



The Cult of True Womanhood in Harriet Jacobs' Narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

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Abstract— In a time where women were expected to abide all the rules that been put by men (the cult of true womanhood, a model was constructed by the white male patriarch), such model during the 19th century, it shaped and made women considerable. So, many women fought for their rights. Jacobs account challenges the cult of true womanhood qualities of piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness. Even though *Incidents in the Life of a Slave girl* is considered to be as an account of the brutalities and the atrocities that happened to slaves, especially women; however, the account reveals the opposite. It shows that such atrocities are in the favor of the slaves. These atrocities made the main character powerful and maintained her identity against all the odds. Also, because of the brutality that happened to her; it made her escape for her freedom. In this research paper, I will attempt to show how oppressing women lead them to agency and make them powerful by defying the patriarchal society they live in. Also, I will show how they challenge the cult of true womanhood, a term that was described by Barbara Welter in 1966 which consisted of four ideals, namely, piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. According to Welter, “put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife—woman. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes” (152). These ideals were not just objectives to aim for; however, they are elements of womanhood. Being a true woman was a serious responsibility, it was planted in young girls’ minds since their upbringing. In other words, I will show that none of the women mentioned in the narrative, white or black, have met the standards of the true cult of womanhood and how Jacobs’ memoir is used as a tool for her to express her voice and feelings.



Keywords— Slavery, Feminism, Womanhood, Patriarchy, Ideals.

I. INTRODUCTION

Slaves had a terrible life during the antebellum period of America. During the 19th century, black men and women were born into slavery. Both sexes were put into subjugation automatically. However, the treatment of both sexes was different, women were treated very differently from men; they were sexually abused, beaten, tortured, and they had to endure the inequality and the oppression. Women of the mid-nineteenth century found themselves in a position that society had changed for them. These changes gave chances to men to work outside their home and earn more money to be the supporters of their house. Also, these changes made women stay in their house and stick to their roles as women. In a time where women were

expected to abide by all the rules that had been put by men (the cult of true womanhood, a model that was constructed by the white male patriarch), such model during the 19th century, shaped and made women considerable.

Some women believed in the model and some rebelled against it. Many women fought for their rights. Jacobs’ account challenges the cult of true womanhood qualities of piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness. Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* was written to show that none of the women included in the narrative meets the idealized image that was put by men in nineteenth century. By this ideal, women who helped Linda escape slavery are not true women in spite of them trying to be so. Jacobs also shows that it is impossible to

practice the four ideals altogether, there has to be at least one ideal missing. Even though *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* is an account of the brutalities and the atrocities that happened to slaves, especially women, the account reveals the opposite. It shows that such atrocities are in the favor of the slaves. These atrocities made the main character powerful and maintained her identity against all odds. Also, because of the brutality that happened to her; it made her escape for her freedom. In this research paper, I will attempt to use feminism to show how oppressing women will lead to agency and make them powerful by defying the patriarchal society they live in. Also, I will show how Jacob challenges the cult of true womanhood. In other words, I will show that none of the women mentioned in the narrative, white or black, have met the standards of the cult of true womanhood.

II. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

During the 19th century, America was developing faster than it was imagined. The industrial revolution created so many jobs and opportunities for the American family. Laurie Bonventre's *The Cult of True Womanhood: Women of the Mid-nineteenth Century and their Assigned Roles as Reflected in Contemporary Writing* states that "For a country less than fifty years old, these swift changes brought instability and uncertainty. American society had to find balance and a center upon which to base itself" (7). In other words, many families had to leave the countryside and move to the city where new businesses of factories started to develop gradually. Since these factories produced the same things that families used to make in the countryside, families during the industrial revolution had to stop producing many things that they used to, such as food and clothes. Bonventre states that these jobs created "a new middle class" that "began to emerge consisting of lawyers, teachers, factory managers, doctors and other, along with their families, different from the middle class that had been prevalent during pre-industrial retimes" (9).

The emergence of middle class made men have the upper hand; they were considered to be the superiors, protectors, and the providers. Men during the industrial revolution were capable of earning more money than before to support their families. On the other hand, since women were considered to be inferiors (mentally and physically) and domestic, they were told to stop working and to stay home. Catherine J. Lavender in her *Notes on the Cult of Domesticity and True Womanhood* states that women's inferiority was based on many observations, such as, "women were generally physically smaller than men", "women had less physical stamina than men because they seemed to faint so much more", "women menstruated...It

was believed that menstruation could bring on temporary insanity in women", and "women were deemed more delicate and weak than men because the female nervous system was finer, more irritable, and more prone to overstimulation and fatigue than the male nervous system" (4). However, that did not seem to happen in the women's world of the lower middle class. These working women were either poor, African-American (slaves), or immigrants, says Bonventre. Unlike white women who could find jobs in the city, poor, slaves, and immigrants' women were not able to find jobs in the city. So, they had to stay in the countryside serving the ladies of the house. Bonventre states that "some women lived as domestic assistants to the ladies of the house for the years between their education and their marriage. These women were often seen as surrogate daughters and used the time spent in employment as a time of training for the lives they would lead after they married and obtained families of their own" (11). This image gave men the opportunity to be the superiors, protectors, and providers of their homes. With this image, a new ideal for women emerged that is called "the cult of true womanhood".

Moreover, this image was "presented by the women's magazines, gift annuals and religious literature of the nineteenth century" and woman "was the hostage in the home" (151), says Barbara Welter in an article called *The Cult of true Womanhood: 1820-1860*. During the 19th century, women were inferiors and victims of their society. They were limited to marriage and motherhood. Susan M. Cruea's *Changing Ideals of Womanhood During the Nineteenth-Century Woman Movement* states that marriage and motherhood "resulted in domestic dependency. While they could find jobs as shop girls or factory workers, women were discouraged from being wage earners by the belief that women who earned wages were 'unnatural.'" (187). So, "Women were forced, for a variety of reasons, to be dependent upon their husbands for financial support" (187).

Even though this ideal of the true womanhood was especially made for the upper and middle-class woman, lower class women could obtain this ideal. Only slaves could not be taken into consideration to obtain the ideal image of the true womanhood. Linda M. Perkins in her article, *The Impact of the "Cult of True Womanhood" on the Education of Black Women*, states that "since most blacks had been enslaved prior to the Civil War and the debate as to whether they were human beings was a popular topic, black women were not perceived as women in the same sense as women of the larger (i.e., white) society" (18). Bonventre also says,

It is important to note that, though this was encouraged as the ideal for all women, this was

only a realistic expectation for free middle and upper-class women. Enslaved women and women of the poorer classes were unable to follow the ideals of true womanhood as they were required by their social standing to toil outside of their homes. This was especially true for enslaved women who had no choice in the way that they lived their lives. Unfortunately, these women were not generally considered as being part of polite society and were overlooked as though they did not play a role in society (18).

Finally, Laurie Kaiser in her article, *The Black Madonna: Notions of True Womanhood from Jacobs to Hurston*, states that “this view of the ideal extend to black women, who insatiable sexual appetites. Many blacks felt they had to combat this notion” (98). However, according to Welter, “one thing at least remained the same—a true woman was a true woman, wherever she was found” (152).

III. LITEARATURE REVIEW

The cult of true womanhood is a term that was described by Barbara Welter in 1966. It consists of four ideals, namely, piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. According to Welter, “put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife—woman. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes” (152). These ideals were not just objectives to aim for; however, they are elements of womanhood. Being a true woman was a serious responsibility, it was planted in young girls’ minds since their upbringing. They were taught to be obedient and chaste for their husbands. They were also taught the important skills of how to manage a house and raise kids. Any woman who pursues education was discouraged. Cruca states that “a True Woman was expected to fulfill herself in the 'instinctive' arts of child rearing, domestic pursuits, and spiritual comfort” (189). A woman was encouraged to raise her daughter to be pious, pure, submissive, and domestic, not to be an intellectual. These ideals were sent to women through magazines, editorials, and speeches. If any man tries to mess with one of the ideals of true womanhood, “he was damned immediately as an enemy of God, of civilization and of the Republic. It was a fearful obligation, a solemn responsibility, which the nineteenth-century American woman had to uphold the pillars of the temple with her frail white hand” (152). Moreover, women who hold the four ideals are “promised with happiness and power” (152). Women (white) were judged based on their commitment to these four ideals.

Poor and black women were struggling to meet these ideals because they were considered as imperfect women.

One of the ideals that Welter discussed in her article is piety. Welter states that it “was the core of women’s virtue, the source of her strength. Young men looking for a mate were cautioned to search first for piety, for if that were there, all else would follow. Religion belonged to woman by divine right, a gift of god and nature” (152). A true woman ushered her husband and kids in the issues of morality. Unlike men, immorality was something terrible for women. Just like irreligion “almost too awful to contemplate” (154). Women also were cautioned not to pursue intellectual education because it will take them away from religion and God. Welter gives an example about Margaret Fuller, an intellectual woman who pursued education and forgot about her religion and God. She (Welter) states that “the greater the intellectual force, the greater and more fatal the errors into which women fall who wander from the Rock of Salvation, Christ the Saviour....” (154). A woman being irreligious is considered to be a no woman because “irreligion is the most revolting feature in human character” (154). In other words, religion is the answer for the troubled mind and considered to be one of the most traits that women should obtain.

The second ideal is purity. Welter claims that purity “was as essential as piety to a young woman, its absence as un-natural and unfeminine. Without it she was, in fact, no woman at all, but a member of some lower order. A "fallen woman" was a "fallen angel," unworthy of the celestial company of her sex” (154). Purity is the greatest virtue that a woman can hold. Women were supposed to protect their virginity before getting married. If a woman was not pure or lost her virginity, Bonventre states that “she was inexorably led to madness or death” (22). Thus, women were encouraged to preserve their virtue. Unlike men, preserving their virtue was not a problem for them, because they could not help it. However, women must not give her virginity to any man except her husband. If a woman manages to resist any man’s assaults, this means that she “demonstrated her superiority and her power over him” (156). Purity was not only concerned with preserving woman’s virginity, woman’s purity was questioned in any social change. For example, the development of the sense of fashion during the 19th century, if a woman wears shorter skirts, people would attack her virtue.

The third ideal is submissiveness. According to Welter, submissiveness “was perhaps the most feminine virtue expected of women. Men were supposed to be religious, although they rarely had time for it, and supposed to be pure, although it came awfully hard to

them, but men were the movers, the doers, the actors. Women were the passive, submissive responders" (158-159). In other words, men could never be submissive to their mothers or wives. Before marriage, women were supposed to be submissive to their fathers and brothers. After marriage, she was encouraged to be submissive to her husband's needs to find happiness. Moreover, they "were to be passive bystanders, submitting to fate, to duty, to God, and to men", says Lavender (3). Women were supposed to be weak and willingly submit to powerlessness of their lives. "Woman understood her position if she was the right kind of woman, a true woman. She feels herself weak and timid. She needs a protector" claims Welter, (159). Women also believed in working in silence, even if their husbands were abusive to them, women should "never retort" (161).

Finally, domesticity is considered to be the last of the ideals. It was believed that the woman's place is in her house. Welter states that "the true dignity and beauty of the female character seem to consist in a right understanding and faithful and cheerful performance of social and family duties" (162). Women's role was to keep the house comfortable and cheerful for their husbands and sons, so that they could relax when they come back from work. To put it in a different way, "women were expected to uphold the values of stability, morality, and democracy by making the home a special place, a refuge from the world where her husband could escape from the highly competitive, unstable, immoral world of business and industry" (Lavender, 4). Nursing was one of the domestic activities that women had to learn. She was concerned with her husbands' and sons' sickness. She had to study from books to find remedies to cure her loved ones. Another activity that was encouraged is needle-work. This activity promised women to maintain their piety and purity.

Welter concludes her article by saying that it was hard for real women to meet the expectations of the cult of true womanhood. "Some of them blamed themselves, some challenged the standard, some tried to keep the virtues and enlarge the scope of womanhood" (174). And to manipulate women and keep the order to make them believe that they have power and happiness, they (men) found a way to convince women that they "had the best of both worlds—power and virtue and that a stable order of society depended upon her maintaining her traditional place in it" (174).

Lower-class women who had to work for little salary to support themselves could not fulfill the ideal of domesticity of the cult because they worked for other people, not in their homes. Thus, many of these women believed that the ideal image of true womanhood was made to give a better life of middle and upper-class

women. A. H. Forss and Peg A. Lamphier in their review of *Cult of True Womanhood* state that "As a result, many working-class women consciously rejected notions of submissiveness, moral superiority and passionlessness" (1). They continue their review by saying that even middle and upper-class women had many difficulties in fulfilling the ideal, because not all women found a supportive-none violent husbands. They state that "Wives whose husbands who drank away the family income or beat them had little recourse in a society that often refused to recognize problems and often blamed for wives husbands' failings" (2). In other words, women were to be blamed for everything, even if it was their husbands' mistakes.

Black women had a similar case, but it was slightly different from lower, middle, and upper-class white women. They were exploited and sexually abused by the nineteenth century's man. It was almost impossible to have houses of their own to fulfill one of the ideals, domesticity. For black women during the 19th century, Venetria K. Patton in her book *Women in Chains: The Legacy of Slavery in Black Women's Fiction* states that,

The nineteenth-century black women writers were faced with a similar situation when they sought to find a way around a cult of motherhood and womanhood, which implicitly excluded the experience of black females, yet still presented their definitions of motherhood and womanhood as desires for all women. This is not to say that the definition of womanhood was inclusive for all white women, but rather that its very tenets excluded black females. These early writers, therefore, sought a means of negotiating the cult of true womanhood in such a way that black females could be recognized as mother, and therefore women. In other words, their writing in many respects was an attempt to engender themselves the eyes of dominant society (38).

In other words, these black women were familiar with the ideals and images of the cult of true womanhood, so, they tried to include themselves in this ideal, but the society refused them. Furthermore, these black women challenged the standard and the idealized image of true womanhood.

IV. THE CULT OF TRUE WOMANHOOD

Jacobs' narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, talks about the life and the experiences that Harriet Jacobs (Linda) had to endure. It also talks about her fights to win her freedom from slavery during the 19th century. Her narrative shows that it is impossible for women to achieve

the idealized image of true womanhood in a patriarchal society. Not only was it impossible for black women to meet the standard, but also white women had difficulty to live up to the idealized image. As mentioned above, Welter claims that "Some of them blamed themselves, some challenged the standard, some tried to keep the virtues and enlarge the scope of womanhood" (174). Jacobs, her grandmother, and the white women in the narrative chose to challenge the idealized image of true womanhood.

Linda Brent, the main character of the narrative, is being stressed to be Dr. Flint's mistress; however, she refused to let her modesty be taken away from her and be submissive. Moreover, she takes Mr. Sands as her lover. Glen McClish and Jacqueline Bacon in their article, "Telling the Story Her Own Way": The Role of Feminist Standpoint Theory in Rhetorical Studies, state that Linda fails "to adhere to the sexual patterns she had been taught to endorse but also questions the adequacy of this standard and tentatively reaches toward an alternative moral code" (42). This moral code that Linda took was to defy the white male's patriarchy. If Linda agrees to be Dr. Flint's mistress, then, she agrees to be submissive and her purity would be taken away from her. But instead, she refuses to submit to her master. By taking Mr. Sands as her lover, Patton states that "Linda is violating one of the cardinal rules of the cult of true womanhood—purity. The ideal woman was passionless, yet Linda has not only engaged in sexual relations, but also encouraged and perhaps even initiated them" (67).

Being involved in sexual relations by taking Mr. Sands as her lover was not something she is really proud of, but, the reason was to be fully in charge of her body and make her own decisions. In other words, Brooke Logan in her essay, *Feminism and Slavery: Harriet Jacobs' Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, states that Linda "exercises the limited power available to her by conducting an affair with Mr. Sands" (no. pg). In an attempt from Mr. Flint to disintegrate Linda's acceptance to have a sexual relationship, Linda says that Mr. Flint,

Told me I was his property; that I must be subject to his will in all things. My soul revolted against the mean tyranny. But where could I turn for protection? [...] In either case, there is no shadow of law to protect her from insult, from violence, or even from death [...] The mistress, who ought to protect the helpless victim, has no other feelings towards her but those of jealousy and rage. The degradation, the wrongs, the vices, that grow out of slavery, are more than I can describe. They are greater than you would willingly believe. Surely, if you credited one half the truths that are told you

concerning the helpless millions suffering in this cruel bondage, you at the north would not help to tighten the yoke. (26-27)

It shows that Linda has been insulted, beaten, and tortured because as a black-slave woman, the law will not protect her, not even Mr. Flint's wife, Mrs. Flint. However, Linda succeeds in resisting her master's attempts. Even when Mr. Flint verbally abuses her, McClish and Bacon state that Linda is "defiant and verbally resourceful" (45). Mr. Flint uses methods to scare and threat Linda, such as doing whatever he wants with her or even killing her. However, she challenges him and does not comply to his orders.

In a conversation between Linda and Mr. Flint, he says, "Do you know that I have a right to do as I like with you, -that I can kill you, if I please?", Linda replies by saying "You have tried to kill me, and I wish you had; but you have no right to do as you like with me" (36). To save face and sustain his powerful existence; he tries to silence her. Linda says that "I know I have been disrespectful, sir, [...] but you drove me to it; I couldn't help it. As for the jail, there would be more peace for me there than there is here" (36). In this conversation, Linda tries to assert herself by challenging Mr. Flint's power. McClish and Bacon state that "Jacobs creates a new standard by which to judge a woman based on will, defiance, and verbal power" (45). Moreover, Patton claims that "According to Joanne Braxton, Linda's backtalk, or sass, is a form of self-defense[...] Linda employs verbal warfare and defensive verbal postures as tools of liberation" (65). Rather than giving her virginity to her master, she sacrifices her purity to another white man. Sarah Cleveland in her thesis, *Revealing Incidents: Harriet Jacobs and the New Black Female Virtue*, states that Linda,

Offers her defiance of Dr. Flint's sexual advances as the moment in which a slave becomes not only a woman, but a virtuous woman. She gives away what might be regarded as woman's most precious gift, the ultimate sacrifice of her virginity, to take away the power of her master to rob her of what is only hers to give. Both symbolic and literal, this sacrificial act raises Jacobs from an unchaste and defiled object to a virtuous mother (1).

Even though Linda defies her master's sexual advances and takes another white man as her lover, she expresses her sexual history with shame and hesitation. Linda says,

And now, reader, I come to a period in my unhappy life, which I would gladly forget if I

could. The remembrance fills me with sorrow and shame. It pains me to tell you of it; but I have promised to tell you the truth, and I will do it honestly, let it cost me what it may [...] my master had done his utmost to pollute my mind with foul images, and to destroy the pure principles inculcated by my grandmother and the good mistress of my childhood. (47)

Linda expresses a feeling of guilt because of having sex and children before marriage; however, Patton states that "Wallace describes Linda's guilt as unnecessary agony, the agony of measuring herself against a standard which was not designed to fit her circumstances, and which could only work to destroy her image of herself" (59-60).

Regardless of the sorrow and shame Linda feels, she knows that there is no other way around because "the condition of a slave confuses all principles of morality, and, in fact, renders the practice of them impossible" (48). By failing to meet the standards of true womanhood, Patton states, Linda "suggests that people should be judged within their context and not by rigid expectations and definitions" (60). In other words, female slaves should have a different judgment from people, because black-female-slave women had to experience the hardest things, such as sexual and verbal abuse. Patton continues by saying that "While Jacobs may not have been a true woman based on the standards of her day, she questions the justification of those standards and suggests that a woman be judged by more than her sexual purity" (60). This sexual purity is not something that Jacobs can elevate; however, her sexual purity comes from not being in a relationship with Mr. Flint since she is not allowed to own her body as a slave during the nineteenth century. According to Welter, "If, however, a woman managed to withstand man's assaults on her virtue, she demonstrated her superiority and her power over him" (156).

Linda's grandmother, Aunt Martha, is pious, pure, domestic but not submissive. She has her own house and she sells goods to her neighbors which show that she is indeed a domestic woman. Her purity, according to DoVeanna S. Fulton in her *Speaking Power: Black Feminist Orality in Women's Narratives of Slavery*, states that "For the grandmother, the value of purity becomes unquestioned and undiscussed" (31) because Jacobs does not mention the grandmother's purity, whether she had a relationship or not. However, her purity is seen and felt when Linda confesses her pregnancy. The grandmother says

O Linda! has it come to this? I had rather see you dead than to see you as you now are. You are a disgrace to your dead mother. She tore

from my fingers my mother's wedding ring and her silver thimble. "Go away!" she exclaimed, and never come to my house again. (50)

Linda's grandmother refuses the idea that her granddaughter is to become pregnant from a man before marriage. To show how frustrated she is, the grandmother takes Linda's mother ring. What the grandmother wants to demonstrate is that Linda should have lived the hard reality of slavery instead of getting pregnant and commits this horrible sin. Sarah Way Sherman in her article, *Moral Experience in Harriet Jacobs's "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl"*, states that "Sexual purity [...] a value for that ideal world whose future possibility Linda is unwilling to give up-at the same time she must live with the reality of slavery in this one" (174). And as a punishment to Linda of doing such act, Fulton states that,

Even when Brent explains her situation and choice of a sexual relationship with Mr. Sands, the grandmother sympathizes and understands but does not forgive her. Therefore, we have a grandmother who believes in chastity and purity without particularly revealing her own sexual experiences. (32)

In other words, Aunt Martha's reprimand to her granddaughter shows that Aunt Martha is a devout Christian, chaste, and pure.

Another ideal Aunt Martha loses to maintain true womanhood is submissiveness. Through the whole narrative, Aunt Martha does not show any kind of submission to anyone. Even Mr. Flint is scared of the grandmother. In a scene in the narrative where Mr. Flint went to Aunt Martha's house to despise Linda, both characters argued and their voices could be heard by the people outside. Aunt Martha heard their screaming, when she arrived to her house, she made Mr. Flint leave the house by saying "Get out of my house!" and continues by saying "Go home, and take care of your wife and children, and you will have enough to do, without watching my family" (70). In return, Mr. Flint left the house without doing anything to Aunt Martha. This indicates that the grandmother has power bestowed to her by her mistress which Jacobs explains at the beginning of her narrative. Jacobs says that her grandmother "evinced so much intelligence, and was so faithful, that her master and mistress could not help seeing it was for their interest to take care of such a valuable piece of property [...] She was much praised by for her cooking; and her nice crackers became famous in the neighborhood" (9). All these traits that Aunt Martha gained through her life as a slave helped her gain respect from the white society as she grew older.

Mrs. Flint is a white female character in the narrative who does not represent the four cardinals of the cult of true womanhood. When she learns that Mr. Flint is sexually harassing Linda, Mrs. Flint makes it even worse for Linda, she starts to harass her. Linda Says,

"[...] for she spent many a sleepless night to watch over me. Sometimes I woke up, and found her bending over me. At other times she whispered in my ear, as though it was her husband who was speaking to me [...] I began to be fearful for my life. It had been often threatened; and you can imagine, better than I can describe, what an unpleasant sensation it must produce to wake up in the dead of night and find a jealous woman bending over you. Terrible as this experience was, I had fears that it would give place to one more terrible" (31).

This quotation shows that Mrs. Flint makes it difficult for Linda; she does not aid her in any situation, she only makes it worse. Even when Linda tells Mrs. Flint of Mr. Flint's attempts, Mrs. Flint

Felt that her marriage vows were desecrated, her dignity insulted; but she had no compassion for the poor victim of her husband's perfidy. She pitied herself as a martyr; but she was incapable of feeling for the condition of shame and misery in which her unfortunate, helpless slave was placed (31).

Even though Mrs. Flint is a white woman who should meet the four ideals, as Mr. Flint's wife, she is supposed to stop her husband from harassing Linda. She is afraid that her pride and dignity would be at stake. Also, living in a man's world will not help her sustain or maintain any kind of power. Patton states that Mrs. Flint [...] is represented as an antiwoman Rather than forging a sisterly bond with her slave, Mrs. Flint views Linda with antagonism and antipathy [...] Mrs. Flint does not recognize Linda as a sister, but as a competitor [...] Mrs. Flint should not only be a maternal figure for the young Jacobs, but also a protectress. She should seek to show her husband the error ways, since as a woman she should be his moral superior. However, Mrs. Flint is not only powerless before her husband, she does not even realize that she and Linda are both victims of Flint's patriarchal power. (62-63)

Zafar and Khan state that "In this manner white women are depicted as both the sinning and the sinned against; victims as well as accomplices in their husbands' sexual exploitation of the enslaved black women" (2). Since that Mrs. Flint has sinned and submitted to her husband's power, she is excluded from two of the four ideals, piety and submissiveness.

Also, since Mrs. Flint is a jealous woman, she does not maintain domesticity or the home sphere because she makes the environment (her home) distrustful, negative, and mischievous. Cleveland states that "Mrs. Flint further fractures the cult's call to domesticity because" Mrs. Flint "had not strength to superintend her household affairs; but her 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" (14). This quote shows that Mrs. Flint lacks both piety and domesticity.

Not only Linda and Aunt Martha defy the patriarchal society, there is also a white woman who speaks for herself and challenges the male patriarchy like the second Mrs. Bruce. She is a true woman; she is pious, pure, domestic but not submissive. Linda compliments her; she says "For the system of slavery, she had a most hearty dislike of it. No sophistry of Southerners would blind her to its enormity. She was a person of excellent principles and a noble heart. To me, from that hour to the present, she has been a true and sympathizing friend" (155). It shows that the second Mrs. Bruce hates slavery and dislikes it, Linda's relationship with her becomes powerful. Through the narrative, Mrs. Bruce hides Linda from Mr. Flint to keep her safe, even though she risks her life. Shahila Zafar and Zaved Ahmed Khan in their article, *The Images of White Womanhood in Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, state that Mrs. Bruce is "in all aspects, a true woman except for the fact that she is not submissive" (3). In other words, Mrs. Bruce challenges the people who wanted to hunt Linda down by not telling them where Linda's place is. Since Mrs. Bruce lacks one of the four ideals of true womanhood, according to the white society during the 19th century, Mrs. Bruce is not considered a woman. To maintain the image of true womanhood, Mrs. Bruce should have told the hunters where Linda is. As mentioned above, Welter states that women were "the hostage in the home" (151). To put it in a different way, Mrs. Bruce knows the dangers that could harm her very well. In a conversation with her "wealthy relative" (158), he told her that she is breaking the country's rules by hiding a fugitive slave; she says "I am very well aware of it. It is imprisonment and one thousand dollars fine. Shame on my country that it is so! I am ready to incur the penalty. I will go to the state's prison, rather than have any poor victim torn from my house, to be carried back to slavery" (158). In other words, White women should never help a slave (especially a fugitive) and defy men, because white women's place was in the home where they make sure that the house is comfy and relaxing.

V. CONCLUSION

Throughout the narrative, none of the women mentioned above have met the idealized image of true womanhood. Linda defies the male patriarchy by not submitting to Mr. Flint's sexual and verbal assaults, which gives a sense of agency in the narrative. She declines any identity imposed on her from both, white males and females. She also criticizes the cult of true womanhood by expressing that it is impossible for women to meet the four cardinals. Her grandmother, Aunt Martha, has a similar case; she is pious, pure and domestic, but not submissive. She is pious and pure because she scolds Linda for getting pregnant before marriage; she is domestic because she sells crackers to her neighbors, but she is definitely not submissive because she also challenges Mr. Flint and kicks him out of her house. Mrs. Flint loses two of the four cardinals, piety and domesticity. She loses piety for not aiding Linda to gain freedom and for making Linda's life worse when Mrs. Flint knows that her husband is sexually harassing Linda. She loses domesticity for making her house mischievous and negative, not comfy and relaxing as she is supposed to do according to the cult of true womanhood. Finally, the second Mrs. Bruce, a white female character, does not meet the four cardinals either. She is not submissive for defying the country's law and the hunters who wanted Linda. Even though she is white and supposed to help white males, she refuses that because she despises slavery. For that reason, she is not considered a true woman.

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