Behind Closed Doors

Southern Upper-Class Notions of Womanhood in the Plantation Mistress's Intimate Sphere

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By writing I create an identity for myself. Without it I wouldn't feel being anybody, thus a personality. - It's not as much a question of self-expression as a need of finding yourself.
—Pentti Saarikoski

Every wall is a door.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson.

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The basis of my master's thesis started in the class *American Passages*, taught by Professor Willard Pate at Furman University, S.C., in the first academic semester of 2008. In this class, I wrote my final paper about the bonds between plantation mistresses and domestic female slaves in the plantation household as represented by Harriet Jacobs' narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). As I was thinking about a subject for my bachelor's thesis in American Studies in the second semester of the same academic year, my thoughts returned to this paper. Subsequently, I wrote my bachelor's thesis titled *"There is no slave, after all, like a wife": Intimacy between Female Domestic Slaves and Mistresses in the Antebellum Plantation Household*. Inspired by other interesting and challenging classes in American Studies, I discovered what issues in American history and culture greatly sparked my interest: How did American women—in both the North and the South, East and West, from the lower and upper class, as Caucasians or African Americans—respond to changing physical environments, behave in socially controlled communities, and either conformed to or actively resisted dominant patriarchal notions of womanhood and gender stereotype throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries?

First and foremost, I owe special thanks to my master's thesis supervisor, Damian Alan Pargas, who greatly inspired me as a teacher and researcher, and who supported me to believe in my academic qualities. Overall, I want to thank all professors of the American Studies Department at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (BA) and the University of Utrecht (MA), the Netherlands, for providing such an interesting academic curriculum, which shaped me as an individual as well as my outlook on life. I am specifically thankful for my Professors Marian E. Strobel of Furman University, S.C., and Christina Greene and Sandra Adell of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, who passed on to me their passion for their respective fields of expertise—Women in American History, African American Women's Resistance, and African-American Literature. I am also greatly indebted to Andrew Fearnley, visiting professor at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, who, as my bachelor's thesis supervisor, pointed me in more suitable directions, enabling me to think about hitherto unexplored issues. Finally, I want to thank my parents, siblings, and friends for supporting me throughout the whole writing process. In particular, I give thanks to my oldest sister, Anneke Korfker, who has always

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INTRODUCTION

Walking to their new genteel mansion in Philadelphia late in the evening, the newlywed middle-class couple, Mr. and Mrs. Woodbridge, was full of expectation. Upon arrival, the couple excitedly examined every room of the house, and discussed how the interior should be organized. Tensions started to rise, however, when the young Mrs. Woodbridge held a different view on the function of a little plain room in the back-building than her husband. Rather than her husband's wish for a library in this space, Mrs. Woodbridge pleaded her case: "'I tell you once and for all, Harvey Woodbridge, that I must and will have this very apartment for an eating-room, or a dining-room, or a sitting-room, or whatever you please to call it—to take our meals in without danger of being caught at them, and to stay in when I am not drest and do not wish to be seen.' 'The hiding room I think would be the best name for it'—murmered Woodbridge."[1] Eliza Leslie (1787-1858), writer of the novel *Mr. and Mrs. Woodbridge, with Other Tales* (1841), evidently shows her condemnation for a woman's need to get away from the public gaze. Although this story revolves around a middle-class couple from the North, nonetheless, the message applied to southern elite women as well. Leslie's aim was to convey to her readers that "a proper woman has nothing to hide," as Milette Shamir contends.[2]

In both the North and the South, conduct literature such as *Miss Leslie's Behaviour Book: A Guide and Manual for Ladies* (1834), *Godey's Ladies Book* (1830-1878), and *The Lady's Repository* (1841-1876) proliferated in the antebellum years. In these magazines, novels, or instructive essays, detailed advice was given on rules of propriety according to Victorian notions of womanhood. Exemplary is *Miss Leslie's Behaviour Book,* which gives full instruction and advice to middle- and upper-class ladies in letter writing, receiving presents, incorrect words, borrowing, obligations to gentlemen, offences, children, decorum in church, at evening parties, and more. Historian C. Dallet Hemphill explains in his essay "Middle Class Rising in Revolutionary America: The Evidence from Manners" that although conduct literature does not illustrate how Americans in actuality behaved, it reveals "the preoccupations and expectations of those

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[1] Eliza Leslie, *Mr. and Mrs. Woodbridge, with Other tales Representing Life as It Is: And Intended to Show What It Should Be*. (Providence, R.I: Isaac H. Cady, 1841), 28.

[2] Milette Shamir, *Inexpressible Privacy: The Interior Life of Antebellum American Literature*. (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2006), 42.

who wrote and those who read them."[3] Accordingly, conduct literature is a vital piece of information for the study of nineteenth-century Victorian notions of womanhood.

Particularly interesting, in the Old South the archetype of the southern belle prevailed among young elite ladies and was surely a model to strive for. Popular culture, such as regional magazines, novels, and newspapers of the nineteenth century, affirmed and buttressed this unattainable stereotype. Indeed, twentieth-century romanticist novels and movies such as *Gone With the Wind* (1939), freezes the perception of the southern belle, and portrays the mythicized young lady as the source of all beauty, grace, delicacy, civilization, hospitality, and maternity. Although this myth may contain a grain of truth, nevertheless, diaries, letters, and autobiographies suggest different day-to-day realities. While slaveholding women needed to behave according to southern notions of womanhood and etiquette to uphold their status in the public realm, in the *intimate sphere* these elite women were preoccupied with taking care of their children, disciplining their slaves, and managing domestic duties, now and then at the expense of antebellum standards of propriety.

At large, patriarchal ethos, religion, the doctrine of the separate spheres, and rules of propriety, were the bedrock upon which the southern slaveholding gentile community was built. Intense public surveillance within this close-knit community functioned to uphold the fundamentals of the antebellum cultural system. However, as the plantation mistresses and her family could rarely escape from the public gaze, one can imagine that the southern lady needed to have certain outlets or private spaces in which she was able to express emotions openly, release her natural passions, and move freely—in other words, in which she could let her guard down. Therefore, in this study the extent to which the plantation mistress's *intimate sphere* corresponded to southern upper class notions of womanhood will be examined.

In recent decades, various scholars have contributed to the gender debate by interpreting the roles and identities of plantation mistresses through a feminist revisionist lens. Prior to the 1970s, southern women's voices were practically muted in historical publications. Historians Guion Griffis Johnson, and Arthur Link and Rembert Patricks, for instance, wrote about the southern past in *Ante-bellum North Carolina* (1937) and *Writing Southern History* (1965) respectively, rarely mentioning southern

[3] C. Dallet Hemphill, "Middle Class Rising in Revolutionary America: The Evidence From Manners," *Journal of Social History* 30, no.2 (Winter 1996): 318.

women's experiences.[4] Also, in these years the idea of hegemonic ideologies was acknowledged and justified, consequently perpetuating the ubiquitous icon of the southern belle in historical accounts. Women's studies as a discipline, with Julia Cherry Spruill as the forerunner with her book *Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* (1938), did not become firmly established until the 1970s.[5] From this time on, an increasing number of scholars started to subvert patriarchal myths and acknowledged southern women's agency, consequently redefining gender roles. These feminists, Milette Shamir argues, "proposed a politics of presence, one that translates hidden, private experience into a coherent social identity and pushes this identity into the limelight."[6]

The first scholar who gave agency to the antebellum plantation mistress, as part of the revisionists, is Anne Firor Scott, pioneer historian of American women. In her essay, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930* (1970), she sets the image of the "Queen of the Home" against the realities of southern ladies, and continues with the feminization of elite women by discussing, among other things, their right to vote following the Civil War. Catherine Clinton, research associate at the W.E.B. DuBois Institute at Harvard University, reaffirms Scott's study by subverting the belle ideal. In her extensive and well-documented account, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (1982), which focuses on the period 1835-1860, Clinton highlights the oppression of southern ladies as "prisoners in disguise".[7] A book of special interest examining gender roles in the Old South is Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (1988)*.* This profound account is a touchstone for scholarship on the inextricably linked concepts of race, gender, and class. While living in the same household, Genovese argues, sisterhood between mistresses and slave women was unlikely considering the sexual exploitation and violence as two themes discouraging intimacy. Also, in her vivid monograph, *Tara Revisited: Women, War & the Plantation Legend* (1995), Catherine Clinton continues her study on southern ladies by focusing on the characterization and redefinition of gender

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[4] Anne Firor Scott, *Making the Invisible Woman Visible.* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 248.
[5] Ibid, 249.
[6] Shamir, *Inexpressible Privacy,* 13.
[7] Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 109.

roles in the course of and following the Civil War. In the vein of Fox- Genovese's account, Marli F. Weiner contends in *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-1850* (1997) that although sharing gender-bound values of domesticity and motherhood, ultimately "male domination, racism, and slavery were simply too deeply entrenched to be overcome by the tenuous ties that united women."[8] Moreover, other scholars who challenge and reinterpret southern notions of womanhood are Cynthia A. Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835* (1998), Alexis Girardin Brown, *The Women Left Behind: Transformation of the Southern Belle, 1840-1880* (2000) and Glinda Fountain Hall, *Inverting the Southern Belle: Romance Writers Redefine Gender Myths* (2008).

Reflecting back, in recent decades, various scholars have given voice to the antebellum plantation mistress, as both a victim and influential lady in the private as well as the public sphere. Emanating from these rich sources, my aim of this study is to contribute to the gender debate by focusing on the dialectic between the *intimate* and *public sphere,* and by exploring the psychological notion of *positioning* and the post-structuralist concept of *fluid identities,* in order to explain to what extent elite women adhered to southern notions of womanhood in the antebellum intimate sphere. Milette Shamir, Professor in the English and American Studies Department at Tel Aviv University, is one of the scholars who deals with the dichotomy between the intimate sphere and public sphere in her account *Inexpressible Privacy: The Interior Life of Antebellum American Literature* (2006). Shamir goes beyond the essentialist distinction between intimate/public as interchangeable with female/male as proposed by, among others, social and political theorist Jeff Weintraub.[9] Although the traditional doctrine of the "separate spheres" pervaded the antebellum South, nonetheless, new scholarship "chartered a map on which liberal and domestic ideologies were shown to occupy different, oppositional, even mutually antagonistic spheres."[10] Taking up this line of thought, while plantation mistresses were supposed to stay in their "female" domestic realms, usually they supervised plantation households, and from time to time even ended up managing plantations on their own in absence of their husbands, which meant stepping into the "masculine" public sphere.

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[8] Marli F., Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-1850* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 150.
[9] Shamir, *Inexpressible Privacy,* 13.
[10] Ibid, 24.

Drawing on Shamir's non-essentialist theory, I use a more general definition of the concept of *intimate spheres*. Rather than a physical place, the *intimate sphere*, as used in this study, is a symbolical domain in which the plantation mistress was allowed to establish and maintain intimate relationships with her family and close associates, outside of the public gaze. German sociologist and philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, puts forward the idea of the divided interior in his account, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962). He argues that from the late eighteenth century, "the line between private and public sphere extended right through the home."[11] This means that in the same plantation household, the bedroom can be considered an *intimate sphere,* whereas the drawing room or parlor represents the *public sphere* if social events are held in that particular space. Moreover, the term "family" extents to the "dark family", meaning the household slaves working, sleeping, and living in the same physical space outside of public gaze. Yet, house slaves held a dual position: slaves, working and living in the plantation household, typically did not belong to the symbolic intimate sphere in the sense that mistresses needed to maintain superiority in order to uphold their status in southern elite community. They *did* belong to that particular symbolic "informal" space, however, since mistresses were usually not under direct surveillance of the community while disciplining their slaves.

The group of close female friends, on the other hand, was neither part of the intimate sphere nor the public sphere. They delineate, to use Karen Halttunen and John F. Kasson's concept, "a kind of third, social, space between public and private life, literally positioned between the street and the deeper recesses of the home."[12] Deep female bonds were often nourished at home, in the intimate sphere, where close female friends witnessed the "intimate" attitude of the mistress toward her husband, children, and slaves. In turn, these female companions were likely to enlighten the hosts of the next plantations they visited of the things they heard and saw in a close-knit female society that hinged on the practice of gossip.[13] Therefore, in my thesis, I focus merely on the relationship between plantation mistresses and their husbands, children, and female

[11] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society.* Translated by Thomas Burger. (Cambridge, Massachussetts: MIT Press, 1992), 45.
[12] Shamir, *Inexpressible Privacy,* 36.
[13] Ibid, 40-41.

house slaves, which were part of the, in this study redefined, *intimate sphere*.[14] Following the above-mentioned theories, an essential question remains: to what extent was social surveillance internalized by the plantation mistress in the intimate sphere?[15]

The rigidity of slave-based elite society in maintaining the *intimate/public* dichotomy associated with the "separate spheres" doctrine, can be explained by socio-cultural psychology through the concept of *positioning.* The concept of "positions" is analyzed in *The Self and Others* (2003):

> A position implicitly limits how much of what is logically possible for a given person to say or do and is properly a part of that person's repertoire of actions at a certain moment in a certain context, including other people. This bounds the content of the repertoire of socially possible actions. [16]

In the same vein, southern slave society deeply "positioned" its elite members. A "collective identity template"—in this context the adherence to rules of propriety, the social system of patriarchy, and the divinely gender-differentiated separate realms—was internalized and acted upon by the gentile community.[17] Rom Harré and other scholars, distinguish two extreme forms of *positioning*: it can be either "planned and executed deliberately" by some authority, or it could be considered a "natural order of things" inherent in a certain social milieu.[18] As for the antebellum South, the system of slavery was as much a system deliberately implemented by authorities as well as a southern "way of life"; the two extremes of the continuum sustained each other. As a consequence, every verbal or non-verbal act of resistance of elite members to the above-mentioned set of three interdependent societal characteristics of southern gentility—propriety, patriarchal authority, and the doctrine of the "separate spheres"—signified a threat to the system of slavery. As a collectivist society, the southern aristocracy was "characterized by social embeddedness and interdependence," as explained in the essay "Cultural and Social Identity" by psychologists Brewer and Yuki.[19] Consequently, the

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[14] Although male house slaves every now and then worked in the plantation household and were allowed to sleep in the house, usually plantation mistresses only worked and lived closely together with female house slaves.
[15] Shamir, *Inexpressible Privacy,* 43.
[16] *The Self and Others: Positioning Individuals and Groups in Personal, Political and Cultural Contexts*, ed. Rom Harré and Fathali M. Moghaddam (Westport, CT, Praeger Publishers, 2003), 5.
[17] Donald M. Taylor et al, "Applying Positioning Principles to a Theory of Collective Identity," in *The Self and Others: Positioning Individuals and Groups in Personal, Political and Cultural Contexts*, ed. Rom Harré and Fathali M. Moghaddam (Westport, CT, Praeger Publishers, 2003), 208.
[18] *The Self and Others,* 7.
[19] Marilynn B. Brewer and Masaki Yuki, "Culture and Social Identity," *Handbook of Cultural Psychology* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2007), 308.

sense of self-worth and well-being in such a society, as opposed to societies centered around individuality, hinged on social harmony and conformity.[20]

One must note though, that southern elite culture could never entirely "determine" its members, "in the sense of definitively settle or fix the limits or forms of human behaviour", as discussed in "Sociocultural Psychology" by psychologists Markus and Hamedani.[21] This is where the post-structuralist notion of *fluid identities* comes in. This concept yields insight into the belief that people are never "monocultural": they engage with the same cultural context in various ways.[22] Similarly, in their book *American Cultural Studies* (2006), Campbell and Kean define *fluid identities* as "neither fixed, nor unitary, but fluid and multiple, conditioned and constructed in a variety of situations."[23] Contrary to the highly- valued essentialist notion of conformity in the past, the climate of the 1960s civil rights movement allowed for multiplicity, dissonance, and hybridity and paved the way for cultural pluralism in which the concept of *fluid identities* became firmly established. To proceed in this line of thinking, plantation mistresses, every now and then, exhibited *fluid identities* as well. While the southern elite community mythicized the plantation mistress as a unitary and fixed "southern belle", in reality, elite women needed to constantly change and adapt their identities in interaction with their social environment. Put differently, while antebellum southern gentility set rigid standards of etiquette in the public sphere, and provided the plantation mistress a graceful, frivolous, moral, and well-mannered model to emulate, on a daily basis, these elite women could not or, at times, decided not to adhere to southern upper-class notions of womanhood.

In this study I will primarily rely on autobiographies of both plantation mistresses and slave women. Before the autobiography as a genre was firmly established from the 1850s on, the centuries-old biography was a means to present narration of wealthy successful men, airing human values, professional guidelines, and occasionally even unconventional frankness.[24] Although the autobiography was more

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[20] Brewer and Yuki, "Culture and Social Identity," 314.
[21] Hazel Rose Markus and Maryam G. Hamedani, "Sociocultural Psychology: The Dynamic Interdependence among Self Systems and Social Systems," *Handbook of Cultural Psychology* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2007), 7.
[22] Ibid, 7.
[23] Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean, *American Cultural Studies: An Introduction to American Culture* 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2006), 63.
[24] Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860,* Vol. 2 (Chapel Hill and London, University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 654.

personal than ever before, still southern men of status—much more than marginal citizens who did not need to uphold their status—felt inhibited to exchange intimacies with the public realm seeing that southern custom denounced "self-glorification" greatly.[25] Next to the biography and the autobiography—including memoirs, journals, reminiscences and diaries—both female and male planters were intensively engaged in the tradition of letter writing. In the so-called Republic of Letters, family relations were of utmost importance in antebellum southern society, which is reflected by letter writing between particularly women, husband and wife, and parents and children. Personal events, advice on man- and womanhood, and faith in God loomed large in these letters. Although the aforementioned cultural artifacts disclose a certain degree of intimacy, the autobiography, in particular, might serve as an "intimate" confessional instrument when the author allows it to be read solely by his or her immediate surroundings. Various southern elite women were motivated to keep diaries at the outbreak of the Civil War, or write romantic memoirs when the national crisis had ended. Studying their autobiographies reveal the self-perceptions of themselves, their private spheres, and the public world around them.

An essential mistress's diary for my study is *A Diary from Dixie* (1905) and *Mary Chesnut's Civil War* (1905) written by Mary Boykin Chesnut (1823-1886). This prominent slaveholding woman was a South Carolinian abolitionist and feminist, though concurrently holding pro-secessionist views. Although moving happily in the political circles of the Confederacy during the war, she was not free from the stereotype of the "true woman". Mary Chesnut's *A Diary from Dixie*, was at first not intended to be publicized, not even to be read by family. In the 1880s, though, she revised inconsistencies, gaps, and irrelevancies of her diary in a publishable version.[26] Although leaving out the "embarrassing self-revelations" and "unflattering confessions of vanity," the revised 1880s version of her diary allows revelations of intense emotions, anxieties, and frankness, partially ignoring southern formalities.[27] Next to Mary Chesnut, another South Carolinian who will be discussed in this study is Emma Florence le Conte (born in 1847). She kept a journal from December 31, 1864 to August 6, 1865 at age seventeen to record her wartime emotions and experiences, which was subsequently published in

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[25] O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order,* 674.
[26] The diary was first published in 1905 under the unauthorized title *A Diary from Dixie* by *The Saturday Evening Post* in cooperation with D. Appleton and Company.
[27] Mary Boykin Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War,* ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1905), introduction xxvi.

Diary, 1864-1865 (1938). Another prominent South Carolinian plantation lady was Nancy Bostick de Saussure (1837-1915). She recorded antebellum plantation life in *Old Plantation Days: Being Recollections of Southern Life Before the War* (1909), in the form of a letter to her granddaughter, Dorothy. Born in Virginia, Sara Agnes Rice Pryor (1830-1912) reminisces about her contented childhood days, most of them spent with her favorite uncle and aunt, up to the dreadful year of 1900 in which she lost a second son in *My Day; Reminiscences of a Long Life* (1909). Her Virginian counterpart, Letitia M. Burwell (1830-1905), attempts to correct prejudices and erroneous impressions of the South in her recollections, *A Girl's Life in Virginia Before the War* (1895). She entertainingly recalls the luxurious life her family lead in a pastoral setting, where slaves and the white elite lived harmoniously together. Mary Norcott Bryan (1841-1925), born and raised in North Carolina, also romanticizes southern life in *A Grandmother's Recollection of Dixie* (1912), and presents insightful newspaper clippings and letters of her family. In her interesting account, *Memoirs of Southern Women: "Within the Lines," and a Genealogical Record* (1912), Mary Polk Branch (1831-1879), born and raised in Tennessee, describes her childhood, marriage, dealings with slaves, and the patriotic duties she performed during the Civil War. Caroline Elizabeth Thomas Merrick (1825-1908), in addition, grew up at Cottage Hall plantation in Louisiana with her father, step-mother, and five siblings, and records her southern upbringing and pro-feminist views toward the end of her life in *Old Times in Dixie Land: A Southern Matron's Memories* (1901). Moreover, in *Social Life in Old New Orleans, Being Recollections of my Girlhood* (1912), Eliza Moore Chinn McHatton Ripley (1832-1912) tells vividly about southern life in New Orleans including school practices, fashion, shopping, theater, weddings, books, music, and plantation life. Lastly, born and bred in England, Anne Frances Kemble (1809-1893) describes, with an outsider's mind, life as it is on a southern rice plantation in *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839* (1863). Wife of the second largest slave owner of Georgia, it becomes evident that Mrs. Kemble struggled greatly to run the immense plantation household while trying to improve slave conditions, and consequently decided to move back to the North as soon as possible.

Whereas plantation mistresses could express themselves in diaries, letters, and memoirs, slaves' voices were muted. However, African American autobiographies provided slaves with an outlet. Slave narratives started to proliferate between 1760 and 1865 in the Americas and England, and from the 1830s on, the narratives evolved as a

literary form under the aegis of antislavery societies.[28] According to the nineteenth-century racist ideology, slaves were considered inferior human beings, and were therefore denied reading and writing according to their lowest rank in the "Great Chain of Being." Henry Louis Gates Jr. examines in *Signifying Monkey* how ex-slaves "write themselves into being":[29]

> The texts of the slave could only be read as testimony of defilement: the slave's representation and reversal of the master's attempt to transform a human being into a commodity, and the slave's simultaneous verbal witness of the possession of a humanity shared in common with Europeans.[30]

Interestingly, slave narratives represent the political conditions over two hundred years in a remarkably similar way and share the same patterns and details.[31] This common experience does not result from the mere fact that black people were victims of racism by white people; rather, continuity of particular themes or tropes in black narratives is maintained by the mutual reading of each other's texts: "talking texts."[32] In particular, themes female slave narratives all have in common is the process of dehumanization and the escape from bondage to freedom. Seeing that slave narratives were written for the abolitionist cause, the black voice "rests on the 'normative background' of Christian and liberal republican values," enhancing intimacy between female slave writers and white female readers.[33] Considering their white audience, ex-slaves' experiences were challenged for their authenticity; nonetheless, the writing or dictating of their slave experiences accomplish the shift from object to human being, from absence to presence, and from enslavement to freedom.[34]

Peculiarly, "slave narrative" is a blanket unsexed term, the implication being that male and female slave narratives can be grasped unproblematically as one. One might wonder why the genre of female slave narratives was not firmly established. Seeing that a women's rights movement had set in from the late 1840s, it could be argued it was precisely the right time and place to conflate both white and black women's experiences

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[28] O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 677.
[29] Henry Louis Jr. Gates, *Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism.* (New York and Oxford. Oxford University Press, 1989), 131.
[30] Ibid, 128.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Jerry Philips, "Slave Narratives," in *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South,* 53.
[34] Ibid, 54.

with subordination. Former slave Sojourner Truth, who wrote the celebrated *Arn't I a Woman?* (1851), challenged the notion of black womanhood and the double burden of slavery—racism and sexism—suggesting that sisterhood between elite mistresses and female slaves did exist. Moreover, a distinct "female slave narrative" genre could be authorized seeing that slave women's resistance, for the purpose of safeguarding some personal worth, contradicted the nineteenth-century protocol of True Womanhood, unlike slave men who, on the contrary, endorsed their manhood by fighting back.[35]

Abolitionist organizations, such as the Garrisonians, capitalized on the corruption of True Womanhood, arguing that slavery "defeminized" impotent slave women.[36] In this way, female slave narratives furnished an "intimate" bond between slaves and readers seeing that, generally, white women sympathized with their "sisters," implicitly serving both feminist and abolitionist purposes. Thus, the question whether intimate bonds between white womenfolk and slave women were possible against the dictates of the elite community goes even further. Close bonds between plantation mistresses and her female house slaves, which were bi-racial in nature, were not easy to be forged. Typically, it would not have been reasonable for the mistress to expect her slaves to divulge the intimate details of their lives. As above-mentioned, intimacy, on the other hand, could also denote the knowledge that white female readers, or in this case plantation mistresses, deduce from female slave narratives. The five female slave narratives examined in this study represent most of the major issues recounted in African American female autobiographies written in the nineteenth century. The narratives include the notorious *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) written by Harriet Jacobs, *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave* (1831) by Mary Prince, and *Darkness Cometh the Light: Struggles For Freedom* (1891) by Lucy A. Delaney, among other things.

This study will focus on the antebellum South—the period from the 1820s to the 1860s—which was of paramount importance for various reasons. While prior to the 1820s slavery supporters were still preoccupied with rationalizing the institution of slavery, a few decades after the Revolution the era of paternalism set in, in which slaves were valued as an extension of the "white family" rather than mere chattel. "The 1820s

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[35] *Six Women's Slave Narratives* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1988), Introduction, xxxiii.

[36] Kristin Hoganson, "Abolitionists and the Rhetoric of Gender, 1850-1860," *American Quarterly* 45 (December 1993): 561.

marked the beginning of the second phase during which slavery was defended not just as an economic necessity but as a positive good," John Osborne notes in *The Old South.*[37] This shift, therefore, had consequences for the bonds between plantation mistresses and her female house slaves, among others. As for shifting notions of womanhood, the colonial ideal of *Republican Motherhood,* influenced by the Enlightenment, was replaced by the Victorian model of *True Womanhood* derived from the Romanticist Movement. In spite of these cultural shifts starting the antebellum years, southern slave society and its concomitant culture and practices would be in its closing stage with the advent of the Civil War.

For a clear understanding of the plantation mistress's intimate sphere in comparison with ubiquitous southern upper class notions of womanhood, I rely on the above-mentioned five female slave narratives, which publication dates range from 1831 to 1891, ten plantation mistresses's diaries published between 1852 and 1912, and various regional magazines, travel documents, plantation master journals, and conduct literature. In the first chapter, I will examine the dichotomy between southern gender conventions and the daily realities of plantation mistresses. In the subsequent chapters, I will provide interpretations on the bonds between the plantation mistress and her close circle—husband, children, and female house slaves respectively—, and the ensuing implications for her identity, actions, and manners outside of the public gaze.

The issue at hand, the *fluid identity* of the plantation mistress while moving from the public realm to the *intimate sphere,* and vice versa, remains elusive seeing that many factors, such as region, class, time period, number of slaves, and size of the plantation, have to be taken into account. In this study, I will look at the larger agricultural plantations in the South, holding more than twenty slaves. Yet, little attention will be paid to regional differences in the South and its consequences for the relationships between plantation mistresses and her family and close associates. I also do not provide analysis on the question at hand in urban cities. Nor will I consider a great deal of journals of prestigious men folk and male slave narratives. Concentrating on the plantation mistress as the pivot of the study, one must note that I do not intend to present a monolithic view of slaveholding women. Glinda Fountain Hall argues in *Inverting the Southern Belle* (2008) that "the key seems to lie in the fact that a woman's

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[37] John Osborne, *The Old South: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina.* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1968), 33.

sexuality is directly linked to whether she sees herself and is seen by others as a subject or object."[38] Contrary to Catherine Clinton's use of the southern lady as mere "object"—or victim—and Cynthia A. Kierner's recurrent usage of the plantation mistress as "subject"—an individual with agency—, in this study the extent to which both concepts are accurate are examined by confirming as well as challenging "patriarchal historical myths".[39] Although scarcely a comprehensive study of the plantation mistress mediating community requirements and private life, this study does hint at the question to what extent elite women adhered to southern upper-class notions of womanhood in the intimate sphere of the plantation household.

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[38] Glinda Fountain Hall, "Inverting the Southern Belle: Romance Writers Redefine Gender Myths," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 41, no.1 (2008): 38.
[39] Hall, "Inverting the Southern Belle": 38.

CHAPTER ONE

The Ambiguity of the Southern Belle

God in his inscrutable wisdom, has appointed a place & a duty for females, out of which they can neither accomplish their destiny, nor secure their happiness!!
—James A. Norcom, 1848

I early ascertained that girls had a sphere wherein they were expected to remain and that the despotic hand of some man was continually lifted to keep them revolving in a certain prescribed and very restricted orbit.
—Caroline Elizabeth Merrick, 1825.

In historical debates, class, race, and gender are considered the most salient determinants for one's social position in antebellum southern society. In the planter community, a slaveholding lady derived her individual's self-conception from the social group she was a member of—the southern gentility. Belonging to a specific group creates a firmly established identity, according to modern psychological studies. Yet, it could have been a masked identity. Consistent with the self-categorization theory, developed by Turner and other psychologists in 1987, a *depersonalized* identity entails "a shift towards the perception of self as an interchangeable exemplar of social category and away from the perception of self as a unique person."[40] Prescriptive cultural expectations, such as customs, morals, manners, etiquette, and distinct gender roles were embedded in southern elite society to such an extent, that it often precluded plantation mistresses from displaying aberrant behavior. Although plantation mistresses's diaries illustrate, time and again, the *depersonalized* identities of southern elite women in the public sphere, the clash between myth and reality resulted in internal contradictions and the use of different masks. In order to explain the *fluid identities*—or a mixture of masks—plantation mistresses adopted, moving from the public sphere to the *intimate sphere* and vice versa, we must first turn to the new conceptions of womanhood that swept antebellum American society.

[40] Marilynn B. Brewer and Masaki Yuki, "Culture and Social Identity," *Handbook of Cultural Psychology* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2007), 309.

Reflections on Victorian Notions of Womanhood

In the nineteenth century, socio-cultural, philosophical, biological, and religious attitudes towards gender roles led to significant changes. The colonial model of Republican Motherhood, typical of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, proposed that women were supremely qualified to train the next generations for patriotic ends, allowing them to have access to public roles. After the American Revolution, however, gender ideologies underwent a conservative counter-revolution emblematic of the Romantic Movement.[41] The nineteenth-century Cult of True Womanhood, as dubbed by historian Barbara Welter, and the doctrine of the sexually-defined "separate spheres" started to permeate both northern and southern society. In her essay "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860" (1966), Barbara Welter argues that a "true woman" embodied the four fundamental virtues of piety, purity, submission, and domesticity.[42] Since women were considered a breed apart that could humanize society and act as moral transmitters, they were elevated to a superior position in their divinely appropriated domestic sphere.

The ideology of the "separate spheres" was developed and buttressed by social philosophers such as Herbert Spencer, Auguste Comte, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Arthur Schopenhauer and John Ruskin.[43] Whereas "the man's power is active, progressive, defensive" and "is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender," the woman "must be enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise -wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation: wise, not that she may set herself above her husband, but that she many never fail from his side," John Ruskin proclaimed in his second lecture in 1865, published in *Sesame and Lilies* (1907).[44] Also, the religious revival movement of the 1840s, called the Second Great Awakening, proposed Evangelical theory that supported divinely appropriated gender roles. Daniel Robinson Hundley, an Alabama lawyer, states in line with the Apostle Paul's argument on women's place that in the school of the family "a woman finds her proper sphere and mission"

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[41] Clement Eaton, *The Mind of the Old South*. (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 246.

[42] Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 2, Part 1 Summer, 1966, 152.

[43] Jan Marsh, "Gender Ideology & Separate Spheres," Victorian and Albert Museum, http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/periods_styles/19thcentury/gender_health/gender_ideology/index.html (accessed November 20, 2010).

[44] John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies: Three Lectures Delivered in 1864 and 1865*. (London: Dent, 1907), 68-69.

which is a "God-given privilege and honor" and that "it is most important that mothers should be pure, peaceable, gentle, long-suffering and godly--which they never can be, if permitted or inclined to enter the lists and compete with selfish and lustful man for the prizes of place and public emolument."[45] As religious and moral preceptors, it was the duty of evangelical women to embody the domestic ideal, and to honor after God their husbands as "the anointed lords of creation."[46]

Moreover, women's magazines, such as *Godey's Lady's Book,* published by the prominent female writer and editor Sarah Josepha Hale, revealed the qualities and duties of a "true woman" in her domestic sphere. Exemplary is the short story "Incompatibility of Temper: A Story for Young Husbands and Wives" (1862) written by Alice B. Haven, which revolves around Morgan Ash and his wife. When, on one day, Mrs. Ash observes that her husband impatiently waits for her aunt, she gently corrects him. Morgan Ash, in turn, expresses great gratitude to his wife for having improved his character. Thus, nineteenth-century magazines were, according to James Playsted Wood, author in American literature, vital "in spreading awareness of manners, morals, taste, and a 'mild' culture throughout the States."[47] Besides philosophical, religious, and socio-cultural thought, geologist Charles Darwin added another dimension to the Victorian gender construction. In his publication *Origin of the Species* (1859), providing an empirical approach to sociology, he put forward the theory of "natural selection" and the "survival of the fittest" implicitly endorsing female inferiority.[48] In short, various streams of thought within antebellum society, subscribed to, and in so doing, sustained, the same patriarchal gender ideology.

Although both northeastern and southern society shared the same belief system, societal differences resulted in dissimilar notions of womanhood. Regional differences between the North and the South started to become accentuated as social and economic changes—such as industrialization, consumerism, and modernization—swept the antebellum North. In "The Pastoralization of Housework," Jeanne Boydston examines the development of the Cult of True Womanhood in the North. The strictly defined

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[45] D. R. Hundley, *Social Relations in Our Southern States*. (New York: H.B. Price, 1860), 74.
[46] Virginia Cary, *Letters on Female Character Addressed to a Young Lady on the Death of her Mother.* (Richmond, Virginia: Ariel Works, 1830), IV.
[47] James Playsted Wood, *Magazines in the United States*, 3rd ed. (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1971), 59.
[48] Pauline Maier, et al, eds., *Inventing America: A History of the United States* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006), 563.

gender spheres, Boydston argues, were "an intellectual and emotional way of setting limits to the uncertainties of early industrialization."[49] Whereas the social institution of the family, or household, served as a counterbalance to the marketplace as the pivot of northern society, the southern household was the very foundation upon which the agricultural southern economy was built. In response to the divergent political economies of northern and southern society, two different cultures sprang up.[50] The southern institution of slavery was the main determinant of regional differences in Victorian notions of womanhood. Historian Catherine Clinton traces women's roles in both societies in *The Plantation Mistress*. In northern bourgeois society, a close-knit female culture—precipitated by women's vigorous and prominent roles in the Second Great Awakening—laid the foundation for various feminist activities, such as the battle for women's enfranchisement.[51] "Women were able to create a successful counterculture that undermined patriarchal oppression," Clinton observes.[52] Slaveholding women, on the contrary, were greatly discouraged from advancing liberating female roles similar to their northern counterparts. The more the head of the household, the plantation master, accumulated power by suppressing his slaves, children, and wives alike, the more likely he secured a high social status in the antebellum gentile community. "Thus slavery," Clinton concludes, "did accentuate sex roles and perpetuated women's subordinate status."[53]

Myth or Reality?

Myth-making is part of southern history. The antebellum icon of the southern belle was created in order to provide plantation daughters and mistresses with a culturally distinct model of rectitude. Whether reality or romanticized, plantation mistresses's

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[49] Jeanne Boydston, "The Pastoralization of Housework," in *Women's America: Refocusing the Past,* edited by Linda K. Kerber and Jane Sherron de Hart, 4th ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 144.
[50] Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 5.
[51] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 11. See also Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). In Part One, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," Smith-Rosenberg examines eighteenth- and nineteenth-century cultural and social features that determined the normalcy of intimate female relationships. Interestingly, she ends her analysis with the conclusion that the suppressive and conservative Victorian period, ironically, allowed women to experiment with their sexual feelings and intense emotions, or "latent" homosexuality, within a female network.
[52] Ibid, 10.
[53] Ibid, 6.

diaries as well as travel narratives, supported the idealized "model of virtue" by talking about the decorum, beauty, and virtues the belles displayed. In various diaries, the southern belle is depicted as a perfected, attractive, high-bred mistress who never thought of herself, carried a warm heart for the persons around her, cared tenderly for the sick, and whose life was centered around Christ. Case in point is Letitia M. Burwell who stresses the importance of the belle as an attractive and virtuous "hero" in her idealistic narrative *A Girl's Life in Virginia Before the War* (1895):

> The mistress of this establishment was a woman of rare attraction, possessing all the gentleness of her sex, with attributes of greatness enough for a hero. Tall and handsome, she looked a queen as she stood on the portico receiving her guests, and, by the first words of greeting, from her warm, true heart, charmed even strangers. Without the least "variableness or shadow of turning," her excellences were a perfect continuity, and her deeds of charity a blessing to all in need within her reach. No undertaking seemed too great for her, and no details - affecting the comfort of her home, family, friends, or servants - too small for her supervision. The church, a few miles distant, the object of her care and love, received at her hands constant and valuable aid, and its minister generally formed one of her family circle.[54]

In her diary, Mary Chesnut, too, shows that gentile community members attach importance to the ethereal beauty of belles. "Clear brunette she is, with the reddest lips, the whitest teeth, and glorious eyes," Mary Chesnut writes, "having given Mrs. Randolph the prize among southern beauties."[55] Northerner Frederick Law Olmsted, moreover, notices in his travel narrative *A Journey in the Seaboard Slaves* (1856) the graciousness, charm, and high-dressed condition of southern elite ladies who in "silk and satin, under umbrellas, rustle along the side-walk, or skip across it between carriages and the shops, as if they were going to a dinner-party, at eleven o'clock in the morning."[56]

The typicality of the Old South concerning its respectable women is stressed in numerous diaries and travel narratives as well. "I have looked in vain for such women in other lands", Mrs. Burwell notes, "but have failed to find them."[57] Also, an Address of Chancellor Harper, prepared for and read before the Society for the Advancement of Learning, of South Carolina, states the necessity to "elevate the female character", to

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[54] Letitia M. Burwell, *A Girl's Life in Virginia Before the War.* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company Publishers, 1895), 70.
[55] Mary Boykin Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War,* ed. C. Vann Woodward. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1905), 105.
[56] Ibid, 50.
[57] Burwell, *A Girl's Life in Virginia Before the War,* 34.

maintain the "utmost purity of manners" and the "greater severity of decorum than is required elsewhere."[58] The Chancellor Harper concludes his Address with the following firm statement: "Let us say: we will not have the manners of South Carolina changed."[59] Particularly, Frederick Law Olmsted, journalist for the *New York Daily Times*, provides a refreshing perspective to the culture of the Old South from a northerner's point of view. He notices the great pride the southern gentile community takes in its superiority, good manners, form, hospitality, refinement, and social and moral qualities. There is an air of "importance" and "dignity" surrounding the upper-class circle, he observes:

> Long supremacy among their negroes and indented servants had taught them to expect implicit obedience from all inferiors; and, if any one, so unfortunate as to belong to the commons, and thus to be inferior to them in blood, refinement, or possessions, did not yield to their arrogance, every means was put in requisition to reduce him to his proper level. [60]

Olmsted continues: "Because the smallness of their number, proportionately to the whole people, and their widely-separated residences, gave to each a high local consideration and power, and led to inordinate self-respect."[61] Not surprisingly, the superior and refined attitude of the elite community determined, for the most part, the cultivated character of the privileged southern belle. Historian Wyatt-Brown correctly notes in his book *Southern Honor: Ethics & Behavior in the Old South* that the stereotype of the southern belle is "an artifact of imagination in which illusory views of life prevailed over actualities."[62] The above-mentioned portrayed images of southern mistresses were "illusory views", or superficial observations, considering the lives they lived in reality.

Antebellum diaries, correspondence, and journals, repeatedly reflect on slaveholding women taking delight in the culture of southern aristocracy, with its unique rituals, etiquette, and celebrations, while moving in the public sphere. As plantation residences were widely separated from their nearest neighbor, the custom of visiting was of great importance. Southern planters were renowned for their hospitability; passing visitors or travelers would, at all times, be invited for dinner,

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[58] Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slaves,* 404.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid, 247.
[61] Ibid, 253.
[62] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics & Behavior in the Old South.* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1982), 369.

entertainment, and an overnight stay, if so desired. In *A Girl's Life in Virginia Before the War*, Letitia M. Burwell describes her uncle's rules regarding hospitability:

> Uncle Dick had requested Aunt Jenny,[…]to have on his table every day dinner enough for six more persons than were already in the house, 'in case,' he said, 'he should meet friends or acquaintances, while riding over his plantation or in the neighborhood, whom he wished to ask home with him to dinner.'[…]Another hospitable rule in Uncle Dick's house was that company must never be kept waiting in his parlor, and so anxious was his young niece to meet his approbation in this as in every particular that she had a habit of dressing herself carefully, arranging her hair beautifully[…] before lying down for the afternoon siesta, 'in case,' she said, 'someone might call'.[63]

The mistress continues to explain the nature and value of hospitability:

> Many houses were filled with visitors the greater part of the year, and these usually remained two or three weeks.[…]Nor was it necessary to announce these visits by message or letter, each house being considered always ready, and 'entertaining company' being the occupation of the people.[64]

Likewise, Nancy B. de Saussure recollects in *Old Plantation Days*: "We kept 'open house'; everybody was welcome[…]It was a delightful open-hearted, open-handed way of living, my child."[65] Frederick Law Olmsted, in addition, expresses in his travel narrative that he was struck by these "show plantations," whereupon he was told by a native that "their owners always went out and lived on them part of the year, and then they kept a kind of open house, and were always ready to receive company."[66] The word "show plantations" suggests that its plantation members needed to uphold their social and economic status, and in so doing, masked their true identities. Although elite customs, such as visiting or annual balls, often served as a popular outlet for plantation mistresses, nevertheless, one has to bear in mind that these privileged ladies were constantly preoccupied with subconsciously adhering to rules of etiquette.

Another area that served as both an outlet and an institution that kept southern women under control was the church. In *My Day; Reminiscences of a Long Life*, Sarah Anges Rice Pryor explains that her uncle and aunt strictly observed religious duties; "temperance in speech and living, moderation, serenity,—these ruled the life at Cedar

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[63] Burwell, *A Girl's Life in Virginia Before the War*, 149-151.
[64] Ibid, 31.
[65] N.ancy Bostick de Saussure, *Old Plantation Days: Being Recollections of Southern Life Before the War* (New York: Duffield & Company, 1909), 52.
[66] Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slaves,* 412.

Grove."[67] Evangelical theory put forward by the religious revival movement of the 1840s, as previously examined, confirmed the divinely separated gender realms and strengthened women's roles as moral and pious arbiters. Nonetheless, the church was empowering as well. Incited by minister's sermons, socially-sanctioned religious and benevolent organizations encouraged elite women to cure the ills of southern society. Particularly noteworthy is the mistresses's enlarged authority in the public sphere when they were "ready to rush into the Florence Nightingale business," during the Civil War.[68]

Similar to the church, the southern educational institution categorized courses cultivating intellectual abilities for males, and courses in "polite arts", such as dancing, literature, music, drawing, and embroidery for females.[69] At the end of their educational careers, women of privilege were supposed to be trained in domestic skills and able to participate in general conversations, albeit not intellectual ones. Plantation mistresses, in short, were kept in check by cultural expectations and southern institutions, like the church and the educational system, consequently becoming *depersonalized* identities. Although the above-mentioned characteristics of planter culture were areas of the gradual empowerment of plantation mistresses, according to historian Alexic Girardin Brown in *The Women Left Behind: Transformation of the Southern Belle, 1840-1880*, nonetheless, the intimate sphere was a space in which mistresses were more likely to express themselves.[70]

Contrary to the mythicized lively, carefree, and frivolous southern belle, the plantation mistress was burdened with a mixture of domestic responsibilities. Louisianian Caroline Elizabeth Merrick invalidates the ubiquitous myth: "It is folly to talk about the woman[…]being the traditional Southern woman of the books, who sat and rocked herself with a slave fanning her on both sides."[71] Indeed, next to the care of her children, the mistress was required to run the plantation household, which included disciplining, clothing, feeding, and nursing slaves. Historian Catherine Clinton explains in *The Plantation Mistress* that "gardening, dairy activities, salting pork, preserving fruits

[67] Sara Agnes Rice, Pryor, *My Day; Reminiscences of a Long Life*, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1909), 40.
[68]Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War,* 72.
[69] Guion Griffis Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina: A Social History*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937), 228.
[70] See Alexis Girardin Brown, "The Women Left Behind: Transformation of the Southern Belle, 1840-1880," in *The Historian*, 62.4, Summer 2000: 759-778.
[71] Caroline Elizabeth Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land: A Southern Matron's Memories. (*New York: The Grafton Press, 1901), 76.

and vegetables, mixing medicines, the making of candles, soap, rugs, pillows, linen, bedding, and so on" belonged to the household activities as well.[72] In the examined mistresses's diaries, it becomes clear that these added responsibilities were unexpected and extremely burdensome. Letitia M. Burwell reminisces about her mother's tough life: "She often told us of her distress on realizing for the first time the responsibilities devolving upon the mistress of a large plantation, and the nights of sorrow and tears these thoughts had given her."[73] The bigger the plantation, the more duties devolved upon the mistress. "Her cares and responsibilities were great, with one hundred people continually upon her mind, who were constantly appealing to her in every strait, real or imaginary," Mrs. Burwell's continues.[74] Likewise, the English born and bred Frances Kemble describes the incessant pressure, worries, and exhaustion she endured while she lived on one of the largest seaboard rice plantations in Georgia. She critically reflected:

> I really never was so busy in all my life, as I am here. I sit at the receipt of custom (involuntarily enough) from morning till night -- no time, no place, affords me a respite from my innumerable petitioners, and whether I be asleep or awake, reading, eating, or walking; in the kitchen, my bed-room, or the parlor, they flock in with urgent entreaties, and pitiful stories, and my conscience forbids my ever postponing their business for any other matter; for, with shame and grief of heart I say it, by their unpaid labor I live.[75]

Not only the great deal of responsibilities mistresses needed to perform contributed to tensions in the intimate sphere, also the interpersonal relationships—mistresses intimately living and working with their female domestic slaves—in a biracial society added to not infrequent escalations in the Big House.

On top of the duties plantation mistresses needed to perform, the ladies also had to deal with various difficulties inherent in plantation life. First of all, the transition from a carefree unmarried young lady to a highly responsible married woman proved to be an anticlimactic experience. Whereas the "home" was a great source of happiness for women, it was also a source of frustration. Contrary to their husbands who freely moved in the public sphere, mistresses were tied to their households and needed chaperones in

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[72] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress,* 21.
[73] Burwell, *A Girl's Life in Virginia Before the War,* 23.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Anne Frances Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839* (New York: Harpers and Brothers, 1863), 73.

order to travel safely “off the land”.[76] Monotony, boredom, and the feeling of loneliness were part of a secluded plantation life. Olmsted concluded with regard to the experiences of New Englanders living in the South: “The wife misses her relations and neighbors, and her Sunday-meeting, and, after a year or two of trial, declares she will stay no longer; the children want the ready companionship of more thickly populated districts.”[77] Additionally, the complexities surrounding childbirth put a great strain on mistresses. Sexual reproduction was considered a woman’s religious, cultural, and patriotic obligation.[78] The southern ideology, according to Clinton, “sought to bind up a woman’s self-concept completely with her biological ‘destiny’.”[79] Mary Boykin Chesnut illustrates the main purpose of a plantation wife: “Old Colonel Chesnut said one day: ‘Wife, you must feel that you have not been useless in your day and generation. You have now twenty-seven great-grandchildren’"—a poignant reminder for a mistress like Mary Chesnut who did not have children.[80] Yet, various diaries show the fear attending the sanctity of motherhood; the lack of contraceptive devices, sickness or even dying in childbirth, infant mortality, and the added responsibilities were part of such fears.

Considering the often detrimental circumstances plantation mistresses were situated in, rising tensions were not unlikely in the intimate sphere. In various diaries and journals, the individual identities of the mistresses come to the surface as they, from time to time, live on the edge of escalation, trying to observe southern upper-class notions of womanhood and defying those standards at the same time. Although going directly against the grain, plantation mistresses often needed, or were willing, to behave in indelicate ways. Mary Chesnut tells the story of Russell, the wandering English newspaper correspondent, visiting southern plantations. Although Russell had expected to see soft and low-toned mistresses, he found the wife of an ex-Cabinet Minister standing “on the back piazza and send her voice three fields off, calling a servant.”[81] “I dare say there are bawling, squalling, vulgar people everywhere,” Mrs. Chesnut remarked.[82] Also, Frances Kemble reveals in her diary that she daily rode “through new patches of woodland without any guide” and explored the woods full of snakes, land-

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[76] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 9.
[77] Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slaves,* 176.
[78] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 8.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War,* 22.
[81] Ibid, 52.
[82] Ibid.

crabs, and ant-hills by foot, which was considered rather unladylike.[83] Regardless of whether Mrs. Kemble, as an Englishwoman, had internalized southern elite customs already or not, she was perfectly aware of the judgments accompanying her improper behavior. With regard to her rowing lessons, Frances Kemble commented:

> It was the singular fact of seeing a white woman stretch her sinews in any toilsome exercise which astounded them, accustomed as they are to see both men and women of the privileged skin eschew the slightest shadow of labor, as a thing not only painful but degrading.[84]

Although elite women like Mary Chesnut and Frances Kemble "enacted their ideas in individual protests," a small number voiced their criticisms publicly.[85]

From Margin to Center

There were southern plantation mistresses who attempted to find a language to articulate their discontent in the public sphere. The few women of privilege who offered open resistance to the prevalent patriarchal doctrine did not recoil from social warnings, such as Virginia Cary's admonition: "But when woman breaks down the barrier erected by Omnipotence around her, she renders herself liable to the full penalty of God's violated law."[86] Examining the mistresses's diaries, three connected issues of discontent become apparent: the lack of organized education for women, women's rights, and anti-slavery beliefs. Most notably, various slaveholding women were private abolitionists.[87] Exemplary is Mary Boykin Chesnut who linked the status of women and slaves in her legendary proclamation that "there is no slave, after all, like a wife." [88] The Grimké sisters, however, were the most noteworthy among the few southern elite women who went public.

The sisters Sarah (1792) and Angelina Grimké (1805) were born in an influential slaveholding family in Charleston, South Carolina.[89] In her early childhood, it became evident that Sarah was not an ordinary "miss". Independent, critically-minded, and

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[83] Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839*, 226.
[84] Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839*, 52.
[85] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*,12.
[86] Cary, *Letters on Female Character Addressed to a Young Lady on the Death of her Mother,* X.
[87] Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 51.
[88] Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 59.
[89] For a full biography on the Grimké sisters, originally published in Washington, in 1885, see Catherine H. Birney, *The Grimke Sisters.* (Charleston, SC: BiblioLabs, 2008).

highly sympathetic for slaves, she was soon determined to utilize her sense of justice and to do something for society—to the detriment of her traditional family and social circle. Enraged by the fact that slaves were not considered spiritual brothers and sisters by her parents, among other things, Sarah stayed in Philadelphia where her father had died and converted to Quakerism. Angelina, at the time, underwent similar frustration. When a number of attempts to introduce anti-slavery beliefs in various southern religious denominations were met with a rebuff, she moved in with her sister where more opportunities would be within reach. Before long, both sisters energized the abolitionist movement of the 1830s. When the sisters linked the plight of slaves to that of white women in the American Anti-Slavery Society, the leader of the first abolitionist movement, William Lloyd Garrison, enthusiastically supported them.[90]

In "Garrisonian Abolitionists and the Rhetoric of Gender, 1850-1860," Kristin Hoganson argues that in order to counteract destructive criticism of pro-slavery writers, the Garrisonian abolitionists appealed to gender rhetoric in two different ways. They stressed the importance of conservative values inherent in the "separate spheres" ideology and the idea of true manhood and womanhood to renounce slavery in the South on the one hand, and relied on unconventional gender roles in the North to liberate and politicize women on the other hand. As for the South, Hoganson mentions how Garrisonians put forward the idea of "degenderization" to argue that slaves were rendered unfit to become real women and men, whereas southern plantation holders were "degenderized" considering their abuse of power. In other words, although deviant southern women like the Grimké sisters went beyond their divinely appropriated domestic sphere, nonetheless, they used Victorian rhetoric to justify their abolitionist activities. This can be partly attributed to the Second Great Awakening, when women and ministers started a new alliance; clerics encouraged female moral superiority in exchange for women's support and activism. Hence, women—as the voice of justice and humanity—were legalized by the church to push for the abolition of slavery. Also, the era of Republican Motherhood had shown that women were able to use reason in order to create virtuous and moral citizens. For that reason, as argued by southern female

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[90] Maier, et al, eds., *Inventing America,* 385.

activists, women were justified to speak up and influence the citizens of the supposedly free Republic.

Southern female abolitionists also capitalized on their own experiences with both their household and plantation slaves. As plantation masters were often absent, engaging in trade or public affairs, mistresses managed the plantation with its concomitant incidents of brutality. Although they were familiar with the "degenderization" of female slaves, at the same time, the southern abolitionists equated their subordinated position with that of female slaves; both were to submit to the master of the house. "The investigation of the rights of the slave has led me to a better understanding of my own," stated Angelina Grimké in a letter to Catherine Beecher, in 1838.[91] Contrary to the general perception, the Grimké sisters did not believe their abolitionist and feminist activities made them unfit for domestic life, rather, they were of the opinion that they could share their opinions as moral beings while at the same time adhering to Victorian notions of womanhood.

In a society that frowned upon elite women participating in political discussions, it was considered rather controversial and highly inappropriate for these women to express their political views in the public sphere. In his account *Deviance and Respectability: The Social Construction of Moral Meanings*, sociologist Jack D. Douglas examines the concept of "the absolute morality", which ties in with the "absolute" southern rules of respectability. "The social responses of anxiety-induced repression and charges of immorality, makes it very unwise for members of our society to challenge the absolute morality," maintains Douglas.[92] Likewise, as soon as plantation mistresses rebelled against the patriarchal doctrine, Victorian notions of womanhood, or southern etiquette—three linked principles that sustained slavery—they were socially ostracized by the slaveholder's community, concurrently relinquishing their status, protection, and identity. Catherine Clinton, similarly, highlights the danger of social and political activism in southern slave-based society. She draws on the theory of American social theorist George Fitzhugh, who argued in *Sociology for the South* (1854) that, paraphrased, "either a change in the status of women or the downfall of slavery would bring about the end of southern civilization."[93] The Grimké sisters, considered pariahs

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[91] Angelina A. Grimké, *Letters to Catherine Beecher*. (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1838), letter XII, 114.
[92] Jack D. Douglas, *Deviance and Respectability: The Social Construction of Moral Meanings*. (New York: Basic Books 1970), 21.
[93] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress,* 13.

within the southern elite community, testify to the courageousness required to assert oneself as an individual in a society based on social harmony and collectivism.

Reflecting back, it becomes evident that gender was a cultural construct. Whereas the nineteenth-century Cult of True Womanhood permeated both northeastern and southern society, nevertheless, the two divergent cultures appropriated the Victorian ideology for their own ends. The ethereal southern belle provided plantation mistresses with a model to emulate, which encapsulated the cultural expectations of the slaveholder's community. Citizens violating these upper-class southern notions of propriety signified an imminent threat to the social order, or, the institution of slavery.[94] The "thin theory of false consciousness", as put forward by American political scientist James C. Scott, reveals the nature of southern civil society. This theory maintains that the "dominant ideology achieves compliance by convincing subordinate groups that the social order in which they live is natural and inevitable."[95] Whereas some plantation mistresses fully internalized the dominant ideology and others offered open resistance, in general, southern women of privilege settled for resignation.

This "absolute morality", to use Jack D. Douglas' words, had consequences for plantation mistresses' self-conceptions, identities, and behavior in the intimate sphere. Examining various mistresses's diaries, it becomes clear that slaveholding women, while mediating the public and the intimate sphere, revealed oxymoronic identities. Whereas the southern morality, or more specifically, the model of the southern belle, presumes a static identity, various diaries, letters, and journals show the multi-dimensional personalities of the slaveholding women. While keeping up appearances in the public sphere, mistresses needed to adapt to complex situations in the intimate sphere. There was a general trend, according to Douglas, of the existence of "relations of dominance" signifying at the same time "relations of resistance."[96] In the antebellum South, social conformity was not always feasible in a life that was "too complex[…],too conflictful, and too changing for any set of abstract and predetermined rules."[97] In the following chapters, therefore, the question whether the intimate spheres of the plantation ladies offered them an emotional and physical space to defy the southern cultural system will

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[94] Douglas, *Deviance and Respectability*, 21.
[95] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 72.
[96] Douglas, *Deviance and Respectability,* 45.
[97] Ibid.

be examined.

CHAPTER TWO

The Battle of the Sexes
Intimacy Between Plantation Mistress and Husband

Thy husband shall have rule over thee.
—Gen. 3:16

We are valued either too highly or not highly enough; we are never taken at our real worth.
—Marie Ebner- Eschenbach (1830-1916)

Intimate relationships between beaus and belles—the plantation gentry—was predominantly determined by social conventions. Although master and mistress shared the same southern aristocratic norms and values, nonetheless, the Victorian doctrine of the "separate spheres" buttressed by southern patriarchy, historian Steven Stowe suggests in *Intimacy and Power in the Old South,* created not only a physical, but also an emotional chasm between husband and wife.[98] Moreover, Anne Firor Scott argues in *The Southern Lady* that there was an undercurrent of fear in elite marital relationships. Whereas plantation ladies did not stand up for their rights and desires out of fear to lose protection from their husbands, masters, in turn, felt obligated to maintain their status as head of the southern aristocratic family. Notably, research in Cultural Psychology has revealed that "despite its universality, culture has been found to have a profound impact on people's definitions of love and on the way they think, feel, and behave in romantic settings."[99]

In this chapter, I will shed some light on the question whether the plantation mistress and her husband were able to have emotional, intellectual, and physical intimacy apart from the dictates of elite society. In order to disclose everyday verbal and non-verbal acts of marital intimacy in the intimate sphere of the plantation household, I will focus on the practice of courtship in the public sphere, the entrenched doctrine of the "separate spheres", the virulent system of patriarchy, and the immoral acts committed by planters that threatened intimacy.

The Practice of Courtship

[98] Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University), 124.
[99] Elaine Hatfield, Richard L. Rapson, and Lise D. Martel, "Passionate Love and Sexual Desire," *Handbook of Cultural Psychology* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2007), 760.

Young elites approaching a marriageable age, entered into the process of courting. In this stage of life, the young elite was focused on finding an appropriate suitor, which was often influenced by a father or other relatives. "Mr. Saunders wrote that it had been his dearest wish to have me for his daughter," Mrs. De Saussure, a born and bred South Carolinian lady, reminisces, "and he had talked so much to his son about me that he was quite willing to fall in with his father's wishes in the matter."[100] Likewise, fifteen-year old Miss Caroline Elizabeth Nisbet consented to marry Joseph le Conte (1823-1901), a renowned Georgian geologist and natural scientist, as it was her father's will. Although "parental control over marital decisions disappeared by 1800 in the United States," Wyatt-Brown contends in line with a study conducted by Carl Deger, "in any event, fathers could command formidable resources by marshaling kinfolk sentiment against controversial pairings."[101] Every member of the upper class—relatives, companions, and community members alike—seemed to be involved in the courtship in some way.[102] Caroline Elizabeth Merrick, a Louisianan plantation lady, describes with regard to her aunt's matchmaking abilities in *Old Plantation Days*: "I remember that when Mrs. Lafayette Saunders heard that Mrs. Thomas had made this match, she replied: 'It is a pity she did not do the same for all the family, for she surely has made a good one for Caroline!'"[103]

The process of courting was generally considered an enjoyable stage of life. In various diaries it becomes clear that courtship was "as exciting and bewildering as a fox-chase."[104] Joseph le Conte conveys in his *Autobiography*:

> The ladies of Athens were celebrated for their beauty and refinement, and it was the habit of the students to cultivate the acquaintance of the ladies of the families of the faculty and of other families in the town. Refined women were to me then, and I confess to something of the same feeling yet, a sort of superior beings, belonging to another, higher, and purer sphere of existence. I simply worshiped them. Association with them produced in me a delicious delirium, an ecstatic joy and exaltation.[105]

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[100] Nancy Bostick de Saussure, *Old Plantation Days: Being Recollections of Southern Life Before the War* (New York: Duffield & Company, 1909), 112.
[101] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics & Behavior in the Old South.* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1982), 207.
[102] Ibid, 212.
[103] Caroline Elizabeth Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land: A Southern Matron's Memories (*New York: The Grafton Press, 1901), 13.
[104] Mary Boykin Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War,* ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 193.
[105] Joseph le Conte, *The Autobiography of Joseph le Conte* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1903), 46.

The young elites became acquainted at lavish balls, while walking to church, during horseback rides, or by means of correspondence. Mrs. Merrick narrates: "For a year and a half Mr. Merrick and I had seen much of each other and had exchanged frequent letters, many of which have been sacredly preserved to the present time."[106] Flattering, for both privileged ladies and gentlemen, was engrained in the courting process. It served as a primary means to acquaint oneself with potential suitors in a vivacious manner. "Captain Chesnut (Johnny) who knows everything," Mary Chesnut remarks, "has rushed into a flirtation with Buck such as never was.[…]When he leaves her, he kisses her hand, bowing so low to do it unseen that we see it all."[107] Seeing that young belles were excessively chaperoned and constantly supervised, Catherine Clinton argues, "coquetry was a staple of the southern social scene."[108]

In the fictional book, *Georgia Scenes* (originally published in 1835), based on newspaper sketches, A.B. Longstreet warned for the danger lying behind flirtation. She narrated the story of George Baldwin, an accomplished lawyer, who had eyes for the notorious rich and beautiful Miss Evelina. While courting her, Mr. Baldwin found her, against all expectations, "a modest, sensible, unassuming girl, whose views upon all subjects coincided precisely with his own."[109] Although Mr. Baldwin detected some weaknesses in her character, nonetheless, "he found a thousand charitable ways of accounting for all this, not one of which led to the idea that she might have learned these diamonds sentiments by rote from the lips of her preceptress."[110] Consequently, soon Miss Evelina Smith and George Baldwin got married. When Mr. Baldwin saw, one day, his wife talking to his brother, however, "he detected her in the act of repeating, *verbatim et literatim*, the pretty sentences which first subdued his heart."[111] A.B. Longstreet impresses on the reader: "Let the fate of my poor nephew be a warning to mothers against bringing up their daughters to be 'CHARMING CREATURES'."[112] Indeed, the southern process of courting revolved mainly around appearances, in both verbal and non-verbal communication as well as in refined physical appearance. Not

[106] Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land*, 13.
[107] Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 328.
[108] Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 63.
[109] A.B. Longstreet, *Georgia Scenes*, ed. Louis M. Hacker (New York: Sagamore Press Inc., 1957), 75.
[110] Ibid, 76.
[111] Ibid, 93.
[112] Ibid, 96.

surprisingly, while capitalizing on their beauty and charm, young ladies managed to deceive their suitors into marriage from time to time.

Contrary to the marriage of convenience associated with the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, the 1800s was the era of Romanticism in which emphasis lay on the heart in marital requirements. Even though "a good match[…]provided the chance for a soft touch for loans in time of need", Wyatt-Brown asserts, "everyone expected love to be the basis of a union."[113] Mary Chesnut tells the story of the young Miss Toombs who enjoyed courtship, but "wanted something more than to know a man was in mad pursuit of her; that he should love her, she agreed, but she must love him, too."[114] Generally, young ladies, as well as their male counterparts, deemed love important as a prerequisite for marriage. "Love and marriage are necessary supplements of each other," Joseph le Conte utters, "and must be combined to produce the highest spiritual growth.[…]But this is not enough; marriage is necessary to bring about another kind of love: that of the heart and affections, unselfish, self-effacing, wedded love."[115] Accordingly, historian Clement Eaton states in *The Mind of the Old South*: "Romanticism in the South was in part a reaction from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment—a de-emphasis of reason in favor of feeling and intuition."[116]

Moreover, although greatly influenced by family and friends, the young elite was allowed to choose whom to marry in the end. So, too, was Mrs. de Saussure, who declined several requests of a good friend to marry his son. "It was useless to urge me," the young lady states, "though I felt grateful to be looked upon with so much affection I declined the offer."[117] However, an exemplary exceptional case was the true story of the authoritarian plantation master, Mr. Benton, and his daughter, Miss Patsy, narrated by Mrs. Merrick. On one day, Mr. Benton instructed his daughter the following:

> You are a good child, and let me tell you, my doctor has fallen in love with you. He told me so. Yes, Pat, he is mashed on you, and intends to ask you to marry him, and you had better give up any foolish notion you may have taken to Walter Jones, and take the doctor. He is the best chance you will ever have. He is doing well in his profession, and besides having a good home to take you to, he belongs to an influential family. All I ask of you is to promise me you won't refuse the

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[113] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor,* 211.
[114] Ibid, 193.
[115] le Conte, *The Autobiography of Joseph le Conte*, 121.
[116] Clement Eaton, *The Mind of the Old South*. (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1967),246.
[117] de Saussure, *Old Plantation Days,* 113.

doctor. You would be a fool to reject such a man. [118]

This proved to be quite a shocking request for Miss Patsy and responded emotionally: "O father! Don't ask me to promise anything."[119] Mr. Benton, subsequently, verbalized his internalized patriarchal beliefs. "I am going to be obeyed in my own house," exclaimed Mr. Benton, flying into a rage, "and if you don't mind me, I will put you out of doors."[120] Miss Patsy trembled with fear and the next day, Mrs. Merrick narrates, the young lady had eloped with the unsuitable Walter Jones. It was not unusual for a young lady of privilege to elope with an unsuitable partner; in most cases, she wanted to be freed from family control or to evade community pressure to get married at a fairly young age.[121] "Elopement signaled that a woman had enslaved herself to passion[...]", Clinton makes clear, "if a belle forgot herself, parental reins substituted for self-restraint."[122] Indeed, if the spouse proved to be an inappropriate partner in terms of gentility requirements, it could mean social ostracism and for the young lady—the planter's worst nightmare.

Whereas romantic love was mostly visible in the private sphere, in the public sphere the idea behind rituals of courtship served the purpose of endorsing the elite's preeminence.[123] In fact, the consensus was that a sensible marriage did not only consist of romantic love. Whereas a husband should give evidence of "social agreeableness" and particular traits, such as intelligence and courage, a wife was chosen for her virtue, customary roles, and utility. Certainly, most planters believed that marriage was predominantly convenient for economic and social purposes; it boosted the couple's wealth and social status. Therefore, although the "magic spell" young ladies casted on their male victims was customary during courtship—referring to George Baldwin's (fictional) experiences with the flattering and deceitful Miss Evelina— it was an utterly inappropriate practice to maintain during marriage. In married life, a plantation husband needed a mistress who was willing to take plantation life with all its

[118] Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land,* 66.
[119] Ibid, 67.
[120] Ibid.
[121] See Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 201-206. Generally, southern elite ladies married much earlier than northern counterparts. Southern planter daughters married in their mid or late teens, as a means to prevent improper marital decisions made more likely at an older age, among other reasons. Southern elite men married around ten years later than their female counterparts in order to obtain financial security before embarking on matrimony.
[122] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress,* 66-67.
[123] Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South,* 96.

concomitant responsibilities seriously.[124]

Occasionally, there were upper class women who did not feel the urge to marry, could not find a suitable husband, or applied for divorce.[125] For some ladies, marriage represented another form of male hegemony and offered open resistance to the aristocratic social norms; "they saw the social reality behind the romantic idyll of marriage", Wyatt-Brown notes, and preferred to move on "the fringe of southern society".[126] "In those days old maids were rare," Mrs. Eliza Ripley remembers, "every girl, so to say, married. The few exceptions served to emphasize the rarity of an unmated female."[127] Likewise, Mary Chesnut notes: "If you show by a chance remark that you see some particular creature, more shameless than the rest, has no end of children, and no beginning of a husband, you are frowned down; you are talking on improper subjects."[128] The "improper subjects", unmarried women of gentility, were often obliged to perform jobs, such as paid housekeeper, teacher, governess, or landlady—akin to duties of the plantation mistress—in order to earn an independent income.[129] Sometimes, young ladies preferred these spinster-associated occupations over running a plantation household, Wyatt-Brown points out, which in turn decreased their "chances for marriage to a gentleman" as their "occupation disqualified" them, and as they were "too refined to suit plainer men."[130]

For the young ladies who did marry "to fix their fate," as stated by Rachel Mordecai to her brother in 1821, the daily reality of running a plantation household became evident as soon as the matrimonial festivities came to an end.[131] As the spill of the household, the newlywed mistress was necessitated to answer the needs of her family, husband, children, and slaves. Mary Chesnut noted the following conversation she overheard at home about Mrs. Blank pertaining to the institution of marriage:

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[124] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress,* 67-69.
[125] See Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 244-246. Wyatt-Brown maintains that southern ladies were reluctant to obtain divorces, seeing that "the prevalence of male favoritism in divorce actions in the Southern states is most striking.[…]Legal proceedings exposed them to male scrutiny and thus defeated the feminine claim to privacy and protection from public gaze."
[126] Ibid, 85-86.
[127] Eliza Moore Chinn McHatton Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans, Being Recollections of my Girlhood,* (New York and London: D. Appleton and Company, 1912), 91.
[128] Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War,* 6.
[129] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor,* 229.
[130] Ibid, 239.
[131] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress,* 86.

> She says we have an institution worse than the Spanish Inquisition.[…]"It is your own family that she calls the familiars of the Inquisition. She declares that they set upon you, fall foul of you, watch and harass you from morn till dewy eve. […]You ought to do this; you ought to do that, and then the everlasting 'you ought to have done,' which comes near making you a murderer, at least in heart.[…]"Private life, indeed!"

Although Mrs. Blank felt relieved when she moved to a place where she could get out of the sight of her family, most plantation mistresses felt uprooted, isolated and lonely. Most newlywed ladies thought they were finally free to go their own ways, rather, once living on the plantation they discovered they got another superior in their lives instead. Case in point is Mrs. Benton who questions Miss Patsy's elopement: "[…]and she thought marriage would set her free - emancipate her," whereupon Mr. Benton responds that "all females are and ought to be always controlled by their male relations. Nothing on God's earth can emancipate a woman. She only changes masters when she marries and leaves her father's house."[132]

Closeness in a Segregated World

A number of historians agree that, generally, the doctrine of the "separate spheres" primarily determined the extent of intimacy between plantation mistress and husband. Their worlds were literally and figuratively poles apart. While the plantation mistress stayed at home, the master went to the outer world for business. Indeed, the mistress was practically discouraged to go beyond the plantation, seeing that she had to arrange a chaperone wherever she went. What slaveholding men experienced in the public sphere remained often obscure to the plantation mistresses. Raised in a patriarchal society that separated men from women, and aware that women were exclusively created for providing emotional and spiritual support, masters were less inclined to find in their wives an intellectual partner. Accordingly, master Henry Wise claims: "My wife is not competent to advise the statesman or the politician- her knowledge, her advice, her ministry is in a kindlier sphere."[133] Also, public facilities, such as ballrooms, churches, and plantation homes in the Old South, habitually segregated the two sexes. "Physical distance meant emotional distance as well," Wyatt-Brown succinctly remarks.[134] Sadly, although young gentleman were often infatuated by delicate, graceful, virtuous and

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[132] Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land,* 67.
[133] Craig M. Simpson, *Good Southerner: The Life of Henry a Wise of Virginia*. (Chapel Hill: the University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 21.
[134] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor,* 275.

pious ladies in the courting process, a few years in marriage there was an undercurrent of disinterest in their wives due to the doctrine of the "separate spheres". "There is a general agreement that whatever the opportunities for affection," Stowe states, "southern marriage nevertheless was marked by a unique potential for an 'emotional chasm between husband and wife.'"[135]

Reading various diaries of slaveholding women, the reader will notice that narrated conversational topics, attitudes, and intense emotions convey a large degree of either closeness or distance between the plantation mistress and her husband. Verbal communication between husband and wife was, generally, limited to the discussion of trivial daily events. It would have been inappropriate for the plantation mistress, for instance, to make inquiries about the details of her husband's business. The doctrine of the "separate spheres", therefore, kept a tight rein on conversational topics, too. However, as one southern couple explained, it was only because of their duties as husband and wife, rather than their true feelings that emotionally separated them. In a letter from Virginia Cary to her friend Mary, published in *Letters on Female Character* (1830), Mrs. Cary narrated the conversation between the happily married couple Mr. and Mrs. Arundel. Although Mrs. Arundel could not have wished for a better husband, she listed some difficulties with her spouse as well. When her husband, a politician, would come home from a busy working day, she illustrated, "he would sit for hours in my presence, as if he did not see me, with his mind brooding over abstract subjects."[136] Nevertheless, the couple justified this recurring situation—or miscommunication—with another sketch. While Mrs. Arundel sometimes thought her husband dismissed her coldly when she brought him some refreshments, Mr. Arundel, in turn, did not dare to ask her whether she wanted to stay. He states: "It used to give me a pretty hard struggle to let you go off, I assure you. If you had made the slightest desire of movement like desiring to stay, I should have kept you, and then my mind would have been taken from the subject I was studying."[137] Thus it seems, in this particular case, the elite couple did want to show affection for each other, yet still, they were indirectly curbed by gentility requirements.

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[135] Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South*,124.
[136] Virginia Cary, *Letters on Female Character Addressed to a Young Lady on the Death of her Mother.* (Richmond, Virginia: Ariel Works, 1830), 89.
[137] Ibid*,* 90.

In order to share mutual affection, the so-called belles and beaus, as a universal given, needed to be loyal, care for each other, and give each other some room to release pressing emotions. To stand strong as an influential couple, both plantation mistress and master were generally loyal to each other and acted as mediators between their partner and the public sphere. When Mary Chesnut overheard the secretary of her husband and a lady, wife of an officer, talking about "all Mr. Chesnut said, thought, intended to do, wrote, and *felt*," Mrs. Chesnut confronted the secretary and asked: "Are you certain of all these things you say of Colonel Chesnut?"[138] After the lady insistently asked the mistress to introduce herself, Mary Chesnut gave her name and added: "I dare say I showed myself an intelligent listener when my husband's affairs were under discussion."[139] Likewise, Mr. Chesnut defended his wife in public. Mary Chesnut writes in her diary on March 28th, 1862:

> What things I have been said to have said! Mr. - - - heard me make scoffing remarks about the Governor and the Council - or he thinks he heard me. James Chesnut wrote him a note that my name was to be kept out of it - indeed, that he was never to mention my name again under any possible circumstances. It was all preposterous nonsense, but it annoyed my husband amazingly. He said it was a scheme to use my chatter to his injury. He was very kind about it. He knows my real style so well that he can always tell my real impudence from what is fabricated for me.[140]

Even though the prominent mistress regularly flung decorum to the winds and not infrequently spoke her mind in both the private and public, the quote reveals the degree of respect James Chesnut had for his wife.

In addition, the diaries reveal in what ways the elite couples showed care for each other. Frances Kemble states her joy and relief when she found her husband, Pierce Butler, at home from a day at the rice plantation: "I was much delighted on all accounts. I am sure it is getting much too late for him to remain in that pestilential swampy atmosphere."[141] Also, as soon as Mr. Chesnut made known what he needed, irrespective of bad timing, the mistress acted upon his request. Mary Chesnut narrates: "The night I came from Madame Togno's, instead of making a row about the lateness of the hour, he

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[138] Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War,* 154.
[139] Ibid, 154.
[140] Ibid, 164.
[141] Anne Frances Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839* (New York: Harpers and Brothers, 1863), 234.

said he was 'so wide awake and so hungry'."[142] Immediately, she put on her "dressing-gown and scrambled some eggs, etc., there on our own fire."[143] Likewise, Mr. Chesnut warned his wife it was getting late after a busy day. Mary writes: "I had fever as usual to-day, but in the excitement of this crowd of friends the invalid forgot fever. Mr. Chesnut held up his watch to me warningly and intimated 'it was late, indeed, for one who has to travel tomorrow'."[144] Although Mary Chesnut shares discontent with her husband and men in general at times, she also ventilates how proud she is of her spouse and recognizes some good qualities he possesses. She writes in March, 1862: "James Chesnut has been so nice this winter; so reasonable and considerate - that is, for a man."[145] Three years later, she writes on March 5th: "We went after luncheon to see Mrs. Munroe. My husband wanted to thank her for all her kindness to me. I was awfully proud of him. I used to think that everybody had the air and manners of a gentleman. I know now that these accomplishments are things to thank God for."[146]

Even though the southern protocol prescribed their elite members to remain self-controlled in the public sphere at all times, it was not more than natural that respectable women needed to release urgent emotions in a more intimate sphere, that is to say, between husband and wife. Frances Kemble frankly writes about her powerless feelings when it comes to her limited authority as a wife. When she found out that her husband, known in her diary as Mr.-- --, permitted one of their male slaves to be separated from his wife and children, Frances pleaded her husband to intervene:

> I appealed to him for his own soul's sake not to commit so great a cruelty. [...]arguing with him upon this bitter piece of inhumanity -- how I cried, and how I adjured, and how all my sense of justice and of mercy and of pity for the poor wretch, and of wretchedness at finding myself implicated in such a state of things, broke in torrents of words from my lips and tears from my eyes![147]

Even though Mrs. Kemble took the liberty to release all of her frustrations, her husband remained silent and unyielding regarding the issue at hand. The mistress knew she had acted inappropriately. Although Mr. Kemble did not give any evidence of sympathy towards his wife, nonetheless, the reader is able to deduct that Mrs. Kemble was allowed

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[142] Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839,* 151.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid, 125.
[145] Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 151.
[146] Ibid, 358.
[147] Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839,*103.

to take liberty to express her true emotions. One must also keep in mind that Mrs. Kemble was not born and bred in the American South, and, as a result, did not have the chance to internalize proper husband-wife relations according to the southern code of gentility.

As a “real” southern belle, Mary Chesnut, too, did not feel a great deal of restrictions to suppress her emotions towards her husband. After looking at her pictures of Yankee generals and thinking about the dreadful war they were in, she writes: “Then I sat down and wrote to my husband in language much worse than anything I can put in this book. As I wrote I was blinded by tears of rage. Indeed, I nearly wept myself away.”[148] Emotion was a female characteristic, so was the general belief according to the sexually-defined segregated realms, while rationality was inherent in men. However, even though elite men were supposed to control their emotions in both the private sphere—of which the above-mentioned Mr. Kemble is an exemplary case—and the public sphere, it did not always materialize. Although Mary Chesnut’s husband was “a man who could control every expression of emotion, who could play stoic, or an Indian chief,” he nonetheless lost control of his voice in the Council while reading a letter of a desperate mother asking for a permit to see her wounded son in Virginia.

The reader might decipher both emotional and intellectual intimacy between planter and mistress from various antebellum diaries, yet, the discussion of sexual intimacy remains hidden in accordance with proprieties of conservative high society. In the antebellum South, sexual intimacy was not so much a means to obtain physical pleasure and personal happiness as visible nowadays, rather, for elite women physical or sexual intimacy existed primarily for reproductive purposes. As the “cult of virginity” endorsed the ideal of white women’s moral superiority and as effective contraceptive devices were limited, elite plantation mistresses were indirectly desexualized by Victorian southern society.[149] In other words, sexual feelings, too, were prescribed by social and cultural etiquette. Contrary to planter masters and sons who were justified to have premarital or extramarital sexual relations with either white or black women, ladies of gentility would be considered socially ostracized “fallen women” when they would have the courage to do the same.[150]

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[148] Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, 352.
[149] Elaine Hatfield and Richard L. Rapson, *Love, Sex, and Intimacy: their Psychology, Biology, and History.* (New York: Harper Collins College Publishers, 1993), 70.
[150] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor,* 295-297.

Master of the House

Reading the warm letters and narrated events with its concomitant intense feelings, thoughts, and expressed emotions that were shared back and forth, it becomes clear that an intimate relationship between plantation mistress and husband was possible. However, as the master of the house—according to inherent southern patriarchal notions—the plantation husband continually needed to exert authority over his wife to remain in control.[151] A letter written by Mr. Merrick on May 11th, 1856, clarifies the socially defined hierarchical gender differences. The master wrote his wife to inform her that he bought a house without her consent. "'I bought a house yesterday, at public auction, which I think will do very well for us,'" Mr. Merrick writes as a matter of course, '"but it will cost a good deal to make it as comfortable as our home at Clinton.'[…]'You will surely be pleased with the place after it is arranged.'"[152] Mr. Merrick knew his wife would not like to live out of town, nonetheless, after having received a disappointed response from her in return, he replied coldly:

> I do not think you had better come down until you have somewhat recovered from your disappointment. I have read your letter while my colleagues are reading opinions, and now I take some of the precious time of the State to try to console you. The more I see of the house and its neighborhood the better I like it. You think it is an isolated place up-town, still uninhabited. Well, in twenty years everything will be different, and while I have you and the children in the house, it will be all right. Therefore, you must dry up your tears and be happy.'"[153]

This disinterested response surely would have been a slap in her face. Although Mr. Merrick attempted to console his wife by explaining his motives for buying the house, he also gave her a feeling of guilt to having questioned the matter by stating he has more important business on his mind than to enter into discussion with her.

While the master of the house generally expressed incessant criticisms and pushed through his own desires, the wife was to suppress her own thoughts, remain submissive, and self-controlled, having a pleasant demeanor in the midst of accusations and dictatorial commands at the same time. The northern born and bred Caroline Gilman (1794-1888) intelligibly conveys regarding the struggle to resist deviance, while

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[151] Some scholars, such as Wyatt-Brown, have suggested the existence of misogyny—hatred for women by males in a patriarchal society—as a cultural phenomenon in the antebellum South, which goes even further than the need to establish their superiority over women. See David D. Gilmore*, Misogyny: The Male Malady* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.)
[152] Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land,* 24
[153] Ibid, 25.

living in Charleston, South Carolina:

> To repress a harsh answer, to confess a fault, and to stop (right or wrong) in the midst of self-defence, in gentle submission, sometimes requires a struggle like life and death; but these three efforts are the golden threads with which domestic happiness is woven[...]Her first study must be self-control, almost to hypocrisy. A good wife must smile amid a thousand perplexities, and clear her voice to tones of cheerfulness when her frame is drooping with disease or else languish alone."[154]

This quote reveals the great extent to which plantation mistresses needed to adopt a public mask of obedience, subservience, and contentment regarding patriarchal husband-wife relations in the intimate sphere of the plantation household.

Various mistresses felt their husbands were never satisfied with them as wives, which put them in a dependent position to constantly feel the need for approval.[155] Mrs. Blank, a lady who was talk of the day in Mary Chesnut's house, candidly articulated:

> Did you ever see a really respectable, responsible, revered and beloved head of a family who ever opened his mouth at home except to find fault? He really thinks that is his business in life and that all enjoyment is sinful. He is there to prevent the women from such frivolous things as pleasure.[156]

Although it seems Mary and James Chesnut had a relationship based on mutual respect, more so than other planter couples, Mrs. Chesnut, too, expressed criticism of her husband's authoritarian and judgmental attitude in her diary. When on one night Mr. Wigfall visited the Chesnut's and Mr. Chesnut saw it was getting late, he started accusing his wife: "'It is all your fault,'" the master declared, "'why will you persist in looking so interested in all Wigfall is saying? Don't let him catch your eye. Look into the fire. Did you not hear it strike two?'"[157] Even though Mary Chesnut seemed to have been an exceptional uncurbed mistress seeing her candid rhetoric and open-minded views for that time, she, too, made sure she obeyed her husband in the end. Interestingly, Mary Chesnut was part of a small number of mistresses who openly wrote down what was on her mind. She honestly states: "To men, glory, honor, praise, and power, if they are patriots. To women, daughters of Eve, punishment comes still in some shape, do what they will."[158]

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[154] Caroline Howard Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*. (Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 1852), 256.
[155] Wyatt-Brown even goes as far as suggesting male southerners had a propensity for misogyny.
[156] Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War,* 123.
[157] Ibid, 261.
[158] Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War,* 118.

While there were various mistresses who were aware of the injustice of their dependent position on the plantation and the patriarchal atmosphere at large, a few openly resisted their husbands. Accordingly, Mrs. Arundel, after twenty years of marriage, advises unruly mistresses the following in *Letters on Female Character*:

> There should be a mutual willingness to endure each other's burdens, and yet a mutual desire to suffer alone, rather than to impart suffering to the dearest part of oneself.[...]If a woman really loves her husband, it will give her far more pleasure to obey him, than to govern him.[159]

Most elite female members were unaware of or resigned to the fact that they held an inferior position bound up with patterns of gender discrimination due to the instruction they received from an early age, to take up a subordinate role.[160] Only a small number of mistresses engaged in informal acts of resistance or public opposition to break through the patriarchal pattern inherent in antebellum southern society.

Threatened Intimacy

Immoral acts, such as alcohol abuse, violence, and adultery, were committed by plantation men as subconscious signs of powerlessness, which directly or indirectly strained the relationship with their wives. Joseph le Conte narrates the story of the well-dressed, courteous, and educated gentleman who returned home from a visit in Savannah:

> He had a bottle of brandy along, which he too often used. He was evidently very drunk, and became more and more maudlin as we went on. He talked incessantly of his wife, and of how good a woman she was - much too good for him; and as he approached his house, began to shed tears. Finally, about a mile from his destination, he declared he could not go home; he could not bear that his wife should see him in his present condition. He stopped the stage, bade us good-by with many warnings against the vice that had enslaved him, and got off at a wayside inn.[161]

While this gentleman recognized his weakness and protected his virtuous wife from confronting her in his drunken condition, there were a good deal of alcoholic masters who returned home from a night in the local bar, and displayed aggressive behavior

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[159] Cary, *Letters on Female Character Addressed to a Young Lady on the Death of her Mother,* 93.
[160] See James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990).

[161] le Conte, *The Autobiography of Joseph le Conte,* 38.

towards their wives and children. In a power-centered society such as the Old South, there was a general propensity to consider violence an “acceptable form of social conduct,” historian Dickson D. Bruce Jr. remarks.[162] Most southerners interpreted acts of violence as being mere “defensive” or “reactionary”, rather than a controllable vice with far-reaching consequences.[163] Physical abuse remained a private matter “as long as the husband was no sadist and exercised discretion in giving his wife moral correction.”[164] Indeed, violence pervaded the antebellum South and can be attributed to different societal characteristics, such as the code of honor, the practice of dueling, and the southern doctrine of patriarchy. By relying on both verbal and physical violence, the master attempted to exert authority over his wife, and thereby, tried to secure his superior status. Ironically, the more the head of the household tried to gain respect and loyalty by using physical violence, the closer his wife “will cling to and the more she will undergo and bear for him,” David Gavin, a plantation master from South Carolina, observed.[165] This analysis points to the state of submissiveness the mistress was placed in, and its attendant constant need for approval to feel loved and gain a sense of identity, no matter the existing contrary evidence.

The greatest vice of all might have been the southern tolerated sexual “double standard”, that is to say, wedded masters having legitimate sexual liaisons with their female slaves.[166] Surprisingly, while the mistresses were generally greatly grieved at their husband’s infidelity, the sexual exploitation of slave women was condoned by the gentile community at large. Wyatt–Brown gives a possible explanation for general infidelity to southern custom, which can be applied to this phenomenon as well: “Why people behaved as they did cannot be entirely encompassed in so broad a category as ‘strategies’. One must allow for irrationality—including collective irrationality.”[167] In other words, there was not one “rule” in southern society; masters were allowed to take “tolerable” detours as long as it did not disturb the “natural order of things”.[168] Accordingly, a master did not perturb the southern hierarchical system of slavery by

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[162] Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., *Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South* (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1979), 70.
[163] Ibid, 72.
[164] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor,* 282.
[165] Ibid*,* 283.
[166] Considering the emotional and physical state of submissiveness of plantation mistresses, the chances of elite women engaging in extramarital affairs were rare.
[167] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor,* 114.
[168] Ibid. See Chapter Four for more information on the sexual “double standard” inherent in the southern community of gentility.

engaging in interracial sexual relationships; rather, he dehumanized and sexualized his female slaves, in so doing reinforcing their inferiority.[169]

In her diary, Mary Chesnut draws attention to the hypocrisy of elite men who proclaim to be "the model of all human virtues" while freely engaging in sexual practices with their slave women.[170] Mrs. Chesnut repulsively states in her diary:

> You say there are no more fallen women on a plantation than in London in proportion to numbers. But what do you say to this – to a magnate who runs a hideous black harem, with its consequences, under the same roof with his lovely white wife and his beautiful and accomplished daughters?[171]

She continues her critique by revealing elite women's general acquiescence: "The wife and daughters in the might of their purity and innocence are supposed never to dream of what is as plain before their eyes as the sunlight, and they play their parts of unsuspecting angels to the letter."[172] It would not have been the first time that Mary Chesnut shares a different opinion with her female counterparts. "Those dutiful wives who piously overlook – well, everything – do not care one fig for their husbands," the contentious mistress remarks.[173] Although some mistresses left their spouses as soon as they discovered their husbands' infidelity, generally, privileged women had to silently endure the attendant shame, insecurity, and jealousy. The sexual exploitation of slave women by masters and its consequences for intimacy between plantation mistress and her female house slaves will be discussed in a following chapter; for now, it is safe to say that it undoubtedly injured the marital relationship between master and mistress.

Indeed, the degree of intimacy between planter and mistress was predominantly determined by requirements of the close-knit elite community. Modern psychological studies show that intimacy between two partners is dependent on the "world-at-large."[174] This fact applies even more so to southerners of gentility who could rarely escape from the public gaze. In this chapter, I have attempted to shed some light on the

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[169] See Chapter Four for more information on the sexual "double standard", biracial intimacy, and miscegenation.
[170] Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 114.
[171] Ibid.
[172] Ibid, 115.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Hatfield and Rapson, *Love, Sex, and Intimacy*, 255.

culture-bound characteristics that allowed for and threatened intimacy between master and mistress in the intimate sphere of the plantation household. Rather than passionate love, couples of gentility often shared companionate love for each other; warm and comfortable relationships based on deep commitment characterized their marriage life. Born and raised in the same close-knit community, the so-called beaus and belles shared the same set of beliefs, which facilitated mutual understanding, the stability of the relationship, and the feeling of connectedness.

However, the doctrine of the sexually-defined "separate spheres" and the virulent system of patriarchy inherent in the southern community of gentility, threatened emotional, intellectual, and sexual intimacy between husband and wife. As the planter came home from business in the public realm, he brought with him southern etiquette, custom, and tradition, which not infrequently led to tensions in the intimate sphere. Put differently, while a certain degree of intimacy was undoubtedly possible between plantation mistress and husband, the gender differentiation inherent in southern paternalistic society seems to have overshadowed the chances for true closeness in the relationships of elite couples.

CHAPTER THREE

Learned Men and Cultivated Women
Child-Rearing and Education in the Slaveholding Community

This was discipline, and with never a thought of rebelling, she would cheerfully acquiesce.
—Mary Norcott Bryan, 1912.

Man is expected to be 'learned'-women 'cultivated'.
—Herschel V. Johnson, 1853.

At the heart of the slaveholding family, and therefore its community, lay children. A proper southern upbringing was crucial in a society that hinged on respectability, social standing, and patriarchal hierarchy. In *Southern Honor*, Wyatt-Brown argues that honor was of utmost importance in southern child-rearing practices and educational institutions. Whereas in the antebellum North, parents utilized conscience-building techniques inspired by Evangelical thought, in the Old South child instruction was dominated by "rubrics of honor and shame."[175] In the education of their children, southern parents, unlike their northern counterparts, insisted on "identification with community values"—which corresponds with Jack D. Douglas' formerly mentioned theory of the "absolute morality".[176] In the Old South, for generation upon generation the same code of honor was instilled in its elite members; hence, childhood was the start of a socially conventional life.

In this chapter, typical southern childrearing practices, the racial ties between planter children and slaves, and the education of the planter offspring will be addressed in order to provide insight into the way sons and daughters of the plantation elite were trained to occupy a high social position within southern society. While childrearing in the intimate sphere as dictated by social conformity will be the leading thread running throughout this chapter, the challenges to the southern system of honor will be considered as well.

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[175] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics & Behavior in the Old South.* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1982), 127.
[176] Ibid.

Southern Discipline

In line with the nineteenth-century Cult of True Womanhood, plantation mistresses were inculcated with the importance of motherhood throughout their lives. As the majority of mistresses were in their mid to late teens when they entered into matrimony, parenthood at a relatively young age became an attendant challenge. Although trained in domesticity and prepared for maternity from an early age on, motherhood, coupled with added responsibilities and dangers such as infant mortality, often proved to be the naked truth. Clinton argues that nursing, one of the major childcare responsibilities, put both an emotional and physical strain on young ladies.[177] "Although mothers nursed according to their personal inclination, by the mid-nineteenth century, many southern upper-class women had turned over the task of suckling infants to white wet nurses or slaves," Clinton claims.[178] Even though black wet nurses took the physical burden of their mistress, at the same time the new mothers were confronted with prescriptive tracts circulating the South warning of the dangers involved in the supervision of slaves over plantation children.[179] Irrespective of the maternal burdens the inexperienced mistresses needed to bear, the joy of motherhood becomes clear in numerous diaries and letters. "It is hardly a matter for surprise that my first-born child appealed so strongly to my love[…]for my boy was always in my arms-perhaps the more that I had been cut off prematurely from my dolls," Caroline Merrick reflects on her young motherhood.[180]

In southern patriarchal society, plantation mistresses and their husbands were assigned different roles in childrearing. Whereas the mistress acted as the "socializing agent" and "mediator" between father and child, the master adopted the role of distant disciplinarian.[181] Indeed, it was imperative for young ladies to adhere to upper-class notions of womanhood and southern respectability in order to be proper role models and act as moral transmitters. Seeing that masters were frequently away for business affairs, plantation ladies were responsible for the daily discipline of their children. While

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[177] Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 155.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Ibid, 47.
[180] Caroline Elizabeth Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land: A Southern Matron's Memories (*New York: The Grafton Press, 1901), 19.
[181] *The Self and Others: Positioning Individuals and Groups in Personal, Political and Cultural Contexts*, ed. Rom Harré and Fathali M. Moghaddam (Westport, CT, Praeger Publishers, 2003), 258.

mistresses took care of the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of their offspring, they also functioned as a "safe haven" where maternal indulgence was rarely absent. Mrs. Merrick reflects in her diary that when her children had made friends she was very much pleased "for it proved that the womanly accomplishment of making themselves beloved was a lesson they had laid to heart - and they had learned it by their own fireside where love ruled and reigned."[182] In turn, children of slaveholding families were frequently mother-centered. "Her sons were never so happy as when holding her hand and caressing her," Letitia M. Burwell, a plantation lady from Virginia, states.[183] Mary Chesnut, too, affirms the position of the plantation mother: "Old Mrs. Chesnut is dead. A saint is gone and James Chesnut is broken-hearted. He adored his mother."[184]

As head of the household in antebellum southern families, masters had the final say in matters of childrearing. Mary Norcott Bryan, born and raised in North Carolina, remarks about her grandfather that he "had very strict ideas about bringing up children".[185] On one day, when her mother wanted to go for a ride with her Arabian mare, her mother's father "would tell her she need not go, he preferred her remaining at home, without giving any reason at all." "This was discipline, Mrs. Bryan rightly remarks, "and with never a thought of rebelling, she would cheerfully acquiesce."[186] Caroline Merrick also clarifies the gender-differentiated parenthood roles. Patsy's father capitalized on his paternalistic power, when he disagreed with his daughter's fondness of gardening. Mrs. Merrick recollects: '"'My mind's made up,' said he, striking his closed right hand into the open palm of the left. 'I'll wipe out that flower-bed.'"[187] The next morning, Mr. Benton "marched into the garden armed with a hoe."[188] Both Patsy and her mother, on finding the ruined state of the garden, were in tears. Acting as an intermediary, the mistress "soothed Patsy's feelings" and reminded her daughter of the need to respect her father at the same time.[189]

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[182] Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land,* 117.
[183] Letitia M. Burwell, *A Girl's Life in Virginia Before the War* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company Publishers, 1895), 85.
[184] Mary Boykin Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War,* ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1905), 299.
[185] Mary Norcott Bryan, *A Grandmother's Recollections of Dixie* (New Bern, N.C.: Owen G. Dunn, Printer, 1912), 8.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land,* 62.
[188] Ibid.
[189] Ibid.

Although these clear-cut gender roles in parenting practices were the norm in the community of gentility, many contradictions in the manner of childrearing existed.[190] Drawing a parallel between slaves and children, Mrs. Merrick argues that too much maternal indulgence can be harmful for children. "The slaves of the severer masters stayed with them during the war," the mistress states, "when those of indulgent ones ran away. It is the petted, spoiled darlings whose ultimate 'ingratitude is sharper than the serpent's tooth.'"[191] Plantation masters, in turn, were not always stern, stoic, and authoritative fathers who utilized emotional withdrawal. "Father said he missed us so terribly that he felt as if he could not live without one of us with him," N.B. de Saussure utters.[192] Also Mrs. Merrick refers to the affectionate traits of her father. On one day, Caroline's father brought her to her "new" mother, filling the place of her deceased mother, and "as he kissed me affectionately", Mrs. Merrick recalls, "I turned away and said: "I am not your child, and I have no mother now."[193] Although the master could have disciplined his daughter for her disrespect, Caroline Merrick expresses, "I have never forgotten the sad look he gave me nor the tenderness he manifested toward my waywardness as he took me in his arms and carried me into the house."[194]

While children learned how to move within the slaveholding community, which parents promoted by means of intrusiveness and advice, young children were liberated to a certain degree. "Patriarchy did not necessarily involve a complete submission to parental will," Wyatt-Brown argues, "Southern fathers expected a degree of liveliness, even independence from the young."[195] In order to let them find their own way in the world, southern parents tolerated more of young children until sexual divisions between boys and girls were made.[196] The reader of mistresses's diaries and letters will, for that reason, come across enlightening situations when there is a young child involved. Mary Chesnut, for instance, tells the incident of General Preston accusing her of "degenerating into a boarding-house gossip", whereupon "is answered triumphantly by his daughters: 'But, papa, one you love to gossip with full well.'"[197] Referring to another incident, Mrs.

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[190] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor,* 126.
[191] Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land,* 117.
[192] Nancy Bostick de Saussure, *Old Plantation Days: Being Recollections of Southern Life Before the War* (New York: Duffield & Company, 1909), 44.
[193] Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land,* 6.
[194] Ibid.
[195] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor,* 131.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War,* 162-163.

Chesnut shows, again, that young children were not restrained in the public sphere as much as they would be later on. She writes: "Drove with Mrs. Davis and all her infant family; wonderfully clever and precocious children, with unbroken wills. At one time there was a sudden uprising of the nursery contingent. They laughed, fought, and screamed."[198] Although it was generally considered inconceivable to be so impetuous in the public sphere, young children of various planter families were encouraged to freely express themselves within a patriarchal framework.

Young children of slaveholding families were, to a great extent, free from restraint, nonetheless, from their early childhood on they learned to internalize the collective identity template of the southern gentile community. Wyatt-Brown discusses in *Southern Honor* that it was imperative for privileged parents to instill in their children the importance of lineage, family pride and "good blood" from a young age on.[199] Hence, in conduct literature and child-rearing practices, the following passage in a letter from Miss Columbiana Porterfield to her stepson was a standard message to children:

> You must keep up the family prestige; your talents and associations demand a foremost place, and you must refuse to communize with that low, ignorant, profane, dram-drinking set of young men around you. I do heartily despise them all, and have never received them in my house when I could help it. They would gladly drag you down to their own level if they could. Your loving aunt, COLUMBIANA.[200]

Also, children learned to use signs of deference. "These customs," such as the use of proper name titles, Wyatt-Brown states, "suggest the persistence of very elemental means of preserving patriarchy."[201]

Both young boys and girls were trained for their future gender-differentiated roles in life, which came rather naturally as various mistresses recollect. Mrs. Pryor reminisces about her girlhood: "I was too young, much too young, but we took our lives very naturally and unconsciously, accepting a guest and doing our best for him, whether he was old or young.[…]Lizzie and I felt that we were young hostesses, and took pains to be, according to our lights, ceremonious and conventional in our behavior."[202] Also, Mrs. Burwell recollects the life of a general Virginian girl:

[198] Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War,* 302.
[199] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor,* 118-119.
[200] Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land,* 202.
[201] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 125.
[202] Sara Agnes Rice Pryor, *My Day; Reminiscences of a Long Life* (New York: The MacMillan Company,

> She had never any occasion to make what the world calls her *"début,"* the constant flow of company at her father's house having rendered her assistance necessary in entertaining guests as soon as she could converse and be companionable, so that her manners were early formed, and she remembered not the time when it was anything but very easy and agreeable to be in the society of ladies and gentlemen.[203]

Early on, the planter offspring gained knowledge on the distinction between the intimate and public sphere. "What sprightly *conversazioni* in our rooms at night!" Letitia M. Burwell remembers, "young girls *will* become confidential and eloquent with each other at night, however reserved and quiet during the day."[204] As soon as young ladies were introduced to southern proprieties, they were educated in deportment, dancing, linguistic and musical skills—the attributes of a "demoiselle". In her recollections, Mrs. Ripley looks back at her lessons of deportment executed by teacher M. Devoti:

> He wore a long-tail coat, very full at the spider waist-line, that hung all round him, almost to the knees, so he used it like a woman's skirt, and could demonstrate to the awkward girls the art of holding out their skirts with thumb and forefinger, and all the other fingers sticking out stiff and straight. Then curtsey! throw out the right foot, draw up the left.[205]

This introduction to elite proprieties would serve as life lessons for the future mistresses, who were expected to act as true southern belles in the intimate as well as in the public sphere.

Considering the "absolute morality" in childrearing practices, it was natural that this southern dogmatic upbringing brought rebellion as well. Every Saturday morning after prayers, Mrs. Ripley recollects, "when we were presumed to be in a celestial frame of mind, each girl reported her infringement of rules—if she was delinquent, and she generally was."[206] The mistress continues bringing to mind a couple of delinquencies she committed as a young lady. Although it was strictly forbidden to bring your own, uncensored, reading material to school, "in some way 'Jane Eyre' (just published) was smuggled in and we were secretly reading it by turns," the mistress conveys.[207] Caroline Merrick, too, recalls an incident in which she rebelled against social custom—not in act

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1909), 58.

[203] Burwell, *A Girl's Life in Virginia,* 51-52.

[204] Ibid, 81.

[205] Eliza Moore Chinn McHatton Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans, Being Recollections of my Girlhood,* (New York and London: D. Appleton and Company, 1912), 10.

[206] Ibid, 18-19.

[207] Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans, Being Recollections of my Girlhood*, 19.

but in thought. Ready for a pony ride with her cousin, Miss Caroline informed her father that they were going for a short ride and would come home before breakfast. "You will do nothing of the kind. You have no brother here to ride with you, and it is improper for two young ladies to be seen on the public road alone so early in the morning," the master responded.[208] "We were obliged to submit to his authority without protest," Caroline Merrick reflects, "though I was ready to say, 'There is a word sweeter than 'mother, home, or heaven,' and that word is 'liberty.'"[209] Although some southern parents relied on instructive rhetoric in childrearing, most southerners shared the belief that corporal punishment was an essential means to prepare children for community purposes—for there was "no order without law[…]no law without punishment, and no punishment without pain."[210] Roughly put, there was a general trend of socio-cultural identification in slaveholding childrearing practices. In line with Brown's argument that honor was an integral part of southern culture, so too, were community and family needs emphasized over individualistic needs in the upbringing of privileged children.

Racial Ties

Throughout their childhood, the slaveholding offspring were inculcated with the significance of their exclusive position within the southern community. Examining the attitudes of planter children towards slaves, and vice versa, provides an interesting perspective in the discussion of typical southern childrearing practices. Modern studies in developmental psychology show that parents have an indirect role in children's social development, which clarifies the nature of the adaptive behavior of children.[211] Therefore, a couple of questions need to be asked: At what point in childhood did planter children become conscious of their superiority? What were the social functions and behavioral implications of this revelation? And, how did these children assume a dominant posture towards the plantation slaves? From their infancy on, privileged children associated with plantation slaves. Enslaved black women frequently acted as wet nurses to the offspring of white planters as well as surrogate mothers to the older white children, while the mistress was preoccupied with running the plantation

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[208] Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land,* 202.
[209] Ibid*,* 202.
[210] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor,* 151.
[211] Irving B. Weiner et al, eds., *Handbook of Psychology: Developmental Psychology* (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2003), 253.

household. "No harm ever came to us," Mary Norcott Bryan remarks, "our servants would guard their little mistresses and masters entrusted to their care with their lives."[212]

The early connection between the slaveholding offspring and slaves was based on paternalism, which becomes evident in a number of mistresses's diaries. "I believe the maltreatment of one of our servants - we had never heard the word 'slave' - would have distressed us beyond endurance," recollects Mrs. Burwell.[213] "If any of the older servants became displeased with us," the mistress continues, "we were miserable until we had restored the old smile by presenting some choice bit of sweetmeat to the offended one."[214] Although several mistresses clarify that, in their early childhood, they did not see the plantation servants as "slaves", and were happy as long as their slaves were happy, increasingly their power relationship went beyond paternalism. While the planter children and their slave playmates naively bonded with each other, gradually an undercurrent of hierarchy grew between the youngsters.[215]

Most white children realized they held a superior position in relation to their black counterparts in response to the slaves' attitudes towards them. "My sister and myself, when very small children, were often carried to visit these cabins, on which occasions no young princesses could have received from admiring subjects more adulation," utters Mrs. Burwell.[216] Also, Miss Sarah discovered her supremacy over slaves in an incident with the female house slave, Milly. The black woman insisted that spinning and churning was no business for ladies: "'The inconsistencies as to proprieties puzzled me then and have puzzled me ever since. 'Why mustn't I spin and churn, Milly?' I insisted.' 'Ain't I done tole you? Ladies don't nuvver do dem things.'"[217] Even though most mistresses felt that the power relationship between their children and slaves were natural, the English-born Frances Kemble complains of the evil effects slavery has on her children:

> I do not think that a residence on a slave plantation is likely to be peculiarly advantageous to a child like my eldest. I was observing her to-day among her swarthy worshippers, for they follow her as such, and saw, with dismay, the universal eagerness with which they sprang to obey her little gestures of

[212] Bryan, *A Grandmother's Recollections of Dixie,* 4.
[213] Burwell, *A Girl's Life in Virginia,* 5.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor,* 153-154.
[216] Burwell, *A Girl's Life in Virginia,* 2.
[217] Pryor, *My Day,* 15-16.

> command. She said something about a swing, and in less than five minutes head-man Frank had erected it for her, and a dozen young slaves were ready to swing little 'missis.' -- -- , think of learning to rule despotically your fellow creatures before the first lesson of self-government has been well spelt over![218]

With regard to child-slave relationships, Frederick Law Olmsted cites a typical passage from the *Southern Cultivator*, published in June 1855: "Children are fond of the company of negroes, not only because the deference shown them makes them feel perfectly at ease, but the subjects of conversation are on a level with their capacity."[219] In racist southern society, Wyatt-Brown argues, "the child absorbed the proper relation to those beneath, for the man of honor assumed a posture that encouraged inferiors to defer."[220] Psychologists Smith and Mackle correspondingly argue in their account *Social Psychology* that "regard, esteem, and liking for *in-groups*—groups to which we belong—are often coupled with disregard, derogation, and dislike for *out-groups*.[221]

Trained in the southern community of gentility in which parents were respected role models to emulate, planter children were given a "model for approaching life in the world."[222] In her diary, Frances Kemble noted that no actions or words of parents slips children's minds: "children are made of eyes and ears, and nothing, however minute, escapes their microscopic observation."[223] This observation corresponds with the social learning theory proposed by psychologist Albert Bandura in 1970. In his essay "Social Learning Theory", Albert Bandura asserts that "man's capacity to learn by observation enables him to acquire large, integrated units of behavior by example without having to build up the patterns gradually by tedious trial and error."[224]

The social learning theory ties into the complexities surrounding the issue of violence in southern childrearing. The fact that either physical or verbal violence was the order of the day in slaveholding community, surely resulted in a negative effect on planter children adopting this rooted "pattern of belligerence."[225] Even though physical

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[218] Anne Frances Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839* (New York: Harpers and Brothers, 1863), 73.
[219] Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slaves; With Remarks on Their Economy* (New York: Dix and Edwards, 1856), 403.
[220] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor,* 157-158.
[221] Eliot R. Smith and Diane M. Mackle, *Social Psychology*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press, 2000), 204.
[222] Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., *Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South* (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1979), 18.
[223] Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation*, 22.
[224] Albert Bandura, *Social Learning Theory* (Morristown, N.J.: General Learning Press, 1971), 2.
[225] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor,* 152.

aggression, such as dueling, was a means to solve social conflicts in the Old South, argues Dickson D. Bruce, Jr. in *Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South*, nonetheless, "every effort of Southern child-rearing was directed toward the opposite goal, toward the repression of impetuosity and the channeling of self-assertion."[226] However, as Wyatt-Brown makes clear, while the system of slavery did not bring about absolute brutality or a deficit in conscience development in planter children, "the early introduction of the modes of honor did serve to blunt sentimentality about the unfairness of hierarchy."[227] Likewise, Thomas Jefferson addresses this "microscopic observation" and the subsequent problematic adaptive behavior of planter children in his *Notes On The State of Virginia* (1781):

> The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this, and learn to imitate it; for man is an imitative animal.[…]From his cradle to his grave he is learning to do what he sees others do.[…]The parents storms, the child looks on, catches the lineaments of wrath, puts on the same airs in the circle of smaller slaves, gives a loose to his worst passions, and thus nursed, educated, and daily exercised in tyranny[…].[228]

Both plantation sons and daughters observed how their parents used different tools of repression to control their slaves, and were commonly exposed to aggressive behavior. The systematic exercise of violence on the plantations created in children a propensity, when confronted with extreme passions, to fall into the use of physical violence rather than "the use of restricted modes for expressing feelings and desires."[229]

Albert Bandura's ideas on learning phenomena through observation can also be applied to the influence of slaves on planter children. Various mistresses's recollections deal with the naïve childhood bonds between white children and their black counterparts, even so, they were also afraid of the bad influence of "negroes" on their offspring. The *Southern Cultivator* of June, 1855, warns:

> "[…]the simple tales, and the witch and ghost stories, so common among negroes, excite the young imagination and enlist the feelings. If, in this association, the child becomes familiar with indelicate, vulgar, and lascivious manners and conversation, an impression is made upon the mind and heart, which lasts for years--perhaps for life. Could we, in all cases, trace effects to their

[226] Bruce, Jr., *Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South,* 44.
[227] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor,* 130.
[228] Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (New York etc.: Back Bay Books/ Little, Brown and Company, 2008), 63.
[229] Bruce, Jr., *Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South,* 65.

> real causes, I doubt not but many young men and women, of respectable parentage and bright prospects, who have made shipwreck of all their earthly hopes, have been led to the fatal step by the seeds of corruption which, in the days of childhood and youth, were sown in their hearts by the indelicate and lascivious manners and conversation of their fathers' negroes."[230]

In agreement with Bandura's theory, time and again, planter parents were adamant in teaching their children to observe the right role models, and to keep aloof from the plantation slaves as much as possible. Older elite children were more likely to critically think about the attributes of the models they wanted to emulate. "Those who have high status, prestige, and power," Bandura claims, "are much more effective in evoking matching behavior in observers than models of low standing."[231] While the more mature youngsters recognized their parents as proper models worth imitating, the younger, more receptive planter children could, now and again, not help being exposed to—and therefore observe and imitate—some of the slaves' customs, such as superstitious beliefs and practices.[232]

One may draw a parallel between Douglas's concept of "relations of dominance" as an equivalent for "relations of resistance" and the paradox between the emphasis on self-restraint in childrearing practices and the reality of the everyday use of violence. "Southern children were brought up to accept only a few highly formalized techniques for approaching other human beings," Dickson D. Bruce explains, "and when those techniques were ineffective, as they would often appear to be, people raised that way were likely to despair of using normal means for solving problems."[233] Re-evaluating Douglas's concept, one may infer that southern slaveholding society equaled extremities in various aspects of the intimate gentile way of life. In the realm of childrearing, these extremities, time and again, translated into inconsistencies and irregularities for both planter parents and offspring.

The Power of Education

"Education is power", to use Christie Anne Farnham's words, "—the power to inculcate a worldview or to empower a viewer of the world."[234] The role of education in antebellum

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[230] Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slaves,* 403.
[231] Bandura, *Social Learning Theory,* 18.
[232] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress,* 49.
[233] Bruce, Jr., *Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South,* 65.
[234] Christie Anne Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization*

society gained renewed interest as reform movements swept the northeastern states. Emanating from the Second Great Awakening in the 1840s, middle-class women felt morally responsible for identifying the main problems of society and were eager to contribute to their community. Besides moral and social reforms such as women's rights, temperance, poor relief, and abolitionism, there was widespread agitation for free tax-supported public education.[235] A great actor within this reform movement was the Protestant preacher, Horace Mann, who pushed for "common schools" in the 1830s. As the Secretary of the Massachussetts Board of Education, Mann argued that public education could serve as a remedy for the ills of society in his first lecture "Means and Objects of Common School Education." "The mobs, the riots, the burnings, the lynchings, perpetrated by the *men* of the present day," Mann declares, "are perpetrated, because of their vicious or defective education when children."[236] According to Mann, widespread public education would be "the great equalizer of the conditions of men."[237]

Antebellum southern society, on the contrary, lagged far behind in creating public educational institutions. The dissimilarity between the two societies with regard to its education systems, stems, on a broader scale, from its divergent ideas about patriotism. "The Southern concept of patriotism was constructed upon faithfulness to a particular place and people and their past," Wyatt-Brown explains, "not upon some abstract idea such as 'democracy or freedom'."[238] On a more practical level, John Osborne claims, the aspiration of having public schools in the antebellum southern states was greatly "undermined by population distribution, by reluctance of the rich to pay the necessary taxes, and by the apathy and resentment of the poor."[239] Generally speaking, while the aristocrats did not want to send their children to the pauper schools, poor families needed their children as additional labor forces and considered education in general "an impractical frill".[240] Although scores of private universities and colleges had been established by the 1850s, illiteracy remained terribly high; in 1860, eighteen per cent of southern adult whites were illiterate and thirty-five per cent of the children between 1-

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in the Antebellum South (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 1.

[235] Pauline Maier et al, eds. *Inventing America: A History of the United States* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 390.

[236] Horace Mann, *Lectures on Education* (Boston: WM. B. Fowle and N. Capen, 1845), 13.

[237] Maier et al, eds. *Inventing America*, 391.

[238] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor,* 112.

[239] John Osborne et al, eds. *The Old South: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1968), 153.

[240] Susie King Taylor, *A Black Woman's Civil War Memoirs*, eds. Patricia W. Romero and Willie Lee Rose (Princeton New Jersey M. Wiener Pub, 1988), 35.

18 years old did not attend school.[241] The ignorance among the community of gentility strikes Frederick Law Olmsted when he observes in his travel narrative: "I have been astonished by the profound ignorance and unmitigated stupidity I have found in some planters of the State, of considerable wealth, and owning large numbers of slaves."[242]

Although prior to the 1830s, planter children were often sent to northern colleges, such as Harvard or Yale for boys and female academies for young ladies, a spirit of anti-intellectualism started to grow in reaction to the rising northern abolitionist movement.[243] "In the minds of conservative Southerners," Clement Eaton claims, "public education now became associated with the 'isms' of the North—abolitionism, feminism, pacifism, Fourierism, Grahamism."[244] An active propaganda, therefore, was initiated by preachers, politicians, and editors to prevent students from enjoying their education in the North, while "textbooks were purged from any criticism of slavery" in southern colleges.[245] Exemplary of this anti-northern sentiment is an editorial in the southern newspaper *The Standard*, in which university alumni Joseph A. Engelhard anonymously declared: "We must have certain security[…]that at [Southern] State Universities at least we will have no canker worm preying at the vitals of Southern institutions."[246] In short, it could be argued that the educational institution of the antebellum southern states was a microcosm of southern culture and its practices.

The education of the planter offspring started at home, in the plantation household or on plantation schools. Until reaching their eighth to thirteenth year—depending on the manner of childrearing in planter families—children were primarily educated by their mothers. In the examined mistresses's diaries, it becomes evident that both planter sons and daughters were raised in a literate culture. Maternal training involved—besides music, history, modern languages, and cultural graces—(novel) reading and writing. Numerous diaries reveal the advanced level of books young girls and boys needed to read. "Remember, I had not yet planted my tenth birthday tree," Mrs. Pryor recollects, "these were the books deemed suitable for my age,—Abercrombie's 'Intellectual Philosophy,' Watts on the 'Improvement of the Mind,' Goldsmith's 'History

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[241] Bruce Collins, *White Society in the Antebellum South* (London and New York: Longman, 1985), 105.
[242] Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slaves,* 501.
[243] Osborne et al, eds. *The Old South,* 154.
[244] Clement Eaton, *The Mind of the Old South*. (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 305.
[245] Ibid.
[246] Michael Thomas Smith, *A Traitor and a Scoundrel: Benjamin Hedrick and the Cost of Dissent* (Cranbury, N.J.: Rosemont Publishing & Printing Corp., 2003), 74.

of Greece,' and somebody's 'Natural Philosophy.'"[247] In *Within the Plantation Household*, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese mentions that, while living on an isolationist plantation, novel reading could serve an escapist function for both planter daughters and mistresses.[248] In the same manner, Emma le Conte reveals her delight in books as an escape to the "hard school" she was bred up in: "If it had not been for my books it would indeed have been hard to bear. But in them I have lived and found my chief source of pleasure. I would take refuge in them from the sadness all around if it were not for other work to be done."[249]

Besides maternal instruction, planter fathers and tutors shared educational responsibilities in the plantation household as well. Mrs. Burwell reminiscences in her diary:

> The lady presiding over this establishment possessed a cultivated mind, bright conversational powers, and gentle temper, with a force of character which enabled her judiciously to direct the affairs of her household, as well as the training and education of her children.[...]She helped the boys with their Latin, and the girls with their compositions. In her quiet way she governed, controlled, suggested everything; so that her presence was required everywhere at once.[250]

We can infer from Mrs. Burwell's statement that because the mistress's "presence was required everywhere at once" some extra help in the education of her children was needed. Fox-Genovese has pointed out that in most planter families "fathers took charge of their daughters' formal education" as planter mothers were not infrequently overwhelmed with added domestic responsibilities.[251] Emma le Conte writes during wartime that she "ought to try to persevere in working at it"—her education—although she "could not very well study Physics and Latin while father is away."[252] Fathers, too, capitalized on their authority in the choice of tutors and academies. Mrs. Burwell relates that her father, when her sister and she were rather young, determined they "should have proper educational advantages " and subsequently hired an accomplished Danish tutor, who was "better versed in many other languages than in our own".[253] Nancy

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[247] Pryor *My Day,* 45.
[248] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 262.
[249] Emma le Conte, *Diary 1864-1865* (Chapel Hill: Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, 1938), 13.
[250] Burwell, *A Girl's Life in Virginia,* 84.
[251] Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household,* 111.
[252] le Conte, *Diary 1864-1865,* 14.
[253] Burwell, *A Girl's Life in Virginia,* 190.

Bostick de Saussure recounts another experience of home education in her diary, that of a schoolhouse on the plantation. Next to a governess, the planter children had a music teacher who employed the youngsters “while mother was busy housekeeping.”[254] Because it was not a lady’s occupation to teach at public schools, the occupation of governess on the plantation was a marginal, but accepted one in the community of gentility.

Above all, the southern educational institution was vital to the community of gentility; in this institution, namely, planter children from the age eight to thirteen started their journey of becoming the epitomization of decorous master and mistresses.[255] As plantation mistresses had received little education in their younger years, they were rather ill-equipped to educate their children. Mrs. Pryor was sent to a Female Seminary, because “there it was supposed I should learn everything my aunt could not teach me.”[256] Mary Norcott Bryan, in addition, explains the necessity of educational institutions: “I had led such a happy roving life that my education was sadly neglected, so when I was thirteen years old, I was put in a boarding school.”[257] Whereas planter sons were sent to colleges to follow in their father’s footsteps and improve their political and economic status, young ladies were taught to “gracefully” enter “into the responsibilities of their station.”[258] Despite the anti-intellectualist movement of the 1840s and 1850s, planter daughters received single-sex education at both northern and southern ladies’ academies, where they were trained for around two to five years. At the start of the academic year of 1854, at the Wesleyan Female College in Macon, Georgia, Judge Herschel V. Johnson stressed the relevance of gender-differentiated education in his Address:

> Female education is such a development and cultivation of her physical, mental, and moral powers, as will qualify Woman, to perform her part, in the sphere of action, to which she has been assigned, in the order of Providential arrangement.[…]Her mission is to dispense the amenities and charities of social life, and to direct, as well as adorn, the domestic circle.[259]

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[254] de Saussure, *Old Plantation Days,* 43.
[255] Catherine Clinton suggests in *The Plantation Mistress* that the education of young ladies could serve as a means to “marry up” in southern society. See p.124.
[256] Pryor, *My Day,* 44.
[257] Bryan, *A Grandmother’s Recollections of Dixie,* 20.
[258] Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household,* 257.
[259] Herschel V. Johnson, *Address by the Hon. H.V. Johnson, At the Commencement Exercises of the Wesleyan Female College, Macon, Georgia, on the 14th of July, 1853* (Macon: Georgia Telegraph Print, 1853), 11-12.

Similarly, Catherine Clinton argues that, unlike their northern counterparts, southern young ladies were not trained "to explore new avenues of experience" but had a pre-ordained role as wives and mothers in the community of gentility.[260] A female student who received a similar education as her male counterpart "is *learned*, but not *educated*; not *cultivated* but *unsexed,*" according to Herschel V. Johnson.[261]

Female academies, which served as disseminators of cultural ideals, therefore, validated the antebellum doctrine of the "separate spheres". The southern curriculum at these academies involved history, philosophy, classics, modern languages, mathematics, religious texts, and geography in addition to domestic skills and etiquette. Not only the curricula of antebellum academies were gender-differentiated, the geography of these universities endorsed the divinely appropriated gender roles, too. Southern male and female academies "operated as separate schools and were physically separated as well," Farnham observes.[262] "I had my first real love affair then, Mr. Corcoran's nephew was the subject," Mary Norcott Bryan divulges, "and how we managed to evade the teachers and pass notes even at the church door, is a mystery to me even now." While attending college, the planter offspring were under strict control and supervision of principles, professors and ministers, nevertheless, planter parents were able to enforce a great deal of influence in these years as well. In numerous letters, Catherine Clinton observes, parents managed demanding "letters on a regular basis and forwarded their own advice at every opportunity."[263] Then again, both upper-class mothers and fathers regretted the day they had to wave their children goodbye. "I went for a time to a boarding school near Columbia, at the early age of twelve, and at fifteen went North with my sister, your great-aunt Catherine Robert," Mrs. de Saussure recalls, "father objected to my leaving home again, as he wanted me near him, but mother said education was all important, and the personal sacrifice had to be made."[264]

A great deal of mistresses look back at their school years as the happiest times of their lives. Even though the young ladies were conscious of the policy of social control at the female academies, nonetheless, they were able to escape the isolation of the family plantation and could engage in social activities with their peers. Mrs. Bryan looks back at her school years:

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[260] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress,* 137.
[261] Johnson*, Address by the Hon. H.V. Johnson,* 13.
[262] Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle,* 51.
[263] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress,* 134.
[264] de Saussure, *Old Plantation Days,* 43.

> But my most delightful experience, and which quite made up for anything bad that had gone before, was my school life at Washington City.[...]We attended President Buchanan's levees, admired Miss Lane's graciousness, took walks to the Capitol and heard great speeches, went to art galleries, and best of all had an informal soiree every month at the school, to which our sweethearts always managed to come.[265]

Yet, there were also young ladies who were not eager to leave their homes or did not agree with their predestined roles in life due to their personalities and critical minds. As a young lady, Mrs. Burwell loathed the idea that females were cultivated to be a mere "ornament to the drawing-room."[266] Also, abolitionist Sarah Grimké was of the opinion, in her younger years, that "[...]the powers of my mind have never been allowed expansion; in childhood they were repressed by the false idea that a girl need not have the education I coveted."[267] Mrs. Merrick, moreover, addresses the hypocrisy of southern elite society: "They have decided that brain work is detrimental to the full development of the organization of the female; but they do not worry over the effects of tobacco, whisky and certain vile habits upon the congenital vigor of both boys and girls."[268] Irrespective of the social control and expectations exerted on these young ladies, they were spirited enough to voice their own critical opinions on the current state of affairs. Reviewing the coming of age of the planter offspring, it is safe to say that, as young members of the gentile slaveholding community, the planter children were strongly disciplined to fit the "collective identity template" and to follow in their parents' footsteps. The manner in which class, race and sexual differentiations were constructed from an early age on in antebellum southern society can be explained by social psychology theory, which was founded by Floyd Henry Allport. In his book *Social Psychology* (1924), Allport refers to the "collective mind", sameness, and control of an army, political party, or trade union, which can be applied to the gentile slaveholding community as well. "Collective consciousness and behavior are simply the aggregation of those states and reactions of individuals, which owing to similarities of constitution, training, and common stimulations, are possessed of a similar character," Allport

[265] Burwell, *A Girl's Life in Virginia,* 21.
[266] Ibid, 194.
[267] Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 64.
[268] Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land,* 15.

maintains.[269] While some politicians "try 'to keep their finger on the pulse of the public'", likewise, the instructors of planter children—parents, governesses, ministers, and college professors—actively upheld the "collective identity template" of the slaveholding community in the education of the next generation. Therefore, the "collective mind" of the slaveholding community "is not an entity in itself, but a practical working concept," which serves as a "means of acquiring widespread control."[270]

This "widespread control" or "absolute morality" inherent in the southern slaveholding community, created, according to psychologists Smith and Mackle, a strong "group membership" which supported their "need for mastery as well as connectedness."[271] Belonging to such a close-knit community was important for defining the self. It offered the in-group members "support and confidence" in their "way of understanding the world."[272] Although some mistresses explained in their diaries that it was not easy to be bred in such a dogmatic society, for the majority of the young ladies the close-knit community of gentility provided them a strong sense of belonging. In other words, because "group membership contributes so directly to individual self-identity", resistance of the planter offspring to the doctrines of the slaveholding community not only negatively affected their group membership, but also their derived self-esteem, which in turn served as a great incentive to meet the community's expectations.[273]

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[269] Floyd Henry Allport, *Social Psychology (*Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1924), 6.
[270] Ibid.
[271] Smith and Mackle, *Social Psychology*, 204.
[272] Ibid.
[273] Smith and Mackle, *Social Psychology,* 229.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Problem of Sisterhood
Bonds Between Plantation Mistresses and Slave Women in the Big House

And she had nothing to fall back on, not maleness, not whiteness, not ladyhood, in the desolation of her reality, she may very well have invented herself.
—Toni Morrisson

I'm always true to you darling
In my fashion.
Yes I'm always true to you, darlin'
In my way.
—Cole Porter

Considering the entrenched formalities and intricacies surrounding the concept of intimacy in the Old South, the study of intimacy between the southern lady and female domestic servants in the private sphere is one worthy of note. The fact that slaveholding women were largely restricted to the home in their wedded state had a dichotomous implication for intimacy with their female slaves. It could be argued that the widespread "separate spheres" ideology encouraged bonds of sisterhood allowing mistresses to exhibit *fluid identities* along gender lines, and to drop their guards in the intimate sphere. Conversely, as the mistress held ultimate sway over the plantation household, she needed to wear a mask of authority, every so often revealing *fluid identities* when resorting to unladylike haphazard violent behavior, thereby complicating intimacy with her black womenfolk. As a rule, interactions between the plantation mistress and slave women were fraught with ambivalence and brittleness. Living and working under close control in the same domestic spaces portended a number of anomalies between the "sisters" of dissimilar racial and status positions.

In this last chapter, the extent to which the plantation mistress's behavior towards her female house slaves, living and working side by side in the same physical *intimate sphere*, corresponded to southern upper-class notions of womanhood will be examined. In order to disclose everyday interactions between the mistress and female house servants in the Big House, the focus will lie on the themes of interracial intimacy, racialization, sexual exploitation, and "infrapolitics" as portrayed by mistresses's diaries and female slave narratives.

Interracial Intimacy

Female slave narratives, travel journals, and mistresses's diaries alike testify to the fact that mistresses were, time and again, greatly attached to their female slaves. Travelling throughout the South, Olmsted observes in *A Journey in the Seaboard Slaves* how slaves "in the most comfortable of wearing apparel" were sitting alongside their owners in the most fashionable carriages.[274] "Touch that slave, if you dare," OImsted notices, "and you will see the owner's attachment."[275] Mrs. Burwell's affection towards her slaves becomes evident when she links their position to that of the planter offspring. "A mistress became offended if the faults of her servants were alluded to," Mrs. Burwell explains, "just as persons become displeased when the faults of their children are discussed."[276] It becomes clear, furthermore, that the figment of the trustworthy and resourceful black Mammy held a superior position in the plantation household. "Her importance was derived from her alleged influence over whites", Clinton argues, "in her tutelary role, she was, in fact, invented as the desired collaborator within slave society."[277] The Mammy frequently provided the mistress with practical as well as emotional support, which is illustrated in Mrs. Ripley's diary. "I felt then and there mammy would be a comfort for me and a real help," she declares after the war, "and so she proved, in all my sunny life in the plantation home and in the dark days of the war, too."[278] Accordingly, Fox-Genovese observes that Sarah Gayle—a slaveholding woman who recorded plantation life in Alabama from 1827 to 1835—like most mistresses "saw nothing contradictory between her deep affection for—and emotional dependence on—people whom she proposed to hold in perpetual slavery[…]."[279]

Next to a good deal of attachment, both slave narratives and mistresses's private writings show in what ways slaveholding women sympathized with their female domestic servants. In *The Story of Mattie J. Jackson* (1866), Jackson explains how her mother's mistress behaved disinterestedly towards her mother and her sickly

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[274] Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slaves; With Remarks on Their Economy* (New York: Dix and Edwards, 1856), 317.
[275] Ibid.
[276] Letitia M. Burwell, *A Girl's Life in Virginia Before the War* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company Publishers, 1895), 42.
[277] Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 202.
[278] Eliza Moore Chinn McHatton Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans, Being Recollections of my Girlhood,* (New York and London: D. Appleton and Company, 1912), 212.
[279] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 26.

brother.[280] The mistress was reluctant to make her mother's tasks easier and was, moreover, not allowed to give her son any attention. When the mistress saw, however, that the little boy was in a sorry plight, she immediately ordered grave clothes and gave Jackson's mother time to bury her son.[281] This scene discloses a sense of compassion; when the mistress came face to face with a mother, rather than a slave, stricken with grief, she sympathized with her. Similarly, Frances Kemble, holding antislavery convictions, reveals in her diary that she befriends her female slaves and listens to their cries for help, irrespective of her husband's admonitions that her "existence among slaves was an element of danger to the 'institution'".[282] "My way of speaking to the people, of treating them, of living with them, the appeals I make to their sense of truth, of duty, of self-respect, the infinite compassion and the human consideration I feel for them," Frances utters, "-- all this of course makes my intercourse with them dangerously suggestive of relations far different from anything they have ever known."[283] Whether or not these mistresses identified with their black womenfolk along gender lines remains open to the question; however, it is clear that they reveal the "potential to identify common ground across racial lines" which "offered them the possibility of transcending slavery and viewing one another as individuals, allowing a measure of intimacy."[284]

By and large, southern ladies showed a propensity to—consciously or subconsciously—use intimacy as a functional tool to keep their black womenfolk in check. Exemplary is Mary Chesnut who, by having a close relationship with her maid Molly, establishes a successful joint effort in running the plantation household. Although Molly's stubbornness shines through the diary, Chesnut emphasizes she is "the best cook, the best dairy maid, the best washerwoman, and the best chambermaid I know."[285] Their affiliation can be best explained as a mother-daughter type of relationship. Mrs. Chesnut does not lump Molly together with the other slaves, but sees Molly's true character and accepts her unconditionally. When at a certain point a drunken man

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[280] Mattie J. Jackson was born in St. Louis, Missouri, around 1846. *The Story of Mattie J. Jackson,* recorded by her stepmother L.S. Thompson, was published at Sentinel Office in Lawrence, Massachusetts, in the year 1866 when she arrived in the North as a free woman.

[281] Mattie J. Jackson, "The Story of Mattie J. Jackson," in *Six Women's Slave Narratives,* ed. Lucy S. Thompson (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1988), 12.

[282] Anne Frances Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839* (New York: Harpers and Brothers, 1863), 172.

[283] Ibid, 171.

[284] Marli F., Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-1850.* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 2.

[285] Mary Boykin Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War,* ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 699.

harasses Mary Chesnut, Molly utters: "If he was sober I could whip him—fair fight—and drunk as he is, I kin throw him over the banister—ef he so much teches you."[286] As a reassuring mother, Chesnut keeps her hand on Molly's head while Molly sits on the floor next to her chair. Moreover, Mary Chesnut regularly takes Molly into her confidence and vice versa: "Molly will tell me all when she comes back—and more."[287] Although the mistress accepts her loyal maid regardless of her bad manners and allows some extent of intimacy, the implicit or explicit underlying motive for treating Molly well were, first and foremost, utility considerations. Indeed, the relationship between the mistress and Molly bears relation to the persistent nineteenth-century rhetoric of benevolent paternalism, which, according to Lawrence Goodheart "entangles the donor and recipient in a reciprocal relationship of giving and receiving, dominance and subordination" and "affirmed the worthiness and pre-eminence of the benefactor".[288]

In return, slave women were not reluctant to show some intimacy towards their mistresses in both the private and public sphere. Not only Mary Chesnut reveals affection for her cherished slave in her diary, she also describes how her unconditional love for Molly is reciprocated. Mrs. Chesnut writes: "Molly came to complain—a black catalogue of crimes urged against Team, the overseer—crimes against me, not against 'cullud people.'"[289] Also, according to Chesnut—writing in the post-bellum period demonstrating that slavery does not have to be cruel by definition—Molly made no attempt to disguise her affection toward her mistress, both verbally and non-verbally. She proclaimed her loyalty stating that she would "Never lef' Missis for no husband an' childen in this world," and had put a bouquet of flowers on the center table for her mistress on one day.[290] Molly was even in the position to give Mrs. Chesnut advice: "Missis, listen to the guns. Burn up everything. Mrs. Lyon says they are sure to come, and they'll put in their newspapers whatever you write here every day," whereupon the mistress granted Molly's request.[291] These incidents of intimacy unveil that Molly felt safe and was allowed to move freely in Mary Chesnut's proximity, trusting the mistress's assessments.

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[286] Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 462.
[287] Ibid, 355.
[288] Lawrence Goodheart, "The Ambiguity of Benevolence," *Reviews in American History* 33 (2005) Johns Hopkins University Press: 359–360.
[289] Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War,* 248.
[290] Ibid, 829.
[291] Ibid, 453.

Just as plantation mistresses not infrequently sympathized with their female slaves on the basis of shared womanhood, black womenfolk commiserated with their female superiors from time to time. Mary Prince showed great compassion for her mistress, who was evidently subdued by her patriarchal husband. In one incident Prince even stood up for her mistress when she was dreadfully hit by her husband. She recalls: "I strove with all my strength to get her away from him for she was all black and blue with bruises."[292] Indeed, she ranks affection towards her mistress with her mother, stating: "I was truly attached to her, and, next to my own mother, loved her better than any creature in the world."[293] This is one of a number of narrated scenes, which indicates that slave women felt some sort of sisterhood with their mistresses. While slaveholding women frequently used intimacy as a psychological tool, slave women capitalized on shared motherhood to further their own ends. Case in point are Frances Kemble's slaves who flattered and called upon the mistress as mediator and custodian to exert some influence on the master. "These niceties of station were not lost on the servants, who knew that the mistress they served was herself accountable to a higher authority," Fox-Genovese reveals.[294]

Observing both mistresses's diaries and slave narratives, the reader may realize that intimacy between a southern lady and female domestic servants served multiple purposes. Both burdened by patriarchy in the Old South, albeit in unmistakably distinctive ways, one may argue that some degree of sisterhood may have existed in the Big House. As we have seen in Mrs. Kemble's diary, however, ladies who pushed the sympathetic attitudes they held towards their black counterparts beyond due proportions, were considered a threat to the institution of slavery. One also has to keep in mind that intimacy was a commonly-used functional tool for both white and black womenfolk to reach their respective objectives. As the mistress held all responsibility for dealings in the station of the household, one gets the impression that the mistress was "relieved from direct surveillance" in the interlocking social relations with domestic servants; nonetheless, the social and divine order remained in place regarding every

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[292] Mary Prince, "The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave," in *Six Women's Slave Narratives,* ed. Thomas Pringle (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1988), 13.
[293] Ibid, 1.
[294] Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household,* 141.

type of social interaction in the Big House, and was carefully checked by the master—the final authority.[295]

Racialization and Sexual Exploitation

Companionship between mistresses and female domestic servants was often complicated by the racialization and sexual exploitation of slave women—a reality of relations based on ownership according to the slave law**.** In part, the level of intimacy between black and white womenfolk was circumscribed by the lack of obvious shared traditional feminine virtues as defined by public discourse. While a sexual division of labor concerning house slaves was maintained in the Big House, nevertheless, slave women were, as a rule, defeminized and put on par with cattle in order to psychologically excuse their exploitation. Strikingly, a recurrent theme in a great number of female slave narratives is that black womenfolk, working in the plantation household, seemed to have shared Victorian traditional norms and values to a great extent.[296] In *The Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), Harriett Jacobs affirms the ideal of domesticity by reiterating how much she longs to create a safe home for her children.[297] Also, Mattie Jackson reveals in *The Story of Mattie J. Jackson* (1866) how black womenfolk deemed piety important by recalling how her mother never failed to reiterate the worth of having a good Christian heart.[298] In spite of this, the domestic servants admit, the fact that slave women were often separated from their husbands and children, and were exploited in every possible sense, prevented them from adhering to southern notions of womanhood.[299]

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[295] Milette Shamir, *Inexpressible Privacy: The Interior Life of Antebellum American Literature*. (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2006), 42.
[296] See "Gender Convention, Ideals, and Identity" in *Black Women and Slavery in the Americas: More Than Chattel*, ed. David Barry Gasper& Darlene Clark Hine (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996) by Brenda E. Stevenson. Stevenson argues how female slaves in the Old South combined gender-specific behavior of Western Europe and West and Central Africa with the Victorian norms and values prevalent in the United States to develop their own African American system of traditions, norms, and values.
[297] Harriet Ann Jacobs was born as a slave in Edenton, North Carolina in 1813. When her sexually-abusive master sent her to a country plantation, she hid for seven years in an attic and escaped to the North in 1842 where she was later accompanied by her two daughters. Lydia Maria Child, a fervent abolitionist, became interested in Jacobs' narrative, written under the pseudonym of Linda Brent, and both edited and published *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* in Boston, in 1861.
[298] "The Story of Mattie J. Jackson," 20.
[299] See "Gender Convention, Ideals, and Identity" by Brenda E. Stevenson. She argues that idealized versions of female passivity and helplessness with regard to slaves were absurd. In the Old South many slave families were female-headed households, since female slaves often lived separately from their husbands. Besides, husbands did not have any legal rights, excluding the right of protection. Slave women

Slave narratives, in general, abound with illustrations of the ways in which planter families have treated their "black family" as "the Other" by means of objectification and racialization.[300] Mary Prince explains in *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave* (1831) how her five-year old mistress played with her as with a pet and called her "my little nigger."[301] In addition, while Prince specifies that "black people are treated like cattle, without natural affection," Jacobs states that "women are considered of no value" and are "put on par with animals."[302] Moreover, Lucy A. Delaney mentions in *Darkness Cometh to the Light, Struggles for Freedom* (1891), the inhuman attitude of the mistress towards her: "Lucy, you don't want to work, you are a lazy good-for-nothing nigger!"[303] Jackson, too, proves the fact that house slaves were not treated like human beings by explaining how her mistress did not want "the nigger's clothes" to be washed in the same tub as the mistresses' clothes, indicating the fear of contamination.[304] As for Mary Chesnut, she easily stereotyped general slaves as "lazy, dirt, slatternly, idle, and ill-smelling by nature."[305] Particularly, after several rebellions she was horrified by these "horrid brutes—savages, monsters—" but was nonetheless "ready to trust their own yard."[306] Mary Chesnut did not lump her domestic servants together, rather, she saw them as human beings with different characters displaying

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became stabilizing forces in the slave family, and made day-to-day decisions. Slave women could not maintain their value of domesticity, seeing that they constantly performed labor for their owners and thus could not give their undivided attention to their husbands and children.

[300] See Toni Morrison's "Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination" in *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror,* edited by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997). In this essay, Morrison discusses that in the colonial era, "white" Europeans pursuing the American Dream articulated their power and freedom against the notion of enslavement—the "black" Africans they had imported. "What rose up out of collective needs to allay internal fears and to rationalize external exploitation," Morrison states, "was an African-Americanism—a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire that is uniquely American."

[301] Mary Prince, born in Bermuda in the late 1780s, recorded her slave experiences in Barbados in the account *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave*. Editing the first female slave narrative from the Americas, Thomas Pringle emphasized that he merely edited the record to the extent "to render it clearly intelligible."[301] The narrative was first published in London and Edinburgh in 1831, and was supplied to anti-slavery associations across Great Britain. See also Kimberly W. Benston's *Black Literature and Literary Theory* edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Routledge, 1984). In this account, Benston discusses the naming and unnaming of slaves as part of a racialization process.

[302] Prince, "The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave," 9; Harriet Ann Jacobs, "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl," in *The Classic Slave Narratives,* ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Ontario and New York: Penguin Books Canada Limited, 1987), 380.

[303] Delaney, Lucy A, "Darkness Cometh the Light: Struggles For Freedom," in *Six Women's Slave Narratives*, ed. J.T. Smith (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1988), 25. Delaney paid a great deal of attention to her mother's attempts to prove she was once a free slave in *Darkness Cometh the Light: Struggles for Freedom*, published by J.T. Smith in 1891.

[304] Ibid,18.

[305] Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 245.

[306] Ibid, 211-212.

both good and bad traits. Even though Mrs. Chesnut does not racialize her slaves in her diary, she suggests that intimacy could also be "used" as a tool of control: Mary Chesnut rationalizes the possession of "good" slaves by stressing that southern elite planters make or break their slaves, that is to say, by providing good treatment slaves would be useful, happy and obedient.

Besides the objectification of slave women as "the Other", sexual extortion was a poignant reality in the lives of both white and black womenfolk. As prudery reigned on the part of southern ladies, their male counterparts were condoned to maintain a "double standard" concerning sexual relations.[307] In *Southern Honor*, Wyatt-Brown traces the three simple rules southern gentlemen of distinction needed to observe in order to "suffer very little public disapproval", when committing adultery with slave women.[308] Firstly, Brown claims, "the disparity between rank and race" between plantation master and slave woman should be apparent.[309] The concubine, in addition, ought to be "sexually attractive in the white men's eyes", excusing the aberrant deed.[310] Moreover, the master should abide by an honorable and principled moral ethic rather than having a history of dissolution. Indeed, when committing such a sexual misdeed "transcendent silence was the proper policy" towards both black and white company, Wyatt-Brown asserts.[311]

Although slaveholding women were not supposed to speak about sexual matters in both the private and public sphere, they did point to the sexual transgressions committed by male planters. Mary Chesnut powerfully identifies the hypocrisy of the poor state of morality inherent in the planter class:

> But what do you say to this - to a magnate who runs a hideous black harem, with its consequences, under the same roof with his lovely white wife and his beautiful and accomplished daughters? He holds his head high and poses as the model of all human virtues to these poor women whom God and the laws have given him. From the height of his awful majesty he scolds and thunders at them

[307] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics & Behavior in the Old South.* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1982), 293. Whereas passionlessness, passivity, and prudeness were vital assets for a true woman in the nineteenth century, male libido was accepted and encouraged. "To repress natural impulse was to defy nature itself, leading to prissiness and effeminacy," Wyatt-Brown maintains.
[308] Ibid, 308.
[309] Ibid.
[310] Ibid.
[311] Ibid*,* 126. See *Southern Honor* by Wyatt-Brown and *The Plantation Mistress* by Catherine Clinton for more information on female adultery and biracial sexual interactions. Contrary to southern planters legitimately upholding the "double standard", Wyatt-Brown and Clinton argue, feminine adultery was considered taboo in southern slave society."A woman ought not be touched 'even by the breath of suspicion,' and could never fully recover her good name once it was blemished," Wyatt-Brown argues.

> as if he never did wrong in his life. Fancy such a man finding his daughter reading Don Juan. 'You with that immoral book!' he would say, and then he would order her out of his sight.[312]

While the archetypal master of the house commits adultery with various slave women, Mrs. Chesnut explains, at the same time he pretends to be the paragon of morality by correcting his daughter for reading a debased book. The wives of the planters, in turn, feel inhibited to correct their husband's debauched behavior and "were glad to let him do as he pleased in peace if they could only escape his everlasting fault-finding, and noisy bluster, making everybody so uncomfortable."[313] Indeed, Mary Chesnut observes that the majority of mistresses and their daughters, coming face to face with sexual exploitation, "prefer to adore their father as model of all earthly goodness" albeit it is "as plain before their eyes as sunlight."[314] Whereas these "make-believe angels" refrained from addressing such painful matter to their husbands, they frequently burst out in wrath toward the helpless victims—the sexually exploited slave women—knowing they had to come to terms with their husband's infidelity and the lifelong confrontation with sin.

Frances Kemble was bitterly aware of the hypocritical sexual "double standard" in the Christian system of the Old South as well. "Now it appears very evident that there is no law in the white man's nature which prevents him from making a colored woman the mother of his children, but there *is* a law on his statute books forbidding him to make her his wife," Mrs. Kemble blatantly reveals in her diary.[315] She points to the series of laws enacted in most southern states delegitimizing interracial marriages.[316] Verena Stolcke, Professor of Social Anthropology at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, elucidates in "A New World Engendered: The Making of the Iberian Transatlantic Empires" for what reasons Cuban parents, and the Spanish colonies at large, objected to interracial marriages in the nineteenth century. The following grounds for banning interracial marriages in the Spanish colonies bears relation to the racist rhetoric used in the nineteenth-century American states as well:

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[312] Mary B. Chesnut, *A Diary From Dixie* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1905), 114.
[313] Ibid, 115.
[314] Ibid, 169.
[315] Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839,* 15.
[316] Charles F. Robinson, *Dangerous Liaisons: Sex and Love in the Segregated South* (Fayetteville, AR: The University of Arkansas Press, 2005), 11. See also *"Miscegenation": Making Race in America* by Elise Lemire. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), and *Interracial Intimacy: The Regulation of Race and Romance* by Rachel F. Moran (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2001).

> The ‘absolute inequality’ of the couple, of their own ‘known purity of blood’, and of the ‘remarkable and transcendental stain’ on their reputation, of the ‘degradation of the offspring’, and of the ‘disgrace and discontent’ the marriage would bring to the family.[317]

In her journal, Kemble explains that she is repelled by the idea that masters, who have “a natural repugnance[…]to any alliance with the black race”, are sexually intimate with their female servants “because it is the *interest* of these planters to increase the number of their human property, and that they add to their revenue by the closest intimacy with creatures that they loathe, in order to reckon among their wealth the children of their body.”[318] Similarly, Clinton maintains that through fathering slaves, “planters gained an increase in capital—the dollar value of slave offspring—with a genetic dividend into the bargain.”[319]

Through the window of slave narratives, one may observe that female slaves were not able to comply with an essential Victorian principle of womanhood, purity, seeing their continuous sexual exploitation, resulting in tensions between “lascivious Jezebels” and “pure” mistresses. In *Behind the Scenes* (1868), Elizabeth Keckly divulges the truth about how she has been raped for four years by a white man at plantation Hillsboro’.[320] “I do not care to dwell upon this subject, for it is one that is fraught with pain. Suffice it to say, that he persecuted me for four years, and I--I--became a mother,” Keckly painfully recollects.[321] She affirms the southern justification of the sexual “double standard” inherent in the community of gentility, by stating that her son “must blame the edicts of that society which deemed it no crime to undermine the virtue of girls in my then position.”[322] The image of the lewd and overly sexual “Jezebel”, Fox-Genovese clarifies, “eased the consciences of white men by suggesting that black women asked for the treatment they received.”[323]

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[317] Verena Stolcke, “A New World Engendered: The Making of the Iberian Transatlantic Empires,” in *A Companion to Gender History*, ed. Teresa A. Meade and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks (Malden, MA,USA, Oxford, UK, and Victoria, Australia: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 384-385.
[318] Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839,* 15.
[319] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress,* 205.
[320] Elizabeth Keckly was born a slave in Virginia, 1818. In her narrative, *Behind the Scenes*, published at G.W. Carleton & Co. Publishers, New York, in 1868, she tells the impressive story of how she developed from a slave to a dress-maker and personal maid to First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln, living in the White House for four years.
[321] Elizabeth Keckly, *Behind the Scenes* (New York: G.W. Carleton & Co., Publishers, 1868), 39.
[322] Ibid.
[323] Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household,* 292.

Moreover, in *The Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,* Harriett Jacobs explains how the sexual threats of Dr. Flint, her master, started when she was still a young child: "He tried his utmost to corrupt the pure principles my grandmother had instilled. He peopled my young mind with unclean images, such as only a vile monster could think of."[324] Whereas a white woman had the right of protection from her husband, Jacobs explains that she could not turn to anyone for protection. She puts her mistress on the spot: "The mistress, who ought to protect the helpless victim, has no other feelings towards her but of jealousy and rage."[325] Jacobs reveals the incident of her mistress loosing all self-control and showing intimacy as a tool of repression: she whispered sexual insinuations into Jacob's ear at night, as if it was the master, in order to find out how she would respond. It becomes clear that Jacobs' mistress felt victimized by patriarchal society considering the "legal" sexual exploitation of female slaves, and moved to spontaneous acts of repression, physical violence, and lethal threats.

Jealous mistresses, who, in all probability, realized that the ills of slave society damaged their self-esteem, the emotional and sexual intimacy with their husbands, and their exclusive position within the planter family, were capable of proceeding "from suspicion to hatred; from hatred to frenzie; from frenzie to injurie, murder and despair."[326] In *The Plantation Mistress*, Clinton has connected the mistresses's ferocity towards sexually abused slave women with the psychological syndrome of child abuse:

> Perhaps the best modern analogy to this pattern is the syndrome of child abuse, whose victims often become child abusers themselves. Persons trapped within a system that psychologically handicaps them frequently strike out, not at their oppressors, but at those equally helpless.[327]

Trapped in a system of virulent patriarchy, slaveholding women played the role of the victim rather than the "instigators of inhumanity."[328] Harriet Jacobs, attempting to invert the victim role of the archetypal plantation mistress, pleads southern ladies in her narrative: "Rise up, ye women that are at ease! Hear my voice ye careless daughters!

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[324] Harriet Ann Jacobs, "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl," in *The Classic Slave Narratives,* ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Ontario and New York: Penguin Books Canada Limted/ USA, 1987), 361.
[325] Ibid, 361.
[326] Elaine Hatfield and Richard L. Rapson, *Love, Sex, and Intimacy: their Psychology, Biology, and History.* (New York: Harper Collins College Publishers, 1993), 284.
[327] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress,* 188.
[328] Ibid, 196.

Give ear unto my speech."[329] Albeit addressing a white, middle-class feminist audience, former slave, Sojourner Truth, too, challenges the notion of black womanhood and the double burden of slavery—racism and sexism—in the celebrated *Arn't I a Woman?* (1851). Jacobs and Truth were two of the scores of (ex) slave women who invoked the rhetoric of true womanhood to facilitate sisterhood, and therefore, appeal for equality and justice.

For southern ladies, interacting with female domestic servants included notions of authority, patriarchy, and utility. The objectification and sexual exploitation of slave women formed the poignant backbone for the system of slavery. American feminist and writer, Kate Millet, argues in her powerful account *Sexual Politics,* that "power-structured relationships", such as sexual relationships, are defined by German sociologist Max Weber as *herrschaft*—"a relationship of dominance and subordinance."[330] Even though plantation mistresses were aware of the unchecked power concerning the master's sexual liaisons with slave women, they often times pretended or believed their impeccable husbands were not to be blamed. Indeed, rarely retaliating against their spouses—which would implicitly suggest a condemnation of slavery—the "pure" slaveholding women turned their backs on the "Jezebels" who, in their belief, caused this rivalry. Thus, while subscribing to southern upper-class notions of womanhood by accepting the system of patriarchy and the model of social hierarchy at large, these southern "make-believe angels" gave vent to their errant pent-up frustrations against their black rivals in the charged climate of the Big House.

"Infrapolitics"

If anything, the Big House represented a site of a wide-ranging political struggle within an intimate context. In *Race Rebels*, Robin D.G. Kelley, Professor of American Studies and Ethnicity at the University of Southern California, deals with the term "infrapolitics" to describe how oppositional actions of the black working class from the Jim Crow Era to the present can be traced back to the intimate struggle for power in the antebellum world of slavery.[331] He talks about the "hidden transcripts" which lies underneath the concerted actions to obtain black political power. Kelley explains how hidden

[329] Jacobs, "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl," title page.
[330] Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 23-24.
[331] See Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class (*New York: Free Press, 1994).

transcripts—an oppositional political culture—manifests itself in cultural practices such as religion, jokes, folk tales, and songs. Next to these hidden transcripts, female domestic servants offered resistance to white supremacy in various ways in order to exercise more influence on their own lives. Moreover, since "the microsites of familial and intimate space figure so prominently in the macropolitics of imperial rule," as Ann Laura Stoler, Willy Brandt Distinguished University Professor of Anthropology and Historical Studies at The New School of Social Research, suggested in *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, one might wonder to what extent the intimate space of the plantation household was crucial for white supremacy.[332] Both Kelley and Stoler argue, roughly put, that the personal is political, and raise important questions for the in-depth research of the complex relations between female house slaves and their mistresses.

In order to maintain some measure of self-respect, female domestic slaves frequently challenged the Victorian value of submissiveness. While slave women, working in the Big House, believed they should do good works and be of great service to their slave owners and the southern elite community at large, they also believed that if submissiveness meant an infringement on their physical and emotional well-being, they were allowed to fight back.[333] In *Closer to Freedom,* Stephanie M. H. Camp, associate Professor of History at the University of Washington, Seattle, greatly contributes to the accommodation-resistance dichotomy debate regarding the slave system in the antebellum South.[334] In her illuminating book, Camp argues that bondswomen have challenged slaveholders' paternal notions of temporal and spatial containment by everyday resistance. Noteworthy, the overt resistance displayed by female domestic servants toward authority figures, such as the plantation mistress, was complicated as personal relations with their female superiors, time and again, had been established and nurtured throughout their lives. On the other hand, seeing that female house slaves lived

[332] Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 19.
[333] Brenda E. Stevenson argues in her essay "Gender Convention, Ideals, and Identity Among Antebellum Virginia Slave Women" that resistance became part of black female conduct in plantation household to gain some control over their daily lives and futures. The celebrated feature of self-deterministic behavior could be considered a typical "masculine" characteristic, which was needed in order to survive physically and emotionally. See also Amina Mama, *Beyond the Masks: Race, Gender, and Subjectivity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 20-21. Mama argues that slave resistance was considered a slave-specific ailment, called "drapetomania", which main symptom was "an incurable urge to run away". Slaveholder's belief in "drapetomania" served to excuse slavery and "performed psychological assistance of soothing white fears of insurrection".
[334] See Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (UNC Press, 2004).

and worked in everyday proximity of the southern lady, they were able to utilize psychological resistance "derived from intimate knowledge of a mistress's weak points."[335]

Throughout history, slave women have found innovative and strategic ways to resist the dehumanization and defeminization inherent in their slave status, in accordance with their own personalities, circumstances, and physical surroundings. Clinton has pointed out in *Tara Revisited* that "while slave owners drilled into slave children the creed that a master's power superseded parental authority, many slave mothers instilled in their families a value system that defied the master's dictates."[336] The close-knit slave community was crucial in providing the nurturance, acceptance, and identification slave women needed in order to develop and maintain a sound sense of self. Fox-Genovese equally contends:

> If they defined themselves as wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters within the slave community that offered them positive images of themselves as women, they were also likely to define themselves in opposition to the images of the slaveholders for whom their status as slave ultimately outweighed their identity as woman.[337]

Without a strong base of support to live from, female house servants would not have been able to survive physically, emotionally, and socially in the cruel system of slavery.

The web of resistance in the Big House included insolence, false acquiescence, idleness, theft, stealing of time, sabotage, arson, excuses, schemes, poisoning, feigning illness, and occasionally even arson, truancy, murder, and participation in slave rebellions.[338] Like the greater part of female domestic servants, Lucy A. Delaney's mother favored rebellion over intimacy with her mistress in order to secure freedom—despite the good treatment she had received. Interestingly enough, throughout the five examined female slave narratives, domestic servants exhibited the courage needed to rise up against their authority figures and stand up for themselves, irrespective of the weighty repercussions. Case in point is Mary Prince, who by thwarting washing clothes in hot water—given her aversion for hot water on account of her disease—was able to

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[335] Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 308.
[336] Catherine Clinton, *Tara Revisited: Women, War & The Plantation Legend* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1995), 32-33.
[337] Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 329.
[338] See *Slave Rebellions* by Robin Santos Doak (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2006), *Stono: Documenting and Interpreting a Southern Slave Revolt* edited by Mark M. Smith (Colombia: University of South Carolina, 2005), and *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory* by Kenneth S. Greenberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

survive physically while taking the consequence of banishment. House slaves, moreover, often times capitalized on the slaveholders' racist views—such as being regarded as innately indolent, sluggish, and lazy black creatures—to offer covert resistance. While Caroline Merrick's "self-protected blacks allow themselves 'between times,'"[339] Olmsted observes how a southern lady complained that hardly one of her servants "can be trusted to do the simplest work without being stood over."[340]

Theft by house slaves is a topic of concern in the mistresses's diaries as well. Caroline Merrick frustratingly remarks in September, 1865:

> You know I have never locked up anything. Now I am a slave to my keys. I am robbed daily. Spoons, cups and all the utensils from the kitchen have been carried off. I am now paying little black Jake to steal some of them back for me, as he says he knows where they are. I cannot even set the bread to rise without some of it being taken.[...]It is astonishing that those we have considered most reliable are engaged in the universal dishonesty.[341]

Mary Chesnut similarly complains of burglary committed in the Big House: "I have been mobbed by my own house servants."[342] Olmsted, moreover, relates the story of a black maid "who had the reputation of being especially devout, was suspected by her mistress of having stolen from her bureau several trinkets."[343] When the domestic servant was reproached by the mistress for the lost articles that had been found in her pockets, "she replied with the confident air of knowing the ground she stood upon, 'Law, mam, don't say I's wicked; ole Aunt Ann says it allers right for us poor colored people to 'popiate whatever of de wite folk's blessins de Lord puts in our way'."[344] Indeed, Fox-Genovese contends, "the slaves rationalized their stealing as 'taking'—as a mere transmution of the masters's property from one form to another—and explicitly asserted their own sense of redistribution within a household of which they were part."[345]

In *Closer to Freedom,* Camp elucidates how bondswomen have invented strategies to challenge the notion of their bodies as objects and agricultural sources. According to Camp, enslaved people possessed three types of bodies: a body as a site of domination,

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[339] Caroline Elizabeth Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land: A Southern Matron's Memories (*New York: The Grafton Press, 1901), 20.
[340] Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slaves,* 196.
[341] Merrick, *Old Times in Dixie Land,* 78.
[342] Chesnut, *A Diary From Dixie*, 22.
[343] Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slaves,* 116.
[344] Ibid, 117.
[345] Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 96.

as a subjective experience, and as a site of pleasure.[346] As a response to Dr. Flint's sexual threats, for instance, Jacobs decided to get rid of her virginity—which would mean the loss of her purity—and slept with Mr. Sands, against the master's will, in order to get pregnant. Jacobs admits: "The condition of a slave confuses all principles of morality, and in fact, renders the practice of them impossible."[347] Interestingly, Camp observes furthermore how bondswomen created a gendered culture of pleasure as "political loaded acts" to oppose "slaveholder's scheme of domination."[348] In preparing for illegal parties off the plantation, slave women, among other things, vibrantly traded with black boat workers at seaports and exchanged products they made themselves in off-hours, and resourcefully dyed, wove, and designed their clothes. Through the reappropriation of dress, jewelry, and hair-style, slave women were able to personally express themselves as a counterbalance to the Old South's notion of their bodies as savage objects.

As the conscience and authority of the plantation household, the southern lady was expected to deal with tensions, conflicts, and threats, which were part of the intricate web of relations in the intimate sphere. Indeed, Fox-Genovese contends: "When they spoke of abilities in the housewifery, they primarily meant their ability to order, persuade, or cajole servants to do assigned tasks properly and at the proper time."[349] In other words, the disciplining of female house slaves—either verbal or physical—was fundamental for the mistress's sense of self. This did not mean, however, that managing domestic affairs was an easy task. Slaveholding women often felt that they "lacked the habit of command and the authoritative voice necessary to manage slaves."[350] Female house servants, who not infrequently used their intimate knowledge of the mistress for their own benefit, "pushed more than one mistress to the brink of distraction or despair."[351] Recalcitrant slaves, the constant threat of slave insurrection, and the everyday frustration of physical and psychological stress, were roots of emotional escalations in the Big House. Various mistresses, exhausted with too many

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[346] Stephanie Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2004), 66-67.
[347] Harriet Jacobs, "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl," 361, 385.
[348] Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 68.
[349] Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 115.
[350] Ibid, 110.
[351] Ibid, 133.

responsibilities, consequently directed their dissatisfaction, anger, and frustration at black womenfolk, and not uncommonly resorted to merciless whippings.

Having grown up with their black friends—playing together, being suckled together, and sharing beds—did not preclude plantation mistresses from exerting physical control on those very same mature slave women. "Never be kind, nor speak kindly to a slave. I have now been for some time a slave-owner, and have found, from vexatious experience in my own household, that nothing but harshness and hauteur will do with slaves," states an English lady in South Africa to the wife's editor of Mary Prince's narrative.[352] Camp, additionally, points out that the southern ladies' style of violence was more temperamental as opposed to the master's style of orderly discipline: they "yanked hair, pulled ears, smacked faces, burned skin, punched bodies, and stabbed at random."[353] Again, one has to take into account that the tools of repression used by slaveholding women varied according to personality, upbringing, region, size of the plantation, and circumstances. While Mary Prince's mistress "took pleasure in punishing her slaves in the most cruel manners with or without reason,"[354] the mistress Olmsted observed "endeavored, by kindness and by appeals to the girl's good sense, to obtain a moral control over her."[355]

As scholars Kelley and Stoler have suggested, the Big House symbolized a terrain where a personal struggle epitomized a political one. Whereas female domestic servants engaged in everyday acts of resistance as a political lever in their battle for equality, plantation mistresses sustained white supremacy by means of their disciplinary roles in the plantation household. The southern lady was supposed to act as a moral authority whereby physical punishment guaranteed "a degree of proximate stability" and maintained "the balance wheel of race, order, and rank."[356] As opposed to southern upper-class notions of womanhood, such as the Victorian values of self-restraint, patience, benevolence, and calmness, however, slaveholding women regularly resorted to unladylike haphazard violent behavior. Exemplary is Harriet Jacobs' mistress whose "nerves were so strong, that she could sit in her easy chair and see a woman whipped, till the blood trickled from every stroke of the lash." "She was a member of the church,"

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[352] Prince, "The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave," 235.
[353] Camp, *Closer to Freedom,* 43.
[354] Prince, "The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave," 194.
[355] Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slaves,* 194.
[356] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor,* 369.

Jacobs recalls, "but partaking of the Lord's supper did not seem to put her in a Christian frame of mind."[357]

In retrospect, intimacy between slaveholding women and female domestic servants was fraught with complexities: formal and personal, distant and intimate, racialization and respect, affection and utility. Although class and race were overriding factors in determining intimacy between mistresses and female slaves, Mary Chesnut, among others, suggests that some sort of sisterhood existed; indeed, in her diary, she utters: "There's no slave, after all, like a wife."[358] Although the majority of female slave narratives insinuate that companionship with their mistress was welcomed, nevertheless, a dominant theme is the double burden of slavery—particularly, sexual exploitation coupled with defeminization—discouraging intimacy. Consistent with this view, Rudman and Glick propose in *The Social Psychology of Gender* that prescriptive stereotypes are established to "serve a system justification function" in which people belong to different social and status positions considering "social category memberships"; violation of these regulatory stereotypes engenders violence, outburst of anger, or whimsicality, as we have seen in a number of cases.[359]

We may conclude that in the charged climate of the Big House, southern ladies, now and again, deviated from southern upper-class notions of womanhood, and exhibited *fluid identities*. Whether showing a propensity for sympathy and understanding or for blatant rage and violence vis-à-vis their black womenfolk—depending on factors such as personality, size of plantation, region, and upbringing—both postures defied southern elite conventions of femininity.

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[357] Jacobs, "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl," 348.
[358] Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War,* 59.
[359] Laurie A. Rudman and Peter Glick, *The Social Psychology of Gender: How Power and Intimacy Shape Gender Relations* (New York and London: The Guilford Press, 2008), 107.

CONCLUSION

Women's history has been marked by invisibility.[360] In one of his letters, Italian American anarchist Bartolomeo Vanzetti shrewdly noted: "Our friends must speak loudly to be heard by our murderers, our enemies have only to whisper or even be silent to be understood."[361] This statement reveals a basic reality of the marginality experience, which has been a reoccurring struggle throughout times past. Whereas women's voices have been strategically muted in historical records, male influence, agency, and power have never been questioned as American historians chronicled their nation's past. In *Women's America: Refocusing the Past*, Kerber and de Hart delineate the three stages of conceptualizing women's history, put forward by Gerda Lerner in the 1970s and 1980s: "compensatory history", "contribution history", and the "reconfiguration of the historical narrative."[362] The latter stage focuses, unlike the former two, on reconstructing historical generalizations by problematizing women's historical experiences.[363] Revisionist historians Firor Scott, Clinton, Fox-Genovese, and Kierner alike, could be considered contributors to the latter stage as they have subverted patriarchal historical myths and have redefined gender roles. Whether revisionist historians highlight the victimization or agency of southern ladies in the antebellum South, both postures challenge monolithic views of slaveholding women.

The aim of this study is to contribute to the ongoing revisionist debate dealing with gender history by exploring the complexities, ambiguities, and irregularities inherent in the plantations mistress's identity, self-conception, and behavior as she mediated traditional public ethos and private sentiments. By and large, intense public surveillance within the close-knit elite community functioned to uphold the fundamentals of the antebellum cultural system. While strictly adhering to southern

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[360] Joan Wallach Scott, "The Problem of Invisibility,"in *Retrieving Women's History: Changing Perceptions of the Role of Women in Politics and Society*, S. Jay Kleinberg ed. (Paris, France: Unesco Press and Oxford, New York and Hamburg: Berg Publishers Limited, 1988), 5.

[361] Marion Denman Frankfurter and Gardner Jackson, eds., *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti: Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics.* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Penguin Books, 1997), 277.

[362] Linda K. Kerber and Jane Sherron De Hart, eds., *Women's America: Refocusing the Past*, 4th ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 5. "Compensatory history" denotes, in Gerda Lerner's words, the study of previously unknown women who have made noteworthy accomplishments throughout history. Rather than exploring formerly unidentified women, the second stage of "contribution history" focuses on women who made great contributions to significant developments in American history initiated by men. The third and final stage, the "reconfiguration of the historical narrative", involves the questioning of generalized historical experiences based only on men.

[363] Ibid.

upper-class notions of womanhood in the public sphere, slaveholding women occasionally found in their *intimate spheres* a physical as well as an emotional space to unveil their public masks and vent their "true" feelings. Drawing on non-essentialist theories of identity, the close examination of life behind the scenes in the plantation household discloses both the objectification and subjectification of southern ladies. By providing a socio-cultural, historical, and psychological framework, the thesis moves beyond women's history as "topically narrow, predominantly descriptive, and[...]devoid of interpretation."[364]

The southern elite community, operating as a distinctive powerful entity in the Old South, can be described by three structural dimensions: collectivism versus individualism, masculinity versus femininity, and public sphere versus private sphere. Research in cross-cultural psychology reveals the implications of the *collectivism/individualism* continuum as it explains, among other things, cultural differences in identities, self-conceptions, and social behavior. Whereas *individualism* "pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose", *collectivism* "pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive ingroups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty."[365] Unquestionably, the southern slaveholding community maintained a collectivist outlook on life. In exchange for loyalty, solidarity, social obligations, and role fulfillment, elite community members were guaranteed group membership, protection, status, and a sense of self. Accordingly, it was not unproblematic for plantation mistresses to subvert prescriptive cultural expectations—customs, morals, manners, etiquette, and distinct gender roles—in a community where harmony, compliance, and interdependence carried great weight.

The *masculinity/femininity* continuum is another significant structural tendency that clarifies the inner workings of the southern aristocracy. The patriarchal family was the basic building block upon which the slaveholding community was built. Patriarchal ethos, or male hegemony, was particularly manifested in the Victorian "separate spheres" ideology and the Cult of True Womanhood. Whereas southern men of gentility inhabited the public world of status, influence, and power, southern ladies were

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[364] Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History.* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 1.

[365] Uichol Kim, Harry C. Triandis, and others, eds., *Individualism and Collectivism: Theory, Method, and Applications*, Vol. 18 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), 2.

restricted to the domestic sphere "without access to the means of social definition."[366] In *The Creation of Patriarchy*, an influential book in feminist theory, Gerda Lerner compares the system of patriarchy with the illustration of men and women living on stage:

> It takes considerable time for the women to understand that getting "equal" parts will not make them equal, as long as the script, the props, the stage setting, and the direction are firmly held by men. When the women begin to realize that and cluster together between the acts, or even during the performance, to discuss what to do about it, this play comes to an end.[367]

Lerner's illustration of men and women living on stage as a microcosm of the world at large can be utilized to clarify the entrenched system of patriarchy in the Old South. Antebellum influential men—ministers, judges, politicians, philosophers, anthropologists—were the "scriptwriters" of the southern ruling elite and decided its course. The system of slavery was the "stage setting"—the foundation upon which the southern upper-class community was built. Ideologies and beliefs like the protocol of the "separate spheres", the Cult of True Womanhood, benevolent paternalism, Evangelical thought, or biological determinism, were the "props" of the androcentric community to keep its women in check. The "direction" of the community of gentility was to preserve its distinct way of life, thereby powerfully reinforcing the vicious cycle of patriarchy.

The third, and last, dimensionality that sheds light on the slaveholding community is the *public/private* dichotomy. Although disregarding gender, German sociologist and philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, proposes the idea of the divided interior in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962). Inspired by Habermas, historian Milette Shamir goes beyond the essentialist distinction between intimate/public as interchangeable with female/male as proposed by a number of historians, and elaborates on a "gendered division *within* the home" in *Inexpressible Privacy*.[368] Drawing on Habermas' and Shamir's non-essentialist theories, I have used the term of *intimate spheres*, denoting a symbolical domain, rather than a physical one,

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[366] Ann D. Gordon, Mari Jo Buhle, and Nancy Schrom Dye, "The Problem of Women's History," *Liberating Women's History: Theoretical and Critical Essays,* Berenice A. Caroll, ed., (Urbana, Chicago, London: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 75.

[367] Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy.* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 13. Lerner provides a feminist theory of history by tracing the established system of patriarchy as a 2500-year process starting in as early as the fourth millennium B.C. in ancient Mesopotamian society.

[368] Milette Shamir, *Inexpressible Privacy: The Interior Life of Antebellum American Literature*. (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2006), 25.

in which southern ladies were able to nurture intimate relationships with their husbands, children, and domestic house servants outside of the public gaze. The rigid dichotomy between the private and public sphere could also denote the importance attached to outward appearance—rituals, etiquette, and sociability—by the southern aristocracy in the public sphere. Indeed, proper verbal and non-verbal communication as well as refined physical appearance and respectable behavior in the public realm, served the purpose of endorsing the elite's preeminence.

Next to a "macro approach", the study of sociology and culture, a "micro approach", the focus on psychology, to examine plantation mistresses's identities, self-conceptions, and behaviors, has been provided as well.[369] The post-structuralist concept of *fluid identities* helps explain the extent to which slaveholding women observed southern upper-class notions of womanhood in the intimate sphere. For the southern lady, conflicting community standards and harsh daily realities resulted in internal contradictions and the use of various masks. While showing a *depersonalized* identity in the public sphere, the plantation mistress occasionally revealed oxymoronic and complex identities in the intimate sphere. Indeed, the antebellum mistress, time and again, demonstrated two selves—a social identity and a personal identity. The psychological notions of *identification* and *individuation* are two extremes on the identity formation continuum.[370] Whereas *identification* "is a precondition for the development of collectivist orientation," *individuation* "leads to cognitive separation of a person from his or her environment and lays the groundwork for acquisition of the individualist orientation."[371] Likewise, as slaveholding ladies were inclined to move towards *identification* in the public arena, in the private sphere they were, every so often, able to make a shift towards *individuation*. In psychological terms, in this study the extent to which plantation mistresses exhibited depersonalized identities, adopted social identities, or moved towards identification in the intimate sphere have been examined.

A leading thread throughout the thesis is the conscious or subconscious internalization of the aristocratic "absolute morality", which deeply encroached on privacy in the intimate sphere. Throughout the mistresses's diaries, it becomes evident that the social self looms large in the intimate sphere as southern ladies observed the

[369] Kim, Triandis, and others, eds., *Individualism and Collectivism,* 3.
[370] Ibid, 279.
[371] Ibid.

"collective identity template"—including southern etiquette, subordination to male domination, and gender-differentiated separate spheres—even outside of the public gaze.[372] While calculatedly adhering to rules of propriety during courtship, at annual balls, or whilst visiting other plantations, privileged ladies, time and again, either fully internalized southern cultural doctrines and practices, or simply settled for resignation in the private sphere. The southern institutions of the church, the educational system, and the slaveholding family alike, could be considered microcosms of southern elite morality and aided southern ladies in making the collective identity template part of their social and psychological nature. Illustrative is the way in which planter children gradually became aware of the undercurrent of hierarchy in their friendships with slave playmates as elite childrearing practices supported the idea of status, power, and identity derived from *in-group* membership as opposed to disregard for *out-groups.* As for husband-wife relationships, physical, emotional, sexual, and intellectual intimacy was complicated through the doctrine of the "separate spheres", the system of patriarchy, and the sexual "double standard"—ideologies and practices intrinsic to the elite community, or the "world-at-large."[373] Moreover, companionship between mistresses and female domestic servants—which required slaveholding women to step outside of the boundary of pure ownership—was a complex matter as slave women were regularly racialized and sexually objectified in accordance with the core of social and divine order. In sum, it could be argued that, to a great extent, there was no strict segregation between the public and the intimate realm as the "absolute morality" or "collective identity template" helped to outline intimate life in the plantation household.

Whereas the aristocratic "absolute morality" reigned in the intimate sphere of the plantation household, nonetheless, in daily life, mistresses needed to adapt their identities, self-conceptions, and behaviors in interaction with their social environment. Time and again, southern ladies were not able or deliberately decided not to fulfill the "merciless task of conformity," and exhibited *personal* or *fluid identities*.[374] Surely, the slaveholding women who did not live up to the community standards were considered

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[372] Kim, Triandis, and others, eds., *Individualism and Collectivism*, 14.

[373] Elaine Hatfield and Richard L. Rapson, *Love, Sex, and Intimacy: their Psychology, Biology, and History.* (New York: Harper Collins College Publishers, 1993), 255. See Chapter three of this study. Modern psychological studies show that intimacy between two partners is dependent on the "world-at-large"—the broader social context.

[374] Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics.* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 31.

pariahs and risked the threat of being socially ostracized, which involved a loss of protection, status, sociability, and approval from family members, close associates, and the close-knit community at large. Moreover, the loss of identity was a crucial incentive to refrain from seeking confrontation and rebellion. Lerner poses in *The Creation of Patriarchy:*

> How can her daring thought—naming the hitherto unnamed, asking the questions defined by all authorities as "non-existent"—how can such thought coexist with her life as woman? In stepping out of the constructs of patriarchal thought, she faces, as Mary Daly put it, "existential nothingness."[375]

Similarly, plantation mistresses who asserted their autonomy and independence outside the southern elite constructs of morality, risked to be judged "non-existent" by the community—loosing their sense of self. Indeed, southern ladies were not allowed to threaten social dictates in both the public and intimate sphere as it would indirectly put an end to the system of slavery, which obviously was central to the southern way of life.

Examining primarily plantation mistresses's autobiographies and female slave narratives, one may deduct the apparent *fluid identitie*s of southern ladies behind the scenes. Firstly, three intimately connected issues of discontent become evident in the journals of privileged ladies, which went directly against the grain of southern ethos: the lack of organized education for women, women's rights, and anti-slavery beliefs. Mary Boykin Chesnut, Frances Kemble, and the Grimké sisters were exemplary southern ladies who crossed the aristocratic boundaries of passivity, dependency, and harmony, by proactively identifying the ongoing structural problems within their cohesive communities. In *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, for instance, Mary Chesnut addresses the virulent system of patriarchy and suggests that a basis for sisterhood exists between mistresses and slave women. "There is no slave, after all, like a wife," she proclaims.[376] Whereas most slaveholding women merely vented their frustrations and concerns in their "intimate" diaries, a handful of ladies like the Grimké sisters asserted themselves as critical and political individuals by articulating their discontent in the public sphere.

Secondly, southern ladies revealed multiple selves when they were all by themselves, or while interacting with their intimate family members and female domestic slaves. Outside of the public gaze, Frances Kemble was not reluctant to take up

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[375] Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, 226.
[376] Ibid, 59.

the unladylike tasks of rowing down the river and exploring the rough woods all by herself—two illustrations of degrading and improper behavior, believed at the time. Also, regardless of their deep respect for hierarchical gender relations, women of privilege occasionally dared to step out of patriarchal thought in their marriage life. Due to the fear-induced observance of the "absolute morality", the prevalent institution of patriarchy, and suppressed thoughts and emotions, mistresses often lived on the edge of emotional escalation. Southern belles, Mary Chesnut, Frances Kemble, and Caroline Merrick, all struggled to remain self-control, suppress individual thoughts, and curb any personal desires, in the midst of blatant accusations and dictatorial commands of their husbands. When Frances Kemble released all of her frustrations and pleaded her husband to do something about the detrimental situation their slaves were situated in, the master remained reserved after which Mrs. Kemble reminded herself of her improper expostulations. Moreover, considering Douglas' examination of "relations of dominance" as an equivalent for "relations of resistance," one may understand that southern dogmatic childrearing practices caused overt rebellion in both the private and public sphere, too.[377]

The adoption of *fluid identities* by plantation mistresses is particularly noteworthy as regards the daily interactions with her female house slaves. Roughly put, slaveholding women revealed their individual selves, rather than their social identities, in two types of situations. On the one hand, there were southern ladies who gave evidence of compassion and affinity towards their black womenfolk and occasionally identified with them along gender lines, implying the collapse of class and racial hierarchy. In point of fact, in her journal, Frances Kemble informs the reader of her husband's reaction to her expression of infinite sympathy towards their black womenfolk: "my existence among slaves was an element of danger to the 'institution.'"[378] On the other hand, plantation mistresses, now and then, exhibited the improper and unladylike values of egotism, aggression, and intemperance, due to the intense interactions with their domestic house servants. The condonation of the sexual "double standard"—gentlemen having legitimate sexual relations with their slave women—not infrequently caused extreme jealousy and frenzy on the part of the

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[377] Jack D. Douglas, *Deviance and Respectability: The Social Construction of Moral Meanings.*(New York: Basic Books 1970), 45.
[378] Anne Frances Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839.* (New York: Harpers and Brothers, 1863), 172.

mistress. Exemplary is Harriet Jacobs' mistress who resorted to manipulative sexual whisperings in Jacobs' ear at night as she found out that her husband had sexually abused the young slave girl. Thus, whereas some mistresses revealed emotional intimacy with their black womenfolk beyond due proportion, others turned to spontaneous acts of repression, unfettered physical violence, and lethal threats, as a ruthless means to discipline their house slaves and to attain a degree of personal power. Either showing excessive intimacy or exploding in unladylike fury towards their black womenfolk, both postures disclose the *fluid identities* of plantation mistresses as they secretly or openly defied southern upper-class notions of womanhood.

The larger significance of this study is, predominantly, the disclosure of early signs of feminist consciousness in the intimate sphere of the plantation household. Albeit faint, southern ladies deliberately challenged elite conventions of femininity or were pushed to such extremes that deviation from female morality was inevitable. In *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* and *Personal Politics*, Ann Laura Stoler and Sara Evans have pointed to "infrapolitics" and the revolutionary phrase "the personal is political", respectively.[379] The mistress's intimate sphere could be considered the heart of southern politics, seeing that the patriarchal family was the emotional, physical, and intellectual site where internalization of the "absolute morality" was initiated, sustained, and also challenged at times. The examination of the *fluid identities* of southern ladies when they were, for a change, not under the watchful eye, provides for insights into the way the so-called antebellum southern belles invisibly pioneered the decade-long process of cultural change. Admittedly, the start of the emancipation of southern aristocratic ladies materialized during and after the Civil War when these ladies discovered their strength, adaptability, and resourcefulness in times of fear and adversity. The break down of the institution of slavery after the war provided the grounds on which the former plantation mistresses could truly strive towards reinvention on equal and independent terms—to a certain degree, that is.

Another overarching theme that lingers throughout the study is the preoccupation with the elusive notion of privacy, which is shared by various American historians, literary critics, politicians, journalists, anthropologists, sociologists, and

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[379] See Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), and Sara Margaret Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left.* (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, 1979).

philosophers. Throughout history, the very definition of the term privacy has gone through various stages. Whereas the term "derives from a Latin word meaning *deprived*: specifically, deprived of public office; in other words, cut off from the full and appropriate functioning of man", according to Patricia Meyer Sachs, in modern day western society the term has shifted towards a wider perception as media, information, and technology have become powerful shapers of the world.[380] Reverting to the study, physical and psychological privacy in the antebellum South was a complex matter considering the fact that seeking or advocating it "entailed a degree of threat to the values of a society still hierarchical and still retaining ideas about the importance of the communal."[381] This area of focus, therefore, generates reflections on the fear and scope of hypocrisy, uncontrollability, and hysteria in the intimate sphere as a flat contradiction to social surveillance and masquerade in the public arena.

Examining the private lives of plantation mistresses, it is up to further inquiry how regional differences may have affected their sense of self, conduct, and actions outside of the public gaze. Surely, in Bruce Collin's words, "the South is many Souths-many things."[382] Roughly speaking, the antebellum South can be divided up in three geographical areas: the Upper South, the Low South, and the Deep South. In the Upper South, in states like North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia, the small size of plantations gave rise to intense relationships with both house and field slaves. Often times, slaveholding families in these cotton states lived far beyond their means and attempted to preserve their status at all costs. In the Low South including the coastal areas of South Carolina and Georgia, furthermore, the large size of rice plantations and slave units strictly separated house and field slaves. The management of the plantation required a whole lot of effort, increasing the demands placed on mistresses with all the consequences it entails. Finally, the Deep South, including frontier states like Louisiana and Alabama, was a true thriving area from the 1850s on. In this frontier region, unlike the Low and Upper southern areas, privileged ladies were required to co-operate with their slaves in the plantation household as plantations were yet to be fully established. These insights lead to the question how plantation mistresses's true natures in the

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[380] Patricia Meyer Sachs, *Privacy: Concealing the Eighteenth-Century Self*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 1-2.
[381] Ibid, 7.
[382] Bruce Collins, *White Society in the Antebellum South*. (London and New York: Longman, 1985), 7.

intimate sphere related to the their respective regions, the size of their plantations, and their physical and emotional proximity to both house and field slaves.

In retrospect, the close examination of diaries, journals, and memoirs allows the reader to take a brief look into the psyche of plantation ladies. As the aristocratic "make-believe angels", in Chesnut's words, dutifully adhered to social codes of feminine decorum in the public arena, they were every so often able to adopt *fluid identities* behind closed doors, transgressing southern upper-class notions of womanhood. Returning to Eliza Leslie's novel *Mr. and Mrs. Woodbridge, with Other Tales* (1841), the "hiding room", a room of great value in Mrs. Woodbridge opinion, offered the newlywed northern lady a physical private space in which she could unmask her social identity. Undoubtedly, southern plantation mistresses needed a physical and psychological "hiding room" as well, keeping in mind that the entrenched "absolute morality" inherent in the slaveholder's community was calculatedly implemented on various levels of society, in both the intimate and public sphere, in order to curb every sign of confrontation. Therefore, in closing, the significance of the emotional and behavioral implications of the "hiding room" or intimate sphere, lies in the fact that it offered southern ladies a site where they could assert themselves as agents of their own lives, and of their own history.

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