstrated his belief in the connection between access to the written record and power. Not only did Douglass write two further autobiographies (published in 1855 and 1881), but he also edited and published a series of weekly and monthly newspapers¹¹ and in later life toured as a lecturer and wrote for national periodicals such as the *North American Review* and *Harper's Weekly*. Douglass never forgot Hugh Auld's inadvertent lesson, "if you teach that nigger . . . how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master" (78). Nor did Douglass forget Auld's insistence that Douglass cultivate "complete thoughtlessness. . . and setting aside [his] intellectual nature, in order to [achieve] contentment in slavery" (139-40). In fact, by contravening Auld's insistence that he live out his existence as a thoughtlessly contented slave, by making every effort to achieve literacy, and finally by becoming quite unmanageable, Douglass showed how well he understood Auld's dictates.

Power and personal autonomy have special significance to the former slave who has endured utter impotency and lack of control. Lucinda MacKethan even

speaks of male slave narrators crafting “master narratives” in order to explore “what it means to be a master, not what it means to be a fugitive slave.”¹² In the *Narrative* Douglass structures his story to show how he has used literacy to achieve power and control in his life. As Eric Sunquist notes, “Both the contents and the serial development of his autobiographical writings make evident the subversive lesson young Frederick first learned in reading the alphabet—that literacy is power.”¹³ The *Narrative* demonstrates in 1845 how someone has gained control of his life by gaining control over the means of communication.

Drawing on Harold Bloom’s *A Map of Misreading*, William L. Andrews finds that African-American autobiographies such as Douglass’s prod readers to review and sometimes revise “the myths and ideals of America’s culture-defining scriptures.”¹⁴ Throughout the *Narrative*, Douglass appeals to two major legitimizing sources in American culture: the Bible and “documents” (84) of political tradition in the United States. As the youthful Douglass realizes when he reads, rereads, and mulls over his copy of *The Columbian Orator*, the American rhetorical tradition speaks in terms of universal freedom and the rights of all men. This rhetorical tradition prevailed even after laws further restricted African-Americans following the Nat Turner Rebellion (1831) and in the Fugitive Slave Law (1850), enacted a few years after his *Narrative*’s publication. Yet slave owners and their sympathizers attempted to cut off Douglass and other slaves from both the scriptural and Revolutionary rhetorical sources that championed human freedom.

One of Douglass’s most vehement arguments against Christianity as practiced in the South was that it perverted the Scriptures—the Word of God. Thus early in the *Narrative*, an overseer, Mr. Severe, is known for his swearing as well as for his sadism, “his fiendish barbarity” (55) as Douglass calls it. And later in the *Narrative*, Thomas Auld, who “after his conversion. . . found religious sanction and support for his cruelty” (99), quotes Scripture (“He that knoweth his master’s will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes”) to justify his sadism when he ties up a young lame woman and whips her until blood drips off her naked shoulders (98-99). In these and other passages where white Christians break up black Sabbath schools, Douglass clearly associates access to the written word (and sometimes to the Word of God) with control of one’s situation.

Despite the “generic conventions” that mold into types all the characters and even the protagonist’s voice in most slave narratives¹⁵ Douglass does, in fact, manage to stamp his individuality onto his *Narrative*. In this, his *Narrative* stands apart from most of the other extant narratives. In the *Narrative*, Douglass presents himself as someone who has learned to read and write almost solely by his own efforts, who fought with Covey, the slave breaker, for his human dignity, and who finally seized his own freedom, all pretty much on his own. Douglass actually sets up two contrasting frames: he presents himself as someone who is “one of a kind” and at the same time “representative.” Douglass presents himself as someone who, in order to break free from slavery, found sources of strength within himself

rather than from his community. Yet at the same time, he puts himself forward as someone whom other slaves, freedmen, and fugitives can emulate. Thus he also becomes an Emersonian “representative” man, an exemplar. His story, in one sense, is every slave’s; in another sense, his story is that of the extraordinary man. Part of the appeal of the *Narrative* is Douglass’s invocation of the twin but opposing American themes of individualism and community. Douglass’s challenge in the *Narrative* is to combine them.

* * *

Douglass and the other slaves in the *Narrative* live isolated and mistrustful lives. As a child, for example, Douglass uses guile to learn and practice his letters—first tricking or bribing white boys into teaching him letters he does not know and then practicing these letters in the discarded copybooks of his master’s son. The youthful Douglass does not dare accept the offered help of Irish workmen because they might be trying to entrap him. In the *Narrative* Douglass appears single-handedly to have beaten Covey to a standstill. (Douglass’s second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, reveals that Caroline, a strong slave woman, could have tipped the balance in his opponent’s favor; however, she chose to stay out of the fight and was later punished for not helping Covey.) Douglass’s first attempt to flee North with two other slaves by using the passes he has written almost ends in disaster because someone, presumably another slave, has warned the owners. The *Narrative* thus gives the impression that neither slaves nor whites can be trusted. Douglass primarily emphasizes his uniqueness, and the other black characters in his *Narrative* interact only warily either among themselves and with whites; the theme of individuality, depending on oneself alone, predominates over the theme of community.

How does an individual conscious of himself, his singularity, his sense of being “self-made,” come to know and understand himself without appropriating a community and a means of communication? Writing the *Narrative*, reflecting on his experience in words, helped Douglass to understand his passage from the isolation he perceived in being a slave to the community possible as a freeman. It may be that his lack of peers made the language Douglass used all the more critical. He needed to put his insights into words so that he could understand them. Telling one’s own story is a particularly human way of organizing and coming to understand one’s experience.

Telling his story in his three autobiographies became Douglass’s means of understanding his experience and that of other African-Americans. This is why, as his understanding evolved, he had to keep rewriting his story. With his “story” to communicate, Douglass could begin to connect with those who could become his community at large. Language and control of that language became both his opportunity and his vehicle. As an adolescent slave, he had written passages which he had hoped would help him and his friends on their way to freedom. As

an adult writer of autobiographies, he was still attempting to use language to further his own and his people's freedom. Douglass used language to break out of the isolation he perceived in slavery, finally through his later autobiographies, he attempted to build a relationship with the rest of the African-American population.

As the single most widely read slave narrative, Douglass's *Narrative* has often come to represent the entire genre. Despite its impressive craft, however, it presents problems as a representative text. First of all, its implicit assumption that literacy provides the power leading to individual freedom does not characterize women's narratives. In addition, its advocacy of literacy as a major route to personal autonomy might prove misguided. Valerie Smith critiques the utility of making literacy central in a struggle for equality because literacy has often served not only as a means of access for the underprivileged but also as a means by which dominant groups have controlled access to society's rewards and thus preserved their hegemony.¹⁶ Smith even credits Douglass's "story of his own success" as "provid[ing] counter evidence of his platform of radical change; for by demonstrating that a slave can be a man in terms of all the qualities valued by his northern middle-class reader—physical power, perseverance, literacy—he lends credence to the patriarchal structure largely responsible for his oppression" (27). This does not necessarily mean that Douglass was wrong in his choice of language as his most important weapon for his struggle, merely that he had not examined nor critiqued that choice.

In part because of what she perceives as Douglass's limitations, Deborah McDowell also has challenged the *Narrative*'s preeminence among slave narratives and suggests that a presumably inadvertent male bias has insisted on its primacy as an Emersonian "representative" text. McDowell contends that "the literary and interpretative history of the *Narrative* has, with few exceptions, repeated with approval its salient assumptions and structural paradigms. This repetition has, in turn, created a potent and persistent critical language that positions and repositions Douglass on top, that puts him in a position of priority."¹⁷ Indeed, Douglass's *Narrative* has enjoyed a preeminent place among North American slave narratives. Yet Davis and Gates maintain that among Douglass's contemporaries, Douglass's account may have been considered most "representative" because it was most "presentable." "He was most presentable because of his unqualified abilities as a rhetorical artist. Douglass achieved a form of *presence* through the manipulation of rhetorical structures within a modern language."¹⁸

A number of critics, among them Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, have explored the process whereby Americans judge the significance and value of a piece of literature according to dominant male and European-derived cultural values. Reactions to Douglass's *Narrative* seem to illustrate this process because it affirms what his nineteenth-century white male audience valued. Although Douglass labels his confrontation with the slave-breaker Edward Covey *the*

“turning point” in his life, most of the language and imagery of the *Narrative* emphasize Douglass’s increasing fluency with and control over written language and how literacy gave him the means to make himself free and to live as a free man. With its emphasis on gaining control of language, the structure of Douglass’s *Narrative* reflects accepted hierarchical values common to nineteenth-century Western culture: education leads to social uplift, and progress is good. The *Narrative* also accepts the assumptions that men are the natural heads of the family and society and that children “belong” to their father. When they found the *Narrative* “representative,” Douglass’s “fellows” may have responded to what felt comfortably familiar to them as male readers and writers educated in a cultural milieu that taught them to respond positively to specific paradigms.

The dominant culture values in Douglass’s narrative, in turn, often reflect male values. The black women in Douglass’s narrative are by nature subordinate to the men. They serve as examples of victimization, such as his aunt, or as shadowy helpmates, such as the free woman he marries. Sophia Auld may think independently as a young bride but quickly accommodates herself to her husband’s preferences. The narrative assumes a hierarchy that places male prerogatives (such as the right of Hugh Auld to countermand Sophia’s attempt to teach Douglass, of Douglass’s father to impregnate and abandon Douglass’s mother, of Douglass himself to use and ignore his wife) at the apex. If Valerie Smith and others are correct in their argument that traditionally, literacy and a literary canon have been used to support patriarchy and other powerful groups to suppress the rights of oppressed people, then women slave narrators were right to doubt the value of learning to read and write as a major strategy in achieving their freedom. Patriarchy limited their worth both before and after slavery.¹⁹ Women who had been slaves had reason to seek “their own independent definition of womanhood.”²⁰

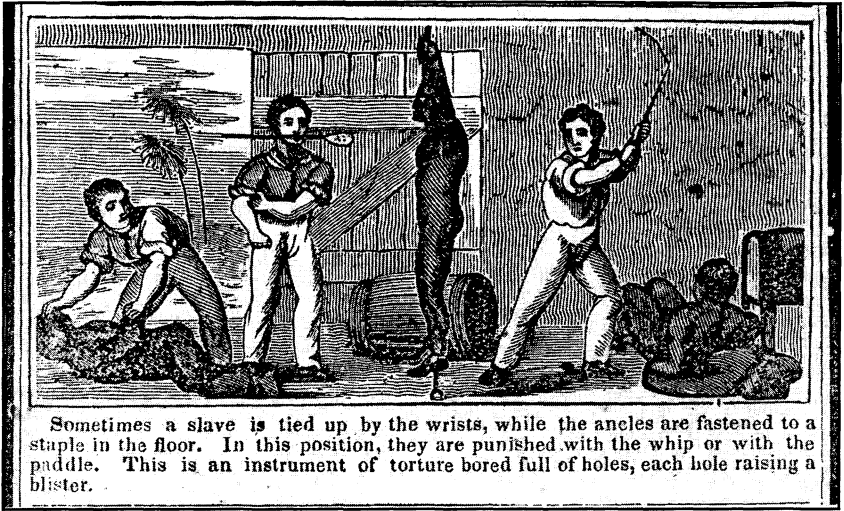
Douglass’s use of printed language to connect with others differs considerably from the relationship-building found in the work of women writers like Jacobs. Female as well as male, slave narrators desired and strove for literacy. Nonetheless, being literate never saved women fugitives from the burdens of slavery, racism, or sexism and they knew it. Whether they found literacy at best a weak reed on which to lean—whether they were ultimately more cynical or perhaps more realistic in confronting the economic realities of the racist and sexist societies in which they lived—women narrators do not give central significance to the acquisition of literacy. Instead, the most significant realities in these women’s lives usually derived from their personal relationships. While many nineteenth-century white women also developed significant ties among themselves,²¹ African-American women had little choice but to depend on one another in order to endure. Nineteenth-century social definitions of femininity marginalized white women but entirely excluded black women. The relationships that enabled women to survive slavery remain in their narratives like the framing timbers of a ship’s hull, outlining how slave women used connections with others in their efforts to keep out the seas of oppression that threatened to overwhelm them.

Jacobs's Narrative

Feminists writing in a variety of fields offer contemporary readers insight into the preference of Jacobs and other women narrators of slave experience for organizing their narratives around their relationships with meaningful people in their lives rather than around how they "proved themselves." Far more so than today, asserting "rugged individualism" would have been a foreign, perhaps repellent, notion for most nineteenth-century American women of any racial heritage. Even today, as psychologists such as Carol Gilligan and Jean Baker Miller have noted, women, more than men, tend to come to make choices based on their understanding and experiences of relationships.²²

Not only does contemporary psychological research emphasize the importance of relationships in women's lives, but a look at literary forms popular during Jacobs's lifetime demonstrates that her female contemporaries also relied on sustaining relationships. For example, relationships play a central role in women's religious conversion narratives. Susan Juster notes the centrality of relationships in the published conversion narratives of women during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century: "Authority for women is experienced as personal rather than abstract power. Embodied in personal relations, authority is exercised through the emotional and social channels which connect human beings. The exercise of authority thus requires the establishment of a relationship which is in some way significant for both partners."²³ Juster's analysis of religious conversion narratives suggests contrasting values in the slave narratives of men and women. She points out that the men and women who wrote conversion narratives during the early nineteenth century needed to suppress and assert different dimensions of themselves in religious conversion: men needed to suppress their egos and to link with others, while women needed to assert their egos and cease submerging themselves in others if they were to achieve the human wholeness demanded by religious conversion. In fact, Juster's study of religious conversion narratives seems to show men and women writers of conversion narratives following separate paths to ultimately the same goal.

Relationships also play a central role in women's novels of the period. According to Beth Maclay Doriani, Jacobs and her contemporary, novelist Harriet Wilson, both reshaped the slave narrative as it had been written by men²⁴ in order to show "the world of the black woman—as a person *inextricably bound up with others* yet responsible for her own survival, emotionally, economically, and politically" (emphasis added) (207). While male fugitives stressed their individuality, their ability to stand alone and assume adult male responsibility for themselves, women fugitives generally saw themselves as part of their communities. So women like Jacobs and Wilson, according to Doriani, stress connections among members of their communities rather than their isolation. Female narrators envision them-



Sometimes a slave is tied up by the wrists, while the ankles are fastened to a staple in the floor. In this position, they are punished with the whip or with the paddle. This is an instrument of torture bored full of holes, each hole raising a blister.

Slave, tied up by wrists, being flogged. From American Anti-slavery Almanac for 1838. Courtesy of State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

selves as striving with and for others. They do not think of themselves or other fugitives as alone.²⁵

* * *

Harriet Jacobs's narrative differs significantly from Douglass's autobiography. While Douglass's narrative emphasizes his acquisition and development of written language, Jacobs depicts a network of relationships on which she depends and to which she contributes; her most important relationships devolve from bonds of love. She respects and fears but, above all, she loves, her grandmother. She loves her children, her brother, her uncles and aunt. Her feelings for her employers, both the first and second Mrs. Bruce, and later, as revealed in her letters, for abolitionist Amy Post, derive far more from affection, acceptance, and a sense of worth than from patronage. There is nothing legalistic about these relationships. In *Incidents* bonds of affection support and nourish the individual and contrast with the contrived and unreasonable bonds of slavery. Unlike Douglass, who tries to connect with and control his relations with both white and black communities through his manipulation of language, Jacobs already feels closely connected with family and friends. She makes sense of her responsibility to larger communities in terms of the ties that bind her to her family and friends. The support she receives from family and friends nourishes her; it assures her of her own worth; it impels her to take a role in the larger world. Not only did Jacobs write *Incidents* after her years as a nanny, she also worked with her brother,

running an abolitionist library. During and after the Civil War, she joined in relief work and the education of freed slaves.

In contrast with Douglass, Jacobs does not find language much of a weapon. Although literate, Jacobs makes only limited use of reading and writing to distract her enemy, Dr. Flint. Eventually, Jacobs does write letters from Edenton and has them mailed from Northern states, and later she peruses the “arrivals” section of Northern newspapers for warnings about the presence of her enemies. Nonetheless, at an earlier point in the story, Flint actually turns Jacobs’s literacy against her and uses her ability to read as a further avenue of sexual solicitation. For the most part, Jacobs feels she has no other resource than her relationships with family members and close friends and no other weapon than low cunning. Recognizing the hopelessness of overt opposition, Jacobs’s narrative glories in her ability and that of other oppressed slaves to subvert the will of their oppressors.²⁶

The people in Jacobs’s narrative engender respect as a result of the moral authority they wield. They earn respect. Jacobs serves her first mistress because she loves her and views her as a “second mother.” Her grandmother also dominates Jacobs not because of any parental “right” but because they share a bond of love. In contrast, her “ownership” by the Flints becomes an abstract and irrational legal fiction. The events of her story show that not only “ownership” of human beings is unjust; more important, the institution of slavery is evil because it perverts all relationships between men and women, children and parents, slaves and free people. The institution of slavery encourages a relatively good man such as Mr. Sands to keep his and Harriet’s children in bondage. In addition, it destroys society’s basic unit, the family. It poisons the Flints’ marriage and condones Dr. Flint’s attempted seduction of the adolescent Jacobs. It leaves a slave child unsure whether he “belongs” to his parents or his owners. Thus, for example, Jacobs’s young brother Willie does not know whether his first responsibility is to answer his father’s or his mistress’s call (9). As women narrators like Jacobs show their readers, slavery works to weaken familial relationships: those between husbands and wives, children and parents, brothers and sisters.

Relationships in *Incidents* demand responsibility by other individuals and the larger community. Drawing out the implications of Jacobs’s narrative, one might even judge individuals by how they respond to that responsibility. By this criterion, one would have to say that some characters, such as Mr. Sands, fail as human beings. The men and women of Jacobs’s family, however, invariably respond wholeheartedly to their responsibility for one another. Jacobs remains for years in Edenton for the sake of her children; later, after fleeing to the North, she works from dawn to past dark to support her children. As much as she can, she also tries to contribute to her larger community. For instance, even though the Anti-Slavery Society offers to pay Jacobs’s fare and her friend Fanny’s to New York through the Durhams in Philadelphia, Jacobs refuses (161). She is

motivated in part by pride in her ability to pay her own way; but in addition, she recognizes that if she accepts more than she needs, funds may not be available for other fugitives. Later, after the first Mrs. Bruce dies, Jacobs accompanies her “little motherless” (183) child to the girl’s grandparents in England. She values the salary the child’s father offers, but in part she makes the overseas trip to acknowledge the kindness she received from the child’s dead mother.

The structural core for *Incidents* emerges from a series of encounters through which Jacobs learns to rely on some relationships and painfully discovers how unreliable others can prove. *Incidents* details Jacobs’s testing of relationships. One of these is her relationship with God; another relationship involves the dealings of Jacobs and of all slaves with those who purport to own them. And, finally, there are all of the personal relationships of individuals with one another based on blood, sex, friendship, or employment. Examining the relationships she has experienced, Jacobs gradually comes to decide on the validity of various social and religious claims. The very length of *Incidents* seems to suggest Jacobs’s evolving apprehension as to which relationships to trust and what moral and ethical principles flow from those relationships.

But personal relationships come first. What Jacob’s experience seems to teach is that few relationships, especially few relationships with whites, can be trusted because overlying all Southern and many Northern relationships is that initial and overwhelming fact noted in her first line, “I was born a slave” (1). Jacobs’s narrative contrasts the unreliability of relationships with white people with the warmth and steadfastness of those with her own family. Her grandmother functions as a good angel whose virtue opposes Dr. Flint’s vice. Thus Jacobs’s angelic grandmother is “*always kind, always ready to sympathize*” (emphasis added) (83) and confronts in different ways both the “the demon Slavery” (83) and the demonic Dr. Flint whom Jacobs’s toddler son calls “that bad man” (80). Jacobs’s grandmother might even be a figure of the angel of death when she warns Flint, “You ain’t got many more years to live, and you’d better be saying your prayers. It will take ‘em all, and more too, to wash the dirt off your soul” (82).

While Jacobs’s grandmother is portrayed as a woman of universally recognized piety, perhaps her most impressive quality is her ability to forgive her enemies. Thus, after Dr. Flint’s death, her grandmother actually writes to Jacobs, “Dr. Flint is dead. He has left a distressed family. Poor old man! I hope he made his peace with God” (195-196). In response to her grandmother’s words, Jacobs comments with a summary of his sins: “I remembered how he had defrauded my grandmother of the hard earnings she had loaned; how he had tried to cheat her out of the freedom her mistress had promised her, and how he had persecuted her children; and I thought to myself that she was a better Christian than I was, if she could entirely forgive him” (196). When Jacobs finally flees to the North, her grandmother gives her “a small bag of money”—literally the biblical widow’s mite that Jesus commends—and enjoins Jacobs and Jacobs’s son to prayer (155).

Jacobs tells readers that her grandmother had “a beautiful faith” (17). Yet she is human and reacts with consternation to the news of the teenaged Harriet’s first pregnancy.²⁷ In contrast to her grandmother’s usual forbearance, Dr. Flint “chuckle[s]” to hear of what he considers another’s adversity (136), works to the death Jacobs’s faithful aunt Nancy (195), and almost to his dying day is still lying to Jacobs and trying to cheat her (171-72).

While they live, Jacobs’s parents and grandmother are the most important people in her life. She reveres their memories after their deaths. While she and they live, Jacobs depends on her parents, her grandmother, her uncles, her aunt, and her brother. In addition, her fugitive uncle and brother are models to emulate. And for the most part, other blacks are also almost as supportive as “family.” For example, while she does not marry the “young colored carpenter” identified as “a young girl’s first love” (37), he might be the “Peter” who more than ten years later risks his life to spirit her away to the North.

Jacobs’s most important relationship, of course, is with her children, and this keeps her in place when she might otherwise have fled or even committed suicide. Jacobs speaks of her infant son as a “little vine. . .taking root in my existence” (62). From the time her son Benjamin is born, he and, later, his sister Ellen become the primary influences on Jacobs’s decisions.²⁸ Jacobs fears that if she runs away, the Flints, as retribution, would sell her children; yet she takes a chance on breaking the cycle of slavery because she fears even more having Ellen grow up and repeat her humiliation. Even as her children’s welfare undermines any desire she might have had to run away, they also strengthen her resolve “that out of the darkness of this hour a brighter dawn should rise for them” (85). For them, Jacobs stays alive even during her seven years hiding in “a dismal hole” (113), the crawl space over her grandmother’s storage shed. Jacobs’s physical separation from her children, despite her knowledge of their proximity and occasional glimpses of them, proves almost as difficult for her as the physical rigors of life in her “bolt hole.” For years after their escape to the North, Jacobs struggles to follow her grandmother’s example by caring for and educating her children. A poignant touch at the end of the narrative involves Jacobs’s acknowledgment that she has not yet been able to provide a home for her children.

* * *

Jacobs’s relationship with her northern, white, middle-class women readers, her primary audience, is perhaps best thought of as analogous to her relationships with the white women in her narrative. Both were problematic. She found some of these women trustworthy, some untrustworthy, but few capable of genuine empathy. Jacobs feared that publishing her story might scandalize some of her new northern friends. They had no way of knowing the reality of her life and might misinterpret her experience and condemn her unwed motherhood. Her relationship with her northern reading audience lacked the trust and support she enjoyed

from friends and relatives. Although her support for the abolitionist cause impelled Jacobs to make her story public, she worried about public acknowledgment of her teenage pregnancies. To communicate with this audience, she used her ability to write her own story; to do that she used a mode, a variation of the domestic novel, suited to their expectations and appealing to their sympathies. Her reliance on narrative strategies usually encountered in sentimental domestic fiction certainly shows that she assumed that this audience would have difficulty accepting, much less understanding her experience.²⁹ In addition to the experiences Jacobs details in the text, Yellin's research has shown that Jacobs's encounters with such anti-slavery advocates as Harriet Beecher Stowe had taught her not to depend much on the help or the understanding of her northern audience.³⁰

Yet given her avowed purpose—to persuade northern readers to the abolitionist cause—Jacobs sought to engage and thus to place some reliance on her white audience. Indeed, both Jacobs and Douglass encountered overt as well as covert opposition from a part of that audience, white fellow writers who wanted to “help,” perhaps, at least unconsciously, to control their narratives. Jacobs wrote only after she had finished her long day's work as a child's nurse and glorified domestic. She guarded her manuscript from the view of her de facto employer, Nathaniel Willis. A noted, presumably liberal, white writer, Willis could have helped Jacobs; but she distrusted his commitment to the abolitionist cause. Living in his home for years, she probably had cause. Jacobs did ask for Harriet Beecher Stowe's help, but Jacobs's dealings with Stowe convinced her that Stowe would coopt her story and “use” her but never allow her to tell her own story. So Jacobs refused entirely Stowe's “help.” Eventually, despite her self-doubts, Jacobs learned to trust her own work. The editor Jacobs finally chose to trust, Lydia Child, insists in the original introduction to *Incidents* that the changes she made were minor.³¹

Jacobs needed her white audience and she knew it. Valerie Smith makes the interesting points that while Jacobs flees from “one small space to another” (31) in her slow progression toward freedom, she leaves each “only with the aid of someone else” (31-32). Jacobs's white female audience provided her with one of her only partially reliable relationships. She feared their judgmental reactions. Nonetheless, she needed this audience as much as her grandmother once had needed the white women of Edenton who bought her bakery goods. Smith further notes that by underscoring a reliance on other people, Jacobs reveals an alternate way in which the story of slavery and escape might be written (34). While male narrators, including Douglass, emphasized their own derring-do, a woman like Jacobs remains aware of the role of her compatriots in her escape. She relates her own subterfuge and courage, but she also includes illustrations of the considerable courage her escape demanded of her grandmother, her uncle, and, in time, her children, as well as the white friends of her family. Jacobs's emphasis on

relationships also serves as a further defense of slaves who have not even attempted to flee bondage. As her story implies, the same bonds of love that hold Jacobs, her grandmother, and her uncle in Edenton just as surely keep other slaves from dashing to freedom.

Throughout her account Jacobs values relationships because they have sustained her. Her loving relationships with African-Americans in the South are based on ties of kinship, affection, and mutual interdependence. In contrast, the legal relationship of owner-slave constitutes a perversity. By the time Mrs. Bruce pays off the Flints, who now have legal title to Jacobs, Jacobs is a middle-aged working woman living in the North and longing for the healthy adult independence of a mother able to care for herself and to educate her children. Jacobs believes that she and her ancestors have fully paid for her free status. They have paid for her freedom through her grandmother's, her mother's, and her own years of service. She defines freedom as independence, as the right and ability to maintain herself and her loved ones within a network of mutual care and service to and from others. Her experience has convinced her that she already has *earned* her freedom. Thus, she comments, "I regarded such laws [as those that declared me still a slave] as the regulations of robbers, who had no rights that I was bound to respect" (187).

Although the second "Mrs. Bruce"—whom Jean Yellin has established was Mrs. Nathaniel P. Willis³²—finally did pay the Flints' son-in-law \$300, she did so against Jacobs's will. Mrs. Bruce's payment made Jacobs feel unreasonably indebted. Valuing as she did the independence of freedom, Jacobs felt *bound* in a new way. Much of Jacobs's anger and resentment (200) at finally being *bought* and set free by Mrs. Bruce may come from Jacobs's sense that their relationship had been altered. All of her adult life, Jacobs tried to deny the validity of the slave's bond. In effect, Mrs. Bruce's action implicitly acknowledged chattel slavery. That altered their relationship from that of peers and free women, even friends, to one—at best—of patron and client. Having been redeemed, rather than acknowledged a free peer, can also prove a burden.

Incidents concentrates on slavery—and to a lesser degree, racism—which Jacobs depicts as a poison infecting relationships. (Jacobs often uses images of poisonous snakes and the devil in referring to the South and slavery.) As it poisoned most close personal relationships, slavery also distorted social relationships. Only a few exceptional people, such as the first and second Mrs. Bruce and Amy Post, seem immune to the racism that infected even the northern states. Finally, Jacobs shows how slavery has perverted the relationship between human beings and God. As does Douglass, Jacobs shows in *Incidents* not only how slavery has perverted Christianity but also suggests her own spiritual doubts and possibly the evolution of an adult faith.³³ Jacobs admires her grandmother's adherence to a radical Christian forgiveness. But the incessant demands of the Flints make it impossible for Jacobs to follow her grandmother's example of forgiveness. The destruction of the African-American church in the woods (67)

symbolizes the impossible situation of African-Americans slaves enjoined to live as Christians but denied the opportunity. In addition, Jacobs includes in *Incidents* many tales about ministers who do not see any conflict between their professions of “Christianity” and the “rules” of southern slavery.

In contrast with Douglass’s *Narrative*, which is the story of an individual’s finding and using language as the key to effecting his freedom, Jacobs structures her narrative with incidents that illustrate her place within personal and communal relationships. Their different emphases grow out of gender differences. Most male narratives reflect the nineteenth-century popular admiration for “rugged individualists.” The proportionately few women slave narrators, on the other hand, were hostages to nineteenth-century America’s “cult of domesticity”³⁴ that demanded a standard of feminine “purity” that slavery denied them. Unlike men, women were excluded from the public recital of their stories in a culture that at least publicly insisted on the cult of pure womanhood. Readers who insisted that women should choose “death before dishonor” would not accept mothers of fatherless children. The recital of their abuse gained female narrators neither money, power, nor social advantage. Since women narrators could not show that they had been the “perfect wives” that the cult of domesticity demanded, they emphasized instead the ways in which their relationships with their families allied them with their white reading audience.

Alternate Strategies

Male and female slave narrators had basically the same goal: to show that they deserved to live as free people in a free society. Nonetheless, in their need to contest different stereotypes, male and female fugitives and former slaves seized on different strategies. Men and women fugitives may well have had different models of freedom. The slave narratives written by men emphasize their desire to be “men” in their society, to take a “man’s” role. In the words of Niemtzow, “Male slave narratives, indeed male autobiographies, are frequently stories of triumph in a public sphere.”³⁵ In a blatantly patriarchal society, the public sphere would, of course, entail a position of power. Attaining literacy and writing literature advanced those goals. Male slave narrators stress the importance of achieving literacy and their independence as men; they need to demonstrate that they are men among men.

Female slave narrators, on the other hand, have to convince their readers that they were neither the victims nor the fallen women that stereotypes have labeled them. With Sojourner Truth, they cry, “Ar’n’t I a Woman?”³⁶ These women, therefore, stress their kinship with their white and black sisters: they remind their readers that they were someone’s children, sisters, wives, mothers, and friends. For instance, throughout her memoir, Elizabeth Keckley emphasizes her ties with “kind, true-hearted friends in the South as well as in the North.”³⁷ Keckley’s memoir emphasizes her business accomplishments, but she considers her role as

Mary Todd Lincoln's seamstress and sometimes confidant far more significant than her ability to read and write, because the former, after all, allows her to achieve the modicum of independence that she cherishes. Mary Prince, another woman narrator, tells a story of physical labor, abuse, and misery after her early years with her mother. Although Moravian ladies teach Prince to read,³⁸ this does not alter her situation. At the end of the narrative, living in England, she still pines for reunion with her husband (22). Male narrators relate little about their families; women always describe their close relatives. A pattern emerges in these narratives as well as those of Douglass and Jacobs: most male fugitives seem to define freedom as autonomy, whereas most female fugitives seem to define freedom as interdependence within relationships.

Women narrators are more apt than men to stress, as Jacobs does, a desire for a home of one's own. Yet to maintain their own homes, women need a degree of economic power. Male slave fugitives might earn a living lecturing on the abolitionist lecture circuit and writing slave narratives, but for woman fugitives, publishing narratives frequently meant a certain amount of infamy. Even in freedom, most fugitive slave women still worked as domestics, cooks, laundresses, and seamstresses.³⁹ Although most male former slaves worked as laborers, some used literacy to open up broader employment opportunities; for women, it offered little advantage. For women narrators, literacy was useful, but it only marginally advanced their "independence."⁴⁰ Even in freedom, racism and sexism combined to keep ex-slave women's status—to alter Orlando Patterson's definition of slavery—that of people suffering permanent, violent domination, generally dishonored, as they had been from birth (13).⁴¹

Written slave narratives flourished with the abolition movement. At abolition meetings, male ex-slaves were known to bare their scarred backs as testaments to slavery's cruelty. Written slave narratives extended that oral testimony by relating both the physical and psychological cruelty experienced by slaves. Readers encountered the individual, a fellow human being wounded by the system. Women fugitives, like men, told their stories because they believed that publication furthered the abolitionist cause. But for women, abolishing slavery meant more than achieving atomized, personal goals. Ultimately, in telling their stories, women were motivated by the need to build communities and—by extension—the commonwealth. Ironically, the nineteenth-century American admiration for rugged individualism actually militated against building communities that could enrich and vivify public life. Working with others seemed less valued a trait.

Further significant differences may well exist between male and female narratives. Identifying them might also provide further strategies that women used in dealing with slavery. Women's narratives, as suggested by Jacobs's *Incidents*, offer a demanding but humane path to public life. Their narratives stress the bonds that tie people together but also support them. Their narratives widen the critique of the slave culture encountered in men's narratives. The slave

narratives of male and female writers together, given the emphasis on literacy and control in the former and on relationships and interdependence in the latter, offer insight on balancing individualism and community. Women narrators emphasized implicitly that sexual abuse and the break-up of their families violated the community. Women slaves regarded this as more destructive than the withholding of education.

Notes

1. William L. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865* (Urbana, 1988), 1.

2. John Sekora, for example, in "Red, White, and Black: Indian Captivities, Colonial Printers, and the Early African-American Narratives," *A Mixed Race: Ethnicity in Early America*, ed. Frank Shuffleton (New York, 1993) shows significant connections between early slave narratives and contemporary Indian captivity narratives; and in *To Tell*, William Andrews discusses the influence of black spiritual autobiography on later slave narratives.

3. Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91 (1986), 1053.

4. Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I A Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York, 1985), 124.

5. Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., eds., (Oxford, 1985), xxviii.

6. As still another illustration of how common the assertion has been—in an end note reminding readers that "most students of the slave narrative have commented on how central the moment of literacy is to the individual narrator," Annette Niemtzwow in *The Problematic of Self in Autobiography*, ed. John Sekora and Darwin Turner (Macomb, IL, 1982), 108, lists four further scholars (H. Baker, S. Butterfield, R. Rosenblatt, G. Taylor) who have characterized the acquisition of literacy and writing as an essential mark of the slave narrative.

7. "From Fugitive Slave to Man of Letters: The Conversion of Frederick Douglass," *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 16 (1986), 55.

8. Equiano in *Great Slave Narratives*, ed. Arna Bontemps (Boston, 1969) weaves into his narrative his progressive steps toward a more complete education. At one point—right before he is sold by Pascal—he makes an explicit identification between his desire for freedom and education (62). Pennington, though trying to demonstrate Christian forbearance in his narrative, makes clear that his greatest resentment comes from having been "robbed of my education" (246). Having gone to great lengths of disguise in order to mask their illiteracy as they fled, the first thing William and Ellen Craft attend to during their first three weeks of relative freedom in Philadelphia is learning how to spell and write their own names (317). All three narratives are reprinted in Bontemps's collection.

9. See Houston A. Baker, Jr.'s introduction to the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* (New York, 1982). All page numbers refer to this edition of the *Narrative*. In her introduction to an excerpt from *Incidents in Invented Lives: Narratives of Black Women, 1860-1960* (New York, 1987), Mary Helen Washington also notes specific parallels between the rhetorical arguments of Jacobs and Douglass.

10. Michael Meyer, ed. *The Narrative and Selected Writings of Frederick Douglass*. (New York, 1984), xv.

11. John Sekora takes for the title of an essay, "'MR. EDITOR, IF YOU PLEASE,'" in *Callaloo* 17 (1994), 614, Douglass's reply when asked what title of address he preferred.

12. Sekora and Turner, 56.

13. "Frederick Douglass: Literacy and Paternalism," *Raritan* (6: 2), 109.

14. Andrews, *To Tell*, 14.

15. Frances Smith Foster, "'In Respect to Females. . .': Differences in the Portrayals of Women by Male and Female Narrators," *Black American Literature Forum*, 15 (1981), 66.

16. *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Literature* (Cambridge, MA, 1987), 4.

17. "In the First Place: Making Frederick Douglass and the Afro-American Narrative Tradition," *Critical Essays on Frederick Douglass*, ed. William L. Andrews (New York, 1991), 207.

18. *The Slave Narrative*, xxiii.

19. As Kari Winter succinctly reminds her readers in *Subjects of Slavery, Agents of Change: Women and Power in Gothic Novels and Slave Narratives, 1790-1865* (Athens, GA, 1992), 3, the exploitation of slave labor that developed in the southern United States “was based primarily on race [but] secondarily on gender.”

20. White, 141.

21. See, for example, Carol Smith-Rosenberg’s “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Signs* 1 (1975), 1-29.

22. Many contemporary researchers conclude that most women value relationships over, for example, abstract notions of right and wrong. Women’s decisions often flow from what they have come to understand through their relationships. As Mary Field Belenky, et al. demonstrate in *Women’s Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York, 1986) this proves true in women’s understanding of themselves and their world view. Carol Gilligan argues in *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, MA, 1982) that women develop moral choices in terms of relationship; and the work of Nancy Chodorow, “Family Structure and Feminine Personality,” *Woman, Culture and Society*, ed. M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (Stanford, 1974) as well as that of Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (Boston, 1976) supports Gilligan’s argument. Deborah Tannen’s findings about the ways women handle language also points to the importance of relationships in women’s lives. As Nancy Chodorow notes, “The feminine personality [often] comes to define itself in relation and connection to other people more than masculine personality does” (43-44). Mary Belenky and her collaborators further argue that women develop their understanding of themselves, their worlds, and even their ethical sense through what they learn “in relationships with friends and teachers, life crises, and community involvements” (4). In her books on socio-linguistics focusing on the centrality of spoken language and relationships in the lives of women, Deborah Tannen too posits that each woman tends to come to grips with her environment “as an individual in a network of connections” (25).

23. “‘In a Different Voice’: Male and Female Narratives of Religious Conversion in Post Revolutionary America,” *American Quarterly* 41 (1989), 39.

24. “Black Womanhood in Nineteenth-Century America: Subversion and Self-Construction in Two Women’s Autobiographies,” *American Quarterly* 43 (1991), 203.

25. In “Race, Gender, and Cultural Context in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Dust Tracks on a Road*,” *Life Lines: Theorizing Women’s Autobiography*, ed. Bella Brodski and Celeste Schenck (Ithaca, 1988), Nellie Y. McKay emphasizes that “In constructing their personal narratives, black women negotiate the dangerous shoals of white male and female role and class oppression and white and black male sexism. Connected to black men by the history of class and race, to white women by sex and the configuration of gender roles, and to both by the politics of writing from the outside, they have, from the beginning, created unique selves-in-writing to document their individual and collective experiences” (177). Female fugitives and former slave women respond to the common pressures they share with former male slaves to strive for full freedom and with other women to perceive themselves as connected to community.

26. Luke, for instance, the brutalized slave of a dying but depraved psychopath, tricks the man’s heirs into giving him a pair of the dead man’s old pants into which Luke has secreted a goodly cache of money (192-93). Jacobs explicitly praises Luke’s having acted with the “wisdom of serpents.” All page numbers for Jacobs’s text refer to Jean Fagan Yellin’s edition of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Cambridge, MA, 1987).

27. Yet the reader may wonder at this point in the narrative whether Jacobs’s grandmother’s anger might not be directed in part at herself as well as toward Harriet. Despite Jacobs’s care to name her father as well as her mother, Jacobs never names her maternal grandfather. Her grandmother’s distress may stem, in part, from seeing Jacobs repeating her own mistakes.

28. Jacobs’s plight reminds one of Frances Kemble’s story found in *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839*, ed. John A. Scott (New York, 1975) about an overseer on her husband’s plantation who explained that he never worried about his wife’s slave running away once she got to free territory. He noted that although, “I take care when my wife goes North with the children, to send Lucy with her; Her children are down here and I defy all the abolitionists in creation to get her to stay North” (344).

29. While much of the current discussion of what Frances Smith Foster—see *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of Ante-bellum Slave Narratives* (Westport, CT, 1979), 55—calls Jacobs’s “literary embellishments” focuses on Jacobs’s use of and limitation by sentimental fiction, some of the most useful are Hazel Carby’s exploration in *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York, 1989) of the “variety of narrative forms” (61) Jacobs and other black women writers utilized to break out of the procrustean bed of either the black male-dominated slave narrative form or the white female tradition of “true womanhood” found in sentimental fiction and Valerie Smith’s

parallel exploration with perhaps more emphasis on "class, race, and gender analysis" (43). Smith also emphasizes the limits for Jacobs's purposes of both the sentimental novel (41-42) and the male slave narrative (34).

30. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese outlines her belief in "My Statue, My Self: Autobiographical Writings of Afro-American Women," *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Shari Benstock (Chapel Hill, 1988), that Jacobs and her contemporary Harriet Wilson "harbored deep bitterness toward northern society in general and northern women in particular" (71). A reading of Jacobs's letters found at the back of the Yellin edition of *Incidents*, including those letters describing to Amy Post Jacobs's unhappy encounters with Stowe, certainly appear to give Jacobs reason for bitterness.

31. Douglass ran into similar trouble with his white sponsors. William Lloyd Garrison had helped Douglass to a career as a public speaker, an effective orator at abolitionist meetings. Yet as Douglass changed from an object of concern, a live illustration at abolition meetings, to an independent thinker and writer who crafted his own language and focused his own message's point for his own rather than Garrison's ends, the two became estranged.

32. Jean Yellin has identified Mrs. Bruce (480) and most of the other significant players in *Incidents* for modern readers of the narrative.

33. Ann Taves in "Spiritual Purity and Sexual Shame: Religious Themes in the Writing of Harriet Jacobs," *Church History* 56 (1987) has explored the interconnections between Jacobs's "intense, female-oriented family relationships" (60) and her religious sense. Taves believes Jacobs accepted the association women whom she admired made between sexual purity with spirituality. Taves sees *Incidents* as a healthy adult "movement toward autonomy" (72) because in the narrative, Jacobs publicly acknowledges the choices she has made as a slave.

34. Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1800-1860," *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Barbara Welter (Athens, OH, 1976), 21.

35. In Sekora and Turner, 104.

36. *Narrative of Sojourner Truth, A Bondswoman of Olden Time*, Comp. Olive Gilbert (Battle Creek, MI, 1878; rpt. New York, 1991), 133-34.

37. *Behind the Scenes: or Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House* (1868; rpt. New York, 1989), xi.

38. William L. Andrews, ed. *Six Women's Slave Narratives*, [Mary Prince, Old Elizabeth, Mattie J. Jackson, Lucy Delaney, Kate Drumgoold, Annie Burton] (New York, 1988), 17.

39. William Andrews's *Six Women's Slave Narratives*, for example, have been chosen to illustrate typical stories; the occupations of the earlier accounts typify those of former slave women living in the North. Certainly before the Civil War and Emancipation, educational and professional opportunities for black women were even more restricted than the limited opportunities available to white women.

40. Dorothy Sterling, ed. *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1984), 72, 87, 97, 119-150.

41. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA, 1982), 13.