

Another Long-Term Effect of Slavery? Erasure of African American Ancestry and

Individual Self-Worth

Kaela Braxton

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Marin Wenger

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY, College of Criminology and Criminal Justice



Abstract

In the past few decades, the term “Black American” has been replaced with the term “African American”; this change was widely accepted in the Black community and was advertised as a way to reclaim a heritage that was erased due to the absence of record-keeping during the time period of American slavery. With recent efforts to try to trace one’s genealogy, African Americans have often run into “the brick wall” which signifies the lack of census records of African descendants dating before 1870. The focus of the study was to investigate how not having knowledge of one’s ancestry affects African Americans’ self-worth and their sense of identity. African Americans’ experiences were compared to the experiences of Black Americans who do have knowledge of their ancestry in order to investigate how having knowledge of one’s ancestry affects one’s self-worth and sense of identity. Ultimately, the goal of the study was to investigate whether there are some more long-term effects of slavery that has affected African Americans’ self-worth and sense of identity.

Research Objectives

1. Examine the relationship between an unknown ancestry and self-worth in order to measure the potential long-term effects of slavery relating to African American’s sense of self-worth.
2. Generate survey data that will aid in measuring the difficulty of obtaining information about family ancestry as an African American.

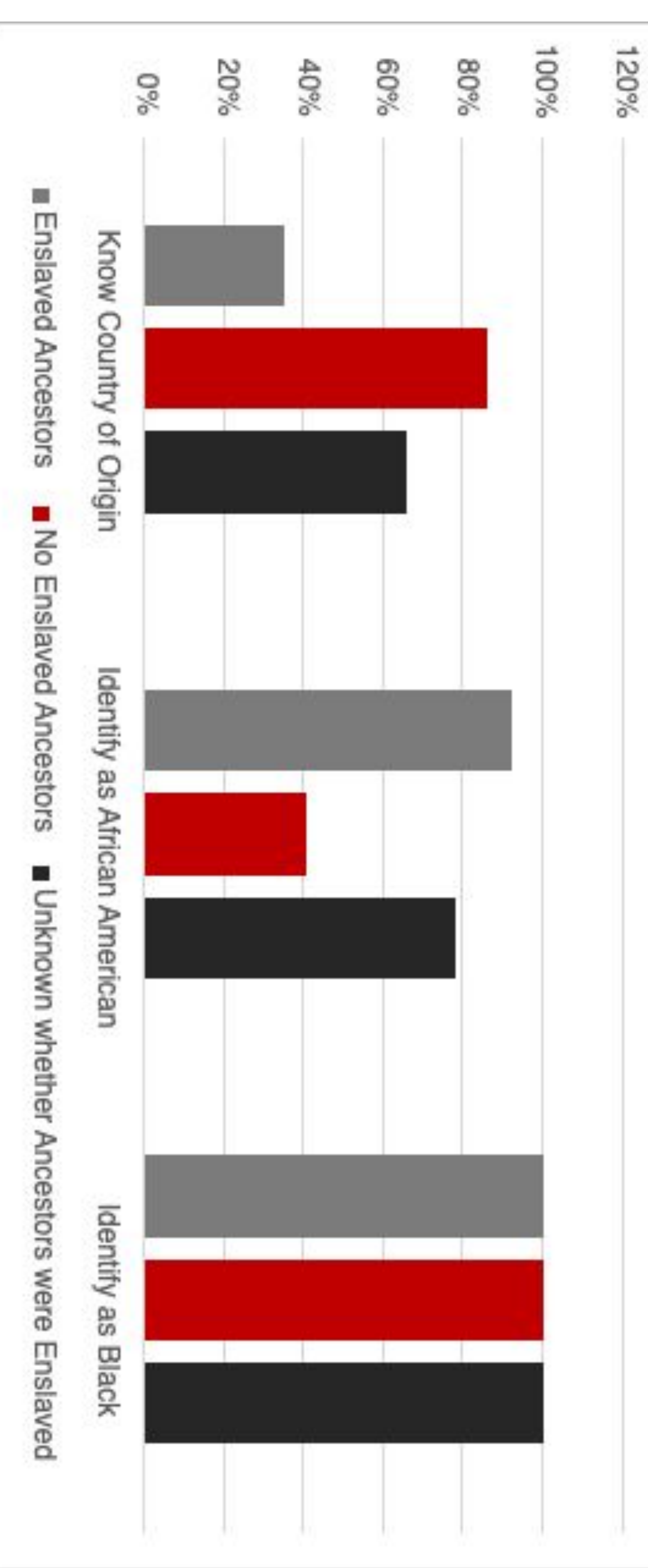
Data and Methods

- Survey sample of 132 18-24 yr. old Tallahassee college students who identify as Black or African American
- The survey was administered using Qualtrics. Respondents were asked about basic demographics, experiences with tracking ancestry, feelings about those experiences, and how knowledge or lack of knowledge of their ancestry has affected their self-worth.

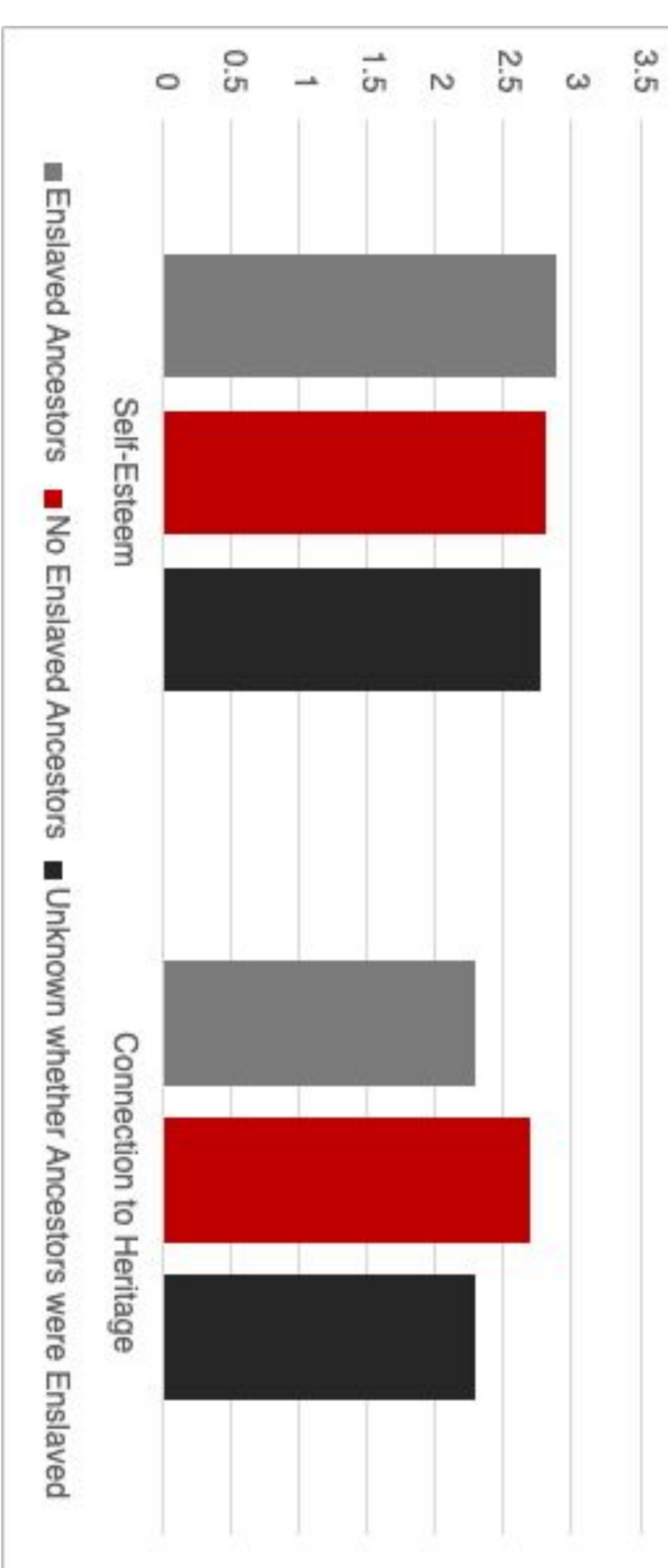
Results

Variable	N	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Age	108	20	1.143858	18	24
Mixed Race	115	17%		0	1
Female (vs. Male)	109	73%		0	1
Attend College/University in Tallahassee	111	89%		0	1
Attend FSU	96	90%		0	1
Can't Trace More than 3 Generations	85	33%		0	1
Self-Esteem	99	2.82	0.59	1.4	4
Connection to Heritage	93	2.40	0.83	0.4	4
Know Country of Origin	94	60%		0	1
Identify as African American	108	73%		0	1
Identify as Black	111	100%		1	1
Ancestors were Enslaved	94	39%		0	1
Ancestors were not Enslaved	94	30%		0	1
Don't know whether Ancestors were Enslaved	94	31%		0	1

Differences by Ancestor Enslavement



Differences by Ancestor Enslavement



Discussion

- While 100% of the sample identified as Black, only 74% identified as African American.
- Respondents who had knowledge that their ancestors were enslaved were less likely to know their country of origin while respondents who reported that their ancestors weren't enslaved were more likely to know their country of origin.
- Results may be attributed to the lack of records kept of enslaved people and their countries of origin.
- Rates of self-esteem were not significantly different among respondents who had enslaved ancestors and respondents who did not have enslaved ancestors.
- Respondents who had enslaved ancestors had a weaker connection to heritage compared to respondents who had no enslaved ancestors.
- Greater perceived connection to heritage is associated with having no enslaved ancestors.
- There was no significance found on whether the ability to trace one's ancestor 3 or more generations plays in role in one's self-esteem and/or connection to heritage.

Future Directions

- Future research will focus on broadening the sample size to get more definitive answers in regards to whether being able to trace one's ancestry has an effect on one's self-esteem and/or connection to heritage.
- Future research will focus on broadening the sample population to include more of a variety Black students who attend both PWIs and HBCUs.
- There will be a focus on whether these choices of schools affects students self-esteem.

References

Rosenberg, M. (1965). Society and the adolescent self-image. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.