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Importance of Relationships in Frederick Douglass' Life

Relationships between people are one of the foundations of modern civilization and maintaining social ties is fundamental for the mental health. Arguably the most important connection in a person's life is that with their family.

A child's first and closest relationship is the one with its mother, and every human desires it. Frederick Douglass never had the chance to experience the traditional upbringing in a loving family and he never experienced "... to any considerable extent, her soothing presence, her tender and watchful care" (Douglass 13). Instead, the closest he got to familiar ties was with the old woman tasked with taking care of the children, whom he referred to as his "poor old grandmother" (Douglass 33).

For a short while, he found a new family in Mr. and Mrs. Auld and their family. Mrs. Auld taught him the A, B, C (Douglass 26), which is an act a mother would perform under normal circumstances. He might have also found a brother in his young master Thomas, but he does not elaborate on this.

Rather than searching for parental figures, which he is mostly unsuccessful in, he finds comfort in relationships that resemble those of siblings. While he is not close with his blood related siblings, he substitutes them with other people. The first such instance is his relationship with Master Daniel, who "was sort of a protector of me" (Douglass 23) and was kinder to him than any white person until then. Later he formed a bond with the young white boys in Baltimore. This

relationship first began as a strategy to reach his goal of learning to read and write, but the more time he spent with them, the more personal the relationship became, so when he had to leave, despite having little to lose in any other aspect, he states that “it was to those little Baltimore boys [he felt] the strongest attachment” (Douglass 34) and he mourns the loss of their presence in his life, and says that never being able to see them again was going to be “painful indeed” (Douglass 34).

The next time he formed brotherly bonds was that with his group of fellow slaves that he taught to read. Douglass recalls the time he spent teaching them “with an amount of pleasure not to be expressed” (Douglass 48) and declares that he “loved them with a love stronger than any thing [he has] experienced before” (Douglass 49). His ties were especially strong with the men he was going to escape with. This is expressed by him stating that they would have died for each other (Douglass 49).

In his account of his life, Frederick Douglass provides a powerful statement about slavery experienced first hand. He never got the chance to properly experience a parent’s love, but he did not search for a similar relationship either. His wife is also only mentioned fleetingly three times in the entire story, which points to him not putting very much value on this kind of relationship. Rather, he focused on friendly ties and connection, which seem to be more important to him than any other kind of relationship.

Works cited

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*.

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