

**Experiences, Identity, and Mental Health  
of Louisiana Creole People of Color**

BY

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THESIS

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This dissertation is dedicated to my family, Louis, Ellen, Michael and John Cooke, and Elizabeth Maddox, who gave me the encouragement and support to see this project through. I only wish that my father, mother, and brother John had lived to see me finish.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	5
A. Introduction.....	5
B. Pilot Study.....	7
C. Multiracial Identity .....	8
D. Creole Background and History.....	17
E. Intersectionality and Multiracial Identity.....	22
F. Ethnic Identity and Mental Health.....	30
G. Multiracial Identity, Stress, and Mental Health .....	32
H. Minority Mental Health and Treatment .....	41
1. The Surgeon General’s Report on Mental Health.....	41
2. Creole mental health .....	43
3. Race, health, and mental health .....	48
4. Race and access to care.....	50
5. Race and access to medication.....	53
I. Summary .....	56
III. RESEARCH PROBLEM.....	60
A. Statement of the Problem.....	60
B. Purpose of the Study .....	62
C. Theoretical and Conceptual Influences.....	63
D. Research Questions.....	68
IV. METHODS .....	69
A. Introduction.....	69
B. Methodological Approach .....	69
1. Grounded theory .....	70
a. Overview .....	70
b. Constructivist grounded theory.....	71
2. Research design .....	73
C. Instruments.....	75
1. Researcher as instrument .....	75
2. Interviews.....	75
a. Interview guide .....	75
b. Focus group interview.....	76
c. In-depth individual interviews .....	77
d. Family interview .....	78
3. Quantitative instruments .....	79
a. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale .....	79
b. The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure .....	80
c. Beck Depression Inventory - II.....	81
D. Sample.....	81
1. Eligibility criteria.....	81

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
2. Sampling approach.....	82
3. Sample size .....	86
4. Recruitment.....	87
E. Research Communications.....	88
F. Research Ethics .....	89
1. Institutional Review Board and informed consent.....	89
2. Confidentiality .....	90
G. Participant Compensation .....	90
H. Enhancing Rigor .....	91
1. Managing researcher bias .....	91
a. Credibility .....	91
b. Transferability.....	92
c. Authenticity.....	92
2. Trustworthiness in the analysis.....	93
a. Member checking.....	93
b. Debriefing .....	93
I. Data Analysis .....	94
1. Recording and transcription.....	94
2. Data management.....	95
3. Simultaneity of data collection and analysis.....	95
4. Thematic analysis.....	95
a. Open (initial) coding .....	96
b. Reduced codes – focused coding .....	97
c. Families of codes – advanced focused coding .....	98
d. Axial coding.....	99
e. Categories revised into final themes .....	99
V. PARTICIPANTS .....	100
A. Chapter Overview .....	100
B. Reflections on Participants .....	100
1. Cindy.....	100
2. Bruno.....	101
3. Popinno .....	101
4. Grandma Smith .....	102
5. Nancy .....	103
6. Cathy .....	103
7. Joan .....	104
8. Veronica.....	105
9. JuJu .....	106
10. James.....	106
11. Juanita .....	107
12. Marie.....	108
13. Gracie .....	109

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
14. John.....	110
15. Iris .....	111
16. Ophelia.....	112
17. Francis.....	113
18. Sue.....	114
19. Michael .....	115
20. Leona.....	116
21. Jane .....	116
C. Relevant Information about Participants .....	118
VI. RESULTS .....	119
A. Overview.....	119
B. Quantitative Scales Results.....	119
C. Qualitative Results .....	124
1. Creole identity.....	129
a. How Creole people define themselves.....	129
b. Creole designation: How Creole people name their group .....	130
i. How in some Creole families the word “Creole” was not used	130
ii. How Creole people’s group names express racial affiliation	132
iii. How people adopt “Creole” as their group designation .....	133
c. Identity tension.....	134
i. Creoles can have chameleon-like feelings of being either	
Black or White .....	134
ii. “Many Creoles have the choice to be either Black or White”	134
iii. Creole is a positive mixture .....	135
iv. The betweenness of being Creole, between Black and White,	
“We ain’t Black, we ain’t White” .....	137
d. Development of Creole identity.....	138
i. Forming Creole identity through intergenerational	
transmission because their parents told them they were Creole at a	
young age .....	138
ii. Other pathways to Creole identity .....	139
iii. Genealogy as an influence of identity .....	140
e. What cultural aspects characterize Creoles.....	142
i. Creole foods.....	142
ii. Zydeco music.....	143
iii. Creole parents do not disparage their children .....	143
iv. Creoles are Catholic.....	143
v. Creoles have their own language.....	143
vi. Physical features of Creoles .....	145

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

<u>CHAPTER</u>		<u>PAGE</u>
	f. How Creoles' voices are unique and should be heard .....	147
	g. Pride in being Creole .....	147
	i. Creoles feel they come from some prominent people .....	147
	ii. Creole is a very unique heritage .....	148
2.	The place of race in Creole experience .....	149
	a. Racial identity and racial identification .....	149
	i. Coming to terms with hypodescent .....	149
	ii. Passing .....	151
	iii. Official categories .....	154
	iv. How Creole people appear to others and how Creole women are exoticized .....	158
	v. How Creole people are made to fit in a racial box and often pressured to identify as Black .....	160
	b. How politics and power center on racial identity .....	162
	i. How African Americans can claim Creoles as Black when African Americans are in the minority and not when African Americans are in the majority .....	162
	ii. Political benefits of African American identification .....	163
	iii. West Coast Creoles are a whole different race of Creoles .	164
3.	Devaluation, prejudice and negative treatment .....	165
	a. The discrimination that Creole people feel they face from both Black and White people .....	165
	i. Many Creole people feel they are not White enough to be White nor Black enough to be Black .....	166
	ii. Creole people feel they are discriminated against by both Black and White people .....	166
	b. How Creole people are made to feel that they have to stay in their place .....	168
	i. Some Creole people feel they are not allowed to excel because they are Creole .....	168
	ii. Some Creole people feel that White people are angry about the browning of America and they are trying to keep people of color in their place .....	168
	c. Skin color issues .....	169
	i. How Creoles with lighter skin are treated differentially better than Black people .....	169
	ii. How Creole people discriminate against darker-skinned people .....	170
	d. Racism .....	171
	e. The separation and segregation that Creole people face .....	172
	i. Many Creole family members of different colors were not allowed to associate with one another .....	172
	ii. Creoles are clannish .....	173



## TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

<u>CHAPTER</u>		<u>PAGE</u>
	iii. Many Creoles built their own churches because of racist practices of White churches .....	174
	f. The devaluation of Creole even if it is in the public imagination.....	174
4.	Stress and mental health.....	175
	a. The stress of being Creole because of racism .....	175
	i. Many Creoles feel it is stressful that they are put in a racial box where they feel they do not belong .....	177
	ii. Some Creoles feel that being of any color that is not White is stressful .....	178
	iii. Some Creole people feel they are subjected to stress because they look different.....	179
	b. How Creoles experience racial stress and how that leads to mental health problems .....	180
	i. Some Creole people feel that stress from discrimination caused them anxiety and depression .....	180
	ii. Some Creole people experienced anxiety related to the need to get away from the mixed race situation .....	181
	c. Alcoholism.....	182
5.	Community and community support .....	183
	a. How other individuals feel about Creole as a choice for a racial identity .....	183
	i. Many other individuals have trouble accepting Creole as a racial identity .....	183
	ii. Some individuals accept Creole as a racial identity .....	184
	iii. Many Creole people have a negative reaction from Black people when they tell them they are Creole; they think it is divisive 185	185
	b. The support that Creole people get for their Creole identity .....	186
	i. Support from family .....	186
	ii. Support from community.....	187
	c. Many Creole people feel they have a certain racial identity depending on the cultural context they find themselves in.....	188
	d. The races of the network of friends that Creole people have .....	189
	e. The Creole culture or community as being a touchstone.....	191
VII.	DISCUSSION .....	194
	A. Creole Identity, Racialized Stress, and Mental Health .....	194
	B. Revisiting the Research Questions.....	197
	C. Ethnic Identity, Race, and Culture .....	201
	D. Experiences of Racism and Comparing These Findings to Past Research .....	206
	E. Limitations .....	215
	F. Future Directions .....	217
	G. Conclusion .....	218

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
1. Addressing gaps in the literature.....	218
2. Closing reflection.....	221
CITED LITERATURE .....	222
APPENDICES .....	235
APPENDIX A .....	236
APPENDIX B .....	237
APPENDIX C .....	238
APPENDIX D .....	240
APPENDIX E .....	241
APPENDIX F.....	242
APPENDIX G .....	244
APPENDIX H.....	248
APPENDIX I .....	249
APPENDIX J .....	250
APPENDIX K.....	252
VITA .....	255

## LIST OF TABLES

<u>TABLE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
I. PARTICIPANT INFORMATION.....	83
II. QUANTITATIVE SCALES DATA AND INTERPRETATION .....	120
III. OUTLINE OF THEMES AND SUBTHEMES.....	125
IV. PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC DATA AND INSTRUMENT SCORES .....	252

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
AA/Cr	African American and Creole (identity)
BDI-II	Beck Depression Inventory-II
CODOFIL	Council for the Development of French in Louisiana
DSM	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders
EI	Ethnic Identity Achievement
GSS	General Social Survey
HPA	High Poverty Area
IRB	Institutional Review Board
LPA	Low Poverty Area
MEIM	Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure
NAMI	National Alliance for Mental Illness
NMES	National Medical Expenditures Survey
OCD	Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
OGO	Other Group Orientation
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RSE, RSES	Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale
SEP	Socioeconomic Position
SES	Socioeconomic Status
SGR	Surgeon General's Report

## SUMMARY

Multiracial people are being recognized more since the 2000 census gave respondents the option to choose more than one race. There have been more multiracial people in the United States since the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1967 that laws prohibiting interracial marriage are unconstitutional. The number of people who identify as multiracial has grown steadily since then. However, there have been multiracial people in this country since at least the colonial 1600s, resulting from encounters between White settlers and Native Americans or individuals of African heritage (Davis, 1991). One such multiracial group is Louisiana Creole people of color. The Creole Heritage Center defines Creoles of color as people who are racially mixed with French and/or Spanish and/or Native American heritages and African heritage. However, as Jolivet (2007) points out, they are intergenerationally mixed, so the option to check more than one race is not the best option for them.

Multiracial people face many challenges. They face challenges to how they racially identify. They also face discrimination. Past research on multiracial people has focused primarily on Black/White racial mixture (Renn, 2003; Rockquemore, 1998; Root, 1996). There is little research on Creole people. The research on Black/White multiracial people does not reflect the experience of Creole people. Creole people's mixture is not of actors of one generation. Their mixture stretches back through many generations.

The literature on Black/White multiracial people indicates that they form their identity in several ways, including in stages and as a resolution of a problem (Renn, 2004; Root, 1990). Literature on ethnic identity suggests that ethnic identity protects people from racial stress that can lead to mental health problems (Mossakowski, 2003).

## **SUMMARY (continued)**

This research investigates how Creole people of color form their racial identity and explores the effects of the stress of unfair racial treatment, i.e., racial discrimination and prejudice, on the mental health of Creole people of color. These concepts were investigated by using a primarily qualitative approach of a focus group, a group interview of a Creole family, and 18 individual semi-structured interviews with people who identified as Creole. These participants were recruited at Creole events and via contacts of people who agreed to participate.

Data collection and data analysis were conducted simultaneously, as is commonly done in a grounded theory approach. As I interviewed a participant, I analyzed the data. Data analysis was a process of sifting through the data and producing memos and codes, i.e., meaningful bits of data, and then thematic analysis involved inductively building themes from the codes.

The data initially yielded ten themes, which were then reduced to five major themes that encapsulated the experiences of the participants. The first theme, “Creole Identity,” focuses on how Creole people describe and name themselves. It describes how Creole people see themselves racially as “in-between people,” i.e., in between Black and White. The second theme, “The Place of Race in Creole Experience,” describes how other people racially define Creole people. It is divided into two subsections: “Racial identity and Racial Identification,” which includes a discussion of hypodescent (the one drop rule) and how Creole people can pass for White or Black, and “How Politics and Power Center on Racial Identity,” which addresses the political power of Creoles who identify as African American and the difference between West Coast Creoles and Louisiana Creoles. The third theme is “Devaluation, Prejudice, and Negative Treatment.” It describes the discrimination that Creole people report facing and also the ways in which Creoles have discriminated against darker-skinned people, including darker-skinned

### **SUMMARY (continued)**

Creole people. The fourth theme is “Stress and Mental Health.” This theme reports the stress that Creole people experience because of racism and how some of them feel that this racial stress led them to develop mental health problems. The fifth theme, “Community and Community Support,” describes how Creole identity is viewed in the community, the support that Creole people feel they receive for their Creole identity, and how the Creole community is a touchstone for its members.

The participants in this research formed their racial/ethnic identity differently than the literature suggests is the case for other multiracial people. My participants primarily formed their racial/ethnic identity through intergenerational transmission. Additionally, their identity was much more salient than the identity of other multiracial people. When they were younger the racial stress they experienced did, for some of them, lead to mental health problems. However, they prove to be resilient and do not, for the most part, experience mental health problems in the present, potentially confirming the research of Mossakowski (2003), which indicates that having high ethnic identity protects one from experiencing depression.

## I. INTRODUCTION

This dissertation investigates racial/ethnic identity formation and the effect of perceived unfair racial treatment on a notably under-researched group: Louisiana Creole people of color. There is literature on the effects of racial discrimination on the mental health of Black/White multiracial people, but there has been scant research on Louisiana Creoles and even less on Louisiana Creole people of color.

“Creole” conjures up pictures of mixed-race people, especially from New Orleans. Although there are White Creoles, who are descendants of the French in the New World, and Black Creoles, who are descendants of Africans who came to Louisiana by way of Haiti, it is Creole people of color whom we usually think of when we use the word Creole.

Creoles of color have French and/or Spanish and/or Native American heritage(s) and African heritage (Jolivet, 2007). In fact, my Creole of color participants in this study, for the most part, thought that Creole meant mixed heritage. White Creoles are fewer in number because many of them assimilated to White when the U.S. bought Louisiana. Black Creoles live together, for the most part, in communities such as St. Martinville, Louisiana. Creoles of color are spread around Louisiana and have migrated across the U.S. to places like California, Texas and Chicago.

This study investigates the effect of perceived unfair racial treatment on the mental health of Creoles of color. Are Creoles of color discriminated against? If so, does this have an effect on their mental health? This is important because if Creoles’ mental health has been affected in a deleterious manner, interventions need to be created to counteract the negative effects.

Racial/ethnic identity formation is an important facet to know about a racialized group. Multiracial people, i.e., people who are mixed-race of one generation, tend to form their



identities in stages and resolutions of problems (Renn, 2003; Root, 1998). Creole people of color are also mixed-race, but the mix extends inter-generationally, while the multiracial Black/White people we usually speak of are mixed in one generation (Jolivet, 2007). The question then is do Creole people of color form their racial identity in the same way? In stages? As resolutions of problems, such as negative racial treatment?

How Creole people of color develop their racial/ethnic identity is important because we want to know if they are like other multiracial people in forming a sense of self while navigating race-based social stressors. If so, are they subject to hypodescent, i.e., the one drop rule? Are they treated differently? Creoles had their own racial categories in 18<sup>th</sup> century Louisiana before White people of the Civil War era reduced the tripartite racial category to a binary racial category and pushed Creoles of color into the Black racial group. For the last 25 years, in fact, there has been a movement, sometimes referred to as a “Creole Renaissance,” in which Creoles have tried to reclaim their pre-Civil War status.

In the next chapter of this dissertation, the Literature Review, I discuss the origin of the word “Creole.” I also discuss the pilot study I conducted as groundwork for this dissertation research. The chapter also discusses the literature on multiracial identity development, Creole background and history, and information on how the stress of perceived unfair racial treatment is thought to affect the mental health of minorities.

In the subsequent chapter, the Research Problem, I present the statement of the research problem addressed by the dissertation study, the theoretical and conceptual influences guiding this research, and the research questions. I discuss the gaps in the literature that I found by searching past research in relevant domains, such as Creole, multiracial, identity, discrimination, stress, and mental health. I also discuss Mossakowski’s (2003) theory that ethnic identity is a

potential coping resource for minorities. Also discussed is McGonagle and Kessler's (1990) postulate that when one experiences chronic stress and then encounters an acute stressor, such as an act of discrimination, coping resources are mobilized more quickly than if the chronic stressor was not present.

In terms of theory, the Research Problem chapter addresses how this study was informed by social constructionism, the social model of disability, social identity theory, and critical race theory. This chapter also discusses Charmaz's preference for interpretive theorizing. Last, I list the two primary research questions and the secondary research question.

The Methods chapter describes the approach used to conduct the research, including the philosophy behind the research and research design, a discussion of the grounded theory approach, and a description of the procedures used for data collection. Additionally, I discuss how I recruited my sample, the type of data collected, the trustworthiness of the study, and finally the data analysis.

In the Participants chapter, I describe each of my participants, reporting the information that I collected from the demographic screening questionnaire I administered to them in order to decide whom I would choose to be in the study. It also contains information about them that I gleaned from the in-depth interviews. For those participants who participated in the focus group, there is also information from that interview.

The Results chapter is the longest chapter and heart of the dissertation because it showcases the participants' experiences and views in their own words. After discussing the scores my participants received on the three quantitative scales administered directly preceding the in-depth interviews, I present the qualitative findings, beginning with an outline of the

themes and subthemes that emerged from the data analysis and leading into an in-depth discussion of each major theme and its associated subthemes.

The last chapter is the Discussion chapter. Whereas in the Results chapter I presented my findings, in the Discussion chapter I interpret the implications of the information gleaned from both the qualitative and quantitative findings. I also re-visit the research questions and compare my research results to the literature, particularly to another study of Louisiana Creole people of color. In the conclusion of the Discussion chapter, I summarize the major findings, describe some limitations of this study, and discuss future directions for research.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Introduction

Almost all individuals experience stress in their lives and for many the experience of stress may lead to the development of a mental illness. Furthermore, many studies (e.g., Geronimus et al., 2006; Kessler et al., 1999; Williams et al., 1997) indicate that persons of minority status experience additional stress due to racial hostility and discrimination and this impacts their health. The correlation between stress and illness is strongest with mental illness (Williams et al., 2003).

Identity formation is a major task for all adolescents and it is an even more complicated task for ethnic and minority youth in the U.S. (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990). Spencer and Markstrom-Adams posit that the process of identity formation is more complex as a function of color other than White, e.g., physical features and social stereotypes, etc. Therefore, identity formation is a very complicated task for multiracial individuals

There is little research on the multiracial group, Creoles of color. Most of the research on them is on their culture. Creole is a term that has many meanings for different places and times. Scholars are unsure of the origin of the term. It has been said to be derived from the Portuguese *crioulo*, the Spanish word *crollo*, and the French term *creole* (Cope & Schaefer, 2017), which probably derives from the past tense “crialdo” of the verb “criar” which means “servants raised in the master’s house” (Mosadomi in Kein, 2000). A widely used contemporary meaning of the term Creole is someone of mixed race who has African ancestry, though some refer to individuals with this background as Creoles of color and distinguish between them and Black Creoles and White Creoles (Dubois & Melancon, 2000). The Africans with whom the Creole

people were mixed came primarily from Senegambia, therefore one should look to Senegambia for the African part of Creoles' culture (Dunbar-Nelson in Kein, 2000).

The French occupied Louisiana as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Though it was illegal, Black people and White people in Louisiana formed unions and their children were held by the Louisiana Supreme Court in 1810 to be free. Creole was the term used to designate first generation European settlers, black slaves, mulattos, and other free people of color. Creoles with mixed-race heritage had higher social standing than Black Creoles. They were educated and landowners. When the United States took over Louisiana in 1803, Creoles of color became classified with Black people and lost their status. There has been in the past 25 years a Creole Renaissance in which Creoles of color strive to be recognized again.

This chapter explores the literature on multiracial identity development and how racial stress impacts the mental health of multiracial persons. The following review of the literature presents six sections that emerged giving background information on the topics. The first section is a description of the pilot study that informed this dissertation research. The second section on multiracial identity traces the beginnings of the race-mixing of Black native people of Africa with White Europeans up to the specific racial-mixing of Black people and certain Europeans and/or Native Americans in the U.S. that produced Louisiana Creole people of color. The third section discusses Creole background and history. The fourth section details the effect of gender on multiracial identity. The fifth section discusses ethnic identity and mental health. The final section on multiracial identity, stress, and mental health provides information on how the stress of unfair racial treatment is thought to affect the mental health of minorities, in particular multiracial individuals. These sections contribute to deepen our understanding of multiracial individuals, including Creole people.

## B. **Pilot Study**

Before I conducted this dissertation research, I conducted an unpublished pilot study titled “Creole People: Identity and Mental Health.” The pilot study was a qualitative study using a semi-structured interview approach that was Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved. Participants were a convenience sample of 14 Creole people whom I recruited at a Creole Heritage Center conference in St. Charles, Illinois. The nine female and five male participants were from all parts of the U.S. The average age of the participants was 50.8 years. All participants signed an IRB-approved consent form and I informed them that their participation was voluntary and they could drop out of the study at any time without any repercussions. I created the interview guide after a review of Creole literature with the help of my faculty sponsor. Because they were from all different parts of the country, I interviewed them over the telephone and audio-recorded the interviews with an in-line recording device. I transcribed all of the interviews for ease of analysis. Thematic analysis produced four major themes: 1. Identity; 2. Creole Culture; 3. Negative Racial Treatment; and 4. Stress and Mental Illness.

Some of the important findings of the study include that these Creole participants feel they are more than an ethnicity, they want a census racial category, the Catholic religion is important to Creole people, and Creole people do experience stress when they are thought of as Black. In addition, the majority suffer from stress sometime in their lives because of racial issues. Participants who grew up in a Creole community where their identity was supported and solidified, but do not have the support of a Creole community at present, do not report suffering from stress and mental illness, while many who did not grow up in a Creole community report suffering from alienation, stress, and mental illness.

The overall findings of the study included:

1. How Creole people racially identify depends largely on context – time, place, generation.
2. Creole people feel that most Black people, as well as other individuals, pressure them to racially identify as Black.
3. Creole people raised in Creole communities report having ethnic pride and experience less stress from negative racial treatment than those who did not live in those communities.
4. The majority of Creole people identify as “Other” on official race forms.
5. Most Creole people who grew up in Creole communities did not report going through stages in forming their Creole identity.

These findings helped shape how I designed my dissertation research. I asked my participants interview questions based on some of the findings, e.g., “How do Creole people racially identify on official forms” and “How do other people feel about you identifying as Creole”?

### C. **Multiracial Identity**

F. James Davis (1991) wrote the seminal work on hypodescent in the U.S. – *Who Is Black?*. Jolivet (2007) defined the rule of hypodescent as the law under which “one drop of Black blood not only qualifies, but forces, requires, and restricts an individual to be Black, a category which is often false or misleading and only partly true” (p. 22). The law of hypodescent is also called the “one drop rule.”

In his book, Davis asserts that White-Black miscegenation occurred for centuries before slaves were brought to North America. The Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, and Norse

explored North Africa and had sexual contact with African women (Davis, 1991). Thus many Africans were already racially mixed before coming to the Americas. According to Davis, miscegenation occurred in the colonial U.S. between free Black people and Black slaves and the White underclass, though there were laws forbidding it. There were conflicting laws regarding the racial status of the so-called “mulatto” child until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century when society, affected by the pressures of the Civil War, changed the racial classification system from a tripartite one to a binary Black and White system.

Homer Plessy was a Creole man who sat in the White section of a railroad car and was forced to leave. He sued and the case went all the way to the Supreme Court where he lost. With the Plessy versus Ferguson decision in 1896, the “one drop rule” became the established norm in the U.S. In consequence, mulattoes assimilated into the Black community so much so that many Black people now vociferously defend the “one drop rule” and oppose the multiracial movement because they feel it will dilute Black political power (Davis, 1991). However, work contemporary to Davis pointed to a new trend in how mixed-race people racially identify. Rockquemore (1998) found that many biracial people racially identify in other ways than Black, including biracial and refusing to racially identify themselves altogether. Multiracial people also value other peoples’ accurate perception that they are multiracial (Remedios & Chasteen, 2013). Remedios and Chasteen found that multiracial people have great interest in interacting with a partner who correctly perceives them as multiracial. Their multiracial status is something they want verified by others.

Tajfel (1979) found that when people identify themselves as members of a group (in-group) and the group has been socially disadvantaged, this can lead the members of the group to fortify their connections to the group. Therefore, discrimination against one’s in-group can foster



more identification with the group (Giamo et al. 2012). Jackson et al. (2012) found that perceived discrimination is related to mental stress and threatens psychological well-being. Giamo et al. found that for multiracial people, self-stereotyping, i.e., feeling one belongs in the multiracial category, helps one to feel satisfied with one's life.

Davis (1991) does not mention Louisiana Creole people in his book on hypodescent. The majority of Louisiana Creole people of color never assimilated to Black, but maintained their status as multiracial, identifying as "Other" on official forms asking for race (Brasseux, 2005; Dominguez, 1986).

Spencer (2004) is aligned with Davis (1991) in that both agreed that multiracial people are not a new phenomenon and Spencer estimates that 90% of African Americans are multiracial. He disagrees with a principal argument of the multiracial movement--that multiracial individuals are free to racially identify in many ways. He feels the argument is critically unsound. He asserts that proponents of the multiracial movement must accept race as a biological reality and then selectively use hypodescent in order for their arguments to work. If they claim race is socially constructed, they must explain why the biological mating of persons from two socially constructed races results in the birth of a biological multiracial child. Spencer argues that multiracial ideology creates these philosophical problems because it posits a multiracial population whose existence is dependent on the existence of a pair of biological races. He asserts that proponents of multiracial ideology must make logical sense of these issues before this ideology can be accepted as intellectually sound.

Spencer (2004) also takes a stand against a multiracial category on the federal census, saying that he does not see the necessity of a new racial category for the welfare of multiracial people. However, it can be argued that he does not adequately address the psychological welfare

of mixed-race people, more than half of whom prefer to racially identify as biracial (Rockquemore, 1998).

Spencer's (2004) article is important because it highlights certain issues with multiracial ideology that should be examined more closely. However, the article does not offer solutions. Spencer claims that multiracial advocates use circular logic, but he also used circular logic in how he addresses these issues. In some parts of this paper, he supports the social construction of race; in other parts he discusses race as biological. In addition, Black as a race had been defined by the federal government as being 1/32 Black, i.e., having at least one great-great grandparent who is Black. By this criterion, many people considered White actually would be Black. Therefore, many Whites are multiracial--a point that Spencer does not discuss.

The definition of Creole has changed over time. The Royal Spanish Academy of Arts held that the early use of "Creole" meant all persons born locally who are of non-native origin. The 1929 edition of Larousse stated that race was the determining factor over who was Creole and not local birth. However, the 1976 Webster New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English language gives eight definitions of Creole which include racial, cultural, and geographic definitions (Dominguez, 1994).

There have been many models of biracial and multiracial identity development. Most early models show biracial/multiracial identity development taking place in stages. Root's (1996) model introduces a new way of looking at biracial identity development. She proposes looking at racial identity as not being developed in stages, but rather as reflecting different resolutions (described later) that the problems of biracial and multiracial identity problems pose for the individual (Ponterotto et al., 2006).

Root (1996) chose to use an ecological model of racial identity development, as does Renn (2003), to investigate this issue. For Root the ecological model of racial identity development allows individuals to adopt various identities which may be “situational, simultaneous or changeable throughout the lifecycle.” Renn (2003) uses a more formalized ecological process; she uses Bronfenbrenner’s ecology model of human development to frame her discussion of the racial identity development of students of multiple racial heritages. Though Renn discusses early theories of biracial identity development, she singled out Root’s (1996) model as having the greatest influence on her work with respect to identity. Root’s model recognized different ways in which an individual’s race situates him or her on the border between the races:

1. Believing that one can have several racial identities at the same time.
2. How one chooses to racially identify at a given point in time depends on social context.
3. Refusing to choose between two racial identities, but identifying with both.
4. One holds an identity for a finite time and holds another identity at a different time in life.

Several circumstances can influence biracial or multiracial persons’ choice of identity away from Black, e.g., family dysfunction, little exposure to Black people, negative pressure from Black people (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001; Rockquemore & Arend, 2002; Root, 1998). Louisiana Creole people expressed the same “push factor”--the negative treatment by Blacks and Whites that pushes biracial individuals away from identifying as Black (Cooke, 2014; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002).

Whereas Root's (1998) use of ecology in delineating identities for mixed-race persons was a loose schema, Renn (2003) used Bronfenbrenner's processes and outcomes framework to provide the following processes for multiracial identity development :

1. "The influence of individuals (person);
2. Their interactions with the environment and the responses they provoke (process);
3. Their interactions within immediate settings (context); and
4. Changing socio-cultural influences on development (time)." (p. 385)

Using this model revealed how complex mixed-race racial identity development can be. It definitely revealed how mixed-race racial identity is nonlinear. Chavez and Guido-DiBrito (1999) "make it clear that people with minority status have a different ethnic make-up and one that is less desirable within mainstream society" (p. 39). If race is looked at biologically, persons of the stigmatized race might feel shame if they do not also receive positive messages about their race or racial component (Chavez & DiBrito, 1999). This sense of ethnic pride is important because it has been associated with higher self-esteem (Bracey et al., 2004). Bracey and colleagues found that adolescents with higher self-esteem have a more positive ethnic identity, though the direction of causality is not known. In addition, having a positive ethnic identity also protects one from depression (Mossakowski, 2003) and perhaps other mental illnesses. My study examined this question.

Likewise, if looked at literally, persons of mixed race belong in a mixed-race category. However, until very recently they have not been placed in a mixed-race category because of the one drop rule. In places in the world where biracial persons are accepted, such as Latin America, mixed-race persons have not fared much better. In Brazil, biracial and other multiracial persons do not fare any better socially and economically than Blacks, even though they are higher than

Blacks in Brazil's caste system. These mixed-race persons have strong national identities but a weak racial consciousness and consequently have little power as minorities (Telles & Sue, 2009).

Mixed-race individuals may be at a disadvantage in forming their racial identity because racial identity is triggered by two conflicting processes: 1) values and traditions instilled by family, neighborhood, and educational communities, and 2) many negative messages hurled at one by society if one is not White (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999). Unless one is from a specific formal group of multiracial persons such as Louisiana Creoles, there does not exist the community of White/Black multiracial people to give one those positive messages about one's identity. Therefore, multiracial individuals are not given much support in forming a multiracial identity. However, recent research has shown that the "marginal man" is a myth and that multiracial people who achieve a healthy multiracial identity have good psychological health (Renn, 2008). In fact, in my Creole pilot study, I was told that older generations of Creole persons did not want to identify as Creole because that means one is part Black, but the youngest generation of Creole persons embraced their African heritage. However, Feliciano (2016) found that those multiracial people who identify as Black and another race are generally classified as Black. She also found that dark skin is identified with Blackness. She found that Black people who do not have dark skin are likely to be classified as multiracial. Feliciano believes that this suggests that the one drop rule is changing.

Renn (2008) reports that several studies (Root, 2003; Wijeyesinghe, 2001)" find that how a multiracial individual looks--skin tone, hair texture and color, eye and nose shape, etc.-- influences choice of racial identity" (p.18). This seems to contradict Root's (1998) assertion from the Biracial Sibling Project that phenotype does not influence choice of racial identity.

Some of the theories of biracial/multiracial identity development are similar but they approach the problem from different perspectives. Root (1996) was among the first researchers to talk about racial identity development in a nonlinear fashion. She also discussed something other authors had not talked about--that the experiences of biracial people of varying racial mixtures share some common experiences. She developed the concept of borders to explain the social location where the two racial components of identity meet. From this vantage point she discussed the different configurations of racial identity that a biracial person can make. Her schema included these different ways in which an individual may be situated in relation to the border (p. 6).

Root's (1996) racial categories are different from Rockquemore's and Brunsma's categories, which are discrete racial categories such as exclusively Black or exclusively White, border, protean, and transcendental (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). Root describes multiracial people as crossing racial borders such that they can: 1) have both feet in both groups; 2) shift background and foreground as one crosses social contexts defined by race; 3) experience the border as a reference point such as the *mestiza*; and 4) make a home in one camp for a long time and then travel to other camps from time to time. Rockquemore's work dealt exclusively with White/Black biracial persons (Rockquemore, 2002; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Rockquemore & Arendt, 2003). Of the other authors, only Root (1996) suggests the possibility of a multiracial person identifying as White for any extended period of time with her forays into different identities at different times in one's life.

Renn (2000) focuses on multiracial students creating a multiracial space and does not entertain the possibilities of racial classification in this article. She focuses instead on how and why the multiracial spaces were created and maintained. The study asks if there were enough

students to create a multiracial identity space and how did most multiracial students create their own peer culture? Renn looked at three colleges and found that:

1. one had enough students and the opportunity so that its multiracial students created a public multiracial space;
2. at a smaller school where there were fewer multiracial students, the students created a private space; and
3. at the third school the students felt that their multiracial identities were accepted and they, therefore, did not feel the need to create a multiracial space.

This work is important to my work with Louisiana Creole people because it highlights how important reference groups are. Renn found that with college students, race is a master status--an important factor in how one understands oneself. Reference group orientation showed up as one of the four important themes in Miville's (2005) phenomenological study of multiracial identity development. The other three important themes were:

1. Encounters with racism;
2. The "chameleon" experience in which multiracial individuals expressed that their racial identification did not contain strict social boundaries; and
3. Identity development in context in which racial identity tended to depend upon the influence of others such as parents.

In Miville et al.'s (2005) study, the participants expressed many feelings including alienation and pride. Several expressed the sentiment that they had given up trying to "fit in." The authors of this study said that as usual with White/Black people, the participants in this study identified racially with the parent of color. However, for Rockquemore & Brunsma (2002), it is not known what the contributions of each of the parents are except for some general labeling

tendencies Brunsma (2005) brought to light, e.g., that parents of biracial children are beginning to move the child away from identification with the minority parent and that ethnicity is trumping race in the case of Hispanic/Black mixture.

#### D. **Creole Background and History**

The word “Creole” just means indigenous to an area, but over the years it has acquired many meanings. The term “criollo” from which it is derived was used in Spanish settlements in the New World and was used to denote slaves. Creoles were not just people, but there were also creole ponies, creole tomatoes, and creole onions among other things (Brasseux, 2005).

Creole people of color are descendants of the gens de couleur libres. There were few free Blacks in Louisiana in the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there were a significant number of free Blacks. Manumission did not happen as much after the Americans took over Louisiana. Many places, i.e., Creole women placed into long-lasting relationships with European men, were given parcels of land, which they developed and became very successful (Brasseux, 2005).

Although White/Black multiracial individuals had some social standing, Louisiana Creoles had the highest socioeconomic status (SES) of free people of color in the South during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; however, they were not seen as on the same level as Whites (Susberry, 2004) but rather on a higher level than Black people. Mixed race people are usually put into the Black category; however, in Louisiana there was formerly a caste system in which Creole people had an intermediate status (Mills, 2013). During that time, there was a cultural divide between Black and part-Black Creoles. However, once slavery was abolished, there was little distinction between Louisiana Creoles and Blacks. This made it easier for the three-tier race society to be abolished and to be replaced by a two-tier society (Susberry, 2004). DuBois and



Melancon (2000) gave additional details about Louisiana and defined modern-day Louisiana Creoles more specifically. They write about the tripartite system of race that existed in the Louisiana Territory. According to DuBois and Melancon, during the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Louisiana there were White Creoles, colored Creoles and Black Creoles. When the U.S. bought Louisiana in 1803, the White Anglos tried to Anglicize Louisiana and eliminate the French language and culture. White Creoles began to adopt Anglo culture. When the Civil War came about, White Creoles aligned themselves with White Anglos and began to distance themselves from colored Creoles and wanted to distance themselves from the label of Creole which they now associated with Black. White Creoles and Anglos saw colored Creoles and Black Creoles as the same and a binary system of race began to develop--Black and White. Black Creoles, colored Creoles and African Americans began to intermarry until the distinctions between them blurred according to Dubois and Melancon (2000).

Dubois and Melancon (2000) stated that White Louisiana Creoles spoke colonial French. Black Louisiana Creoles spoke what is today Creole French. Colored Louisiana Creoles spoke either, but the majority spoke White Creole French. There are three theories of the origin of Louisiana Creole: 1) French origin; 2) hybrid; and 3) African origin. It is probably a hybrid, originating from the mulatto middlemen involved in the slave trade who had one African parent and one European parent who could speak to the Europeans and to the Africans. Gwendolyn Hall stated that Louisiana Creole is largely French, but that its grammar is primarily African. (Mosadomi in Kein, 2000).

White Louisiana Creoles started speaking English when the Anglos bought Louisiana. Many colored Louisiana Creoles stopped speaking French, but Black Louisiana Creoles continued to speak Creole French up to the present. Creole writers usually wrote in French, but

White writers of folktales wrote in Creole (Kein, 2000). Dubois and Melancon (2000) argue that because the Black Louisiana Creoles continued to speak the patois that they should be considered today's true Louisiana Creoles. However, there are many Louisiana Creoles today who participate in Creole culture and do not speak Creole but consider themselves true Creoles because of their mixed ancestry and cultural heritage. Many people call themselves Creole, but there is no official consensus on the definition of who is Louisiana Creole. However, in modern history, Creoles of color are considered Black by the government and by race scholars.

Dominguez (1986) wrote of the case of a woman, Susie Phipps, who considered herself White all of her life. However, because she had a great-great-great-great grandmother who was Black, in court Louisiana was able to justify categorizing her as Black. So Creoles of color, with their Black ancestors were also considered Black. However, in 1964, the Supreme Court ruled racial classification as "suspect," although they continued to uphold racist statutes that marked part-Black people as Black. Creoles of color, therefore, have been made to fit in the Black category (Dominguez, 1986). Dominguez cites this as public opinion becoming law.

Dugar (2009) looked at the culture and racial self-identification of Creoles of Color in New Orleans. She argues that to understand Creoles of Color, one must understand the part that isolation played in their history. She recounts that after the U.S. bought the Louisiana Territory, White Creoles assimilated with White Americans, whereas Creoles of Color pursued a path of isolationism. She says this is where they get the reputation for being clannish. Dugar said that this path was positive for Creoles of Color during the Jim Crow era; it became a liability during the Civil Rights era. The use of the "brown paper bag test" and the "comb test" were examples of how Creoles tried to isolate themselves. A Creole of Color had to be lighter than a brown paper bag and a comb had to glide through their hair easily. She said that Creoles of Color segregated

themselves from African Americans and they rarely socialized. According to Dugar, during the Civil Rights era Black was no longer seen negatively, and many Creoles began to identify as Black. However, during the 1990s there was a resurgence of Creole, and multiracial became chic. During this time, Dugar wrote, many Creoles got together to make a resolution to Congress that Creole be a census category. One must keep in mind that Dugar only researched New Orleans Creoles.

Jolivet (2007) provides a radically different perspective. He uses the terms “Creole” and “Creole of Color” interchangeably. He does not acknowledge the separation of Louisiana Creole into White Creoles, Creoles of Color, and Black Creole. He asserts that there was not a large enough population of White women in the Louisiana Territory to have produced many White Louisiana Creoles. Jolivet also does not acknowledge any difference between Black Louisiana Creoles and Creoles of Color. He does, however, emphasize the special case of the Creole-Indian. Jolivet maintains that it is difficult to trace the Indian roots of many Louisiana Creoles because before 1920, Native Americans were regarded as colored as were Blacks. Thus he posits that many tribes that appear to have died out are probably living in Creole-Indian communities. Jolivet (2007) recalls interviewing many Louisiana Creole people who asserted that they were not Black *or* White nor Black *and* White, but that they were Creole.

There has been so little research done on Louisiana Creoles that there is disagreement about who is Louisiana Creole. Louisiana Creoles of Cane River are credited as beginning with the Metoyer family of the Louisiana Territory. Claude Metoyer was a French landowner and Marie Coin Coin was a former slave and free Black woman with whom he had 10 children. Coin Coin, a successful businesswoman, amassed a fortune which she left to her children with

Metoyer. Some of her children established Cane River, one of the first communities of Creoles of color in Louisiana.

There are other Creoles around the world, all with mixed racial heritage, though not necessarily the same mixture as Louisiana Creoles. The Creole people of Mauritius share some characteristics with Louisiana Creole people of color. When asked to describe themselves, Mauritian Creoles refer to skin color and hair texture in the same way as Louisiana Creole people of color do (Jungers, 2009). The majority of Susberry's (2004) Creole participants reported that the phenotype of olive skin color and straight hair were necessary to be considered a Louisiana Creole. Therefore phenotype is important to Louisiana Creoles while it is not as important for White/Black multiracial individuals (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2001; Root, 1998). In addition, such as with the Louisiana Creole people of color, Mauritian Creoles were embarrassed to speak their Creole language (Jungers, 2009) which is why the Louisiana Creole language, Kouri Vini, has been almost lost.

Though it might not be possible to pinpoint exactly the ethnogenesis of Creoles of color, they probably originate from the very late 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there were few White women in the Louisiana Territory, but there were many mixed-race women. The system of placage was set up in response to this condition. With placage, Creole women brought their daughters to "quadroon balls" where they would find a suitable White man to establish a relationship with, though these men might also be married. Many men had two families. They provided for their Creole children and sometimes stayed with them for life. Placage created another race of people (Martin in Kein, 2000).

### E. **Intersectionality and Multiracial Identity**

Second -wave feminists have theorized that gender is not the same thing as sex.

According to this view, sex is a biological characteristic, whereas gender is a socially constructed achieved status. We are usually born male or female; however, our socialization determines whether our gender is that of a man or woman (West & Zimmerman, 1987) In previous times, biological determinism led people to believe that certain social characteristics of men and women (e.g., intellectual propensities) are innate. However, second wave feminism debunked these ideas and introduced people to the social construction of gender. Gender is socially determined and is commonly used to express power relations (Garland-Thompson, 2002). It is hard to write about gender identity without bringing in racial identity as another historically and socially constructed identity concept. Because women and people of color were historically oppressed, it is also difficult to write about race and gender without also discussing class. Therefore, this section of the literature review will discuss gender, race, and class.

Multiracial people are situated in more than one racial identity group. White/Black biracial persons are situated in two racial identity groups: White and Black. Louisiana Creole persons of color are situated in two or more racial identity groups: Black and one or more of French and/or Spanish and/or Native American racial groups. Identity is what makes an entity the same as another. Individual identity is what makes an individual unique. Group identity is not defined by attributes, but by a sense of common identity that members of the group share (Young, 1989).

Louisiana Creole people whose race mixture is intergenerational are a social group, if not a race, while White/Black biracial persons may constitute a social group. Both Louisiana Creole people and White/Black multiracial people are marginalized within the community of color.

However, this marginalization can be viewed as a sign that the racial identification of multiracial persons is recognized. Young (1989) defines social groups as aggregates in which some feature of identity defines the group. Race is not a biological classification but a social group, as contemporary thought dictates that race is socially constructed. Young gives the example of Black Americans and notes that all people who identify as Black Americans do not have dark skin, but they do have some common affinity that they all recognize.

In 1915, Louisiana passed Act 220, the rule of “hypodescent.” This was a paradigm shift from an earlier time when multiracial persons such as Louisiana Creole people and White/Black multiracial persons had their own racial classifications. Their differences from the dominant racial identity groups were culturally and legally recognized. Creole, mulatto, quadroon and octoroon were racial statuses. During the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries these racial differences were reflected in class differences. Louisiana Creole people and the various classifications of multiracial people were in social classes situated between Whites and Blacks. Louisiana Creole people, in particular, were closely aligned with Whites. Louisiana Creole people were educated and many had land and other markers of wealth. The state’s resources were distributed hierarchically with Black people at the bottom of the hierarchy. Though they were “gens de couleur,” Louisiana Creoles and White/Black multiracial people enjoyed a higher status than Black people.

If one is wealthy and educated but a person of color, as the Louisiana Creoles were, class structures race. As mentioned above, one cannot talk about one of these identity categories without bringing up the other categories. This phenomenon in which social locations are intertwined is called intersectionality. Crenshaw (1991), Ken (2007), and Reynoso (2004) all discuss intersectionality, though Reynoso discusses it in the specific context of the Latina.

Crenshaw writes about violence against women of color and how these women have raised their individual complaints to the level of society where they have a collective voice and thus they have more power. She discusses how these women of color are situated in two political groups, race and gender, that sometimes have opposing agendas. Race and class have overlapped for Louisiana Creole people and, as Dossa (2005, 2006) asserts, it is in these intersectional margins that societal change can take place. It is here that the marginalized Louisiana Creole individuals offer resistance to the status quo in the form of activism. They push against their invisibility by asserting that they deserve their own Census category. They refuse to be classified by society as other than how they racially self-identify and are forcing society to recognize them. Additionally, Louisiana Creole people have another avenue of resistance, which is their effort to preserve the Creole language. This language component adds weight to their assertion that they are a social group with a group identity.

Louisiana Creole peoples' voicing that they wanted a racial category was resisted by the political culture of most African Americans. In their role as preserving the status quo for people with Black heritage, many African Americans did not want the power of their political culture diluted; they argued against such a category and finally agreed to a compromise offered by the federal government to allow multiracial people to check all races that apply on the Census form, thus not diluting the Black racial count (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2008). This compromise might work for the Black status quo; however, Louisiana Creole people have their own race-based organizations and in many studies (e.g., Brunnsma & Rockquemore, 2001; Renn, 2003), the majority of multiracial people have made it clear that they hold a multiracial identity. This divisiveness among oppressed groups (Black and multiracial) weakened their power to fight against the prescribed role of second-class citizenship that the dominant culture tries to thrust

upon them. Louisiana Creole people have some in-fighting too (namely, who are the true Louisiana Creole people — Colored Creoles or Black Creoles?), which weakens their power as well.

Whereas Crenshaw (1991) sees this intersectional region as composed of intersecting social groups, Ken (2007) sees race, class, and gender as social structural locations. They cannot be demographic characteristics because, as Ken (2007) explains, they are constantly changing. Ken reiterates the feminist premise about the fluidity of race, class and gender--that they “depend on and mutually constitute each other.” Ken states that this phrase is best understood in descriptions of the relationship between the privileged and the oppressed. She reiterates bell hook’s (hooks, 1984) perspective that society is a circle and the privileged sit in the center while the oppressed sit around the edge where the view is better. She also claims that the privileged are unaware of their powerful impact on the marginalized. Ken writes of Harstock who uses Marxian theory to challenge the assumption that persons in the cheap seats see more clearly. Ken reminds us that the cheap seats are usually obstructed-view seats. She states that the vantage perspective that those in the margins are claimed to have is not natural but has to be developed. Those in the disadvantaged locations do not know how they got there and it is harmful for them to stay there. Ken adds that at least some of the privileged realize that they perpetrate the oppression because it is to their advantage whether the disadvantaged cannot see or whether they have the “gift of second sight” (or probably both, Ken [2007] says), “the way people are structurally located shapes their perspective” and these perspectives shape the locations in a dialectical fashion.

Race, class, and gender intersect for multiracial individuals. Race is a fluid social location. How society racially classifies multiracial people like Louisiana Creole people has changed over time. Often it has depended on class. As previously discussed, Louisiana Creole



people were racially defined as such in earlier times when their resources located them in the higher class. This reflects how race and class are intertwined.

Crenshaw (1991) introduced the concept of “intersectionality”--why differences within groups need to be taken into consideration if the subjects of interest are to be treated equitably and comprehensively. This further explains Ken’s (2007) intertwining of groups. She explains how intersectionality works in her description of how the special interests of women of color are not taken into consideration by either the feminist movement which primarily serves the interests of White women or the antiracism movement which primarily serves the interests of Black men. Thus their interests as women and as people of color are marginalized. As Dossa (2005, 2006) points out, it is here in the margins that revolutionary change takes place for the subjects. Crenshaw explains how the concept of intersectionality best expresses where and what work needs to be done to create a space where the racial and gender needs of women of color are not subsumed under those of White women and Black men.

Culture is a crucial aspect of multiracial persons’ makeup because they have allegiances to more than one culture. This can be seen as important when the question of dating comes up. Perhaps because multiracial women are sexualized and exoticized, research has been done on the dating preferences of biracial women (Roberts-Clarke et al., 2004; Rockquemore, 2002), but not on mixed-race men. The authors stated that the family has the biggest impact on racial identity formation, but how peers, such as dating partners, see these women is also crucial in these women's racial identity formation. Furthermore, women in their study who were part Black were aware of a certain privilege and power they had among Black men, who prefer lighter skinned women with straight hair. They were also aware of the problems this gave them with dark-skinned Black women. These findings are similar to Rockquemore’s (2002), who found that race

has undertones of power in our society White is considered a high status race while Black is considered a low status race. These women are situated in the middle and they are more likely to be sought after by high status Black men (Rockquemore, 2002). The women in Rockquemore's (2002) study, for the most part, embraced both of their racial identities and were comfortable with themselves (Rockquemore, 2002), except for some friction between them and their dark-skinned sisters.

Binning et al. (2009) reinforced this finding with their study of which racial groups multiracial people identified with. They found that multiracial individuals who identified with multiple groups fared better psychologically, reporting less stress than multiracial individuals who identified with either a high status group, i.e., Whites and Asians, or a low status group, i.e., Blacks or Latinos. In addition, those multiracial individuals who identified with multiple groups experienced less alienation than those who identified with either a low status or high status group.

Rockquemore (2002) and Root (1998) observed that gender matters in multiracial identity development. Gender awareness seems to occur before racial awareness (Root, 1998). Gender appears to matter for mixed-race women in that mixed-race women are exoticized and sexualized by men and this has an effect on their relations with Black women which, in turn, has an effect on their racial identity development (Rockquemore, 2002; Root, 1998). Some mixed-race women react to the friction they receive from Black women by distancing themselves from the Black race and tend to develop a multiracial identity (Rockquemore, 2002).

Historically for Louisiana Creole people, the closer that one's physiognomy approximated White physiognomy, the more one was accepted by the dominant culture (and some Louisiana Creoles too) and allowed to share in the societal privileges accorded Whites.

Rockquemore (2002) found that White/Black biracial women were concerned about their appearance and found it difficult to accept African physiognomy. This reflects how women are judged more on appearances which is power for women in the same way that intelligence and achievement are power for men (Rockquemore, 2002). Gender deeply affects the social process through which multiracial women form their racial identities. As previously stated, Rockquemore (2002) posits that high status Black men prefer lighter-skinned biracial and Black women. This creates negative interaction for biracial women with dark-skinned Black women which, in turn, causes negative internalized feelings towards Blackness, thus affecting their racial identity formation. A Louisiana Creole woman in my pilot study mentioned this phenomenon in her own experience. She said, “my cousin should not have entered the beauty contest with Black women because of course she would win” (Cooke, 2014).

In the history of Louisiana Creole peoples’ struggle with society’s vacillating recognition of their identity, the political economy has figured prominently (Dossa, 2005, 2006; Erevelles, 1996; Young, 1989). When Louisiana Creole people first appeared in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, being progeny of White European men or White men of European ancestry, they were accorded privileges like wealth and education that were not available to their Black counterparts. However, during various times in history when it became advantageous to the status quo, this recognition of difference was rescinded. This can clearly be seen during the pre-Civil War time period when slaves were property and it was economically advantageous for persons like White/Black multiracial individuals to be classified as Black so that Whites could possess most of the property and wealth (Erevelles, 1996). Arguably, society needs this underclass to do its work. Through this exploitative “inclusion,” democracies define their citizens as “us” and “them” (Dossa, 2006).

Racial identification is an interactive process (Rockquemore, 2002) and this can be seen in the history of Louisiana Creole and White/Black multiracial identity development. Several participants in my pilot study said that when Louisiana Creole people were identified as Black by society, they racially identified as Black during that time (Cooke, 2014). In addition, Rockquemore (2002) found the relationship with one's parents to be important in racial self-identification. In the pilot study several respondents talked about racial identification preferences that their parents and grandparents had which influenced and, in some sense, dictated to them how they should racially identify. Davenport (2018) found that gender is a reliable predictor of racial identification with biracial men and women. Biracial women are more likely than biracial men to identify as multiracial. She also found that when observers label racially ambiguous biracial people, women are less often labelled as the racial minority.

Generational differences in racial self-identification also emerged in the pilot study. Older Louisiana Creole persons of two generations ago do not like to call themselves Creole because that racial identity includes Black. They prefer to identify with the French part of their heritage and refer to themselves as "Frenchmen." This was the only racial self-identification that some respondents had until they reached adolescence or adulthood and had more information available to them. Then they began to forge an identity that included Black in their self-concept. One generation closer was able to refer to themselves as Creole and incorporate Black into their self-concepts, though for the most part they did not wish to be referred to as Black. The youngest generation felt very comfortable acknowledging the Black part of their identity, though they identified as Creole (Cooke, 2014).

These changes happened through the interaction of individuals with society. As those in the margins resisted how society wanted to label them, this resistance led to changes in society and those changes affected and continue to affect other individuals in a dialectic way.

F. **Ethnic Identity and Mental Health**

Various stressors have been found to have a deep intellectual impact on ethnic/racial minority groups. Though there has been debate on this issue (Smith & Silva, 2011), some researchers find that ethnic identity acts as a buffer from the negative psychological effects of racial discrimination (Mossakowski, 2003). Discrimination and some stressors have been found to influence mental distress more than large scale life events among African Americans, suggesting that discrimination has an adverse effect over time and is not just limited to the time of a particular negative event.

There are two main dimensions of ethnic identity (Phinney, 1992). Ethnic exploration or search is the process of trying out alternative beliefs and prescriptions about one's identity. Ethnic commitment is the standards one consistently holds regarding the self. Primarily, ethnic identity is composed of pride in one's ethnic group, a person's participation in the group's cultural practices, and a sense of belonging. Mossakowski et al. (2019) found that ethnic identity was associated with enhanced psychological well-being among the foreign-born and not the U.S. born in a study in Miami-Dade County. In fact, they found that ethnic identity can exacerbate the negative consequences of discrimination. The authors suggest that the U.S. born are perhaps more sensitive to the negative effects of discrimination, probably because they can perceive it better than the foreign born or maybe because they have greater expectations in how they should be treated than the foreign born. However, the authors found that everyday discrimination produced depression in both the U.S. born and foreign born.

Most contemporary stress researchers find that stressors that are experienced across the life course make a contribution to continual disparities in physical and mental health (Ong, Fuller-Rowell, & Burrow, 2009). The largest offender of this kind is discrimination based on race. In a large national study, Kessler, Mickelson and Williams (1999) report that nearly 49% of Black participants report encountering some form of discrimination, and research shows that deleterious health in African Americans is linked to racism (Geronimus et al., 2006). National samples of minority individuals do associate major depression and generalized anxiety disorder as comparable in degree to the effects of traumas such as sexual assault (Kessler, Davis, & Kendler, 1997; Kessler et al., 1999). Continual exposure to discriminatory events is associated with cardiovascular disease. Low status individuals have fewer defenses against this threat to their identity because they react strongly to stress (Ong, Fuller-Rowell, & Burrow, 2009).

Most research on minority identity, social stressors, and mental health has focused on African Americans and very little work has focused on Latinos. Torres (2009) conducted a study that looked at Latino students from more affluent backgrounds and found that the perceived discrimination they experienced led to depressive symptoms. The authors postulate that chronic exposure to discrimination may require these individuals to marshal internal resources, which when used up may lead to mental health problems.

Torres and Ong (2010) cite Umana-Taylor, Diversi, and Fine (2002) in stating that ethnic identity has also been associated with better mental health outcomes, including mental wellness and higher self-esteem. Ethnic identity may provide a repository of ways to deal with stress. Torres and Ong support the notion that ethnic identity buffers one from the stress of discrimination and therefore decreases mental health problems. However, this study was done before a meta-analysis by Smith and Silva (2011) of 184 studies in which they examined ethnic

identity and personal well-being of North American minorities and found that in the vast majority of these studies, ethnic identity did not buffer the stress of discrimination. They did, however, find a lag effect, in which the negative effects of discrimination continued into the next day thus diminishing recovery from daily discrimination, but that ethnic commitment is a strong resource that helps with the demands of daily stress and discrimination. Torres and Ong (2010) found that younger individuals were at increased risk of experiencing depression compared to older adults. Almeida and Horn (2004) and Yip et al. (2008) hypothesize that this may be because older individuals have created more coping mechanisms over time. They also found that ethnic identity exploration, or looking at alternatives, promotes vulnerability to discrimination. It could be that ethnic identity exploration is more fluid than ethnic commitment, whereas commitment is a more durable dimension of the individual's sense of self. Therefore periods of exploration may put the individual at risk.

This section would be enhanced if I could write about Creole mental health. However, after searching the databases, I did not find any information on Creole mental health that was relevant to this dissertation. The only information I found on Creole mental health was information about Haitian Creoles and their mental health problems such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) caused by Haitians' experiences with the great Port-au-Prince earthquake of 2010 (James, 2013; McShane, 2011). There was also discussions of the development of a Haitian Creole screening tool for depression (Rasmussen et al., 2015). This also had little relevance for my study of Louisiana Creole people of color.

#### G. **Multiracial Identity, Stress, and Mental Health**

Race is an important part of one's identity. This is especially true for minority individuals. For Whites, ethnic identity is optional and does not affect one's life chances (Waters,

1990). On the other hand, race becomes very important if one's race is discriminated against.

Banks and Kohn-Wood (2007) cite Kessler and colleagues (1999) in stating that Blacks are the most discriminated against racial group. In fact, according to their study, more African Americans believe that others do not hold high regard for African Americans than do not believe that. However, Shih and colleagues (2007) claim that multiracial individuals face rejection from both majority and minority racial groups, including Blacks.

Racial identity is important in how racial discrimination is experienced (Banks & Kohn-Wood, 2007). Banks and Kohn-Wood uncovered four basic identity types that Black people have expressed:

1. Integrationist – feel part of mainstream; do not perceive race to be a core self-concept;
2. Multiculturalist – being African American is central to their identity; feel others view African Americans positively;
3. Undifferentiated – do not believe issues specific to African Americans are important; average level of belief that society views African Americans positively; and
4. Race-focused – being African American is central to their identity; above average regard for African Americans.

For the Multiculturalist and the Race-focused groups in this research, race was a central part of the person's identity. One thing that was striking, however, was that many Black people thought that others do not have a high regard for African Americans. Only one group of these participants, the race-focused, had above average regard for African Americans. This suggests that African Americans' self-esteem is affected by society's view of them.



Unlike White people, Black people are very conscious of their race and have varying opinions about how society views Black people by discriminating against them based on race. Kessler et al. (1999) found that even though discrimination is a common negative experience for many groups of people, it is particularly pervasive against the African American community. Banks and Kohn-Wood (2007) found that some Blacks sidestep this issue and focus instead on being a human being and do not emphasize their race. This view of a minority of Black people is similar to the view that some biracial individuals hold – that they refuse to be classified by race (Rockquemore, 1998).

Several studies indicate that racial discrimination has a negative effect on the psychological health of minorities. An analysis of the third wave of the Americans' Changing Lives study (1994) found that a self-reported measure of racial or ethnic discrimination was associated with more chronic health problems, depressive symptoms, diagnosed depression, and reduced life satisfaction (Williams et al., 1999). The researchers posited that racial discrimination may be the most influential source of perceived discrimination for minorities.

Racism is so pervasive in our society that minorities have to find a way to neutralize or diffuse the negativity directed at them (Geronimus et al., 2006; Kessler et al., 1999; Landrine & Klonoff, 1995; Roberts et al., 2004; Williams et al., 2003). Some are able to accomplish this by making race not central to their identity. For most minorities, especially Black and multiracial individuals, discrimination is accompanied by stress, which has effects on health. Shih et al. (2007) suggest that multiracial people probably have a different reaction to this discrimination because multiracial people are very aware of viewing race as a social construction. These researchers claim that because multiracial people believe races are socially constructed, they are not susceptible to stereotype threat (being at risk of accepting negative characteristics about

one's group). However, the way in which they claim to have proven this was by showing words and non-words to their Asian and Asian/White and White participants on a computer screen and measuring their reaction time in identifying whether what they were shown was a word. Some of the words expressed what the authors viewed as stereotypical ideas about Asians, such as "wok" and "polite." Asians had significantly faster reaction times than biracial Asian/White participants and monoracial White participants. The authors claim that the slower reaction times by Asian/White participants indicate that race is not salient for Asian/White participants, but they do not explain why the behavior of the monoracial White participants is the same. Perhaps there are other reasons why Asian/White individuals identified the words more slowly besides an understanding that race is socially-constructed.

Race is stratified in our society with a hierarchy of White people at the top, African Americans at the bottom, and other minorities in between. This form of racism creates stress that may lead to the development of mental health problems (Brown, 2003; Geronimus et al., 2006; Williams et al., 1997, 2003). According to Brown (2003), examples of mental health problems related to racial stratification are self-destructive behaviors, low self-esteem, delusional tendencies that lead one to pretend that racism does not exist, suppressed anger and racial paranoia (Brown, 2003). Because race is so stratified in society, multiracial individuals have the extra pressure of not fitting into society's neat racial categories. This can cause additional stress.

Stress can be viewed as a normal part of life, though individuals experience differences in vulnerability to stress. The body has neurological systems that protect the body's other systems from stress. However, if these protected systems are activated too frequently, this over-activation can lead to physical and/or mental health problems. In the chronic stress response, the body uses up its resources without necessarily replenishing them (Gunnar & Quevedo, 2007).

The negative effects of the body's repeated adaptation to stress is called allostatic load (Geronimus et al., 2006). Geronimus et al. found that Black people have higher allostatic load than White people of the same age. According to them, non-poor Black people had a higher probability of having a high score than poor White people. They concluded that these racial disparities indicate that Black people's health might be negatively impacted by living in a race conscious society. Their work extends the findings on mental health and the stress of discrimination conducted by several research teams (Kessler et al., 1999; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; McGonagle & Kessler, 1990; Williams et al., 2003). Greater exposure to the stress of perceived discrimination appears to lead to health problems (Kessler et al., 1999; Williams et al., 2003), particularly mental health problems (Williams et al., 2003). Furthermore, chronic stress such as that of perceived discrimination has a greater negative impact on mental health than acute stress (Kessler et al., 1999; McGonagle & Kessler, 1990).

The association between disadvantaged social status and greater mental health problems is explained in part by greater exposure to perceived discrimination and not differences in vulnerability to stress. Often minorities, women, and others are thought to be not coping well with a major stressor, but when seen in the context that they are also coping with the secondary stress of perceived discrimination, they are actually coping well (Kessler et al., 1999). In addition, McGonagle and Kessler (1990) found that chronic stress is a stronger predictor of depression than acute stress. Another repercussion they found of the stress of racial discrimination is that it can lead to physical illness through the effects these negative states of mind have on the body (Williams et al., 2003). For some domains of experience, e.g., physical illness and financial difficulties, acute stress effects only existed when chronic stress was

present, while chronic stress had an independent effect on depression (McGonagle & Kessler, 1990).

Data findings from the General Social Survey (GSS, 1999) showed that White Americans viewed Hispanic, African-Asian-Americans negatively (Roberts et al., 2004). Minorities are generally given lower paying jobs and jobs of lower status and do not have much opportunity for growth. Consequently, minorities deal with a range of negative responses to their discrimination. Little is known about this phenomenon. Roberts et al. (2004) addressed this issue with a study that included Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, and multiracial individuals and found that mixed-race individuals fare the worst with this stress. Among their findings were the following:

- Whites reported the highest level of job satisfaction and multiracial/multiethnic people reported the lowest job satisfaction;
- of the minorities, multiracial/multiethnic people reported feeling the most burned out;
- of the minorities, multiracial/multiethnic people reported the largest number of poor mental health days; and
- multiracial/multiethnic people reported the poorest mental health outcomes.

That multiracial/multiethnic participants fared worse than other groups is supported by other studies. Shih et al. (2007) elaborated that multiracial people suffer the most racial discrimination because they are discriminated against by both the White majority and other minority groups. Bratter and Eschbach (2005) also found that multiracial individuals experience some of the highest levels of psychological distress.

Shih et al.'s (2007) and Bratter and Eschbach's (2005) quantitative findings were corroborated by Cooke (2014) which found that Louisiana Creole people experience race-related stress from both the White majority and from Black people. Therefore, it is not surprising that

discrimination carries over into the workplace. Several Louisiana Creole participants spoke about "passing" at work to make their lives easier. Bratter and Eschbach's study lends support to their need to make this unpopular decision.

In looking at the public and private discrimination that minorities face, Landrine and Klonoff (1996) developed an instrument to evaluate the prevalence and stressfulness of racial discrimination in the lives of African Americans. These authors pointed out that racial discrimination against Black people is so prevalent that depression and other negative emotions about racism are the most frequent reasons African Americans enter psychotherapy. In addition, with their instrument, the Schedule of Racist Events, they found that African Americans who are immersed in their culture experience more racism than African Americans who were more culturally mainstream. They also found that these African Americans have a more intense experience of racism.

Other minorities also face discrimination and the stress that causes mental health problems to develop. When overt and subtle discrimination against Korean immigrants to Canada were examined, overt discrimination was found to affect positive affect; however, subtle discrimination exacerbated depressive symptoms (Noh et al., 2007). This finding adds additional support to the supposition that there is a link between discrimination and depression.

The health of African Americans has declined in recent years (Geronimus et al., 2006; Williams et al., 1997). Some researchers, e.g., Williams et al. (1997), believe that the most accurate way of looking at this precipitous decline in the health of African Americans and thus by extension the health of White/ Black multiracial individuals as well, is that the decline is because of racism since other factors have been adjusted for. This has been hidden from the public by what Williams et al. (2007) call "blatantly racist" research which bases the health

differences between Black people and White people on biological differences between the races. Williams et al. exhort us to look at how the differences in SES, social class and acute and chronic perceived discrimination can account for differences in mental health outcomes. A key difference between the work of Williams et al. and Geronimus et al. (2006) is that Williams et al. hold the inequalities in society of SES, social class, etc. responsible for the additional stress that African Americans experience. Geronimus et al. believe that besides those inequalities in society linked to race, racism itself is a significant stressor. This question has not yet been definitively answered.

Taylor and Turner (2002) looked at the problems of negative mental health outcomes of African Americans from yet another perspective. They evaluated the contribution of the stress of perceived discrimination to see if it made an independent contribution to the problem within the context of other stressors and they found that even when SES and other contributing factors are held constant, African Americans had higher levels of symptoms of depression than Whites. This is similar to the findings of Geronimus et al. (2006), which postulated that this is attributable to the stress of perceived discrimination. Bratter and Eschbach (2005) explored psychological distress in White people and eight minority populations and subpopulations and discovered that socioeconomic factors could not explain all of the distress. They attributed the remaining stress to having a minority status which amounts to the stress of racial discrimination as did other researchers (Geronimus et al., 2006; Kessler et al., 1999; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Williams et al., 1999).

Research shows that Black people experience less psychiatric disorder than one would expect given their experiences with discrimination and that they generally report lower levels of subjective well-being after researchers controlled for explanatory variables (Brown, 2003;

Williams et al., 1997). Therefore, one could conclude that Black people have better mental health given the social space in which they are located and their exposure to racial stress would predict (Brown, 2003). Williams et al. (1997) also found that, adjusted for race related stress, Black people had better mental health outcomes than Whites.

Geronimus and colleagues (2006) advise that even if it appears that Blacks are coping better with their mental stress, they pay for it in terms of worse physical health outcomes. Like McGonagle and Kessler (1990), Williams et al. (1997) found that measures of everyday discrimination were a better predictor of health status than measures of acute discrimination. The authors posited that to improve the health status of Black people will require that the systems of society be made equitable. Geronimus (2006) had a similar idea in positing that it is racism that creates these differences in stress and consequently health.

The stress of racial discrimination has been found to interact with identity. Ethnic identity may act as a coping resource which may buffer the stress of racial discrimination and protect the self-concept from negative stereotypes (Mossakowski, 2003). Williams et al. (1999) used the data from the 1995 Detroit Area Study consisting of 1139 White, Black, Hispanic, and Native American respondents. Perception of quality of life was measured and income and education were noted. African Americans reported lower levels of good health and reported being ill more often than White people. Once the authors adjusted for race-related stress, Black people had better mental health outcomes than Whites. However, Williams et al. pointed out that this additional stress can lead to chronic health problems.

Mossakowski's study (2003) looked at whether ethnic identity is a coping resource for minorities because she found that it buffers the stress of racial discrimination. She used data from

a large epidemiological study of Filipino Americans and found that those with positive ethnic identity experienced less depression than those who did not have a positive ethnic identity.

Racism predicts high psychological distress in young African Americans (Bynum et al., 2007). In addition, those youth whose parents instill in them a sense of pride in being African American experience less psychological distress; however, those youth whose parents have taught them coping resources are more psychologically distressed. Bynum et al. (2007), based on their study, suggest that perhaps the youth who received the messages about coping resources do not put them into practice. I suggest an additional explanation: that the youth who are given these coping strategies are on the alert for racist experiences and experienced distress because of this.

#### H. **Minority Mental Health and Treatment**

##### 1. **The Surgeon General's Report on Mental Health**

Little research has been done on mental health treatments for multiracial individuals; however, research has been done on other minorities, especially African Americans. The 2001 Supplement on mental health of the Surgeon General's Report [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) 2001]. stated that two of its primary purposes are: 1) to understand mental health disparities among minorities and 2) to show how mental health disparities can be eliminated and how healthy mental health outcomes are promoted. African Americans seek help for mental health problems from mental health professionals less than White people (SGR, 2001). The SGR refers to all diagnosable mental disorders as mental illnesses and stated that these disorders are abnormalities in cognition, emotion and social interaction. "Promotions" are the precautions taken so that one does not develop a mental illness and "risks" are factors that make it likely that a person will develop a mental illness. Protective and "risk" factors can



be biological, psychological or social. They can be present in an individual, family, community or culture (SGR, 2001). The SGR looked at traditional minorities like African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians. I do not think that the statistics for these groups would apply automatically for multiracial individuals. This is a gap in the literature.

Culture is important in that it affects how a person perceives and describes his or her symptoms. Culture refers to the knowledge, experience, beliefs and values that a large group of people have in common. Culture has an effect on whether people with mental disorders seek help. The cultures of the clinician and service system are important to diagnosis, treatment, and funding of services (SGR, 2001).

There is not much research on the role that culture plays in coping with mental illness, but the SGR believes that culture is important in how people cope. The SGR identified mistrust of the mental health system by racial and ethnic minorities as a barrier to receiving mental health services. The multiracial population is different from other minorities and we do not know whether multiracial individuals have mistrust of the mental health system. We also do not know if stigma plays as big a part for multiracial individuals as it does for African Americans and the other minorities on which the Surgeon General reported.

Minorities have shorter life expectancies and higher rates of physical illness which lead to more depression and anxiety. We do not know whether multiracial individuals have higher rates of physical illness than Whites and therefore higher rates of depression and anxiety (SGR, 2001). The SGR was published after the 2000 census identified multiracial individuals as a population of interest, so it seems reasonable to expect that the SGR would have studied this population. Perhaps the Surgeon General found this not to be feasible because there are so many racial combinations that are multiracial.

The SGR found that many minority persons prefer to receive mental health services from their family physicians rather than a mental health provider, perhaps because of stigma related to mental health problems. Stigma may be a more troubling barrier to treatment for minorities than for White people.

## 2. **Creole mental health**

The SGR discussed the importance of culture in that it affects how a person perceives and describes his or her symptoms. However, just as the SGR did not report on multiracial people, it did not report on Creoles and mental health. I searched the research literature for information on Creoles' mental health. I only found information on Caribbean Creoles such as people of Haiti and Trinidad, and the information that I found was very specific, such as information on survivors of the 2010 Haitian earthquake regarding post-traumatic stress disorder and drug and alcohol abuse. I could not find any information on mental health or mental illness and Louisiana Creoles.

This lack of mental health information on Louisiana Creole people of color is not a surprise to me, given how Creoles of color are subject to hypodescent and considered Black. One of my participants, Marie, told me she identifies as Black on her medical papers because she thinks that is what she is expected to do. Even if Creole people of color indicate, unlike Marie, that they racially/ethnically identify as Creole, their health provider may still consider them as African American. For example, it is unlikely that there were no Creole or multiracial people that were interviewed for the SGR. They were probably classified as Black. This lack of information on the mental health of multiracial people, including Creole people, is a gap in the health and mental health literature. This study provides information to help fill these gaps. Two of my three research questions are about the mental health of Creole people. Primary research question 2 is

“What is the relationship between the multiracial identity of Creole people, adjustments to the stress of negative racial treatment and mental illness”? The secondary research question is “How does one’s particular path to identity affect mental health outcomes from the perspective of Creole people”? Creole people do experience mental health issues. Ten of my 21 participants reported having experienced a mental health problem. I discuss my Creole participants’ mental health issues further in the Results chapter and discuss answers to the above research questions in the Discussion chapter.

The SGR found African Americans to have mistrust of the mental health system in part because of the racism and discrimination of clinicians. Since the SGR did not look at multiracial individuals, we do not know whether clinicians have biases against multiracial individuals as well which could cause mistrust in multiracial individuals. This finding was not examined in this study, but it is an issue that should be examined for multiracial people, including Creole people of color.

The SGR informed us that while the overall poverty rate in the U.S. was 12% in 1999, the rate for Hispanic Americans was 23% and 24% for African Americans. They pointed out that individuals in the lower SES have more psychological distress and are therefore more likely to have a mental disorder. I do not know the SES profile of multiracial individuals, so I cannot predict if multiracial individuals have higher rates of psychological distress and of mental disorders. However, the Creole people in my study were primarily middle income and higher.

The SGR pointed out that many racial and ethnic minority consumers and families prefer to receive mental health services from their primary care physicians, perhaps because of stigma. The Creole participants in my study did not speak of stigma, though I think most of them who received a diagnosis of a mental health problem received it from their primary care physician and

several reported having a mental health issue and did not seek treatment for it. This report also claimed that minorities are less likely to receive state-of-the-art treatment than whites. Herbeck et al. (2004) also found that African Americans were less likely than whites to receive newer antipsychotic medication treatment. Again, we have no data for multiracial individuals. Asking questions about treatment for Creole people were beyond the scope of this study, but future researchers should examine this question.

As mentioned earlier, factors like status can also affect disparities in health care. Schnittker and McLeod (2005) found that SES is inversely associated with health status. They also brought up the phenomenon of the status anxiety that low status people who live in high inequality areas experience because they compare themselves to high status people. They pointed out that this status anxiety and the experience of relative deprivation affect health directly through emotional responses and their health consequences and indirectly through negative health behaviors. My Creole participants were not, for the most part, low status people. Their pride in being Creole, I think, precluded them from having status anxiety.

African Americans, particularly African American males, are at a disadvantage when it comes to mental health treatment. Some articles discuss the seeming disparities in access to mental health treatment that African Americans experience (e.g., Chow et al., 2003; Snowden & Yamada, 2005). Other articles are more specific and discuss particular medications that are the recommended treatment that African Americans have less access to than whites (e.g., Herbeck et al., 2004; Segal et al., 1996).

Chow et al. (2003) collected data about who lived in certain zip codes and whether they had access to mental health treatment. Snowden and Yamada (2005) did not conduct a study, but developed their opinions from the many papers they reviewed. Snowden and Yamada's article

found racial and ethnic disparities in the use of mental health services and continuity of care. They stated that even though few people in the mental health service system receive them, ethnic minorities are the least likely to receive the services they need. They felt that many factors are responsible for this disparity. My Creole participants did not complain about a lack of mental health services. However, as previously stated few of them sought treatment for their mental health problems.

In this study, race matters. Segal et al. (1996) found that African Americans were less often prescribed second-generation antipsychotic medications and are more likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenia than whites. This study found that African Americans in low poverty areas (LPAs) are significantly more likely than whites to be diagnosed with schizophrenia. Perhaps race has an effect on psychiatrists' clinical judgment, but since this is not a significant finding in high poverty areas (HPAs); perhaps there is another reason. None of my Creole participants reported a serious mental illness such as schizophrenia. Also, discussing medication was out of the scope of this study.

Snowden and Yamada (2005) pointed out that one of the most important factors for this disparity is culture. Culture refers to many things. It can be related to Chow et al.'s (2003) culture of poverty with their work in LPAs and HPAs and their corresponding areas of access to mental health services. Snowden and Yamada suggested that "how mental health services are organized and financed appears to interact with cultural factors to produce wide-ranging variations in rates of access..." (p. 144). Nonetheless they pointed out that access alone does not mean one will have treatment of the quality that will be helpful. They related that many studies find racial and ethnic disparities are still found even after adjustments are made for other access issues. This is related to the SGR's assertion that minority individuals are less likely to enter

treatment and among those who do, a large number do not have continuous care. The authors cited reanalyzed data from the National Medical Expenditures Survey (NMES) and found that African Americans and Latinos have much less mental health care as outpatients than do Whites. Snowden and Yamada (2005) quoted the SGR in the discussion of factors that might explain racial and ethnic disparities in access (e.g., using non-specialty sources of care). They discussed the tendencies of African American, Latino, and Asian-American help seekers to perceive mental health symptoms to be somatic complaints and seek out primary care providers rather than a mental health specialist. They also found that minorities use alternative treatments more than Whites. My Creole participants sought treatment from a physician or did not seek treatment at all. They did not report using alternative treatments.

Access to mental health care for minorities is limited by many factors. Some of these factors come from within the community, e.g., African American and other minorities seek help from sources other than mental health specialists. Some factors which limit access to mental health treatment come both from within and from outside the minority community such as stigma. Many psychiatric patients report being stigmatized by service providers. They also report being racially discriminated against by service providers (Snowden & Yamada, 2005). None of my Creole participants reported being discriminated against or stigmatized by a health care provider.

Access to mental health treatment is a primary issue. However, another issue equally as important is access to what kind of treatment one can obtain and whether or not the treatment is the treatment of choice. Again, there is data on this subject for African Americans, but not for Creole people. This question is out of the scope of this research but is a question that should be researched for Creole people in future studies.

All in all, my Creole participants did not have complaints about their health providers. However, most of them did not seek treatment for their mental health issues, primarily, I believe, because they saw them as related to circumstances of discrimination and racial stress.

### 3. **Race, health, and mental health**

Factors like status can also have an impact on disparities in health care. Different racial groups enjoy different statuses of health because race affects health independently of other factors. For example, Black people live less healthy and shorter lives than White people. (Schnittker & McLeod, 2005). Race as a status has an effect on one's access to appropriate care. Schnittker and McLeod argued that researchers studied the social disparities in health much more starting in the 1990s when most people had access to healthcare and yet there were still disparities. They found evidence that SES is inversely associated with almost all of the major indicators of health status, a fact that is not surprising. People who have a low socio-economic position (SEP) and who live in an area where there is much inequality in SEP status and who compare themselves to people who have a high SEP, have status anxiety. Their health is affected because their feelings of deprivation are linked to unhealthy behaviors like smoking (Schnittker & McLeod, 2005).

Nguyen et al. (2007) spoke more directly about the effects of racism when they wrote about its effects on psychiatric diagnoses of children and adolescents. The diagnosis one is given has a direct bearing on the treatment given. If the diagnosis is incorrect, the treatment might not help. This study not only looked at diagnoses and treatments, but the authors also controlled for confounding variables such as SES, functional impairment status, gender and age. These researchers examined symptoms from the perspective of both caretakers and clinicians. Because of this approach they were able to make comments on the effects of race/racism.

Nguyen et al. (2007) used subjects from a federally-funded project on community mental health and children. They used baseline data from the project and gathered additional data using a measure of caretaker reports of children's problems and measured the children's psychological functioning using an instrument for clinician ratings. This clinician instrument had not been standardized for children of color. This could be why the clinicians returned higher reports of disruptive behavior disorder that were not supported by the caretakers' reports than they did for the White students. Some children react to stress by hurting themselves or others. Nguyen et al. found that Black, Asian and native Hawaiian children had lower scores than White youth on the scale with which the caregivers rate negative behaviors that children do to themselves (internalizing behaviors). They also found that the minority children's scores on the scale of negative behaviors towards others (externalizing behaviors) were comparable to those of White children. This study showed that even after holding many variables constant, race and ethnicity still impacted the diagnoses of these children and how they were clinically described. (Nguyen et al., 2007).

In addition, minority children live in poverty at much higher rates than White children and so the researchers' report that more minority children have higher rates of disruptive behavior disorder should be expected because poverty is a risk factor for this diagnosis (Nguyen et al., 2007). However, the question remains whether poverty explains all of the higher rates of this diagnosis or whether race is a factor. Perhaps the Asian and native Hawaiian caregivers were missing the internalizing behaviors because Asians and Native Hawaiians and some other minority groups are taught that the well-being of the group is more important than the well-being of the individual and that the individual should be humble and set aside his or her needs for the good of the group (Nguyen et al., 2007). This attitude might be interpreted as appropriate by the



caregiver, but it is also consistent with internalizing behavior. Nguyen et al. cite Loo and Rappaport (1998), Skiba, Knesting and Bush (2002), and Weisz and McCarty, (1999) to explain that the reading of the child's behavior is a function of both the observer/caregivers race/ethnicity and the child's race/ethnicity. This misdiagnosis can also occur at the other end of the spectrum. Nguyen et al. (2007) cite Randolph and Koldinsky (2003) in giving the example that while a clinician might interpret the behavior of a minority child as disruptive, the parents might think the same behavior is normal. In Schnittker and McLeod (2005), one's status was important to the subject and had an impact on one's health. In Nguyen et al. (2007), race/ethnicity determined the interpretation of the behavior and symptoms and thus the diagnosis and, therefore, the treatment.

It is dismaying when instruments that measure children's mental health have only been standardized for White youth. This situation needs to be addressed now for the benefit of minority children and also because by 2025 it is projected that 48% of children will be from minority groups (Nguyen et al., 2007). In addition, because of the disparities in how children's health appears to clinicians and caregivers, researchers and health professionals should encourage the mental health system to better investigate the cultural context of minorities when assessing the mental health of minority persons.

#### 4. **Race and access to care**

As previously mentioned, African Americans, particularly African American males, are at a disadvantage when it comes to mental health treatment because of cultural reasons. African Americans are less likely to access appropriate treatment and when they do, they are sometimes met with racism (SGR, 2001). Also African American males are less likely to get the treatment of choice than are whites (Herbeck et al., 2004; Segal et al., 1996).

Chow et al. (2003) investigated racial/ethnic disparities in mental health service access in LPAs and HPAs. The groups they studied were African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans and White people. They posited that in the HPAs the residents are so low income that they probably have Medicaid and thus they have safety net providers. Therefore, HPAs tend to be able to provide mental health services to their residents more so than LPAs, so there is less disparity between White people and minorities in HPAs. Probably another reason that there is not so much disparity between White people and minorities in HPAs is because generally only seriously mentally ill White people live in HPAs (Chow et al., 2003).

Snowden and Yamada (2005) found racial and ethnic disparities in the use of mental health services and continuity of care. Even though few people receive the mental health services they need, ethnic minorities are the least likely to receive these services. Many factors are responsible for this disparity (Chow et al., 2003).

Black people who resided in Low Poverty Areas were significantly more likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenia than White people; however, this was not true in High Poverty Areas. Asians were more likely than Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics to be diagnosed with schizophrenia in both poverty areas. The social service and criminal justice systems referred more Hispanic and Black people to mental health treatment than Whites in both LPAs and HPAs (Chow et al., 2003). The authors established that minority racial/ethnic groups were more likely to use emergency services than Whites. Minorities were more likely than Whites to use inpatient services only in LPAs. A significantly higher proportion of minority children and young adults use public mental health services than young Whites.

This study indicated that for racial/ethnic minorities the use of mental health services was more coercive and less voluntary (Chow et al., 2003). This echoes the findings of the SGR that

minorities use mental health services less than White people. One interesting finding of this study was that the very poorest individuals have better access to mental health services than the marginally poor because the very poor qualify for Medicaid. In this study, Hispanic people were among the poorest individuals while Black people were marginally poor and thus less able to access appropriate mental health services. Moreover, they found that mentally ill individuals are overrepresented in HPA's, so though they are able to access care, their lives are limited by poverty. The authors found that utilization of services was more coercive for Black and Latino people, though they did not give reasons why, but Chow et al. asserted that other studies have the same finding. The SGR and Snowden and Yamada (2005) discussed varying reasons why minorities did not voluntarily utilize mental health services at comparable rates to White people (e.g., mistrust, stigma, experiencing mental health symptoms as somatic complaints and seeking out primary care providers).

Snowden and Yamada (2005) found that though African Americans initially had a positive attitude toward treatment, once they sought out treatment that attitude became negative; this suggested that these help seekers had a negative experience with the mental health system. They cite Corrigan et al. (2003) who found that 50% of participants in their study experienced stigma and African Americans, Asian Americans, and gay and lesbian participants also felt they were discriminated against because of race or sexual orientation by service providers.

Lack of insurance explains some of the differences in mental health service use between racial and ethnic minorities and White people. African Americans are nearly twice as likely as White people to be uninsured (Snowden & Yamada, 2005). Snowden and Yamada cited Alegria et al. (2002) and Sturm et al. (2003) in that there are large regional differences found in access

and disparities and they speculated that these differences may be attributed to differences in state Medicaid policy.

5. **Race and access to medication**

Research has shown that African Americans are significantly less likely than Whites to receive the treatment of recommended practices for the same diagnoses. Herbeck et al. (2004) investigated differences in the use of second-generation antipsychotic medication among Asian-American and White patients who were prescribed antipsychotic medication by a large nationwide sample of psychiatrists. The study controlled for a number of factors that might be related to the use of antipsychotic medication. They hypothesized that African Americans would be prescribed second-generation antipsychotic medication (antipsychotic medications which are newer and have fewer side effects than older first-generation anti-psychotic medication) less frequently than White people, and that publicly insured patients would receive antipsychotic medication less frequently than privately insured patients. Data from a national study was used and also additional randomly selected psychiatrists were used to ascertain prescribing practices.

The authors found that 49% of African Americans received second-generation antipsychotic medication compared with 66% of White patients, a difference that was statistically significant. However, there was a gender effect in that female African American patients received second-generation antipsychotic medication in rates comparable to White female patients. In addition, regional differences were noted. Psychiatrists in the Northeast and West prescribed second-generation antipsychotic medications to African Americans at comparable rates to White people. However, they found that African Americans were half as likely as White people to be prescribed second-generation antipsychotic medication in other areas of the country. They also found African American men were 65% less likely than White

men to receive second-generation antipsychotic medication. Additionally, African Americans are more often diagnosed with schizophrenia than White people. African Americans in LPAs are significantly more likely than White people to be diagnosed with schizophrenia (Segal et al., 1996). Perhaps race has an effect on psychiatrists' clinical judgment, but since this is not a significant finding in HPAs, perhaps there is another reason.

Because second-generation antipsychotic medication is considered the treatment of choice, African Americans tend to receive a lower quality of pharmacological care than White patients (Herbeck et al., 2004). The authors also pointed out that the SGR stated that African Americans are less likely to receive an accurate diagnosis of depression. They therefore posited that perhaps the disparities in medication treatment might be because psychiatrists do not accurately diagnose the symptoms of African Americans rather than it being a question of racial discrimination. African Americans are more vulnerable than Whites to developing tardive dyskinesia, so this problem of not being able to access second-generation antipsychotic medication, which has a lower risk of tardive dyskinesia, is a major problem for African Americans (Herbeck et al., 2004).

Another study (Segal et al., 1996) had also looked at prescribing practices of emergency departments and found results similar to those of Snowden and Yamada (2005). Segal et al. (1996) disclosed that African Americans use emergency services at high rates and that little research has been done on prescribing practices in psychiatric emergency services. Because of these two factors it is important to know whether prescribing practices of psychiatric medication differs by racial group. Though Asians have been found to need lower doses of medication than Caucasians, no difference has been found between African Americans and Caucasians (Segal et al., 1996).

Since psychiatric medications are used to control both symptoms and behavior, in making decisions about medication the psychiatrist must consider the patient's mental status and whether he or she is a danger to self or others (Segal et al., 1996). It is important to engage the patient when deciding treatment and since race may influence communication; it may affect clinical engagement; therefore, Segal et al. (1996) investigated the interaction of treatment engagement and racial and ethnic status. This study investigated prescribing practices for 442 patients who visited four urban California hospitals from 1981 to 1986. The study consisted of triads of a prescribing psychiatrist, the patient and a clinical observer who reviewed what the psychiatrist had done. The observer used the Art of Care Scale to measure the psychiatrist's engagement with the patient. The Global Assessment Scale was used by the psychiatrist to measure the patient's degree of emotional disturbance. The study showed that clinicians spent much less time evaluating African Americans compared with other patients. In addition, African Americans were more likely to receive antipsychotic medication and were prescribed more psychiatric medications than other patients.

When Segal and colleagues controlled for other reasons for medication and for the service variables, being an African American was a significant factor in all the prescribing practices. African Americans were significantly more likely to receive more psychiatric medication, antipsychotic doses, injections of antipsychotics, and to receive a higher 24-hour dosage of antipsychotics. These findings could not be attributed to a greater chance of African American patients being brought in involuntarily which might influence the psychiatrists to perceive them as dangerous. The authors posited that there may be more interpersonal distance between emergency room clinicians and their African American patients. This explanation is likely because when clinicians made efforts to engage African American patients in the

evaluation, the dosage of antipsychotics went down. When the score of optimal engagement was reached, the dosages prescribed for African Americans were nearly identical to those prescribed for White patients.

This study clearly suggested that race was a factor in prescribing practices just as Herbeck et al. (2005) suggested that race was a factor in prescribing practices of second-generation antipsychotic medication. Being African American means one has to surmount many obstacles in obtaining care and in obtaining the quality of care that will help improve one's psychiatric condition. It is not known whether multiracial Americans face the same obstacles and if so to what degree.

It has been seen in other studies (e.g., Geronimus et al., 2006 Williams et al., 2003) that African Americans experience more chronic stress and consequently are posited to have more health problems than White people. Herbeck et al. (2004) suggested that, at least in their study, African Americans received poorer quality of care so they can be expected to have a higher incidence of poor outcomes. Since multiracial individuals are part Black and considered by many to be African American, and because multiracial persons experience more stress than other racial groups, perhaps multiracial individuals who develop psychosis can be expected to have poorer outcomes than White people if they are not phenotypically White (Bratter & Eschbach, 2005).

## I. **Summary**

In sum, this review has demonstrated that who is Black is debatable. Most Louisiana Creole people do not view themselves as Black, though there has been much pressure from society to do so until very recently. Louisiana Creole people voice that "Creole" should be sufficient to express one's ethnicity/race. Creole people in my pilot study expressed the belief that most African Americans hold the opinion that Louisiana Creole people should racially

identify as Black (Cooke, 2014). Nonetheless, modern race scholars hold that multiracial persons can achieve a healthy multiracial identity.

The reviewed literature also demonstrated that race can be gendered. Rockquemore (2002) pointed out that multiracial women are exoticized and sexualized by men. In addition, gender matters when discussing race--how a woman of color experiences racial discrimination is different from how a man of color experiences it. The concept of intersectionality posits that differences between groups must be considered if there is to be equity between how the groups experience their situations.

The literature also shows how several researchers (e.g., Geronimus et al., 2006; Kessler et al., 1999; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Roberts et al., 2004; Williams et al., 2003) have found that racism is so pervasive in our society that it causes minorities to experience much stress. Though researchers have not been able to identify a causal link, many of these researchers postulate that this stress causes illnesses, especially mental illness (Williams et al., 2003). Minorities' ethnic pride apparently buffers them from this stress and thus they experience fewer negative mental health symptoms (Mossakowski, 2003), though this finding did not hold up in a later meta-analysis (Smith & Silva, 2011).

Finally, in addition to experiencing much stress from perceived discrimination, this review has pointed out that African Americans who live in LPAs are more likely than White people to be diagnosed with a major mental illness. (Chow et al., 2003) and African American males are much less likely to receive the treatments of choice and receive higher doses of antipsychotic medications than White people (Segal et al., 1996). The reason for this has been hypothesized to be because psychiatrists are more likely to be White and thus may have more interpersonal distance between them and their minority clients. However, when the psychiatrists



are able to lessen the interpersonal distance with their African American clients, prescribing levels approach those of their White clients (Segal et al., 1996).

The literature review offers several types of historical and empirical information relevant to this research study. Historically Louisiana Creoles of color originally had their own racial category in the early Louisiana Territory. However, after Louisiana was acquired by the U.S., White Louisiana Creoles distanced themselves from Louisiana Creoles of color, whom they associated with Black Louisiana Creoles and developed a binary racial classification from what had been a tertiary racial classification. The rule of hypodescent, or the one drop rule, was put in place by the Louisiana Supreme Court in 1915 and has remained in force until the present day, though there has been a resurgence of a multiracial category in recent times.

Additionally, the literature revealed that Louisiana Creole people are a marginalized group within the minority community. The fact that they are marginalized can be seen from their recognition as social and racial groups. Described by the concept of intersectionality, which argues that differences within groups need to be considered in order for subjects of interest to be treated equitably, race and gender are intertwined. As stated above, Crenshaw (1991) sees this intersectional region as composed of intersecting social groups while Ken (2007) sees race, gender and class as social structural locations. Ken holds that they cannot be demographic characteristics because they are fluid. An example of this is how the special interests of women of color are not considered by the women's movement, which primarily serves the interests of White women, nor are they considered by the civil rights movement because that movement primarily serves the interests of Black men. These women's needs are only served by seeing them in the intersectional region of race and gender.

The reviewed literature also revealed some interesting information about stress and mental health with implications for multiracial individuals. Although experiencing stress is a normal part of life, repeated exposure to stress like that of chronic discrimination can lead to mental health problems. Some researchers speculate that multiracial individuals experience more racial discrimination than other racial groups because they are discriminated against by both White people and by other minorities. Some research has shown that multiracial individuals experience among the highest levels of stress of any racial group (Bratter and Eschbach, 2005). However, ethnic identity may buffer this stress of racial discrimination and protect an ethnic group from developing a mental illness from the stress of negative stereotypes (Shih et al., 2007).

This review of the literature also revealed how little research has been done on mental health treatment for multiracial individuals, especially Creole people. Multiracial individuals were not a population included in the SGR on Mental Health and most of the literature on mental health treatment for minorities is on African Americans, who were found to have less access to quality mental health treatment than White people. Much more information is needed on the mental health treatment of minorities, especially multiracial individuals. Creoles of color are a resilient, culturally complex minority within that minority whose mental health needs and experiences deserve long overdue attention.

### III. RESEARCH PROBLEM

#### A. Statement of the Problem

This research addresses racial identity formation in Louisiana Creole people of color and also how the stress of unfair racial treatment affects their mental health. When I conducted a literature search in the areas of Louisiana, Creole, identity, stress and mental health, there were limited results; scant research has been done in these areas. Susberry (2004) completed a dissertation titled *Racial identification and ethnic identity in Louisiana Creole people of color*, which addresses some of the issues I researched, though with different results. This will be discussed further in the Discussion chapter. These gaps in the literature regarding Louisiana Creole people of color are troubling because the questions I raised about stress, identity and mental health of this community were very important to my participants.

Creoles of color are a heterogeneous group in terms of their paths to identity. Their experiences may increase public understanding of avoidable mental health problems that society is responsible for creating, e.g., the mental health problems created by racism and discrimination. A good deal of research has established that minorities, particularly African Americans, experience perceived unfair racial treatment, and researchers posit that this leads to many of the health problems these minority individuals experience, including mental health problems (Geronimus et al., 2006; Kessler et al., 1999; Roberts et al., 2004; Williams et al., 1999; Williams et al., 2003).

As addressed in the Literature Review, Mossakowski's (2003) work suggests that ethnic identity is important to the self-concept of minorities. She states that it is probably a coping resource which may buffer the stress of racial discrimination while shielding the self-concept from negative stereotypes. She found that Filipino Americans who had achieved ethnic identity

suffered less from depression than those Filipino Americans who had not. Bynum et al. (2007) found that African Americans who had cultural pride suffered less distress from racial discrimination. Similarly, Ledesma (2017) studied Latino ethnic identity and the effect of stress on their mental health and found those with achieved ethnic identity had better mental health outcomes. Not many racial groups have been studied to see if these results can be generalized to other populations. My research was designed to explore this premise for Louisiana Creole people of color to see if they experience comparable mental health outcomes when exposed to the stress of unfair racial treatment because Louisiana Creole people historically have an established racial/ethnic identity and cultural community. Mossakowski's study (2003) and Bynum et al.'s study (2007) suggest that ethnic identity buffers the stress of perceived unfair racial treatment. This study examines if the same phenomenon holds true for Creole people. The present research extends this question to racial/ethnic identity of Louisiana Creole people of color.

The large quantitative studies conducted to investigate racial stress and the mental health outcomes in minority individuals have not been able to establish a causal link between the two (e.g., Geronimus et al., 2006). This qualitative study may provide enough in-depth information to help illuminate the search for this causal connection.

As previously stated, there is scant research on racial/ethnic identity formation of Creole people. There is, however, research on racial identity formation in multiracial people (e.g., Renn, 2000, 2003; Root, 1996, 1998), but Creole people of color are distinct from these groups because their mixture is intergenerational, i.e., they are descended from many generations of mixed-race people. Not knowing how Louisiana Creole people of color form their racial/ethnic identity is a gap in the literature on multiracial people that this research helps to address.

Of further importance is that this research can inform public policy and efforts to build community for the various Creoles of color. Furthermore, the research on stress and mental health may be applicable to other groups that straddle two or more worlds, such as bisexual people and members of other mixed racial groups, such as Asian American people.

**B. Purpose of the Study**

One of the purposes of this study was to examine how Louisiana Creole people of color experience the stress of unfair racial treatment and to explore how it impacts their mental health. Does it affect them in a major way from their perspective? Situations surrounding the changes in their mental health status were examined to assess whether these outside influences bore any of the responsibility for these states of mind.

In addition, another purpose of this study was to investigate how Louisiana Creole people of color form their racial/ethnic identity. All participants were asked when they first realized they were Creole and how they came to that understanding.

This study was conducted to fill in gaps in the Creole of color literature concerning racial/ethnic identity formation and to see whether the detrimental effects of negative racial treatment are buffered by their development of strong Creole identity. It is hoped that this study can help bring recognition to Louisiana Creole people of color as a social group that deserves more research attention. It is also hoped that the findings of this research can be applied toward developing social and clinical supports to enable Creole people to avoid developing socially induced mental health problems while the public learns more about who Louisiana Creole people of color really are.

### C. **Theoretical and Conceptual Influences**

This work was informed, for the most part, by social constructionism, the social model of disability, social identity theory, and critical race theory. My work examines contrasting realities of race and racial issues with Louisiana Creole people of color, a multiracial group. I am looking at the meanings this group gives to these concepts; therefore, this dissertation research is influenced by social constructionism.

Symbolic interactionism can be said to be a precursor to social constructionism and is credited to have been derived from the work of George Herbert Mead (Blumer, 1969). It argues that peoples' actions concerning what they perceive are based on the meaning these perceptions convey to them and these meanings are constructed from and can be fine-tuned by interactions between persons. In other words, meaning is socially constructed.

Both symbolic interactionism and social constructionism emphasize social interaction, though social constructionism emphasizes the dichotomy of subjective and objective reality (Charmaz, 2006). Two of the primary scholars of multiracial identity issues, Rockquemore and Renn, use these theoretical frameworks to underpin their work. Whereas Rockquemore's early work is framed within symbolic interactionism, Renn framed her work with postmodern racial identity theory or social constructionism (Renn, 2000; Rockquemore, 1998). In their work, they produced analogous identity category findings.

Whereas a realist perspective holds that there is an objective reality that can be known while a relativist perspective holds that reality is subjective and that there are multiple realities, social constructionism is a theory of knowledge that holds that knowledge is both objective and subjective (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). Social constructionism proposes that two or more individuals can construct a shared subjective experience of knowledge of things (Andrews, 2012;

Charmaz, 2006). It is possible, therefore, that two people can come to understand each other if they spend enough interactive time together and they can develop shared meanings of things.

This research was also informed by social identity theory, the social model of disability, critical race theory and, to a lesser extent, by gender theory. Social identity theory addresses the group memberships one has that help define the social self and the self-concept (Hogg et al., 1995). Louisiana Creole people of color do espouse a group membership. As one participant said “we recognize each other.” The social model of disability is concerned with examining and identifying the social barriers that restrict access to the rights of citizenship for people with psychiatric disabilities (Mulvaney, 2000). Critical race theory looks at race and racism among the dominant culture (Bell, 1995). Many Creole people experience discrimination from White people and Black people. Creoles have experienced lesser power in society through the power of the law in Louisiana, specifically several Acts that reduced the rights of Creole people in comparison to White people. Black people contribute to this imbalance in power by further marginalizing Creole people by not acknowledging them as a social group. Gender is socially determined and is commonly used to express power relations (Garland-Thompson, 2002). The stereotype of multiracial women is that they are highly sexually desirable and exotic (Nakashima, 1992; Root, 1997, in Rockquemore, 2002).

Although I am writing about what I see as the theoretical influence for this research, the question of the difference between the theoretical framework and the conceptual framework of a study is a matter of opinion. Imenda (2014) suggests that the theoretical framework “refers to the theory that a researcher chooses to guide him/her in his/her research... [ and is] the application of a theory, or a set of concepts drawn from one and the same theory, to offer an explanation of an event, or shed some light on a particular phenomenon or research problem” (p. 189). He further

states that the conceptual framework “may be defined as an end result of bringing together a number of related concepts to explain or predict a given event, or give a broader understanding of the phenomenon of interest--or simply of a research problem” (p.189). He posits that quantitative researchers usually use theoretical frameworks to illuminate their work and that qualitative researchers usually use conceptual frameworks. I have described social constructionism as a theory that informs this research, but I would also like to point out which other concepts underpin this research: the social model of disability; critical race theory; social identity theory; and gender theory.

The social model of disability was the primary theoretical framework for the establishment of disability studies as a critical academic field. Disability studies was “designed to explicate disability as a social, political and cultural phenomenon” (Linton, 1998, p.13). This study looks at psychiatric disability that may be caused or exacerbated socially by the stress of unfair racial treatment.

Oliver (1986) holds up the social model for comparison with the “individual” or “medical” model of disability. He states that the medical model implies that the disabled person’s physical or psychological limitations are the primary reason why the person cannot fully participate in society and this view does not take into consideration the social restrictions placed on the disabled person, thus creating an environment of disability.

The social model indicates where we should look, but it does not give us answers or make predictions. It encourages us to ask our questions in a complex way. For example, my research on Louisiana Creole people of color might lead me to say, “What is wrong with those Louisianan Creole people of color that they develop mental illnesses”? Instead social constructionism leads me to look at what is in the interface between society and these multiracial people that might lead



to the outcome of mental illness. We do not just look at the individual; the problem could be in society. We look at aspects of one's whole life in the social context that makes a difference. Looking at the individual in society is a result of looking at problems through a social constructionist lens.

A person's social identity is the part of one's self-concept that comes from the belief that one has membership in a social group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Tajfel and Turner formulated the concept of social identity to help explain behavior between individuals who belong to different social groups. Through this theory they delineate how individuals define themselves as members of a group and how others are defined as outsiders. With this theory, they predict intergroup behaviors. This interest in the process of group identity is important for Louisiana Creole people of color, because no formal line exists which demarcates who can be considered Louisiana Creole. Even individuals who have Louisiana Creole remotely in their background may strongly consider themselves to be Louisiana Creole, and there are key social factors that contribute to their sense of belonging to a social identity group, e.g., culture, food, and language.

Also underpinning this research is critical race theory. Critical race studies is a discipline that deals with race, racism and power in society. Unlike many disciplines, it has an activist component. A goal of critical race studies is the transformation of society to a more equitable system in which White people do not dominate people of color and do not have the overwhelming majority of control of society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). This theory is important to my study because Louisiana Creole people of color are historically in a position of less power than White people and they strive for recognition as equals. Many Louisiana Creole people in my pilot study (Cooke, 2014) reported that they had ethnic pride and expressed a desire to have their own Census racial category and to be seen on par with other racial groups.

As previously stated in the Literature Review, race is a fluid category that is intertwined with gender and class (see *The Effect of Gender on Multiracial Identity*), which are fluid categories as well. It is difficult to write about one of these categories without writing about the others (Ken, 2007). Rockquemore (2002) and Root (1998) found that gender is important in the development of racial identity in multiracial women. Rockquemore (2002) writes of the “stereotypes of multiracial women as exotic and/or highly sexually desirable” (p. 493) and she suggests that, perhaps because they are closer to society’s ideal of beauty than darker-skinned Black women, some Black men may prefer them. In addition, “the most successful Black men (those with the highest education and income) are as likely to marry outside their race as they are to marry a Black woman.” (p. 493). Multiracial women experience friction because of this phenomenon and some tend to distance themselves from the Black community and from developing a Black racial identity (Rockquemore, 2002). West and Zimmerman (1987) write about “doing gender” because they see gender as an accomplishment that is developed in routine interactions that are behavioral rather than biological. Awareness of gendered social dynamics was important in this research.

This researcher, as a multiracial woman, has experienced firsthand the effect of gender on racial identity development. I informed my participants of my racial background as a woman with one Louisiana Creole parent of color and one White/Black multiracial parent. I grew up in a Creole community and thus view myself as Creole. This allowed the participants know that I am positioned in some ways to understand their situations as an insider and it also reminded to pay careful attention to any biases I may have so as to minimize the effect that they have on my research. Hopefully the findings of this research will be helpful to my multiracial community.

D. **Research Questions**

The literature and its gaps led to the development of the following research questions.

The primary research questions for the present study were the following:

1. In terms of stress, how do Louisiana Creole people of color experience negative racial treatment?
2. What is the relationship between multiracial identity (of Louisiana Creole people of color), adjustments to the stress of negative racial treatment, and mental illness? How does multiracial identity mediate stress and the mental health of Louisiana Creole people?

The secondary research question for this project is:

How does one's particular path to identity affect mental health outcomes from the perspectives of Louisiana Creole people of color?

## IV. METHODS

### A. **Introduction**

This chapter will describe the methods used to explore racial identity formation in and the effects of the stress of perceived unfair racial treatment on the mental health of Louisiana Creole people of color. Topics include the philosophy behind the research and the research design, which includes how this researcher situates herself with respect to the focus of this study. In addition, there will be a discussion of the research method of grounded theory, which necessitates that data analysis is done simultaneously with the data collection and that an analytical method called the constant comparative method (see definition later) is used. Finally, there will be a discussion of procedures used for data collection, the target sample, participant recruitment and selection, type of data collected, the trustworthiness of the study, and the data analysis.

### B. **Methodological Approach**

Corbin and Strauss (2008) affirm that the “research questions should dictate what methodological approach is used to conduct the research” (p. 12). The research questions in my study (see Chapter 1) call for an exploratory qualitative research approach because qualitative inquiry helps make meaning and answers “how” and “why” questions (Goulding, 2002; Patton, 2015), and the topic of Creole multiracial identity and mental health has not been well-explored. Further, qualitative methods can help take the researcher inside the experience of the research participants, which provides an opportunity to see their world through their eyes and to make new discoveries that contribute to knowledge on the subject (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

It is important that the participants’ experience guides the researcher in developing theoretical perspective about them. Adopting a qualitative approach allowed the opportunity to

examine deeply and in detail relevant aspects of the participants' lives, a process that cannot occur when there are large numbers of cases. Specifically, I was able to learn about different ways in which Creole people formed their Creole identity. The primary approach used was to interview the participants about their beliefs about what Creole is. Among the questions asked were what they thought the essential characteristics of Creole are, what is the place of race in Creole experience, and how do Creole people racially identify. Additional information about mental health and ethnic identity was obtained from three quantitative instruments: the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE/RSES), the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure, and the Beck Depression Inventory II (BDI-II). These scales provided data that allowed comparisons with other findings reported in the literature. They also served as a source of triangulation with my understanding of my participants' qualitative descriptions of their mental health and identity status.

# **1. Grounded theory**

## **a. Overview**

Grounded theory research, which informs this study, was “discovered” by Glaser and Strauss (1967). It is inductive in that researchers take topic-relevant parts of the participants' responses, study them, and create a shorthand description of them through a coding process, described in the “Analysis” section below. Then, using the step-by-step analytic method called the constant comparison method, data are compared with data, with codes, and with a higher level of interpretation and abstraction called a category or theme. Categories are compared with categories and with even higher level notions called concepts. Theory is derived from these constant comparisons (Charmaz, 2006).

Although grounded theory is primarily inductive, it also has a deductive side. When one analyzes data and sees a pattern and perceives a theory, the researcher should see if that theory accounts for the data in other interviews. A theory is developed with induction and it is tested for consistency with new examples; that is deduction (Charmaz, 2006).

b. **Constructivist grounded theory**

Charmaz's qualitative research approach, referred to as Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006, 2008; Kenny & Fourie, 2014), was selected as the most suitable method for this study. Charmaz makes action central to her form of grounded theory; she advises the researcher to code with gerunds so that the action in the data is highlighted. This is because when the researcher codes for themes and not actions, the analysis remains at a descriptive level, but coding for action contributes to developing a process. Action for Charmaz can be a process, a state of being or an activity. She offers flexible guidelines for conducting grounded theory research rather than prescriptions. According to Charmaz, Glaser and Strauss believed that they could "discover" theory as it emerges from the data. In contrast, Charmaz presents her belief that researchers "co-construct" the grounded theory with the participants through their "involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 10). She believes that theories interpret the world and are not exact pictures of it.

Charmaz asserts that the researcher should gather rich data and place them in their social context. Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory involves two types of coding, that is, the process of labeling the data so they can be sorted into theoretically meaningful groupings. The first type is initial or open coding in which an interpretive short name is assigned to segments of data that seem theoretically relevant to the study's research questions. The second type is

focused coding in which the most useful or relevant (in terms of the study's research questions) initial codes are used to scan through large amounts of data to determine which initial codes are able to best categorize themes in the data.

A hallmark of Charmaz's approach is memo-writing. Charmaz considers memo-writing as an intermediate step between coding and writing drafts of a paper. Memos are informal notes created by researchers to capture and store emergent concepts and theoretical ideas that occur to them during the process of grounded theory analysis. In memo-writing, the codes are taken apart, analyzed for patterns and potential relationships, and some are made into conceptual categories. Charmaz states that grounded theorists sort, diagram, and integrate their memos to help develop theory.

An additional reason for choosing Charmaz's approach to grounded theory was my interest in staying close to the experiences of the participants. Other forms of grounded theory (e.g., Glaser & Strauss, 1967) place the researcher as "distant expert" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 513) working with only the data to produce interpretations from the data. Strauss and Corbin (1994) acknowledge that they want to "give voice" to the participants' stories; however, it is their interpretations of the participants' experiences (p. 281) that lead to findings. However, Charmaz sees herself as a collaborator and co-constructor with the participants of their experiences and meanings (Charmaz, and Mitchell, 2001). Accordingly, Charmaz wants to see that some of the participants' words appear in the final text (Mills et al., 2006).

Some of Charmaz's methods overlap Corbin and Strauss' methods (2008), such as the "coding" and "memoing" techniques. Those techniques were adopted for this study in a manner that follows Charmaz's approach closely in that I was trying to co-construct as an insider the

participants' experiences and use their own words (e.g., in vivo codes) to a great extent, as the Results chapter will demonstrate.

## 2. **Research design**

According to Patton (2015), there are three kinds of data for qualitative reports: open-ended interviews, observation, and extant written communication. This is primarily an interview study. The research questions for this dissertation research could not be answered by data from observations nor from previously written communication because written texts would not allow the interaction I found so useful in helping me glean information about the participants' experiences. The participants at times thought of their experiences in response to what the researcher had to say to them. An example of this is when the participant referred to as "Jane" was asked if any of her experiences of conflict over her racial status led to mental health problems. For the first time, Jane realized that maybe the reason she experienced anxiety over grades when growing up was because she had hoped to go away to college and escape the problems she had experienced because of her mixed-race background in southwest Louisiana. To collect this kind of information it was helpful to use open-ended interview questions. Semi-structured interview guides, such as the ones I used, are useful because questions are prepared ahead of time and are flexible. The interviewer can ask a question in a way that fits the flow of conversation and can add follow-up probes and other related questions as needed. The interviewer appears prepared but can also extemporize. The structure is also advantageous for the person being interviewed because it allows them to express their views in a way most comfortable for them.

This study included a focus group interview, 18 in-depth individual interviews, and an interview of a family of three. I conducted the focus group interview to pilot test and fine tune the



interview guide. The focus group was made up of volunteers who were going to be interviewed individually for the in-depth interviews. In addition to gathering data from research participants, I also interviewed three key informants. Key informants are individuals with specialized knowledge about a topic related to the research, such as information about a particular community of interest. I spoke with three informants who were well versed in Creole community life and provided contextual cultural and historical information on Louisiana Creoles. The respondents for all of the interviews in this study were Louisiana Creole people of color. One of the reasons I chose Creoles of color to study is because research has shown that racially ambiguous people experience more discrimination than other groups of people (Shih et al., 2007). Another reason this topic was chosen is because Creoles of color are an under-investigated group and they, in many cases, live together in communities in contrast to other multiracial groups who are interspersed throughout the general population and do not live together in a community. In other words, Creoles of color share an ethnic or cultural identity, which is why their path to identity can be studied. Louisiana was chosen as a site from which to study Creoles of color because Louisiana has a rich and documented history of French and Spanish settlers' cohabitating with the minority peoples of the state. Children of such unions were identified as Creole.

As stated in the literature review, I developed the design for this study based partly on the findings of my earlier pilot study (Cooke, 2014) with a convenience sample of Creole people. The pilot study revealed that two of the three participants who experienced depression did not grow up in a Creole community and also reported that they had had problems with their Creole identity (Cooke, 2014). This finding raised questions about the relationship between growing up in a Creole community, having a strong Creole identity, and possible protection against

developing depression or possibly other mental health problems. As noted in the Literature Review, Mossakowski's (2003) research indicated that having a strong ethnic identity can buffer ethnic "outsiders" from negative consequences of prejudice. To explore this dynamic for Creoles of color, I asked the participants to complete a measure of affiliation with ethnic identity as well as measures of self-esteem and depression. These measures are described in more detail in the following section titled "Instruments."

### C. **Instruments**

#### 1. **Researcher as instrument**

In qualitative research, the researcher is the main instrument (Weiss, 1994). Weiss defines the interviewing relationship as a partnership between the researcher and the respondent. "The interviewer will define the areas for exploration and will monitor the quality of the material" (Weiss, p. 65). Weiss also states that the interviewer is the "means by which the respondent can tell his story" (p. 65). I had a special relationship with my participants because as a Creole woman of color I am an insider to this group. This fact helped me in interviewing, as my participants gave me the impression that they expected me to understand them. For example, one of my participants replied to me, "Mhm, you've probably had that experience yourself." (Interview with Cathy). Charmaz (2006) emphasizes a reflexive stance as one which brings the researcher's interests, positions and assumptions into the research. My position as an insider influenced my impressions (see researcher bias later).

#### 2. **Interviews**

##### a. **Interview guide**

The primary way that data were collected in this study was through open-ended interviews. I interviewed a focus group, 18 individuals and a family of three. Though

Glaser is against using interview guides, Charmaz (2006) recommends that novice researchers use an interview guide to “avoid blurting out loaded questions and to avert forcing responses into narrow categories” (p. 18). She further states that having an interview guide with prepared questions and probes increases your confidence and allows you to focus on the person you are interviewing.

I created the interview guide with the help of my dissertation advisor, I developed some of the questions with ideas I derived from data gleaned from the pilot study and some from examining other studies on Creole people. I used the same interview guide with all the interviews. I first used the interview guide with the focus group in order to use their responses to fine-tune the interview guide, adding probes such as “do you think that Creole should be a census category”? and “can you talk a little bit about discrimination within the Creole community and discrimination outside the Creole community”? Then I interviewed the 18 participants individually and the family with the updated interview guide. (See Appendices D and E for the interview guides.)

b. **Focus group interview**

A focus group interview was conducted to inform and refine the questions to be asked in the individual interviews. According to Kreuger and Casey (2000), p. 4), “A focus group isn’t just a bunch of people getting together to talk...It is a way to better understand how people feel or think about an issue, product or service.” The advantage of focus groups is that, unlike individual interviews, focus groups are able to help the researcher gain a lot of information and perspectives in a short amount of time (Gibbs, 1987). The focus group in this study was attended by three participants. Originally I asked for volunteers from the pool of respondents who were participating in the individual interviews and five volunteered to be in the

focus group, but two of the participants did not show up. I decided to proceed with the three I had and the interview was productive. I obtained good feedback that helped me fine-tune the individual interview guide.

The focus group participants also participated in the individual interviews. In a sense, then, they were interviewed twice. This proved enlightening because some participants, shared information when they were together as a group that they did not share in their individual interviews. In fact, in their individual interviews, two participants denied making a sensitive statement about intra-community discrimination based on skin color that had been unanimously expressed in the focus group. This discrepancy might have been a possible example of “safety in numbers.” It could also reflect a context dependent instability in the question, leading them to answer it differently when asked in different settings or they thought differently at different times. All in all, many suggestions for how to conduct the individual interview came out of the responses I got from the focus group. For example, as previously mentioned, I added a probe to question two – “Do you feel that Creole should be a census category?” This probe led to many responses in the individual interviews. The focus group interview took approximately one hour to complete.

c. **In-depth individual interviews**

Speaking with a participant individually allows access to the participant’s deeper thoughts because the interviewer has the opportunity to ask follow-up questions and to probe for more detailed knowledge. Additionally, the interviewer is afforded the possibility of establishing a stronger rapport with the participant who is therefore likely to speak more candidly with the interviewer, revealing things that they might not feel comfortable revealing in a focus

group (Boyce & Neal, 2006). Significantly, however, I found that my participants revealed sensitive information in the focus group that they did not reveal in the individual interviews.

I conducted individual in-depth interviews with 18 participants. Three of the interviewees had participated in the focus group interview. Participants were assured of their confidentiality with the use of pseudonyms and the assurance that any identifying information would be deleted and the recordings would be destroyed one year after the transcripts were transcribed.

d. **Family interview**

In the course of recruitment, one of my participants led me to a person of very advanced age who was interested in participating in my study. In the process of connecting with her, I discovered that her son and grandson were also interested in being interviewed. My dissertation advisor and I discussed this serendipitous opportunity to conduct a family interview, and I pursued and received IRB approval to do so. Traditionally, family research is a quantitative enterprise done with large numbers of families and it focuses on the needs of family members as individuals. Limited family research has been done qualitatively by interviewing individual family members (Eggenberger & Nelms, 2007). This family interview focuses on individuals and the family dynamic as a whole. I got permission from the IRB to have the grandson help the grandmother with the interview because she was hard of hearing and the interview took place over the telephone which made it harder for the grandmother to hear me. I used the semi-structured individual interview guide with them. Bruno, the grandson, repeated the questions I asked and she answered. I asked all three of them the same question in turn before I moved to the next question. Information from the interview reflected knowledge about different generations of Louisiana Creoles. The interview lasted one hour 20 minutes.

### 3. **Quantitative instruments**

I administered three scales to the 21 participants: The RSES; The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM); and the BDI-II. I chose to add these instruments because I wanted a formal, efficient, and externally validated way to characterize my respondents in terms of identity and dimensions of mental health. For example, I used the BDI-II to capture any depression among the participants, including participants who reported that they never experienced depression.

#### a. **The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale**

The RSES measures global self-esteem or one's feeling of worth as an individual (RSE items can be found in Appendix A). It is composed of ten statements that measure self-worth and self-acceptance with Likert-type items that include strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Scores for the scale run from 0-40 with a score of 15 or lower indicating low self-esteem. Twenge and Campbell (2001) analyzed 199 studies that used the RSES and found that age has an effect on one's RSES scores, with self-esteem increasing with age. Butler and Gasson (2006) found credibility issues with the RSES, e.g., there is no rationale for how the items on the RSES were selected. According to Sinclair et al. (2010), the reliability of the RSES was calculated in their study as high, with Cronbach coefficient alpha overall and across subgroups at 0.91. Luhtanen and Crocker (2016) also stated that the RSES has high test-retest reliabilities that are greater than 0.80. Rosenberg (1965) found that the internal consistency, i.e., whether different items that purport to measure the same concept produce similar scores, was 0.77.

b. **The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure**

The MEIM is a 12-item survey that measures ethnic identity achievement (MEIM items can be found in Appendix B). Both the RSES and the MEIM were originally used with adolescents and young adults, but in their current versions can be administered to anyone and to a person of any ethnic group in the U.S. The MEIM evaluates positive ethnic attitudes and belonging, ethnic identity achievement, and ethnic behaviors or practices for any ethnic group. The answers are 4 Likert-type responses ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” There are two components of the MEIM, ethnic identity achievement (EI), which measures one’s sense of affiliation with one’s ethnic group and Other Group Orientation (OGO), which is peoples’ attitudes about how they interact with people from other ethnic groups.

Ponterotto et al. (2003) looked at studies using the MEIM and found measures of internal consistency for six college samples and four high school samples. For the EI subscale, alphas ranged from .81 to .92, with a mean of .86. For the OGO subscale alphas ranged from .35 to .82, with a mean of .69. They cited Reese et al (1998) who looked at test-retest reliability and reported an alpha of .25 for a six week interval.

Gaines et al. (2010) conducted a multi-ethnic study of U.K. racial/ethnic groups using the MEIM and found a better fit for them with a three-factor model, positing a Behavioral component, a Cognitive component, and an Affective component instead of the Ethnic Identity and Other Group components. The scale had good internal consistency. The Behavioral component had a Cronbach’s alpha at .81 and the Cognitive and Affective components had alphas of .89.

c. **Beck Depression Inventory - II**

The BDI-II is a 21 item scale that measures the severity of symptoms of depressive mood from normal to mild depressive mood to severe depressive mood. (The items of the BDI-II can be found in Appendix C.) However, it is not a diagnostic tool; it looks at symptoms that are represented in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) such as hopelessness and guilt and physical symptoms such as fatigue and lack of interest in sex. The BDI-II is a shift from the psychodynamic perspective, which originated with Freud and which emphasizes unconscious processes as responsible for our moods, and instead is a move towards viewing negative thoughts as responsible for the depression.

Beck et al. (1988) conducted a meta-analysis of the BDI and found that it had high internal consistency. For psychiatric patients the mean coefficient of alpha was 0.86 and 0.81 for “normal subjects.” For test-retest reliability, the BDI-II has correlations greater than 0.60. The concurrent validity, or how well a new test compares with other more established tests of the same kind, of the BDI as compared to other scales for depression is high. However, Beck and Beamsderfer (1974) found that it is easy to fake responses and community mental health patients could portray themselves as depressed or not if given the questionnaire in advance (Whitmell, 1978). Beck (1972) found a positive relationship between social desirability and the BDI.

D. **Sample**

1. **Eligibility criteria**

The inclusion criteria for this study were that the participants had to be a Louisiana Creole person of color and be 18 or older. I needed adult participants because I was asking sensitive information about their mental health history that they personally had to know.



The screening tool (Appendix H) asked two questions: 1. Are you 18 years of age or older? 2. Do you racially identify as a Creole person?

## 2. **Sampling approach**

The sampling strategy used was maximum variation (heterogeneity) sampling (Patton, 2002). Patton (2015) describes this kind of sampling as a “strategy aimed at capturing and describing the central themes that cut across a great deal of variation” (p. 283). To understand the process of forming Creole identity and its impact on the experience of negative racialized treatment, I wanted to learn from a range of individuals from the community of Creoles of color. Therefore, I sought a varied sample using a demographic questionnaire to sample for a variation in age and other demographic features (Table I and Appendix K for demographic information). A wide variety of participants was achieved through recruitment. The participants represented various income, occupation, educational and socio-economic statuses growing up and other factors, including who spoke Kouri Vini, the Creole language. The ability to speak Kouri Vini was regional and only present in Creole people of southwestern Louisiana. Indeed many of the Creole people in northern Louisiana did not think that any Creole people still spoke Kouri Vini.

**TABLE I**  
**INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Identity</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Experience living in Creole community</b>	<b>Mental Health Experience</b>
Cindy	Creole	50	Skilled/technical	College certification program	Lived in extended Creole family in New Orleans	ADHD Anxiety Racial stress
Nancy	Creole	99	Office, sales	No high school diploma	Lived most of her life in Creole community in Florida	None Stress question misunderstood
Bruno	Creole	41	Skilled/technical	College certification	Lived most of his life in Creole community in Louisiana	None Racial stress
Popinno	Creole	67	Skilled/technical	3 years college Electrician	Lived all of his life in Creole community in Louisiana	None
Grandma	Creole	103	Manual labor	No high school diploma	Lived all of her life in Creole community in Louisiana	None
Cathy	Creole	77	Skilled/technical Housewife	No high school diploma	Lived all of her life in Creole community in Louisiana	None
Joan	Creole	57	Skilled/technical	B.A.	Lived until age 13 in Chicago; lived age 13 to adulthood in Louisiana Creole community; lived most of her life in Texas.	Depression OCD Anxiety Racial stress
Veronica	Creole	64	Office	1 year college	Lived first 8 years of life in Creole community in Louisiana; lived until 40 in Creole community in California From 40 - present lives in Creole community in Louisiana	None
JuJu	Creole	62	Office	High school diploma	Lived all of her life in Creole community in Louisiana	Anxiety Racial stress
Juanita	Creole	72	Professional	B.A.; some M.A. hours	Lived initially in Black community; Lived most of her life in Creole community in Florida	Clinical depression Anxiety Racial stress

**TABLE 1 (continued)**  
**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION**

James	AA/Cr	66	Professional	M.A.	Lived all of his life in Creole community in Louisiana	None Racial stress
Marie	Creole	66	Professional	Ph.D.	Lived in Creole community in Louisiana first 25 years; lived most years in Texas; now lives in Creole community in Louisiana	Depression Anxiety Racial stress
Gracie	Creole	63	Office	High school diploma; some college hours	Lived all of her life in Creole community in Florida	Anxiety
John	Creole	56	Skilled/technical	30 hours college	Lived all of his life in Creole communities in Louisiana	Depression Racial stress
Iris	Creole	28	Skilled/technical	Technical college	Lived all of her life in Creole community in Louisiana	None
Ophelia	Creole	74	Skilled/technical	3 years college	Lived most of her life in Creole community in Louisiana; also lived some time in Texas	None Racial stress
Francis	Creole	59	Professional	2 years college	Lived all his life in Chicago with ties to Creole community in Chicago & Cane River, Louisiana	None
Sue	AA/Cr	68	Professional	B.A.	Lived 22 years in Creole community in New Orleans; lived 30 years in the North; lived the rest of her life in Creole community in Louisiana	Anxiety
Michael	Creole	21	Student	3 and 1/2 years college	Initially lived in Creole community in Louisiana; lived 15 years in L.A.	None Racial stress
Leona	AA/Cr	67	Professional	M.A.	First 45 years in Creole community in Louisiana; lived in Creole community in Louisiana during college; rest of the time in Creole community in California	Depression Racial stress
Jane	Creole	33	Professional	M.A.	Lived most of her life in Creole community in Louisiana; spent last several years in the Midwest	Anxiety Racial stress

Patton (2015) does state that having a lot of variation in a small sample can be problematic because participants differ so much from each other. However, he says that this weakness can become a strength because any common patterns that are found with such variation are compelling. Of particular interest for this study were participants who responded that they experienced a mental health condition; therefore, participants with this experience were prioritized for enrollment. Some potential participants were not selected for enrollment because their demographics were too similar to already enrolled participants.

I also relied on snowball sampling, which has also been referred to as word-of-mouth or chain sampling (Patton, 2015). This form of sampling resulted in my family interview which was unique in that three generations of Creole people with similar backgrounds provided a historical backdrop for this study. The three key informants were also found through snowball sampling.

One of the main strategies that the constructivist grounded theorist employs is theoretical sampling, which is when the researcher returns to the field to obtain further data to refine the major categories that have been put together until theoretical saturation occurs. Theoretical saturation is when no new information is gleaned from the data that changes the properties of the categories that emerge during the data collection process.

I was interested in enrolling participants of various ages because societal attitudes and practices in relation to race change over time. I did not place an upper limit on the age of the participants as long as the individuals were able to recall and present their narrative in a coherent manner. There were 15 female participants and 6 male participants. My participants ranged in age from 21 to 103. The mean age was 61.6 years; the median age was 64 years. One hundred percent of my sample identified as Creole and 14% of them, or three participants, also identified as African American.

### 3. **Sample size**

Patton (2015) says of whether a sample size is adequate, “It depends” (p. 311).

Explaining that there are no established rules for how to determine the size of a sample in qualitative research, Patton links sample size to the purpose of the study. As Sandelowski (1998) states, there are no numerical operations such as power analyses that you can do in qualitative research to determine conclusively what size a sample should be to produce useful results. The purposes of this study were to be able to delineate how Creole racial identity is formed and to be able to comment on how the stress of unfair racial treatment leads to mental health problems in Louisiana Creole people of color.

This study was designed to capture both breadth and depth. Patton (2015) defines seeking breadth or depth as when a researcher studies a “specific set of experiences for a large number of people (seeking breadth) or a more open range of experiences for a smaller number of people (seeking depth).” (p. 311). In order to get both breadth and depth a sample of 21 participants was chosen, enough to be considered a larger small sample, but few enough to give an in-depth look at the participants relating to my research questions. I also had to balance the size of my sample against the limits of my time and resources. The interviews had to be transcribed by someone other than the researcher to be done in a timely fashion, and the funding for the transcription was limited. After these considerations, it was decided that at least 20 participants would be potentially adequate to support maximum variation/heterogeneity sampling for a grounded theory study, though some researchers suggest 30 or more for developing theory (Sandelowski, 1998). However, many qualitative research guidelines point to theoretical saturation, or the moment when further sampling does not produce any new information about the categories, as the hallmark of adequate sample size and composition (Patton, 2015). I began to find common

themes across my interviewees' responses within the first 10 interviews analyzed, and the last of the interviews produced very little new theoretically important findings.

#### 4. **Recruitment**

For this study there was a recruitment flyer (Appendix I) and a recruitment brochure (Appendix J), both of which the University of Illinois at Chicago IRB approved. To recruit participants, I went to Louisiana twice. The first time, I went to Tulane Behavioral Health Clinic at Tulane Medical Center in New Orleans where I obtained a list of mental health agencies in New Orleans. I drove to many of the agencies and left my recruitment flyers in the waiting areas in an effort to connect with Creole people who had a mental health problem. Then I drove to Natchez, Louisiana to attend the 300 year birthday party for Pere Augustin Metoyer, a member of the first Creole family in the Cane River area of Louisiana, at St. Augustine Catholic Church on January 10, 2016. Approximately 200 Creole people attended the birthday party and I was able to find interest in my study and screen and get contact information from about 30 volunteers, including several young Creole people. However, only four returned consent forms so I could interview them.

I also drove to Pensacola, Florida, part of the Louisiana Purchase, which is home to a Creole community, and recruited two participants from that area. I also contacted Louisiana chapters of the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance to offer information about my study to potential Creole volunteers who might have an experience of mental illness. I also went to the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI) of New Orleans and left flyers there. This search of mental health organizations yielded one participant whom I screened, consented and interviewed.

Because I needed more participants, I made another trip to Louisiana for the "Conference on Louisiana French: Unity and Diversity," which was sponsored by the Creole Heritage Center,

Cane River National Heritage Area and the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL). I had heard about it in an email from the Creole Heritage Center. My networking at the conference led me to three Louisiana Creole people of color who told me they would participate as key informants for the study. One of my key informants posted my recruitment flyer on his Facebook page, a Louisiana Creole page. From that posting I obtained the last few participants I needed along with the participants I received from word of mouth recruitment by a participant that I had met at the Pere Metoyer birthday party.

Recruitment took almost two years to complete. Some potential participants dropped out of the process after being demographically surveyed. Perhaps they felt the questions asked were too personal and did not want to divulge more personal information in an interview. Some of them did tell me that they would prefer not to answer certain questions which they thought were private such as “what is your income level?” However, it was necessary to ask these questions in the demographic survey to diversify the sample and to be able to observe trends.

#### E. **Research Communications**

There were numerous contacts with potential participants and people referred by potential participants. There were 57 initial contacts in person or over the telephone for initial screening and another 37 contacts for demographic questioning in person or over the telephone. The initial contacts took only a few minutes because the eligibility screening tool I used had only two questions: 1) Are you 18 years of age or older? and 2) Do you racially identify as a Creole person? Most of the contacts were over the telephone. Only six of the demographic surveys took place in person. The rest were done over the telephone and took about 20-25 minutes to complete.

The RSES, the MEIM, and the BD-II were administered over the telephone just preceding the interview. It took about 25 minutes to administer these quantitative instruments. All of the interviews were done by telephone because all of the participants except one lived outside of Chicago. I made the decision to interview the participant who lived in Chicago over the telephone as well so that the interview method would be consistent. The interviews lasted from 25 minutes to one hour 33 minutes. In-line recordings were done of the interviews.

F. **Research Ethics**

1. **Institutional Review Board and informed consent**

The University of Illinois at Chicago IRB approved this research with respect to ethical treatment of human subjects before I initiated the research (see Appendix F for the IRB approval letter). A consent form approved by the IRB (Appendix G) was sent to each participant by mail or email. I volunteered to mail the forms by standard mail, but some participants asked if they could have their consent forms emailed and I did so. I explained the consent form to each participant over the telephone after going over their demographic questionnaire and deciding that they were a good fit for the study. The consent form included parts that explained the purpose of the research, what the participant was being asked to do, the potential risks and discomforts, the benefits of taking part in the research, and the nature of their privacy and confidentiality should they agree to participate in the study. I also told them they had the option not to participate in the study and that any relationship they had or will have with the University of Illinois at Chicago would not be affected if they decide not to participate. In addition, I told them that if they had questions about the study they could contact me or my faculty sponsor and if they had concerns or complaints, they could contact the IRB. I gave them contact information for those sources.



Each potential participant was asked to sign a copy of the consent form and return it to me by mail. Some participants wished to email the consent form back, but I explained to them that the IRB needed an original signature. I supplied a self-addressed stamped return envelope to mail the signed consent form back to me. All 21 individuals consented to participate in the study. Only two individuals were lost after consent. One participant died before he could be interviewed and another, Nancy, died after the interview and could not be member checked. A third individual, Grandma, died after member checking.

## 2. **Confidentiality**

I asked participants to choose their own pseudonym for the study to protect their confidentiality. A 99 year old participant, Nancy, refused to choose a pseudonym because she thought it might be illegal. I had to interview her using her own name and edit the results using a pseudonym that I had chosen for her. A master list of the pseudonyms and actual names was kept in a locked file cabinet which was accessible only to me. To further assure confidentiality I removed all identifying information from the interview transcripts and digital data analysis files. Each of the three student transcriptionists had to sign a confidentiality statement, and the IRB had to approve them.

## G. **Participant Compensation**

I did not have sufficient funding to offer each participant a stipend for participating in the study. However, my faculty sponsor had funds to purchase an Amazon Fire tablet. As participants were recruited, they were told that their name would be entered into a drawing to win the tablet. After data analysis was complete all participants' names were written on pieces of paper, a name was pulled, and the tablet was sent to that person.

## H. **Enhancing Rigor**

### 1. **Managing researcher bias**

As a qualitative researcher, I had to exercise reflexivity or strive to be aware of my potential biases as related to this study. As a Creole woman of color, I have some insider information that could have generated expectations about the data. In addition, I had already conducted a Creole pilot study and, therefore, might have had biases relating to my findings in that study (Cooke, 2014). Bias is always a challenge in research, and I tried to manage bias through accuracy in reporting the responses of participants and maintaining openness in interpreting those responses. In addition to the careful verbatim transcriptions and use of key informants for background information, I had to be consciously open to views alternative to mine. I had to listen closely to what my participants said and strive to report it faithfully, without letting my opinion unduly influence what I heard and reported. I also strove to enhance rigor and manage bias by pursuing trustworthiness throughout all steps of my research. According to Mertens (2005) trustworthiness of a qualitative study is and can be judged by using the criteria of “credibility,” “transferability,” and “authenticity.”

#### a. **Credibility**

In quantitative research “Internal validity means that the changes observed in the dependent variable are due to the effect of the independent variable, not to some other unintended variables...” (Mertens, p. 121). Paralleling that criterion in qualitative research is “credibility,” which means that the research has been carried out in such a way as to be faithful to the information gleaned from participants in a manner that would lead to participants to deem the findings credible to them (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A technique that supported the credibility of my findings was member-checking. I made a summary of the findings and contacted

participants by telephone to discuss the study's outcomes (for more details, see the section below on "Trustworthiness in the Analysis").

b. **Transferability**

Another quality that I used to lend trustworthiness to my study was "transferability," which parallels external validity in quantitative research. "External validity is the extent to which findings in one study can be applied to another situation" (Mertens, 2005, p. 124). Strict generalizability is not possible in small sample qualitative research. Whereas the postpositivist can use confidence limits to present results with precision, the qualitative researcher can only give thick description, which allows other researchers to judge and/or test if the results might be replicated in other contexts. To promote transferability, I described the details of the methods in the study – e.g., the population studied (Louisiana Creole people of color) and how it was sampled, how I as researcher/instrument fit into the research approach (researcher as insider), and what effect that context had on how I answered the research questions.

c. **Authenticity**

With authenticity, one moves away from thinking about the reliability and validity of the research. Authenticity differs from credibility where the researcher is linking the study's findings to the reality of the participants and asks whether the findings are true. Authenticity, in contrast, asks whether the research was worthwhile and what its impact is on the participants.

One can gauge authenticity by member checks. I saw this when I asked the participants some questions about themselves. Several of them said that for the first time they could see something clearly about themselves. For example, when I asked Marie if any past incidents of

discrimination caused her any mental health issues, she replied, “I never thought of it at that point but now that you’re asking me that, it probably did cause me more anxiety than depression, but both were there.”

## 2. **Trustworthiness in the analysis**

### a. **Member checking**

Member checking took place after all the interviews were coded and during data analysis. I called all 21 of my participants and 15 returned my call to engage in member checking. I read a summary of their interview and my findings for the study to each participant over the phone.

One participant questioned the accuracy of a quotation but it was found to be accurate when checked against the audio recording. A few participants wanted to edit their responses slightly, such as when they had made a generalization and wanted to qualify it. For example, when I told Leona that she said “Creole people never disparage their children like African American people do their children,” she said she would like to change that to “like some African American people” and not generalize that all African Americans do this. John in his interview had said that “You can’t make a king into a servant,” referring to himself. During the member checking process, he said he would like to say, “You can’t make a king into a serf.” Therefore, the changes they wanted to make were small and, on the whole, they were satisfied with my synopsis and findings.

### b. **Debriefing**

As I finished coding each interview, I discussed the interviews with my faculty advisor including what the codes meant and whether they were applied in a way that was faithful to the participants’ responses. These “debriefing” discussions were helpful to me in

deepening my sense of the data and leading to refinement of the coding scheme. As I talked about the codes and how I came up with them, I began articulating emerging ideas about the possible relationships between the codes in various contexts. With my advisor's encouragement, I wrote memos to capture these ideas which helped identify the categories I later created in the thematic analysis.

## I. **Data Analysis**

### 1. **Recording and transcription**

I chose to audio record the interviews instead of taking notes because I wanted to capture every nuance and detail of the interviewees' speech. The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim by three undergraduate students whom I hired through a grant I obtained from the Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy and all three were approved by the IRB. In their transcriptions they captured everything said including all the 'uhs' and other fractions of speech. After I received a transcript from a transcriptionist, I carefully reviewed it and compared it with the recording to correct any errors that the transcriptionist may have made. In each transcript I tried to represent the language of each participant accurately so that readers of my dissertation could see how rich the data were from which I drew my inferences. Charmaz (2006) states that the quality and credibility of one's study begins with the data. In most qualitative studies the data are the words of the participants.

Weiss (1994) recommends that you should transcribe everything you need, but you will not know what you need until you see everything, so transcribe everything. Transcribing everything also allowed me to select accurate quotations to present in my research write-up. I wanted my readers to see the charm of my Creole participants, see their personalities and see their lives from their intimate perspectives.

## 2. **Data management**

Data from the audio recorder were transferred to a computer file, cleaned of identifying information and then emailed to the transcriptionists. The transcriptionists transcribed the data within three weeks of receiving the audio files and sent the transcripts to me via email. Once I had the transcriptions, the transcriptionists destroyed the audio files of the interviews as specified in their signed statement of confidentiality.

## 3. **Simultaneity of data collection and analysis**

As is conventionally done in grounded theory research, data collection and data analysis took place simultaneously (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory is not just the method of research, it is also the theory that the data produces. Charmaz observes that grounded theorists start their development of theory with the data (Charmaz, 2006). As I conducted the interviews, I coded the interview responses and wrote memos about their theoretical significance. To advance from data collection to theoretical insight, grounded theory researchers continually review the relationships among the data and their developing conceptualizations about the data. This process is referred to as the constant comparative method. The elements of data analysis—including coding, memos, and the constant comparative method--will be explained further in the next section, Thematic Analysis.

## 4. **Thematic analysis**

Coding and creating memos are core components in the analysis of grounded theory. Charmaz describes coding as “the process of defining what the data are about” in the context of the research questions driving the study (Charmaz, 2006, p. 187). It is the link between collecting the data and developing a theory to explain them. It involves assigning a meaningful interpretive name to segments of the data. Memos are informal notes created by

researchers to capture and store emergent concepts and theoretical ideas that occur to them during coding and throughout data analysis. Memos can take any form (e.g., hand-written, audio-recorded, typed into a computer data analysis program) and can remain private or can be shared or discussed in reports of the data analysis. The phases of coding that occurred in this study and the creation of memos are discussed further below.

a. **Open (initial) coding**

Open coding is the first phase of coding and involves assigning interpretive short names to segments of data (words, lines, paragraphs) that are relevant to the study's research questions. Through conducting this first step of coding, the researcher begins to interpret what the data are about but remains open to the widest potential theoretical implications for later analysis. The twenty interviews I recorded, had transcribed, and coded produced approximately 1,100 codes. I did not code the three key informant interviews because they were background information only. Atlas.ti 8 was the analytic software that I used to code the data and to produce some memos, although most memos were recorded manually. Initially, I coded in such a way as to produce many unique codes. I did not reuse the same codes over and over again because I wanted my codes to be faithful to the data and I did not want to anticipate producing themes as I coded. With Atlas.ti, I was able to store and organize my codes across all interviews

As previously stated, I used an inductive method, the constant comparison method, which Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe as defining analytical properties of categories (themes) by making comparisons between data, codes, and categories and scrutinizing these properties. The constant comparative method moves from specific interpretations to a broader idea that helps create theory. The researcher analyzes each piece of data in the context of the whole set of data and the emerging patterns between data in order to develop a data-grounded conceptualization of

the phenomenon being investigated. Types of comparisons include data with data, data with category, category with category, and category with concept. A concept is a category or theme that has been raised to a higher theoretical level because of its “theoretical reach, incisiveness, generic power and relation to other categories” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 139). These comparisons lay the groundwork for developing a progressively more detailed, abstract, and refined theoretical framework. Constant comparison took place in several stages that are described below.

b. **Reduced codes – focused coding**

The next stage in the thematic analysis after initial coding, or line-by-line labeling of segments of data, was using the constant comparison method to conduct focused coding, that is, the review, revision, and reorganization of the most significant initial codes in terms of theoretical importance for my research questions. With focused coding the researcher can look across different interviews and observations and compare the experiences and actions of the participants with each other, with the codes assigned to those experiences and actions, and ultimately, with interpretations of patterns in the data. My code list included both codes that were recurring and also codes that, even if only one participant expressed the idea and I thought they expressed important information about the participants’ lives, I included them. I was able to reach what I thought was theoretical saturation with my 21 participants, in that, as I continued to code all of the interviews, no new categories of information were found.

Through this process I was able to revise the coding scheme. Many initial codes were substantially the same with different wording across different interviews. Thus the codes could be merged and the number of codes reduced, resulting in 144 codes that captured the meanings and information across interviews. Some of these reduced codes were labels for simple ideas; some were representations of more complex ideas. Examples of the first type of code include,



“Creoles are clannish” and “mental health problems.” Examples of the second more complex codes include, “Initially thought Creoles were made of certain traits; now thinks they’re more diverse than what he thought before,” and “Did not like the term Creole because it means almost the same thing as Black.”

c. **Families of codes – advanced focused coding**

The next stage of thematic analysis was advanced focused coding, that is, identifying conceptual relationships between the 144 codes to produce 56 families of codes in which a code could appear in more than one family. The goal was to identify theoretically significant themes or categories and their component sub-categories. An example of a family of codes is family 2. “Appearances,” which contains eight revised codes:

- 139. Creole women are exotic (Cindy, Juanita, John, Leona, Jane);
- 122. Many Creoles have the choice to be Black or White (Juanita);
- 112. Because she came from a diverse appearing group could therefore be a bridge between groups of people (Iris);
- 32. Appears Hispanic (Veronica, JuJu, Jane);
- 77. Appearance attracted prejudice (Popinno);
- 52. Appearances of Creoles (Joan, Popinno, Cindy, John, Marie, Iris, Leona, Nancy, Jane);
- 33. Appears White (Cindy, Gracie, Iris); and
- 99. Some family members fall on different sides of the racial divide of Black and White (Ophelia).

The next stage of the analysis was producing descriptive summaries of each family of codes. For example, this is the summary for Family 1: This family describes how in Creole families, different members choose to belong to different racial groups. The summary of family

21 is as follows: This family is about political power; about how some African Americans may claim Creoles as their own when African Americans are in the minority and not when African Americans are in the majority.

d. **Axial coding**

The next stage in the analysis was, using the constant comparison method, producing categories of how families of codes are related to one another. This is axial coding. These families can have different relationships and appear in more than one category. That was a challenge in putting these more conceptual, abstract codes together. Examples of two of these axial codes are: 1) how Creoles racially identify, and 2) how Creoles identify as Black. Both of these axial codes, or families of codes related to one another, contain the family How Creoles are seen as Black and how that offends some Creole people. There were 30 of these axial codes.

e. **Categories revised into final themes**

The fifth stage of thematic analysis consisted of relating the families of codes related to one another into major categories or themes. Initially, this processed produced 10 major themes: racial identity; racial identification; political power; separation; discrimination; stress and mental health; essential characteristics of being Creole; support; Creole as culture; and community and community support. The next stage of revision involved reducing the 10 themes to seven themes. After further comparison, I found that two of the seven themes could be subsumed under a larger, more inclusive theme, such as Separation being subsumed under Devaluation, Prejudice, and Negative Treatment. Similarly, Creole as Culture could be subsumed under Creole Identity because one's culture is part of one's identity. The completion of analysis yielded five final themes with subthemes that represented the important ideas in the research.

## V. PARTICIPANTS

### A. Chapter Overview

In this chapter I will describe each participant's experience with their Creole identity and their experiences with racial stress and mental health problems in relation to their Creole identity. I will also give other relevant descriptive information. The purpose of the descriptions is to introduce these participants to the reader and to describe part of their personal experiences as Louisiana Creole people of color. The data come from the demographic screening questionnaire used to select which individuals would participate in the study, from information from their in-depth individual interviews, in the cases of Cindy, James, and Joan, information from the focus group interview, and in the cases of Grandma Smith, Popinno, and Bruno, the family interview. I will provide limited analysis, with the major analysis being presented in the Results chapter and some in the Discussion chapter.

### B. Reflections on Participants

#### 1. Cindy

Cindy is a woman in her early 50s who is a middle income skilled/technical worker who has lived all her life in New Orleans. Cindy's mother is Creole and her father is White. She identifies as both Creole and biracial, identifying as Creole to people whom she thinks are Creole and to others as biracial because she thinks most people do not know what Creole is.

Cindy is phenotypically White to this researcher. She has only dated White men. Her first two husbands were White and her present husband is Hispanic. She states that she has been attracted to men of all races, but only White men, except for her present husband, have asked her out. She has two children--one from her first marriage and one from her second marriage. Cindy

checks White and Black on her racial paperwork, and if there is a biracial category, she checks that. She has always put biracial on her children's paperwork, though she states that they are mostly White. Cindy reports that she has always had anxiety and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), but her anxiety increased when her ex-in-laws objected to their son's marrying her because of her racial background. Cindy developed her Creole identity through intergenerational transmission. She is proud of her Creole heritage.

## 2. **Bruno**

Bruno is a single man in his early 40s with middle income. He has an associate's degree and multiple certifications. He lived most of his life in Louisiana. Bruno is proud of being Creole and has a socio-positive Creole identity. Researching his family through genealogy helped him form his Creole identity as well as did intergenerational transmission.

Bruno has always had many different races of friends. He has always had mixed-race friends, Black friends, White friends, and Asian friends.

Bruno never experienced any mental health problems, though he has experienced stress from being asked to categorize himself racially. He feels that forms for race are asking him to do something he cannot do, which is fit in a racial box. He feels he is all races and checks all races on forms. He checks American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, and White. He is a member of the family interviewed.

## 3. **Popinno**

Popinno is a divorced man in his 60s. He is solidly middle income. He is a tradesman. Popinno says that, "[Creoles] are just a different breed of people." When asked what makes Creoles different, he says, "Anything that had any color in it, uhn mulatto, Creole, mixed breeds, you know. I guess they claim all those...a mixture of Black and White."

Popinno racially identifies as mixed race; he says others think his race is ambiguous. He believes Creoles are rejected because of their appearance. He says he did not go through any process in forming his Creole identity. That is just what he was. He formed his Creole identity through intergenerational transmission. He says Creoles come in all kinds and that all races are accepted as Creole. He says that now young Creoles marry all kinds of people--Blacks, Whites, Greeks, Italians--so now there are a multitude of Creole people.

Popinno says of Creoles, "we just like telephones," indicating a connection between Creoles. He has never been diagnosed with a mental health problem. He is part of the family interviewed.

#### 4. **Grandma Smith**

Grandma is a woman of very advanced age. She is the matriarch of the family interviewed. She spent most of her life in Louisiana. Grandma's income is below the national poverty line. She picked cotton and raised pecans for her livelihood.

Grandma says of Creole, "We ain't Black and we ain't White." She says people do not know what to say when she tells them she is Creole. She says, "Some says Creole, some says mulatto."

Grandma formed her Creole identity through intergenerational transmission, she said, "that's what our parents told us." There was also an element of choice. As she said, "What our parents told us, we was Creole and some would call us mulatto and we told them we wasn't no Black. We wasn't Black or White...so I say we was mixed up...My cousins were White--three quarters White, half rattle snake and the other part son of a bitch." Grandma does say that Creoles feel like a family, which is her precursor to Creole pride.

5. **Nancy**

Nancy is of very advanced age and resided most of her life in a Creole community in Florida. Nancy did not know her father but identifies as Creole because her mother was Creole. Nancy considers herself racially mixed and says most people think she is racially ambiguous.

Nancy says she knew from the time she was very young that she was Creole. She learned it through intergenerational transmission. She says she thought Creole was some “Black mix.” She believes Creoles are seen as Black because, “when the Black blood comes in, they consider you Black. They don’t consider the other bloods.” Like Grandma, she says Creoles are mixed up. She says Creole used to be a racial status, but now it is not. She talks of Japanese and East Indians coming here and marrying White people and their children are considered White.

Nancy details how she had to live by the rules of a Black person and not drink out of the White water fountains and sit in the Black part of segregated movie theaters. She did mention that she passed for White at one time.

6. **Cathy**

Cathy is in her 70s. She was born in Louisiana and lived there her whole life. She is in the lower middle-income bracket and does not have a high school diploma. She reports her racial background as Creole, mixed-race. She thinks Creole means coming from a French heritage and is resistant to any mention of Black as part of Creole heritage, though she states that her parents called themselves mulatto.

Cathy feels that because her English is somewhat broken that she is speaking Creole. She says she was taught that she was Creole at an early stage in her life. She feels that she has been

discriminated against because she is Creole. Cathy thinks that people expect her to say that she is Black, but she makes a point of saying that the skin of Creoles is not black.

Cathy says she finds it difficult to be Creole because other people think you are different from them. She feels support for her Creole identity from her family and friends, but not from anyone else. She said growing up, most of her friends were Frenchmen (Creole). She said she has not had any stress in her life because she is Creole and she has not experienced any mental health problems.

#### 7. **Joan**

Joan is in her 50s. She was born in Chicago, but lived most of her life in Texas. She is in the upper middle-income bracket. She classifies her race as mixed-race--Creole. Her racial/ethnic identity is fluid; she tends to blend in with her environment. Around Hispanics she identified as Hispanic; around Creoles she identified as Creole. Though she considers herself as racially mixed, she thinks others often think of her as racially ambiguous. When she was young she was adamant about being designated Creole. Now she said it does not matter as much to her. She is sensitive about being labelled African American and her identity as Creole might be a defensive one to distinguish herself from African Americans.

Joan thinks that, “the way of life that they used to live long ago passed down to generations that makes the Creole community. Yep that makes the Creole.” Joan feels that being of any color other than White makes life difficult for one.

Joan has experienced anxiety and obsessive compulsive disorder but thinks these things do not have anything to do with her Creole identity. She has experienced pressure from Black relatives to identify as Black. She feels that people in Louisiana accept the Creole identity. She gets support for her Creole identity from her family but does not think she gets it from anywhere

else. Before age 10 her friends were Hispanic because she lived in a Hispanic community. Now her friends are varied, though she did not mention having Creole friends.

8. **Veronica**

Veronica is in her 60s. Though she spent the first eight years of her life in Louisiana, she spent most of her life in California. She now resides in Louisiana. She is middle income. She identifies racially/ethnically as French Creole. She had previously identified as a Frenchman, but with the Creole Renaissance, she embraced the term Creole, which had not been used in her family.

To describe her racial identity, she says she considers herself as racially mixed, but that others often think of her as White. Her Creole identity is a socio-positive one. She cites many examples of how Creole people are written about in books and magazines. She is proud of being Creole.

Before she was eight, Veronica's friends were all Creole. After eight Veronica always had friends of all ethnicities. She was ensconced in a Creole community in California. She had a sense that she was Creole from an early age, though her family never used the word "Creole." She learned her identity through intergenerational transmission. She talks about not being accepted by Blacks or Whites. She speaks of segregation and how her family and other Creoles did not put up with segregation, such as segregated churches, and they built their own churches and schools.

She defines Creole as a mixture of European, African, Native American, and other undefined nationalities. She did not really experience stress from being Creole because she grew up in California and was not subjected to segregation. She never experienced any mental health



problems except for some depression when her son died. Unlike some other participants, she feels the community supports her Creole identity.

9. **JuJu**

JuJu is in her 60s. She resided most of her life in Louisiana. She has a solid middle-income background though she was the daughter of a sharecropper. Her marital status is divorced. She has been diagnosed with anxiety, but thinks it is a side effect of chemotherapy she had 10 years ago. She considers her racial/ethnic background as racially mixed but says that people often think of her as Black.

JuJu is different from other study participants in that she developed her Creole identity in stages. At first her family identified as Black. However, at age 12 they thought that since they were mixed-race that the best fit for them was Creole. They went through a search to find this identity. However, they did not start wholly identifying with Creole as their race/ethnicity until the Creole Renaissance when JuJu was 40 and the Creole Heritage Center helped them understand that they were actually Creole.

She says she has a feeling of safety when Creoles are together. This is similar to Bruno's saying he had a Creole in his corner. She talks about keeping the Creole culture going with things their elders taught them such as cooking, sewing, and quilting.

She bemoans the fact that they are not treated as equals by White people. She also bemoans her perception that she was not White enough for certain things and not Black enough for certain things. She said there is discrimination in hiring practices.

10. **James**

James is in his 60s and married. He was born in Louisiana and lived there all his life. His occupation is a supervisory position. His income is in the upper-middle bracket. He

describes his racial/ethnic background as mixed-race--Creole. He also identifies as African American. Though he describes his race as mixed-race, he states that people often think his race is ambiguous. He has never been diagnosed with nor experienced a mental illness.

He established his Creole identity from a young age (junior high). He said he established his Creole identity through his family, community and the Catholic Church. He says that Creole is a mixture of Spanish, French, Native American and African--a gumbo.

James grew up during the time of the Civil Rights era and was very bold in taking stances against racism and segregation. For example, when his sister was getting married, he insisted that her marriage announcement be in the society pages and not in the "want ads" section where minorities' marriage announcements were placed. He argued with the newspaper and got a Black businessman to put pressure on the newspaper and they prevailed. His sister's announcement was the first minority announcement in the society pages.

He is very proud of being Creole and his Creole identity is a very socio-positive one. He feels he comes from the Creole elite, but his parents' education does not support them being in a high SES. James said that where he comes from, Creole was not thought of as a race but rather as a culture.

#### 11. **Juanita**

Juanita is in her 70s and is single. She has spent most of her life in Florida. Her income puts her in the lower middle-income bracket. Although she states that growing up her family was upper-middle SES, her parents' education does not support them being in an upper SES. She describes her racial/ethnic origin as mixed-race--Creole. She has been diagnosed with clinical depression and experienced anxiety.

Juanita makes a point of saying that Creole people come from aristocratic people and that her family is part of the Creole elite. Juanita said her mother explained Creole to her when she was very young, but she did not understand it. She did not know whether she was “Black or White or Indian or whatever.” She did not begin to identify as Creole until she was in her 30s or 40s after being ridiculed by the Black community for being different and after being rejected by the White students in her college. Slowly she began to identify as French Creole and to be proud of it.

Juanita stated that Creole people originated from miscegenation of French and Spanish soldiers with Africans and Native Americans. She stated that the U.S. government does not recognize Creole as a race separate from African American. She said because of this she had to live a “split life,” being African American in the community and Creole at home.

She feels that she would not have had so many identity problems if she had grown up in a Creole community and had support for her identity.

## 12. **Marie**

Marie is in her 60s and divorced. She has lived in Louisiana most of her life. She is a professional and her income and education put her in an upper-middle SES. She describes her racial/ethnic origin as mixed-race – Creole. Though she considers herself racially-mixed, others often think of her race as ambiguous. Marie always knew she was Creole and that she learned that from her parents. Marie has experienced depression and anxiety in her life due to problems associated with her racial status. Marie feels that Creole is a way of life, a way of looking at life. She feels that children and parents are precious in Creole culture. She feels that Creoles are hardworking and ambitious. She sees Creole people in a very positive light. She feels

that Creoles are anyone who identifies as coming from a Creole culture, though she thinks that Creole heritage is French, Spanish, Caucasian, and Afro-American.

Marie experienced stress because of her racial status. She feels she was discriminated against. She said, “My place was not to be at the top of the class, don’t be the top student and expect that I was going to be observed that way...and I learned to accept that.” She said she felt pressure from both White and Black people to racially identify as Black. She said that Creoles are seen “as a lighter Black person.” She feels no support from the community for her Creole identity and does not feel that the Creole Heritage Center is recognized by anyone but Creoles.

13. **Gracie**

Gracie is in her 60s and married. She was born in Florida and lived there all her life. She is in office and non-professional work. Her income and education put her in the lower SES. She considers her racial/ethnic origin to be mixed-race and others often think her race is ambiguous or White. She has experienced anxiety because of problems associated with being Creole.

Gracie reluctantly identifies as Creole because that is the label society gave her and her mother told her that many Black people began identifying as Creole and so Creole took on the Black connotation. Gracie said, “I don’t think Creole will ever be considered anything but Black because Black is part of the description, so I think for anyone who is not willing to want to embrace being straight up Black, they’re not willing to embrace the label of Creole...” Though Gracie distances herself from Black, she said she would identify as Creole if it were a race on forms.

Gracie admits to passing as White when she was younger. She explains that this was not so much so that people would think that she was White, but because she wanted to go to “Whites only” places like theaters. She also said that at some times, she wrote “White” as her race on forms. However, she has not passed as White since she has been older. Now she writes “Other” on forms asking for race. She said she has experienced discrimination from people of her mother’s generation who want her to identify as Black. She said that Black people pressure her to identify as Black if they think she has any Black blood in her.

Gracie has Creole as less than a socio-positive identity and more as an alternative to being Black.

14. **John**

John is in his 50s and is divorced. He has lived most of his life in Louisiana. His income puts him on the lower end of the upper-middle SES. The type of work he is in is skilled or technical. He identified as Negro up until the age of 14 when his grandfather had a talk with him and explained to John that he was Creole and explained what Creole is. He describes his race as racially mixed and that others often think of his race as ambiguous.

John is very interested in his ancestry and explores Creoles on the internet and through online Creole groups he belongs to. He believes that Moor is in his background and he identifies with Jewish Moors. He racially/ethnically identifies as Creole. John feels that an essential characteristic of being Creole is to have a joy in living. This was also reported by Marie and Juanita. He stated that Creoles come in all phenotypes. He thinks having Creole as a race on forms is distinctive; it is going against the norms.

John feels that Creole is a high stress life. He feels that people are constantly challenging him intellectually, physically, and psychologically for identifying as Creole. He also feels he gets

special treatment because he is Creole. He cites examples of when he enters somewhere, he is ushered to the front of the line and attributes this to him being Creole. Like Juanita, he says Creoles come from some classy people. He talked about how people try to drag him down because he is Creole, but that “you can never turn a king into a serf.” He reports experiencing depression because of problems associated with being Creole. He says he does not experience pressure to identify as a single race; people accept him as Creole.

15. **Iris**

Iris is in her 20s and is divorced. She has lived most of her life in Louisiana. She has an office job. Her income and education support a middle-income SES. She describes her racial/ethnic origin as mixed-race--Creole and “Other.” Her sister is participant “Jane.” She has never been diagnosed with a mental health condition.

Iris is very liberal in regard to whom she sees as Creole, identifying Creole culturally as people descended from those who were born in the New World. She includes Asians theoretically as Creole, but not practically speaking because she says that Creoles are mixed-race. When her parents explained Creole to her as a child, she saw herself: “I classified my identity from a very early age as being in the middle, as being I call it like in the gray area, so not being White and not being Black just being what I was and not boxing or classifying myself in any kind of way... something brand new in the middle, something all its own.” She always knew she was Creole. She said she felt she was in the middle and could see the side of both the Black and White people. Because of this she felt she could be a bridge between groups of people.

Iris stated that she feels like a chameleon because she can lapse into either race and adapt easily, though White culture influenced her more than Black culture. She says the linchpin to being Creole is to have the ancestry. She said the discrimination she experienced turned out to be

a positive because she learned as an adult to look at both sides of the coin in racial and other matters. She speaks Louisiana Creole.

16. **Ophelia**

Ophelia is in her 70s and is divorced. She resided most of her life in Louisiana. Her occupation is health professional. Her income and education put her in a lower SES. Her racial/ethnic origin is mixed-race--she is American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, White, and Creole. To describe her race, she says that she is racially mixed and others often think her race is ambiguous. The languages she speaks are English, Spanish, French, and Louisiana Creole. She has never been diagnosed with a mental health condition. She established her Creole identity through intergenerational transmission. Her parents taught her she was Creole because they spoke the Creole language. She does not see Creole as a race, but as a culture. Her Creole identity is a socio-positive one.

She embraces her African heritage freely. She feels a strong and proud Creole identity. Because the Creole language was made fun of, Ophelia did not teach it to her children. In fact, Ophelia and other Creole children were forbidden from speaking Louisiana Creole in school. Once the Americans took over Louisiana, they opposed French culture, and punishing Creole children for speaking Creole was one way in which this was done. Similar to Juanita, Ophelia lived a “split life.” She had to speak English at school and subdue the Creole part of her, but at home she could speak and be Creole. Ophelia said that Creole does not have to do with skin color, but with language.

Ophelia said that Creole is a culture and it is only the American way of life that divides us into a race. Ophelia spoke several times of how Creole families were separated because family members were different colors and there was a time when they could not acknowledge each

other. Ophelia speaks of the mixture of races that make up Creole as being a potpourri of French, Spanish, Native American, and African. She has not experienced stress for identifying as Creole.

17. **Francis**

Francis is in his 50s and divorced. He lived most of his life in Illinois; however, he has ties to the Cane River area of Louisiana. Francis is a board member of an organization of Creole people in Illinois. They host Creole cultural events like Mardi Gras.

Francis has a professional job and is in the at the beginning of upper-middle SES. To describe his racial identity, he says that he considers himself racially mixed and others often think of his race as ambiguous. He has never experienced a mental health condition. Francis is very adamant about being French Creole. It is hard to tell if his Creole identity is a socio-positive one because he was often treated as Black or African American, but he resists that label. He is dark in his family and was stigmatized and compared to his lighter-skinned siblings by some of his relatives. An example of this was when Francis went to a picnic and saw 150 beautiful Creole girls. His uncle told him not to get his hopes up because “they were looking to marry White or people that look like they are White...”

Francis has experienced discrimination from other people. In one incident when Francis was in second grade, the grandmother of a friend of his started calling Francis and his brother “nigger,” “spic,” “wetback,” and “spear chucker.” This was the first time he learned about different races. He says he does not believe in races, as they were created by “by those in power to create haves and have nots...” He spent much of his interview debunking the “one drop rule” as racist.



Francis says he does not exactly feel stress when someone questions him about his racial background but feels very aware of what the question means. He has experienced discrimination from most groups, but the group that discriminates against him the most is African Americans. He feels that when he says he is French Creole, they take this as a slight that he does not want to be African American.

18. **Sue**

Sue is in her 60s and is married. She was born in New Orleans and lived there 22 years but spent the bulk of her life living in the North. She has a professional job and with her income and education, she has an upper middle SES. She states that her racial or ethnic origin is mixed race – Creole, though she also identifies as African American. To describe her race, she considers herself racially mixed, though others often think of her race as ambiguous.

Sue has been diagnosed with anxiety. She was raised to identify as Negro until she was in high school with other Creole students and started identifying as Creole because she saw these people looked like her and also the Creole Renaissance was going on. She says she never thought of it before and the activities of The Creole Heritage Center gave her a push to explore her family's genealogy. The term "Creole" was not used when she was growing up. Exploring her family's genealogy gave her a great sense of pride in being Creole. So, she developed her Creole identity from associating with other Creoles. She stated that some people prefer the term Creole because they do not want to be classified as African American, but she thinks those people are dying out. I did not find this theory to be true with my participants.

Sue spoke of Creole culture such as Zydeco music, certain foods, a sense of community and love of forefathers. She lives in Louisiana where most people are cousins of some kind, so she feels her Creole identity is supported by her community and family.

19. **Michael**

Michael is in his early 20s and is single. He is a college student and has a middle income. He lived in California most of his life. To describe his racial identity, he says he considers himself racially- mixed and others think his race is ambiguous or Black. He speaks English, Louisiana Creole, French, and Mandarin Chinese. He has never been diagnosed with a mental health condition.

Although he always knew he was Creole, because his family spoke Creole and they used the word to describe the language, Michael did not use the word Creole to describe himself until he was in middle school and had to create a project to provide information about his family's lineage. They did not previously use the word to describe ethnicity.

Michael feels that an essential part of being Creole is the food ways of Creole people. Michael feels that the Creole language is essential for his family members but realizes that it has been virtually lost and so he does not feel that speaking Creole is a necessary condition of being Creole for other Creoles.

He gets flak from the Black community when he identifies as Creole. He said the Black students feel that to identify as anything other than Black is divisive. He says he experiences discrimination from White people who watch him closely in stores as if he is going to steal something. He said he was even discriminated against by a Creole woman who said he did not pass the paper bag test in which you have to be lighter than a brown paper bag in order to be considered Creole.

His sources of support for his Creole identity include his family and a community of people in New Orleans who are trying to revive the Creole language. He said that, "Our voices are unique to us and should be heard, they should be represented."

20. **Leona**

Leona is in her 60s and is single. Though born in New Orleans, she has lived most of her life in California. She is a professional with a solid middle income and SES. She has experienced some anxiety related to problems with her Creole identity.

Leona developed her Creole identity over time by making various summer trips to Louisiana and she went to college in Louisiana. In California, she actually lived around many Creole people, whom she regarded as African American, but she thought there was something different about her family from other African American families. It was not until her late twenties that her family started talking about their mixed heritage. She thinks Creole is a subculture of African Americans. She experimented a lot with her identity, wanting at times to smother her mixed-race identity because she feared young African American peoples' reaction if they found out she was miscegenated.

When she lived in Louisiana for college, she learned that the food, culture and other things peculiar to her family were ways an actual group (Creoles) lived. She found that people drew attention to her European characteristics as if they were good things. This made her uncomfortable. She found that some Black men valued these attributes as almost ornamental and did not value her for herself. She has experienced discrimination from both White and Black people and makes the point of saying that Creoles discriminate against darker-skinned people.

Leona has come to accept her Creole identity and now has a socio-positive Creole identity. She is racially fluid and sometimes sees herself as mixed-race and sometimes as Black.

21. **Jane**

Jane is in her 30s and married. She was born in Louisiana and lived there most of her life, though now she lives in the Midwest. She is a professional and her income and

education put her in a solid middle SES. She has experienced anxiety but did not realize until she spoke with me that the anxiety was because she wanted to get away from the racial stress in her hometown. To describe her racial identity, she says that she considers herself sometimes Black, sometimes White, and sometimes racially mixed depending on circumstances.

She is the older sister of participant “Iris”. Her experience of Creole is interesting because unlike her younger sister, Jane did not always know she was Creole. She just knew her family was different. She never felt she fit in, unlike Iris who felt she fit in everywhere. There is a trajectory of her identity moving from a defensive one to a more socio-positive one later in life. She said she did not really start identifying as Creole until not long ago, which is well after she lived in Louisiana. Initially she was angered by being put into a racial box, especially the racial box of Black. Whereas her sister Iris is seen as White by most people, Jane is viewed differently by different people.

She only started learning what Creole is through the genealogy of her sister. She answers “she prefers not to answer the question” when asked what her race is, because she does not want to put the emotional energy out to explain herself, though sometimes she answers Black and White.

She states that being of mixed descent like Spanish, French, and African is essential to being Creole. Also, she says being from southwest Louisiana is essential to being Creole. Her sources of support for her Creole identity are her family and in the Midwest where she is, there are no Creoles, so she supports her Creole identity by cooking Creole foods. None of the people in her present network are Creole, though she has diverse friends.

C. **Relevant Information about Participants**

The following table of information about the participants (Table I) serves as a backdrop to tell the reader who these participants are. These categories were chosen because they help locate the participants in society and because they are relevant to the research questions. Some of the information in the table comes from the demographic screening tool and the rest of it comes from the in-depth individual interviews. The occupation and education categories were derived partly from Appendix A in Jolivette (2007) and from Appendix F in Rockquemore and Brunσμα (2008). The other categories are the researcher's words except for some specific occupations that are listed in the words of the participants.

## VI. RESULTS

### A. Overview

The findings of this research are based primarily on qualitative data from interviews which yielded five major themes as well as subthemes at three additional levels. Participants also responded to three brief self-report scales to provide additional information about their mental health and ethnic identity. These quantitative scale results provided additional context for interpreting the qualitative data.

In the following presentation of results, I first report the findings gleaned from the self-report scales. Then I present an outline listing all the themes and subthemes found in the qualitative data collected through the focus group and interviews. Then I focus on each theme in greater detail and discuss the related subthemes. Last, I summarize the highlights of the analysis.

### B. Quantitative Scales Results

Because the literature on ethnic identity and mental health has used measures of ethnic identity, self-esteem, and depression to test the idea that strong ethnic identity buffers minority communities against mental health problems, I wanted to use such measures for my participants to augment the qualitative data I was collecting through my in-depth interviews. Past research on ethnic identity and mental health has used measures of self-esteem and ethnic identity to support the idea that there is a relationship between ethnic identity and psychological well-being. I used the RSE, the MEIM, and the BDI-II to measure these concepts. Table II summarizes this study's scale results and presents comparison values from the research literature.

**TABLE II**  
**QUANTITATIVE SCALES DATA AND INTERPRETATION**

Scale	RSE		BDI-II		12-Item MEIM	
Descriptive Statistics For Creoles	Range	10 (20-30)	Range	12(0-12)	Range	1.83 (2.17-4)
	Mean Score	27.52	Mean Score	5.0	Mean Score	3.35
	Stan. Dev.	2.71	Stan. Dev.	3.25	Stan. Dev.	0.51
Cut-Off Scores	10 = poor self-esteem <sup>1</sup> 30 = excellent self-esteem		0-13 = minimal depression <sup>2</sup> 14-19 = mild depression 20-28 = moderate depression 29-63 = severe depression		African American <sup>3</sup> Mean score = 3.07 Stan. Dev. = 0.56 Multiracial Mean score = 2.94 Stan. Dev. = 0.60	
Comparison Descriptive Statistics						

<sup>1</sup> Sinclair, S., Blais, M., Gansler, D., Sandberg, E., Bistis, K. et al. (2010). Psychometric properties of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale: Overall and across demographic groups living within the United States. *Evaluation and the Health Professions*, 33(1), 56-80.

<sup>2</sup> Beck, A., Steer, R., Ball, R., and Ranieri, W. (1996). Comparison of Beck Inventories –IA and –II in Psychiatric Outpatients. *Journal of Personality Assessment*. 67(3), 588-597.

<sup>3</sup> Roberts, R., Phinney, J.S., Masse, L., Chen, R., Roberts, C., et al. (1999). The structure of ethnic identity of young adolescents from diverse ethnocultural groups. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 19(3), 301-32.

The RSE is composed of 10 statements that measure self-worth and self-acceptance (Martin-Albo et al., 2007; Robins et al., 2001). The MEIM measures ethnic identity achievement and other group orientation. The version of the MEIM that I used was the 12-item scale that looks at factors such as how involved one is with one's group's social activities, one's participation in cultural traditions, and one's sense of belonging to one's group (Roberts et al., 1999). The BDI-II is a 21-item scale that measures the presence and severity of symptoms of depressive mood (Beck et al., 1988; Segal et al., 2008).

According to the RSE, my participants had relatively high self-esteem. The range of the scores was 10. Their scores ranged from 20 to 30, the mean score was 27.52, the median score was 27, the mode was 30, and the standard deviation was +/- 2.71. The higher the score, the higher the self-esteem of the participant. Many authors have created norms for the RSE. Sinclair et al. (2010), wrote that a score of 10 = poor self-esteem while a score of 30 = excellent self-esteem. They also reported that the African American racial group had the highest score, followed in a close second score by the "Other" group.

My participants' self-esteem scores were higher than those of Sinclair et al. It is possible that all of my participants genuinely had very high self-esteem, which could possibly be true because they had relatively high ethnic identity achievement, and ethnic identity is related to self-esteem (Phinney & Chavira, 1992). It is also possible that some of them answered the questions with socially desirable responses. Several studies have linked the RSE with social desirability response bias (DiStefano & Motl, 2009; Gray-Little et al., 1997; Huang, 2012; Mullen et al., 2012).

Much research has shown that high self-esteem and high ethnic identity achievement are positively related (Bracey et al., 2004; Fisher et al., 2014; Phinney, & Alipuria, 1996; Spencer et



al., 2000). Martinez and Duke (1997) suggest an explanation for this phenomenon, namely, that high ethnic identity protects individuals from negative stereotypes and discrimination and thus protects their psychological well-being. My participants had, on the whole, high ethnic identity achievement as measured by the MEIM. Their MEIM scores ranged from 2.17 to 4, so the range was 1.83. The mean score was 3.35. The median was 3.25. The mode was 3.40. The standard deviation was  $\pm 0.51$ . When Phinney (1992) created the MEIM, she did not think it appropriate to establish statistical norms because the instrument was meant to be used with any ethnic group, and researchers would have to establish norms with the respective ethnic groups they were working with. Therefore, I looked at MEIM scores for multiracial groups. Multiracial individuals scored lower on the MEIM than other minorities, e.g., African Americans (Roberts et al., 1999). The mean score for multiracial individuals was 2.94 in Roberts et al.'s 1999 study, while African Americans scored the highest with a mean of 3.07. However, a surprising result of my study was that my Creole participants' mean score was 3.35, reflecting relatively high ethnic identity achievement. These results are consistent with the possibility that Creoles' ethnic identity is more salient than that of other multiracial individuals.

On the BDI-II, my participants scored from 0 to 12. Cut-offs for the BDI-II are as follows (Beck et al., 1996): 0 to 13 = minimal depression; 14 – 19 = mild depression; 20 – 28 = moderate depression; 29 – 63 = severe depression. The mean score for my participants was 5.00, reflecting minimal depression. Both the median and mode were 4.00. The standard deviation was  $\pm 3.25$ . Only one participant, who had a score of 12, approached the range of mild depressive symptoms.

The depression scores of my participants were consistent with each other and could be viewed as evidence of social desirability response bias in view of past research suggesting that the BDI-II is vulnerable to social desirability response bias (Hunt et al., 2003). However, when

triangulated with the qualitative data, all but one of my participants reported that they do not currently experience depression. In the interviews, four participants spoke of experiencing depression in the past because of unfair racial treatment, but only one of them spoke of experiencing depression in the present. Therefore, the scale scores and the interview data are relatively consistent and may indicate that the “Creole of color” identity buffers these individuals from depression as Mossakowski (2003) suggested occurs for other ethnic minorities. In addition, having salient ties to the Creole community may keep their self-esteem high.

As previously mentioned, the development and impact of group identity in Creole individuals has received little research attention. Susberry (2004), in an unpublished doctoral dissertation, found that higher self-esteem was associated with having a Creole racial identity. She measured self-esteem with the RSE; therefore, I used the RSE to find out if my participants who embraced a Creole racial identity had high self-esteem. All of my participants had high self-esteem and most of them racially identified as Creole. Susberry also found that Creole ethnic identity achievement was associated with higher levels of search and commitment factors on the MEIM. I used the MEIM to gauge my participants’ ethnic identity achievement and had only one participant who formed her Creole identity through search and commitment. Most of my participants formed their Creole identity through direct intergenerational transmission. Almost all of my participants had high ethnic identity achievement, scored high in self-esteem, and all of them scored with minimal symptoms of depression despite incidents of negative racial treatment in their life histories.

Some of my findings supported the findings of Susberry (2004) and some were different. Our results agreed that Creole is an ethnic and racial identity. However, almost all of my participants racially identified as Creole while the majority of Susberry’s participants racially

identified as Black and a racial identity that changes depending on context. Perhaps this difference can be attributed to the fact that most of Susberry's participants were from one place: Lafayette, Louisiana. My participants were from diverse locations around Louisiana and from other places.

In addition, as stated above, most of my participants did not at present experience symptoms of depression and they had high ethnic identity achievement. This supports the findings of Mossakowski (2003) who found that when ethnic minorities have high identity achievement, they are buffered from experiencing depression.

### C. **Qualitative Results**

The themes and subthemes emerging from qualitative data analysis are presented in Table III, direct quotations from the focus group interview, 18 in-depth individual interviews, and family interviews are used to exemplify analytic themes and sub-themes.

**TABLE III**  
**OUTLINE OF THEMES AND SUBTHEMES**

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**1. Creole Identity**

- a. How Creole people define themselves
- b. Creole designation: How Creole people name their group
  - i. How in some Creole families the word “Creole” was not used
  - ii. How Creole people’s group names express racial affiliation
  - iii. How people adopt “Creole” as their group designation
- c. Identity tension
  - i. Creoles can have chameleon-like feelings of being either Black or White
  - ii. “Many Creoles have the choice to be either Black or White and adapt easily”
  - iii. Creole is a positive mixture
  - iv. The betweenness of being Creole, between Black and White, “We ain’t Black, we ain’t White”
- d. Development of Creole identity
  - i. Forming Creole identity through intergenerational transmission because their parents told them they were Creole from a young age
  - ii. Other pathways to Creole identity
  - iii. Genealogy as an influence of identity
- e. What cultural aspects characterize Creoles
  - i. Creole foods
  - ii. Zydeco music
  - iii. Creole parents do not disparage their children
  - iv. Creoles are Catholic
  - v. Creoles have their own language
    - (1) Basically only in southwest Louisiana do Creole people still speak Louisiana Creole
    - (2) Creole was formerly considered a low-class language, so it was not passed to their children
  - vi. Physical features of Creoles
    - (1) Creole people have different complexions and hair types
    - (2) Most Creole people feel fine with their physical features
- f. How Creoles’ voices are unique and should be heard
- g. Pride in being Creole
  - i. Creoles feel they come from some prominent people
  - ii. Creole is a very unique heritage

**TABLE III (continued)**  
**OUTLINE OF THEMES AND SUBTHEMES**

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**1. The Place of Race in Creole Experience**

- a. Racial identity and racial identification
  - i. Coming to terms with hypodescent
    - (1) Black blood trumps every other blood
    - (2) “No [White people] just consider anybody who is tan or brown or whatever, they just lump you altogether as Black people”
  - ii. Passing
    - (1) Some Creole people pass for White for economic reasons or because they think White people have an easier time
    - (2) Many Creole people feel passing for White is bad because the children don’t know their relatives and their heritage
    - (3) Some Creole people pass for Black because they feel it is easier to get a job because many people don’t know what Creole is
    - (4) Some Creole people pass for Black because Black people pressured them to assimilate
  - iii. Official categories
    - (1) Many Creole people feel they don’t fit into one racial category, so they check multiple races on forms
    - (2) Many Creole people identify as “Other” on forms and write in Creole
    - (3) Some Creole people identify with the broader term “Black” and identify as such on forms
    - (4) Many Creole people believe that Creole is a racial and/or census category
    - (5) Some Creole people feel that Creole is a culture but not a race
  - iv. How Creole people appear to others and how Creole women are exoticized
    - (1) Creole people can appear racially different to many other people
    - (2) Many Creole women think of themselves as exotic
    - (3) Many men think Creole women are exotic
  - v. How Creole people are made to fit in a racial box and often pressured to identify as Black
- b. How politics and power center on racial identity
  - i. How African Americans can claim Creoles as Black when African Americans are in the minority and not when African Americans are in the majority
  - ii. Political benefits of African American identification
  - iii. West Coast Creoles are more educated and political and brand themselves as a race

**TABLE III (continued)**  
**OUTLINE OF THEMES AND SUBTHEMES**

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## **2. Devaluation, Prejudice and Negative Treatment**

- a. The discrimination that Creole people feel they face from both Black and White people
  - i. Many Creole people feel they are not White enough to be White nor Black enough to be Black
  - ii. Creole people feel they are discriminated against by both Black and White people
- b. How Creole people are made to feel that they have to stay in their place
  - i. Some Creole people feel they are not allowed to excel because they are Creole
  - ii. Some Creole people feel that White people are angry about the browning of America and they are trying to keep people of color in their place
- c. Skin color issues
  - i. How Creoles with lighter skin are treated differentially better than Black people
  - ii. How Creole people discriminate against darker-skinned people
- d. Racism
- e. The separation and segregation that Creole people face
  - i. Many Creole family members of different colors were not allowed to associate with one another
  - ii. Creoles are clannish
  - iii. Many Creoles built their own churches because of racist practices of White churches
- f. The devaluation of Creole even if it is only in the public imagination

## **3. Stress and Mental Health**

- a. The stress of being Creole because of racism
  - i. Many Creoles feel it is stressful that they are put in a racial box where they feel they don't belong in
  - ii. Some Creoles feel that being of any color that is not White is stressful
  - iii. Some Creole people feel they are subjected to stress because they look different

**TABLE III (continued)**  
**OUTLINE OF THEMES AND SUBTHEMES**

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- b. How Creoles experience racial stress and how that leads to mental health problems
      - i. Some Creole people feel that stress from discrimination caused them anxiety and depression.
      - ii. Some Creole people experienced anxiety to get away from the mixed race situation
    - c. Alcoholism
  - 4. Community and Community Support**
    - a. How other individuals feel about Creole as a choice for a racial identity
      - i. Many other individuals have trouble accepting Creole as a racial identity
      - ii. Some individuals accept Creole as a racial identity
      - iii. Many Creole people have a negative reaction from Black people when they tell them they are Creole; they think it is divisive
    - b. The support that Creole people get for their Creole identity
      - i. Support from family
      - ii. Support from community
    - c. Many Creole people feel they have a certain racial identity depending on the cultural context they find themselves in
    - d. The races of the network of friends that Creoles have
    - e. The Creole culture or community as being a touchstone
-

## 1. **Creole identity**

“Creole identity” is the first of the five major themes that emerged from the qualitative data analysis of this study. The analysis of Creole identity yielded seven level one or primary subthemes that characterize Creole identity as encompassing how Creole people define themselves, how they name themselves, the identity tension they experience, what factors influence how they form their Creole identity, how they define themselves culturally, how Creoles’ voices are unique and should be heard, and the pride they have in themselves. These subthemes and their component secondary or level-two subthemes are presented with examples in the next sections.

### a. **How Creole people define themselves**

My participants, who are Creoles of color or mixed-race Creoles, generally defined Creole as a mixture of French, Spanish, Native American, and African heritage. For example, I asked John when he first identified as Creole; he explained his definition of Creole as follows:

[I first identified as Creole] after my grandfather spoke to me and explained to me the mixture of Creole in his definition at fourteen years old and like I said his definition was Spanish, Negro, Indian, and French. That is how he said it. Just like that. (John)

James also spoke of the combination that is Creole:

The Creole culture as I mentioned is a combination of French influence, Spanish influence, African influence and Native American influence...So really the Creole community that I grew up in was like basically how I described it, a true gumbo which is a mixture of all these ethnic groups (James)

This characterization is best summed up by a quote from Iris:

They told me along the lines of uh, [the kids] kept asking me, “Are you mixed? Are you mixed?” and they knew full well I was because they had teased me about it before...and I turned around and I used to eat this ice cream that was vanilla...and it had chocolate swirls in it...and I remember just turning around and being around maybe nine or ten years old and saying, “Do I look like chocolate swirl ice cream to you?” (Iris)



Iris also had a definition of Creole different from most participants. Iris said,

Being Creole doesn't have to include African American, which a lot of people...a lot of people, that's a misnomer. I think that a lot of people have that like you have to have African or Black ancestry to be Creole, but that's not the true definition of the word...Creole is first and foremost a person who has a lineage and ancestry that is traced back to colonial Louisiana. (Iris)

Gracie also said something similar to Iris:

Well I know a Creole is a person of European descent. Put it this way, when my mother used to say if you go back to the old dictionary you won't find Black in there. You'll only find French and Spanish and then later on as other people ...she would say as Black people took on calling themselves Creoles then it appeared in the dictionary... (Gracie)

Gracie and Iris were the only two to say that Black was not part of the definition of Creole. Other participants said roughly the same as James said about the definition of Creole.

b. **Creole designation: How Creole people name their group**

This subtheme reflects what Creole people name themselves. This includes designations such as Frenchmen, Creole and French Creole. This subtheme is comprised of three sub-subthemes.

i. **How in some Creole families the word "Creole" was not used**

Many older Creole people of color refer to themselves as Frenchmen and deny having any African heritage. Some younger Creole people of color also do not like to use the term "Creole" to refer to themselves. Gracie confided that her mother did not like to use the word "Creole." Initially I asked Gracie, "So when did you first realize that you were a Creole?" Gracie answered,

Well I accept Creole not...you know that's something we were told not so much that my parents told us that we were but that's how other people labeled us 'cause Mama to be honest with you Andrea you know my mom she would ...she never taught us to use that term but as you grow older and you realize that you are of mixed descent you accept the label put upon you by society so I guess when we were eleven or twelve... [Mama]

thought if you embraced the word Creole you might as well say you were Black and I guess for that reason that's why she didn't do it. (Gracie)

Gracie also spoke at length in her interview about not wanting to be considered Black. She felt pressured by African Americans and other people to racially identify as Black because she is Creole. Iris also spoke of being confused when she was younger. Some people referred to her as being Black. She did not think she looked like her African American friends and as she said, "I have African ancestry, but I have a lot of other ancestries as well."

Cindy's mother also told her not to use the word Creole to describe herself. When I asked the focus group the question, "How do people racially define Creole people?" Cindy replied,

I'm not sure how other people define Creole. We, in my family, said we were Creole pretty much all my life. I remember at one point my mom said when speaking to other people don't say Creole because people don't really use that word anymore, but I don't find that to be true. (Cindy)

Michael's family also did not use the word "Creole" to describe themselves, but not because people did not use that term anymore. Rather it was because they so wholly identified with Creole that they felt they did not have to name it. When I asked Michael, "How old were you when you first realized you were Creole?" he said,

In my home we never used the word "Creole" a lot so the only time I ever looked into the word "Louisiana Creole" was when I was in middle school when I was forced to do a family tree and I was supposed to give a presentation about my culture. (Michael).

Michael's family said being Creole was so natural to them that they did not have to name it.

They only used the word "Creole" to speak about their Creole language.

Veronica also comes from a family that did not use the word "Creole." They prefer to use the term Frenchmen. When I asked Veronica, "Did you have a sense of identity as a Creole when you were young?", she said, "Well we didn't ever use the word 'Creole' back then where I

was from...they, my grandparents all grew up ...they just used to say we were Frenchmen. They didn't really use the word 'Creole'."

So Creole people sometimes do not use the particular word "Creole" to designate their identity for various reasons, such as they think people do not use the term "Creole" anymore, because they wish to distinguish themselves from individuals who identify as Black, because they only use the word "Creole" to refer to the Creole language, or because they call themselves by other terms. However, they view themselves as racially/ethnically Creole and practice Creole culture.

ii. **How Creole people's group names express racial affiliation**

I found in my pilot study (Cooke, 2014) that older Creole people like to use the term "Frenchman." Some Creole people with the designation of Frenchman claim to be White whereas some others claim different racial designations. These older Creole people said that they were not Black. I surmised that using the term Frenchman allowed them to evade having Black named as part of their ancestry. Middle-aged and younger Creole people of color say they are French Creole or Creole. They do claim their African heritage.

In the Focus Group interview I asked the question, "What do Creole people think about Creole people identifying as African American?" Joan, who identified as different races and ethnicities because she identifies with those in her environment, stated that "...half of my family says they're White because they're Frenchmen and they profess it all the time that they were Frenchmen." Joan did not identify as a Frenchman, but identifies as Creole now. She has identified as Creole since she was 13. Cathy is an older Creole woman who uses the designation of Frenchman for herself. She denies having any African heritage. I asked Cathy, "What about

your parents? How did they identify?” Cathy replied that “[My parents identified] as Frenchmen. You know at one time I don’t know if it was French or what but they said ‘mulatto.’”

iii. **How people adopt “Creole” as their group designation**

There was even some uncertainty about the word “Creole.” Several Creole people told me that most people do not know what Creole means. Cindy and JuJu are examples of this. JuJu told me that she is identified differently depending on where she is so I asked her, “Outside of Louisiana how do people feel about you identifying as Creole?” She said that “[Outside of Louisiana] it’s like they’re confused, they don’t really know what Creole is.”

As stated above, Cindy’s mother told her not to use the word “Creole” because people do not use that term anymore. However, most of my participants used the word “Creole” as their group designation. I asked Grandma in the family interview, “Did you go through any steps in coming to realize that you were Creole and coming to name yourself as a Creole?” Grandma replied,

...our parents had children with a White man. That’s what they call us Creoles – half White, half Colored...because that’s what our parents told us, we was Creole and some would call us mulatto and we told them we wasn’t no Black. (Grandma)

I asked Nancy if she went through any process in coming to discover that she was Creole and she told me,

...my people supposedly came from Mexico some years ago and I guess it was some Black mix but I have no idea; that’s all I can tell you...and they say they were Creoles. And I just went by what my parents told me. (Nancy)

Marie also spoke of identifying as Creole. I asked her, “... so then you felt that you were Creole from the time you were very small?” Marie said, “Since as long as I remember.”

In summary, some Creole people do not use the word “Creole” to refer to themselves because they think that people do not use that word anymore, some people use the word “Creole”

only to refer to the Creole language, and some people call themselves by other designations besides “Creole.” In addition, some of the names that Creole people use to name themselves, such as “Frenchman,” express racial affiliation. Finally, most of my participants referred to themselves as “Creole” or “French Creole” because they learned to identify themselves that way from their parents, i.e., through intergenerational transmission.

c. **Identity tension**

Multi-racial affiliation such as Creole people have of being both Black and White (though my participants also said they are neither Black nor White) creates a kind of tension in the identity of such mixed-race persons. They react to this tension in many ways such as having chameleon-like feelings of being either Black or White, choosing one race over the other, or just experiencing their “betweeness.”

i. **Creoles can have chameleon-like feelings of being either Black or White**

My participants voiced the idea that Creoles have racial fluidity. Miville et al. (2005) discuss what they call the “chameleon experience” in which multiracial people are emotionally and cognitively flexible in adapting to social settings. Some of my participants voiced having the “chameleon experience.” Iris even said she felt like a chameleon.

I just kind of analyzed [that I was in the middle] from a very young age and observed how both of those races responded to me and responded to each other and I realized that I could get along with anybody and anyone, uh I could be a chameleon because of the fact that my family was so diverse...I kind of feel like a chameleon in ways because I can lapse into either [Black or White] and adapt easily. (Iris).

ii. **“Many Creoles have the choice to be either Black or White”**

Juanita, who grew up knowing she was Creole, but did not understand what Creole was until she was older, brought out a different side of the phenomenon

that Iris was talking about when she said, “Many Creoles have the choice to be Black or White.” She felt that way about herself. Juanita said, “I knew I was Creole; that was not the problem. The problem was I didn’t know if I should go for Black or for White because I can go for both, you know?” This is different from Iris’ lapsing into either Black or White. Juanita was not talking about identifying as Black or White. She was talking about being perceived as either Black or White.

Creoles of color describe themselves as racially ambiguous and thus they lend themselves to this flexibility. More will be said of this later.

iii. **Creole is a positive mixture**

Despite the fact that there are Black and White Creoles (Dominguez, 1986), most of my participants said that Creole is a mixture of at least two races with one of them being Black. Only Gracie and Iris spoke of Creoles who were not mixed race. Both said the original definition of Creole did not include African. When I asked Ophelia about her racial identity, she saw it as a mixture of races. She said,

I am the potpourri that makes the Creole from the area where I am right now, Native American, French, I am Spanish too and African American, African... The Frenchmen who came to Louisiana did not bring their families or their fiancées, but they did mingle with the Africans and Indians and produced the mixture we call Creoles. (Ophelia)

When I asked Iris how her parents explained her identity to her, she recounted the specific explanation of Creole her parents offered. Iris replied, “[I was] in the gray area, somewhere in between a mixture of both [Black and White] but neither 100% one or the other, just something brand new in the middle, something all its own.” Iris’ parents saw Creole as a mixture and did not identify as White like the older Creoles who identify as Frenchmen and did not see Creole as Black, though they acknowledged having African heritage. This influence is probably why Iris

made a point of explaining her definition of Creole to other people. Perhaps this is also why Iris can say she feels like a chameleon because her parents told her she could be both races.

Ophelia expressed pride in being Creole by using the metaphor of a good gumbo to talk about Creole. James also spoke of Creole culture as being a “true gumbo which is a mixture of all these different ethnic groups.” When I asked Ophelia, “Do you think you need to speak the Creole language to be considered Creole?” She responded,

Different people came from different other places and they just intermingled. It's a gumbo really that's what I call it, you know 'cause like with a gumbo you're making a gumbo... We here in Louisiana we are a mixture and this is what I say, you make a good gumbo and you put all of those little things in there. You throw in some crab; sometimes people put... you wouldn't believe what people put in there, but I said this is who we are and once you put it all together, hey it tastes good so that's why I say this is who we are and this is good. We're good. I mean this is something to be proud of. (Ophelia)

Popinno of the Smith Family also commented on Creoles' racial/ethnic background when he answered a different question in his interview, “Yes, Popinno, can you describe any process that you went through in forming your Creole identity? I mean did you have thoughts of race when you were growing up and went through different mental processes until you arrived at being Creole or how did you arrive at your identity as Creole?” He responded,

No that's what I was. I grew up in a Creole environment and my great-great grandpa stood up for us. He didn't run out on his family. He raised White ones and he raised the Creole Indian ones, no matter what they told him, whatever they all say and the writings say Louisiana... We strong everywhere. Also we are religious people, but since then now the new generation has come along they marry Blacks, they marry Whites, they marry Greeks, they marry Italians, and they marry all kinds of people. So now we a multitude of people. We're just like telephones. (Popinno)

Popinno alludes to Creoles as being unique by talking about “the multitude of people” who can be considered Creole and about how the Creole category is growing as Creole people intermarry with various people and still maintain their Creole identity. A Creole woman in my pilot study spoke of not saying a person was half Creole, but just saying they were Creole. Creole people

include many people as Creole. Popinno also alludes to there being a connection between Creoles by saying, “we’re just like telephones.”

iv. **The betweenness of being Creole, between Black and White,**  
**“We ain’t Black, we ain’t White”**

My participants also spoke about the “betweenness” that characterizes Creole – being in between Black and White. For example, I asked Grandma, “Okay, do you feel Creole is a race?” She replied, “Yes some say Creole, some say mulatto... We ain’t Black and we ain’t White.” This echoes what Iris said her parents explained to her about Creole. Grandma also feels she is an “in between” person. She spoke of Creoles as being mulattos, which she says is neither Black nor White. She expresses that Creole people have an identity such as White people and Black people do. Veronica also spoke of the “betweenness” of being Creole, however she frames it in terms of not being accepted by Black people and White people. I asked Veronica, “[Can you give me] any more characteristics of being Creole?”

Veronica replied,

So you know, we’re in between, so we kind of have that characteristic that we understand, you know...in between the White and Black thing...we’re not accepted by the Whites, we’re not accepted by the Blacks. That’s how it works. (Veronica)

Jane added to that idea at the end of her interview when I asked her, “Is there anything else important about your experience as a Creole person that I haven’t asked you that I should know about?” She framed her response in terms of how she did not feel accepted by either Black or White people. She had several experiences in which she was identified not as Creole, but as having a singular identity. She recounted a story of being at a birthday party of a White friend and being embarrassed when one of the children asked the child who was having the party, “Who is the person who your father did not want to come to the party because her family is



Black””? She said she knew they were talking about her. The following quote illustrates how Jane felt about being in between:

my thing has always been kind of feeling in between and just not really accepted anywhere and like I said I kind of ...when I was growing up I really didn't like that feeling so I kind of moved away to get away from it and now...part of me wishes that there was more – like where I live now – I like living here but I wish there was more of a Creole presence because it would be nice to have that (Jane).

In summary, many Creole people have racial fluidity and are able to experience themselves racially in more than one way, choose their racial identification from more than one option, experience themselves as a positive mixture of races, and also experience the racial “betweenness” that characterizes Creole people. Creole people have multiple ways in which they can racially identify.

d. **Development of Creole identity**

This theme is about how some Creole people learn their identity from their parents and some form their Creole identity in other ways. Most of my participants developed their Creole identity by learning about it from their parents (intergenerational transmission). Others learned their identity in stages or through genealogy.

i. **Forming Creole identity through intergenerational transmission because their parents told them they were Creole at a young age**

Nauck (2001) suggests that language transmission is a good way for minority identity to be transmitted to one's progeny and most Creoles have lost that ability because they do not know the Creole language. However, Creoles have a rich culture and Creole parents transmit that heritage and thus the identity to their children.

Marie and Ophelia knew they were Creole all their lives. I asked Marie, "...describe the process, if any, that you went through in forming your Creole identity?" Marie responded, "I never thought of it as a process, it was just life." Marie was alluding to the fact that, like Michael said, accepting that one is Creole is natural for many Creoles. Marie lived in an extended family of Creoles and spent most of her time growing up with Creole people. I asked Marie, "So then you felt you were Creole from the time you were very small?" She replied, "Since as long as I can remember." I asked the same question to Ophelia, "Can you describe the process, if any that you went through in forming your Creole identity?" As a Creole speaker her situation is different from most of my participants' experiences. Ophelia was raised to believe she had a different culture from other people because she was Creole and she replied,

Well ever since I was a child I always heard from my parents and they would say that we were Creole and from my understanding of the meaning of being Creole is the fact that we spoke a different language and basically my parents...my mother more than my father at a younger age explained to us our ethnicity and you know that we were Creole because we spoke French and I was raised on the fact that as a Creole we were in a sense not really...in the physical sense different than other people but it's that our culture was different... (Ophelia)

I asked Grandma in the family interview, "As a child, did you always identify as Creole?"

Grandma replied, "Well yeah, because that's what our parents told us." What I heard from

Marie, Ophelia, and Grandma was what I heard from many participants who formed their Creole identity through intergenerational transmission.

## ii. **Other pathways to Creole identity**

Some participants formed their Creole identity in stages. JuJu, for example, did not form her Creole identity until later in life, even though at one point in her younger life her parents thought that perhaps they might be Creole. I asked JuJu, "Describe the process, if any, that you went through in forming your racial identity." She replied,

Um, I guess we in growing up we just felt like we didn't belong to any one class. We weren't White, we weren't Black, but we didn't really know exactly what we were. And then later on in life we came across well we were Creole because we were mixed and that's what we began to identify with. My parents thought Creole was the best fit for them because we were mixed. However, we did not identify wholly as Creole until I was 40 and the Creole Heritage Center opened. Terrell Dauphin of the Creole Heritage Center helped my family to realize that we were Creole. (JuJu)

JuJu did not achieve Creole ethnic identity until later in life. She and her parents did not really search out their ethnic identity in what Phinney (Bernal & Knight, 1993) calls a search/moratorium which is when an identity crisis occurs that initiates an ethnic identity search (Erikson, 1968 in Bernal & Knight, eds., 1993). That period of identity "search" came when Terrell Dauphin, a Creole activist of the Creole Heritage Center introduced them to their Creole heritage.

I asked Juanita, "...describe the process, if any, that you went through in forming your Creole identity? Juanita had identity confusion. She remembered being told by her mother that she was Creole at a young age, but did not really understand what Creole meant until she was older. She complained that she did not know if she was Indian or something else that was not Black or White. She did not solve this identity confusion until later in life. She explained her identity confusion as follows:

I had trouble with my identity up until I was actually into my twenties and thirties to be honest with you because I never knew if I was Black or White or Indian or whatever. As a child growing up I was in a Black community...I got ridiculed and called all different kinds of names and what have you, so I didn't really belong there and then after I went to college you know, it was an all-White college. They didn't want me there either you know so I just decided to call myself you know what I was and that's what I am, I'm a French Creole from New Orleans, Louisiana...and I went about creating my own persona. It took me a while to do that. (Juanita)

### iii. **Genealogy as an influence of identity**

Some Creole people read the genealogy of their families and this helped them form their Creole identity. Nonetheless, only three participants--Bruno, Sue and

Jane--said that genealogy was a part of how they formed their Creole identity. All three of them formed their Creole identity not when they were very young, but when they were older after exposure to the genealogy of their families. Bruno told me about his interest in genealogy and how it played a part in him forming his Creole identity. Bruno first took an interest in the genealogy of his family when he started high school and his teacher was excited to have another member of Bruno's family in his class. Bruno comes from a very famous Creole family who were pioneers when "the West" meant west of the Mississippi. When I asked him, "Can you describe any process that you went through in forming your Creole identity?" Bruno replied, "Well as one usually does you know, you start asking questions about where you're from, who your family is. So I started doing research and started reading books that were specifically about my family." Bruno repeatedly said how proud he was to be a Creole. Sue also had relevant experience when I asked her the same question. Sue was raised to identify as Negro. When she was in high school, she was around other people who looked like her and they identified as Creole. Because of this exposure she came to understand that she was Creole. When I asked her what process she went through in forming her Creole identity, she replied,

...Lately I've been doing a lot of research on my Creole family history, the genealogy and its learning about the people, the hardships they went through, the entrepreneurship, their skills. They were very strong people, they had strong likes, they were very close-knit people, very close to their church and community and their everyday way of life, very hard working people and even through poverty in the Civil War, they continued to survive and thrive and that gives me a great sense of pride and accomplishment in the group I am from. (Sue)

Naturally this occurs at an older age because one has to be older to understand genealogy. Jane was 33 when I interviewed her and she said she had only recently identified as Creole because her sister told her about her family's Creole genealogy. So genealogy plays a part in how some Creole people form their Creole identity.

In summary, Creole people have different avenues to use to form their Creole identity. Though most of my participants formed their identity through intergenerational transmission, one of them, JuJu, formed her identity in stages, some of them formed their identity as a resolution of problems, such as Juanita did, and some of them formed their Creole identity as a result of their delving into their genealogy, such as three of my participants did. Although most Creole people in this study formed their Creole identity through intergenerational transmission, there were a few who formed their Creole identity in different ways.

e. **What cultural aspects characterize Creoles**

I asked all of my participants what they thought were the essential characteristics of Creole and I received a multiplicity of answers. Many of my participants thought being of mixed race (European and African) was an essential characteristic of being Creole. Being Catholic was also considered by many to be an essential characteristic of being Creole. There are as many unique answers to this question as there are participants. I asked Cathy, an older participant, what she thought was an essential characteristic of being Creole, Cathy replied, “Uhh, I think being a Frenchman I guess...yeah, coming from a French heritage I’d say so.”

i. **Creole foods**

When I asked James the question about what is essential to be considered Creole, he replied,

A unique, really and truly being Creole to me is really um a unique culture and it comes in with our Catholic faith with uh the foods we use and cook, the element of academics, education and family. All of that makes us who we are... (James)

Michael responded to the question of what are the essential characteristics of Creoles by saying, “Today I think it mainly relies on our foodways, which is a big part of our identity...”

Ophelia discussed the Creole food her family made: "...it wasn't sold in restaurants. And the use of it wasn't as prevalent as it is right now; first of all one of the foods we made in our house was "boudan" and you did not buy it in the store."

ii. **Zydeco music**

When I asked Sue that same question, she replied,

Of course, if you see it as a culture, of course your customs, your foods that you eat, how you entertain yourself; as for instance, in this part of the world, people – let's say in entertainment they dance the Zydeco, which is unique to this part of the world. (Sue)

iii. **Creole parents do not disparage their children**

When I came to the end of Leona's interview, she told me she had other things to say. For example, she said,

...I think Creole people in my experience value their children very much and they treat their children very well. And I have never experienced parents, Creole parents like disparaging their children like I have seen some other African Americans do – calling them names and saying negative things you know uhm...(Leona)

iv. **Creoles are Catholic**

When James was enumerating the essential characteristics of Creoles he said, "...another element you will find that is unique to Creoles would be their faith, which would be Catholicism." Leona in responding to my question about the essential characteristics of Creole people said, "...typically they have French names, coming from a cultural group that typically has a Catholic background, but not always..."

v. **Creoles have their own language**

Ophelia said that she understood from her parents that they were Creole because they spoke another language. Ophelia told me at the beginning of her interview, "Well ever since I was a child I always heard from my parents and they would say we were

Creole and from my understanding the meaning of being Creole is the fact that we spoke a different language...”

Of my 21 participants only three spoke Louisiana Creole (Michael, Iris, and Ophelia) and two of the Creole speakers (Ophelia and Iris) lived in south Louisiana; Michael was from south Louisiana, but lived in L.A. In fact, many of my participants from northern Louisiana thought that no one still speaks Creole. However, notably all participants thought that one need not speak Creole to be considered Creole. Louisiana Creole is called in its own language Kouri Vini. I asked Michael as I asked all participants, “Do you think you need to speak the Creole language to be Creole?” Michael responded,

I find that it’s an important part of the culture, but I know due to history that the language is lost. So in today’s society I find it hard for me to say that for other families the language is a necessity, but I know for my family it is. (Michael)

Marie comes from a traditional Creole family. She told me she knew she was Creole as far back as she can remember. They had an extended Creole family. I asked Marie that same question.

Marie replied like most of my participants,

I think there would be very few Creoles if you had to speak the Creole language, the language being uh the Creole French that was spoken a long time ago. I think that has been lost, so if we had to speak that language I think there would be very few people who identify as Creole. (Marie)

Ophelia, a Creole speaker, gave me her experience as a Creole speaker and her idea about how the language was lost. Ophelia moved away from her Creole birthplace and stopped speaking Creole. She was ashamed to speak Creole because she experienced that Creole was considered a low-class language. She did not teach it to her children because she did not want them to experience any negative treatment. She had to relearn Creole from her father when she moved back to Louisiana. I asked Ophelia, “So do you think you need to be able to speak the Creole language to be considered Creole?” Ophelia replied,

Uh no, a lot of people say no it doesn't have to do with the language, that's what I'm saying. There is a mixture of the definition of what Creole is about because I'm noticing now in the Creole page a lot of people they don't speak it. They don't really speak it anymore. Really to be honest with you I'd say very few people, I'd say maybe like in my age (74) I have a lot of friends that in my age range or a little older than me and some younger than me... they can't speak the language. I'm like what...that's when it started like you know that was a forbidden language. It was not a good language; it sounded bad. It was stupid. It was ignorant people speak it or so whatever you know and so that's why we lost it. (Ophelia)

Ophelia alludes to how the Creole language was almost lost. In her interview, Ophelia talks about how Creole children were forbidden to speak Creole. This is much like how Native American children were forbidden to speak their native languages in the schools the English-speaking Americans sent them to in an effort to control them (Filmore, 1996) just as the Americans wanted to eradicate French influence after they took over the Louisiana Territory in 1803 (DuBois & Melancon, 2000).

vi. **Physical features of Creoles**

I asked my participants how they felt about their physical features and got varying responses. Bruno replied to that question, "I feel great! I love it. I like the way I look. I think that our people have a unique look and it's a positive feeling, especially when I see other people that look like me." With this comment and other comments he made we can see that Bruno sees Creole identity in positive terms. James made a similar positive statement when I asked him, "So how do you feel about having those different physical features? Do you have physical features that you can say are Caucasian, French, and African? And Spanish?" James responded with the statement, "I do, I do, I do and um you know from your name and all of the way you look so yes I feel great about it because that's basically who I am. That's why I'm proud of who I am." Two people, Cindy and Sue, credited God with their physical features. I asked Cindy, "OK, how do you feel about the physical features you have acquired from your



different racial heritages, like your Caucasian, French, African? ...Do you have any feelings...about people thinking you're Caucasian? Cindy replied, "No, it doesn't bother me. This is how God made me so I wouldn't know how to feel any other way." When I asked Sue about her physical features, Sue replied, "Well I can't really change, that's the way that God me." My participants mostly said that they are fine with their physical features. Two, JuJu and Joan, both of whom had relatively high self-esteem, did complain of things they would change of their physical features. I asked Joan about her physical features and she told me, "Some of my features I'm not too happy with, ya know some of my features I'm not too happy with." I asked JuJu the same question and she replied,

If I could have a different nose, I'd choose a different nose since I feel like I kind of have a big nose, but other than that my skin color, the color of my eyes, all of that I am totally fine with. (JuJu)

However, there seemed to be a gender difference in how my participants felt about their physical features. All of the men indicated that they felt fine about their physical features and some of the women did not like some of their physical features. Rockquemore (2002) points out that beauty is important for women and that it is "equivalent to men's intelligence, political influence and/or physical strength" (p. 489) and that minority women are held to European standards of beauty. Perhaps the women who were not pleased with their features were comparing them to European features.

In summary, Creole is a rich culture with many unique characteristics. Creole foodways are very well-known, though my participants told me that Cajun food is given some of the credit that belongs to Creole food. Creole also has its own music, Zydeco. Several participants spoke of the way in which Creole people treat their children so well. In fact, some of them spoke about Creole children being shielded from the negative opinions about and treatment of Creole people

such that they are somewhat isolated from the world. As in my pilot study, Creoles were identified as being primarily Catholic. In addition, not in the least, Creole people have their own language, Kouri Vini or Louisiana Creole. Finally, these Creole participants reported that they liked their physical features, though there seemed to be a gender difference in that some Creole women were dissatisfied with some of their physical features, which may relate to what Rockquemore (2002) reported about how women experience their power sometimes in beauty and the beauty standard that women must measure up to is the European beauty standard.

f. **How Creoles' voices are unique and should be heard**

This subtheme addressing representation reflected a comment that Michael made. I asked Michael, "Do you think there should be a census category for Creoles?" In response he said, "I feel we need a more accurate representation of Louisiana Creoles that are in America today and that our voices are unique to us and should be heard. They should be represented." Michael was taunted by the Black students in his college because he wanted to identify as Creole. He feels strongly that Creole should be recognized as a racial/ethnic category.

g. **Pride in being Creole**

Several participants spoke of the pride they feel because they are Creole. As the reader will see below, this pride came from the participants' feelings about their lineage and their belief that Creole culture is a rich socio-positive phenomenon. This subtheme has two sub-subthemes.

i. **Creoles feel they come from some prominent people**

Several participants spoke of their Creole ancestors as being noteworthy people either because they were well known or because they were people of great

character. To illustrate the first point when I asked Juanita, “But so when did you first realize you were Creole?” She responded,

I knew that all the time. I knew that all the time, but I had no one to relate to that was Creole because we were the only family down there, OK yeah where I grew up and um I always knew I was Creole. I just didn’t know half the time what a Creole was, but I’m very proud of being Creole. I don’t have any you know aspersions against that we’re a small culture. It’s a culture. It’s a culture and I’m very proud to be a Creole. I’m glad because we come from some very, very prominent people who were very successful in their lives, you know? (Juanita)

Juanita prides herself because she comes from a Creole family that considers itself prominent in their community. Juanita is probably also speaking about lineage, She has a famous Creole ancestor who is well-known in American history.

ii. **Creole is a very unique heritage**

I asked Sue at the end of her interview, “So is there anything else important about your experience as a Creole person that I haven’t asked you that you would like to share with me?” Sue replied,

It’s a very proud heritage, a very unique heritage in that unfortunately most African--a lot of African Americans don’t know their ancestors and I think that gives my family, my children, my sisters a sense of dignity and belonging. (Sue)

Sue had previously spoken about how proud she was of her ancestors and how, in turn, this gave her a sense of pride in herself. She spoke of their entrepreneurship and how well they faced various hardships. As the quote above illustrates she feels grounded by her ancestors.

In summary, this Creole pride was reflected in my participants’ Multi Ethnic Identity Measure scores. Almost all of them had high or moderately high ethnic identity achievement scores. Having high ethnic identity achievement suggests that one is proud of one’s culture. Several of my participants spoke of their prominent ancestors, some who were famous figures in

American history. My participants also shared that from what they found out about Creole history and genealogy, Creole is a very unique culture.

## 2. **The place of race in Creole experience**

The second major theme that I developed from the data is “The place of race in Creole experience.” Whereas the first theme focused on how Creole people define who they are, this theme is about the way others racially define Creole persons. The second theme is divided into two subsections, each with its own level one and level two subthemes. The first subsection is “Racial identity and racial identification.” This subsection has five level one subthemes. The second subsection is “How politics and power center on racial identity” This subsection has three level one subthemes.

### a. **Racial identity and racial identification**

This subsection consists of subthemes that reflect how others racially identify Creole people, including a discussion of the part hypodescent plays in how Creole people are racially identified, “passing,” the official categories Creole people can identify with, how Creole women are exoticized and how they feel exotic, and how Creole people are made to fit in a racial box.

#### i. **Coming to terms with hypodescent**

This first subtheme of this subsection reflects how Creole people are considered Black by many people. Most of my participants complained that many people, especially Black people, consider Creoles of color as Black. Many Creole people experience this misidentification as an invalidation of their identity, but most are determined to continue to identify as Creole in spite of this. Gracie put it very well when I asked her, “Do you think Creole is a racial status?” She replied,

Well, it could be and it probably should be. It might help clear things up. I don't think Creole will ever be considered anything but Black because Black is part of the description, so I think for anyone who is not willing to embrace being straight up Black they're not willing to embrace the label of Creole because then that would be something that ... I think is so engrained in humans to say that you have one drop of Black blood in you, you're Black. That's so much in people's mental makeup no matter where you are that um I don't care what you would call it, you would still be Black to people, but you may as well check off that you're Black and you know that's true...(Gracie)

Francis also brought up that same point when I asked him, "Who considered that you thought you were better?" He replied,

Oh the African Americans... a lot of African Americans would think that me saying I was French Creole was a put down to them...so that's kind of my experience and even when people brought up the infamous one drop rule 'cause when they ask you, 'what's Creole?' I say French, African, Spanish, and Native American, 'But you got Black in you, so you're Black.' And I say now think about it this way that one drop rule makes no sense whatsoever mathematically. It makes no sense and it's racist. You're saying if you believe in the one drop rule you are saying that either the Black blood is so good that it overrides every other piece of blood you got or it's so bad that overrides every piece of blood you got OK. Both statements are racist. (Francis)

Iris also contributed to this train of thought when she told me how her parents explained her race to her. I asked her, "And can you tell me how they explained it to you?" Iris replied,

Well, they explained it to me as we weren't one or the other, we weren't one or the other, we weren't Black or White even though people tried to ...wanted to box us in or classify us as either or...People just kind of wanted to default kind of like the one drop idea. Well there is Black somewhere in your family so then you're Black and I was confused about that because obviously I'm not Black. I don't look Black even though I have Black ancestry. I have a lot of other ancestry too and that really confused me from a young age because people were calling me Black, but I looked in the mirror and obviously I didn't look like my African American friends. (Iris)

I asked Leona, "Did [White people] pressure you to identify as Black?" Leona replied, "No.

They just consider anybody who is, you know, tan or brown or whatever, they just clump you all together I think as Black people."

Nancy also affirmed the rule of hypodescent. When I asked Nancy, "Have you had any discrimination because of being a Creole?" She replied,

Yes all my life because I lived down south... Well I, I had to go by all the rules of a Black person. I couldn't associate with the Whites. I couldn't go to the White theater. I couldn't drink out of the White fountain just like that you do. I didn't get involved because I knew I wasn't supposed to. I had all of that definitely. I had to go to a Black school and all of that kind of stuff. (Nancy)

So Creole people have to come to terms with still being considered Black, though the rule of hypodescent has started to be eroded in recent times according to many scholars. (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2002; Lee & Bean, 2007; Poston, 1990; Rockquemore, 2002). Brunsma and Rockquemore argue that because the 2000 census allowed people to identify as Black and other races concurrently that the meaning of Black needs to be re-evaluated. Intermarriage can be regarded as the final stage of assimilation into a majority group culture (Gordon, 1964). Many race scholars point to the intermarriage of Black people and White people, though lower than the intermarriage rates of other minorities and White people, as a sign that we are moving away from the "one drop rule," which has bounded racial options for multiracial Americans. Multiracial status, which has become more popular since the 2000 census, signals boundary change; however, the boundary around Black is still less malleable than that for other non-White groups (Lee & Bean, 2007). Creoles still being constrained somewhat by the "one drop rule" are a testament to that phenomenon. However, as Sue said, her Creole ancestors were strong people. Rockquemore (2002) writes that sociologist Richard Jenkins (1996) reports that, "social actors cannot maintain an identity without external validation from others." Creoles, however, have a history of having their identity invalidated, yet they persist in identifying as Creole.

## ii. **Passing**

The next subtheme of this subsection is "Passing." Some Creole people passed for White (*passant Blanc*) and some passed for Black. Creole people passed for various reasons as my participants disclose below. Passing for White is for some Creole people a

taboo subject to discuss (Foreman, 2002), but some of my participants did discuss it. In the Focus Group interview, I asked the group, “Do any of you think that Creole people pass for White for reasons besides economic?” Cindy replied, “I think that White people have it easier and they do it because they are so...because there is so much racism still...you know in our world you know it is easier for them.” James also replied to this question.

Yeah, yeah I agree. That’s why I talked about the racism in this country. It’s easier for them in regards to jobs and so forth and they just see the White society as having it a whole lot easier and they’re the minority and have the real light complexion. If they could pass as White, they did... (James)

James also brought up another negative aspect of passing for White: the effect it has on families.

I personally think it’s a shame because to me those children and they all have to live a very sheltered life and a very lonely life because they don’t know their family and I think it’s unfortunate that people have to do that... it’s very tough when children and their fathers and mothers talk about family members that are not White and those kids have to understand why they never go back to visit them... (James)

Some participants even spoke of passing for White themselves and why they did it. Nancy spoke of a time when she was *passant Blanc* when I asked the question, “Tell me how other individuals feel about your choice of Creole as a racial identity.” Nancy replied, “Well some of them...it’s because I was trying to be on the White side and some of them resented it you know...”

Finally I asked Gracie, “You said you checked...you said at some point in your life you checked White. Did you ever pass?” Gracie honestly responded,

I imagine somehow in our minds somehow when we were younger or like when you were here we all went to those uh we went to the White side in the movies and stuff like that yeah, I would say yeah. Until, not so much cognizant in it just a matter of just being able to do it you know or just going there and putting yourself in that position but not because you’re trying to say I’m White, but you just want to go see that movie and be in that place and just let people think what they want to think. That’s how I saw it. (Gracie)

There was also discussion around passing as Black. Several people made note that they passed as Black at various times. Participant Francis was the inspiration for this subtheme because he gave

a French name to passing as Black (Passant Negre) and he explained reasons why Creole people pass as Black. I asked him a question of whom he was talking about when he said that some people thought he considered himself better than them. I said, “Who considered that you thought you were better?” Part of his response was to talk about African Americans considering him *passant Blanc*; however, in the next part of his response, he spoke about himself and *passant Blanc* and he spoke generally about passing for White. He replied,

...I’m sure you’ve heard the term *passant Blanc* a lot of times. Creoles who can pass for European would leave Louisiana and pass for European because they gave them better opportunities as far as jobs and places to live OK, but sometimes they were looked upon with negativity because he was *passant Blanc*, he doesn’t want to talk to us. Well they had *passant Blanc*, but they also had Creoles who left Louisiana and moved into African American neighborhoods and assimilated into the African American culture, which is the same as the *passant Blanc* did. There were Creoles and they left Louisiana and they assimilated into the White Anglo-Saxon culture, but you never heard anybody say *passant Negre*, passing for Black, No you never heard that; it was always “*passant Blanc*” like that and to me if that’s what you want to do that’s perfectly fine. That’s your business; whatever you do is okay. Everybody has to pick how they choose to identify and if you’re multiracial you can pick several ways, different ways and you can even change it according to who you’re with. I just choose not to change it. I choose to be 100% of the time French Creole. I could also say I’m Black, I could also say that I’m Native American, but I couldn’t say I was White simply because you can look at me and tell I’m not White...I would just prefer to say I’m French Creole all the time, so that’s what I do. (Francis)

Other Creole people in the study spoke of identifying themselves as Black or African American at times for reasons such as obtaining employment or not wanting to be harassed for not identifying as Black. Juanita spoke of identifying as Black after I asked her the question, “And what made you start identifying as Creole after college”? Part of her response was,

...see we had to live kind of a split life because you were one thing out in the community and you were another thing at home. And you had, I had to live [as Black]. I don’t know about anybody else but I had to live that way because at work I was a black-skinned woman, OK? At home I was Creole, so you know you had to realize um back then when I first graduated from college you couldn’t get a job if you were Creole because they didn’t know what that was. (Juanita)



Francis also spoke of Creole people who identify as Creole sometimes and African American some of the time, doing so because they want to be in the best position vis a vis other people's responses to them. I asked Francis the question, "...tell me about how other individuals feel about your choice of Creole as a racial identity?" He responded,

Hmmm, OK there are some people in my family [who] will identify themselves as Black when it's beneficial and Creole when it's not...if they are identifying themselves to a group of Black people or a Black individual or African American they'll say 'I'm Black' OK, but if it's to another Creole person or to a White individual they'll say 'I'm Creole' and then there's those who do the same thing I do, but do it differently. They never say they're Creole. They will say they are African American 100% of the time. (Francis)

I asked Leona, "So have you ever passed as Black"? Leona replied,

I have...I'll say this I really tried to identify [as Black]...I really tried to block out the whole Creole culture. I tried to just focus on African culture...I felt pressured to do that because at the time people, young people, were looking down on a person who was miscegenated and it felt like... looked like well you aren't a real Black person. You gotta ...you gotta shut that part out and just focus on African heritage. That was more valued during that time period. (Leona)

### iii. **Official categories**

This subtheme reflects a conundrum for many Creole people, Most of my participants racially identified as Creole and Creole is not listed as an official race on forms. Most said they checked "Other" and wrote in Creole. Bruno illustrated the bewilderment many Creole people feel when confronted by standard forms that ask the person filling them out to identify their racial background. I asked Bruno, "Can you describe any pressure you might feel from anyone to choose your identity as a single race?" He replied,

Well, I mean it's definitely something I think about every time I have to fill one of [those forms] out because I will say, you know, I just don't fit into one of those boxes. Honestly the way I deal with that is I check the White box, I check the Black box, I check the Asian box, I check the Native American box, I check them all because I am part of all of those, so a lot of times I will do that unless – probably in the last four years or so that's where you probably started seeing the mixed or 'Other' box, if you will. But before that I would check them all and just be like you deal with it because I'm a part of all of those racially and so what's the point of putting me into one. That is something that I have a

problem with. I wouldn't necessarily say stressful, but I would say that it's something that gets on my nerves after so many times and years. Look I don't fit into any of these boxes, but at the same time I do, so I check them all. (Bruno)

Jane approaches standard forms in yet another different way. I asked Jane the same question, "OK well when filling out forms how do you answer the question of what your race is? What do you consider your race to be?" Jane responded,

When I fill out those forms, I just mark that I don't want to answer. Like it depends on the form. I kind of look at it like if it's something that is like maybe a little more personal, I don't necessarily – especially here, I don't necessarily want to get into a conversation about what that means 'cause I don't feel like everybody – I don't feel like I want to put that emotional energy into explaining it to someone if they're going to be looking at it very closely. But I'll put – if they have an 'Other' box, I'll mark the 'Other' box and write Creole or sometimes I'll mark – if they don't have that I'll mark White and Black. (Jane)

Jane's younger sister, Iris, also had a different response to the same question. I asked Iris, "So, Iris, when filling out forms how do you answer the question of what your race is? What do you consider your race to be?" Iris replied, "I consider my race to be multi-cultural, well mostly ethnic, multi-ethnic."

Sue and Leona answered the question in nearly the same way. I asked Leona, "Um, when filling out forms, how you answer the question of what your race is? What do you consider your race to be?" Leona responded, "Well, I just identify with the broader term that's typically on forms. Typically the choice is African American, Latino, Asian, Native American, so I just go with the broader term African American

Cindy's situation is different from most other respondents – her mother is Creole and her father is White. This is reflected in her answer.

I've always – my entire life I've always – I don't leave it blank, I always check African American and White or Caucasian. If that wasn't an option, I've checked 'Other' before and sometimes you find biracial on there, but never one or the other. (Cindy)

JuJu and Veronica answered the question in a way that resonated with most Creole people. I asked Veronica, “So when filling out forms how do you answer the question of what your race is? Veronica answered, “If they don’t have ‘Other,’ I mean I usually check ‘Other’ and now I’ll write in French Creole um or multi and then I write in French Creole, but I usually put in multi race, you know, or ‘Other.’”

Race is complicated for Creole people as the above subtheme illustrates. Creole people find it difficult to racially identify according to standard racial categories. Even though all Creole respondents said that Creole is a culture, we can see from the above responses and the responses to the in-depth interviews that a significant number of Creole people consider Creole to be a race. This can be traced back to the antebellum South when Creoles had racial categories such as octaroon (1/8<sup>th</sup> Black) and quadroon (1/4<sup>th</sup> Black). As was stated in the Literature Review, though Anglos and White Creoles relegated Creoles of color to the Black population, Creoles of color kept their schools and churches separate from Black Creoles and Black people and never assimilated as Black.

Juanita elaborated a little more when I asked her the question, “So, Juanita, I had asked you do you feel that Creole is a racial status? Do you want to comment some more on that?” Her answer was,

Well, since I know for sure that Creole is a culture, but I believe it’s also a race because you don’t have ...all of the Creoles are mixed blood and you got all kinds of different combinations and I think that should mean a race. That’s my own personal opinion though. (Juanita)

Francis had a more tentative answer when I asked him, “Do you think that Creole should be a racial status?” He gave a long explanatory reply,

I go back and forth on that one, um, and OK biologically there is no reason for race biologically. Races don’t make sense. We are all mixed, OK? Race was invented...race is a social system invented by those in power to create haves and have nots...no other

country pays as close attention to race as the U.S. does. There are people in Brazil and South America who are considered White in Brazil and South America, but if they were to come to the U.S. they would be immediately labelled Black or African which doesn't make sense whatsoever. So, if you look at it that way there are no races. Are there different cultures and ethnicities? Yes. ...do much culture and my ethnicity is French Creole. If there are no races, then I'm human French Creole. If you are going to insist on having races, then my race is French Creole... (Francis)

Iris also spoke about what race is and whether Creole is a race when I asked her, "OK, Iris, do you feel that Creole is a racial status?" She replied,

Hmmm let me think about that one...let me see. Well like I said Creole can be anything I mean can be you know a combination of a lot of different nationalities, so just let me think about that for a minute. No, I don't think so because race is classified on uh let me think, let me think...as far as Creole goes I can see why people would want it to be a race and race is a social construct, it's a box that society wants to put us in and Creole is based on ancestry and it can be any combination of different nationalities that we're sticking to the discussion that we are having in pertaining to Louisiana about people who settle here in Louisiana. I think race is based off physical traits and along with ancestry; but race is more about physical traits and Creoles come in any can come with any variation of phenotype of appearance. So, I don't think to label it as a race is an accurate title for Creole because the people can vary so widely um with their ancestry. But, I could see how people would want to classify it as a race because it's its own thing, but like I said it's so skewed in what kind of combinations and nationalities you have in the ancestry that it's almost a misnomer to label it as a race to me, so no. (Iris)

Iris sees race as something society pushes onto one. It is reductive. She has a very affirmative view of what Creole is; she sees Creole as a positive thing, as a combination, but just not a race.

Participants were split on whether Creole should be a census category, with more people believing it should be a census category than not. Each had their own reason why Creole should be a census category. I asked Gracie, "Do you think that Creole should be a census category?" She responded, "Yeah, why not? If it's used as a...as an official race category, it should be a census category. It's a quota." Also, Iris who disagreed that Creole is a racial category, did say that she thought it should be a census category. I asked Iris, "Do you think that Creole should be a census category?" She replied,

Personally, I would like to see it as one but I think logically the definition on the census as far as race goes wouldn't classify Creole, it wouldn't be the same classification, but I would like to see it on there. But I just think that a lot of people would, um, have different interpretations of what Creole is when putting it on the census so that's why I think it wouldn't be allowed on the census because there is such a...it's not a very standardized term, it's not a term that you can fit into any kind of box like Caucasian or Black or African American or Pacific Islander um do I think...but personally selfishly I would like to see it on the census. (Iris)

Several other people also said that Creole should be a census category. Of the participants, Ophelia, Sue and Leona did not think that Creole should be a census category. I asked Ophelia, "Do you think that Creole should be on forms as a race...What about the census?" She responded,

Well wait a minute, now I have to think about this back again, you know maybe we should just leave well enough alone because it would cause a whole new crisis because some of our children they would probably not like it so it would put a division right here. I don't think so. (Ophelia)

iv. **How Creole people appear to others and how Creole women are exoticized**

The fourth subtheme of the first subsection of the theme The Place of Race in Creole Experience is "How Creole people appear to others and How Creole women are exoticized." In the Focus Group, I asked the question, "Do you think you need to speak the Creole language to be considered Creole?" Cindy said,

Uhm, I was raised in my mom's family. She was Creole...In my family there's ranges of brown skin to like caramel color to very fair. I agree that you can tell other Creole people when you see them because we kinda you know all look similar and just kind of know each other. (Cindy)

John was more specific in his interview. I asked him, "Well, can you name any physical characteristics of Creoles? Any biological characteristics of Creoles?" He responded,

Well, Creole isn't any different than anybody else. We just have color, a light color and some have straight hair and some have curly hair...some have kinky hair. Some are dark, some are brown-eyed or blue-eyed or black eyes...green eyes, just an exotic people

depending on your DNA, you know where you are derived from and how many different distinctions of countries are you derived from you know or different races of people you derive from. (John)

Marie also had in mind a specific look for Creole people. She said, “I see us as being olive complexion um having probably dark, curly hair and dark eyes um but that is my bias from a long time ago.”

Along with the description that Creole people give of themselves is also the sense they are exotic. According to Rockquemore (2002), the stereotypes of multiracial women are that they are exotic and/or highly sexually desirable. Multiracial women are routinely objectified as the “racialized ideal” and those who are of a Black/White mixture like Creole are frequently called “light-skinned” by Black men (Nadal et al., 2014). My participants have been told by other people that they are exotic and some feel exotic themselves because they are multiracial. I asked Juanita, “OK, tell me how other individuals feel about your choice of Creole as a racial identity.” She responded to this statement with, “They think it’s...it’s unique. They think it’s exotic, especially men. Men think I’m very exotic for some reason or other. I don’t know, but they do and it’s attractive to some men...” I asked Cindy in her interview, “What stress, if any, do you have in your life because of your racial status and/or your racial identity?” She replied,

The only stress that I’ve had is, like I told you about ex-in-laws when they found out. They didn’t believe in mixing races so they had a problem with it. Other than that that’s the only stress I’ve had. I’ve always thought of myself as being exotic that I was of mixed race, so it didn’t give me a lot of stresses. (Cindy)

Leona had something interesting to say about being exotic. I asked Leona, “Has any of this caused you stress, any of these misunderstandings and having to explain?” She replied,

I think the stress has been sort of like a subgroup of a subgroup having to explain why...you know why you guys are a little different. Yeah, that has had some stress over my lifetime. It’s...the other thing that has added some stress is dating. Sometimes I have dated darker-skinned men and sometimes it becomes evident they are, they value ...they have a lot of influences on a woman being a little lighter so sometimes it’s not so much

you, they like your complexion or someone who looks a little...is more of an exotic type of thing...some African American men value women being a little lighter and having a certain texture of hair or having a certain background that's more multiracial and that adds a certain stress because then it's not ...like it's not substantive; it's just a superficial thing that they have of interest almost like ornamental. (Leona)

Rockquemore (2002) writes of this preference by many Black men for lighter-skinned women whose other features approximate whiteness. She cites Bond and Cash (1992) in that they “found that Black women are fully aware of Black men’s preferences for light-skinned mates.” This stems back to the days of slavery when Black female slaves were raped by White men, producing mixed-race children with lighter skin who were given more privileges than darker-skinned slaves. Rockquemore states that lighter skin was associated with higher status in the Black community. Besides fair skin, many Black people longed for White facial features and straight hair, so in fact, lighter-skinned women’s physical approximation of White beauty standards gave them an advantage with Black men.

v. **How Creole people are made to fit in a racial box and often pressured to identify as Black.**

Cose (1997), writing about racial classification at the time the decennial census was being created, says critics question the point of forcing people into Black, White, red, and yellow boxes which he says “cannot possibly accommodate America’s growing racial diversity, particularly when the Black box is fundamentally different from the others, carries the full baggage of slavery, and defies all common sense? Why, they ask in effect, must a person with any degree of Black African history be forced to pretend that no other racial heritage counts?” (p. 9). Cose quotes philosopher and artist Adrian Piper who said that present racial categories are “too rigid and oversimplified to fit anyone accurately.”

Most of my participants would agree with Cose (1997). For example, Bruno, Juanita, Iris, and Jane spoke of being made to fit in a racial box, especially on official forms when there was not a category “Other.” They all pointed out that their racial status, which for most of them was Creole, was not an option for them to select. They felt that the implication was for them to select Black as their race, though those who were more racially ambiguous were often misidentified as another ethnic group, such as Jane and JuJu often being mistaken for Hispanic.

Juanita made a comment about this when I said to her, “So, I thought you said you knew you were Creole.” She replied,

I know, but Creoles are so small of a community that they are not really recognized by the U.S. government so we just had to fit in the box back then you had to fit in the box, the box for you, you know? (Juanita)

The box that Juanita was referring to was African American. Jane also had thoughts on this. I began Jane’s interview by asking her, “Describe the process, if any, that you went through in forming your Creole identity.” She responded,

Oh, you want me to describe it? OK, I guess I didn’t really know what it was like when I was younger. I didn’t really know what Creole was, I just knew it was different...So, when I am here, I’m like, where I live now, people are like “you’re Mexican” and it always bothered me that people would assume based on how I looked or how my hair was or the color of my skin what they thought I was and they put me in a box. (Jane)

Gracie was specific to Black people in her comment. I asked her in her interview, “OK, well can you describe any pressure you feel from any individual to choose a single race identity?” She replied, “Yes, Black people more want me to choose. They have a problem with us not embracing a straight up Black label, and that has been my experience for some number of years and it basically still is.”

Gilanshah (1993) (in Cose, 1997) wrote of “‘the first national gathering of the multiracial community’ in Bethesda, Maryland in 1992, demanding clarification of their nebulous social and



legal status and seeking official recognition.” So the official recognition that Creole people want is not unusual for multiracial people.

In summary, the public racially identifies Creoles according to the rule of hypodescent--as Black. Some Creole people react to this classification by “passing” as either White for the opportunities that choice presents them or, as some of my participants said, “passing” as Black for the advantages they can get from that position such as affirmative action or just to placate Black people. My Creole participants, on the whole, believed that Creole should be a race and/or a census category, though a few disagreed. In addition, Creole women in this study feel they are, as multiracial women are according to Rochequemore (2002), considered exotic and sexually desirable. Finally, Creole people can feel pressured to fit in a racial box that is not Creole, and typically is Black. Several participants spoke of being pressured by Black people to identify as Black. Therefore, Creole people are racially at odds with society.

b. **How politics and power center on racial identity**

The second subsection of the theme The Place of Race in Creole Experience is “How Politics and Power Center on Racial Identity.” It is about political power in the context of racial identity of African Americans and Creoles who identify as African American. It is also about how West Coast Creoles are different from Louisiana and other Creoles in this respect.

i. **How African Americans can claim Creoles as Black when African Americans are in the minority and not when African Americans are in the majority**

The first subtheme of this subsection is “How African Americans can claim Creoles as Black when African Americans are in the minority and not when African

Americans are in the majority.” This subtheme was created because of the response that Francis gave me when I asked him, “...describe the process, if any, that you went through in forming your Creole identity.” He talked about several things and then said,

...what was a big deal as I got older was as the neighborhood was changing I did see that most of the prejudice I experienced as a kid and actually throughout my life came from African Americans more than any other ethnic groups and I talk about this with some of my cousins and things like that and they had the same kind of experience and it's kind of funny...if I was in a group of ten people and seven of them were Black and two of them were White and then me too, the Black guys at that point it was, ‘Hey, you’re not Black...you’re a half breed or you’re mixed, we don’t know what you are.’ Now having the same people if it was three of the Black guys and seven White guys at that point ‘yeah you’re Black...you know he’s Black, he’s one of us’ OK because it was like they wanted the numbers, but as soon as they got the majority, ‘Oh hell no, he’s not Black, that boy is yellow’ and it actually got to be pretty funny. (Francis)

This quote may demonstrate conflicting feelings that African American people have as to whether to classify Creole people as Black or not Black, though many of the Creole participants in my earlier pilot study and some in this dissertation research said they felt pressured by African Americans to racially identify as Black.

ii. **Political benefits of African American identification**

Some Creole people think that identifying as African American is a political advantage. Leona indicated that she felt this way when I asked her, “So have you ever passed as Black?” Leona replied,

...I consider myself African American. ...That if you put something down, you’re not gonna say I don’t have a drop and if you do have the one drop, you’re grouped with all the other African Americans regardless if they’re biracial, if they’re Creole, if their grandparents were Haitian, you know you’re all treated as if you’re Black in societal context. Now, after getting older, past the young adult phase or whatever that...politically I think we should all identify as Black and have a building block and economic bloc or that so I think the umbrella, in this society, we’re all Black. (Leona)

Sue also was of the opinion that identifying as African American had its advantages. She demonstrated this when I asked her, “Do you think that Creole should be a census category?”

She responded,

Uhhh, nope. Not until...not until monies, I mean monies that are given for minorities in this country. As long as the money, money right now is not going to any Creoles whether, you know, in terms of schooling or loans, the mortgages or whatever the case might be, as long – until something changes, we just leave it the way it is. We got a long way to go before that happens. (Sue)

She was the only person who brought this point up, but I thought it was important to include her perspective because it is a point that other Creole people who oppose there being a Creole census category might agree with. In that allocation of federal funds is an important consideration for a community.

### iii. **West Coast Creoles are a whole different race of Creoles**

The last subtheme of this subsection was created because of what Popinno said in response to the last question I asked him, “Okay, Popinno, is there anything else about being a Creole person that you want to tell me that you think I should know? Anything I haven’t asked you that you think might be important?” He responded,

...we got a whole different race on the west coast, a whole different race of Creoles out there. ...They are more educated than we are down here and they got more into the politics...they are trying to patent themselves as a race. They had a documentary. It was on LPB, Louisiana Public Broadcasting System. (Popinno)

I included this sub-subtheme because it is important to know that Creole people see regional differences among themselves.

In summary, though Creole people state that African Americans pressure them to identify as Black, there are times when African Americans do not wish to see Creole people as African American, especially when African Americans are in the majority in a group of African Americans and others. Some Creole people who identify as African American want this

identification because there are political benefits to it, such as getting federal money for minorities because Creole people are not recognized as an ethnic group by the U.S. government and consequently do not receive public monies. Finally, some Louisiana Creole people feel that West Coast Creoles are an advanced class of Creole people.

### 3. **Devaluation, prejudice and negative treatment**

The third theme of this study is Devaluation, Prejudice and Negative Treatment. This theme has to do with how Creole people feel discriminated against as well as how Creole people discriminate against others, the racism that Creole people face, and how Creole people are treated in comparison to Black people. Three of the subthemes use the terms discrimination, colorism, and racism. These terms are similar but differ in nuance. Merriam Webster Online Dictionary (1980) defines these terms as follows: 1) discrimination means discriminating categorically with groups rather than with individuals; 2) colorism within a racial or ethnic group is when people with lighter skin are favored over those with darker skin; and 3) racism is an unjust, unsubstantiated negative opinion about someone.

#### a. **The discrimination that Creole people feel they face from both Black and White people**

Creole people, for the most part, described themselves as being “in between” White people and Black people. They shared that they were not White enough to be White nor Black enough to be Black and they felt discriminated against by both White people and Black people.

i. **Many Creole people feel they are not White enough to be White nor Black enough to be Black**

In this first sub-subtheme, many of my participants told of incidents of discrimination they experienced. I asked JuJu, “Can you tell me of any incidents of discrimination that you might have experienced because of being Creole?” JuJu replied,

I wasn’t White enough for certain things, but then I wasn’t Black enough for certain things like uh I remember trying out for cheerleading squad and it was like I wasn’t good enough but at the time I felt I was just as good as anybody else, but the squad wound up being Caucasian and African American. There was no Creole whatsoever. (JuJu)

ii. **Creole people feel they are discriminated against by both Black and White people**

Other Creole people spoke of discrimination from both Black people and White people. I asked Juanita the same question, “OK, can you tell me of any discrimination you might have experienced because of your racial status?” Juanita replied,

At one time in my life I had to go to work uh to school excuse me on a bus and I made the mistake of sitting up front and uh the bus driver was very nice about it but he you know he made me go back to the back and sit at the back of the bus. So, that’s one example um I just , it’s just kind of an undertone of discrimination...discrimination from the White side because I had Black in me and the Black side because I was high yellow, what they used to call a high yellow...yes, mmhmm that’s when you have Black in you but you look like you were White. I had discrimination all of my life honey. That’s just something you live with. It’s just like you know I may as well have black skin, ‘cause the Blacks surely didn’t love me, that’s for sure. (Juanita)

My Creole participants spoke of being discriminated against by White people. I asked James the same question, “Can you describe any incidents of discrimination you might have experienced?”

James said to me,

A lot of incidents of discrimination because even though you were a Creole the White community looked at you as not being at the same level with them and as a result you had all that racial discrimination that you were subjected to...Uh, I did earlier around that same period of time there was an optometrist doctor who came from Shreveport and I had back in the late fifties I had an eye injury so I was wearing glasses and I had to go for my

checkup and I chose not to go to the Black area. This time I was going to go into the section that was Whites only and of course it's the receptionist that proceeded to tell me that I had to leave and I debated it and I did not leave and then she got the doctor to debate with me that I could not be seen there and uh as a result the...after that the doctor discontinued his trips to Natchitoches because again all issues of race. (James)

Participants also complained about being discriminated against by Black people. I asked Sue,

“Do you think that Creole is a racial status”? As part of her answer to this question she said,

Unfortunately, some African Americans don't like Creoles and I'm talking about skin color – colorism. We, you know, that's the term you want to use – colorism, light skin, dark skin and that's still going on, very much so, very prevalent now. It's always been that way. Darker complexion people, especially women, not that crazy about Creoles. 'Keep your distance' in other words. It's a fact of life. (Sue)

I asked Francis, “Have you experienced any discrimination because of your racial status?” He responded, “Oh yeah. Yes um unfortunately I would say more from African Americans than any other group. I've experienced discrimination from Hispanics, from Whites, but more than anybody else African Americans...” Marie spoke of this discrimination too when I asked her,

“Can you describe some of these incidents of discrimination?” She replied,

I remember also in P.E. class because I made all A's, I remember that my teacher who was a Black P.E. teacher, I had never gotten anything less than an A in P.E. as well, she never ever gave me an A. She always gave me a B so that I would not have straight A's...I think she knew that I was not supposed to make the kinds of grades that I was making to be going to a White school. It was primarily a White school. There were very few minorities there and she understood the position that I was supposed to be in and she put me there. (Marie)

In summary, Creole people experience discrimination from both Black and White people. Bratter and Eschbach (2005) looked at the effect of discrimination on several racial groups and found that the highest levels of distress occurred with Native Americans, Puerto Ricans, and multiracial people. Multiracial people may experience particular stress because they are discriminated against by both White people and Black people (Shih et al., 2007).

b. **How Creole people are made to feel that they have to stay in their place**

Several of my participants mentioned that they felt that they had to “stay in their place” much like second class citizens. For one it was a matter of not being allowed to be in a certain place in school; for others it was the way White people reacted to minorities trying to get ahead in life. This subtheme has two sub-subthemes.

i. **Some Creole people feel they are not allowed to excel because they are Creole**

Marie’s experience in school reflected how she felt she was made to “stay in her place.” I asked Marie, “What stress do you have in your life because of your racial status or your racial identity as a Creole?” As part of her response she said,

As I got older, I think things were changing in America in general and there was bias many times but it was hidden and less visible on the surface. Underneath I think we still got the idea that we needed to stay in our place. I understood that and in a way...my place was not to be at the top of the class, don’t be the top student and expect that I was going to be observed in that way. (Marie)

ii. **Some Creole people feel that White people are angry about the browning of America and they are trying to keep people of color in their place**

Sue also spoke about Creoles staying in their place. I asked Sue in her interview, “Like what kind of changes do you want to see?” As part of her response she said, “The Caucasian man is very angry, can’t deal with the browning of America. He’s losing his grip and he’s saying things and doing things that are just atrocious, trying to put us in a place that coloreds and Negros were in prior to the civil rights legislation...”

In summary, according to the participants, Creole people are told by both White and Black people that they are to stay in an underdog place. Some White people try to make Creole people, as a minority, feel they are inferior people. Some of my Creole participants complained that society would not let them have credit for excelling. Their place was not to be better than White people even if they did excel.

c. **Skin color issues**

The third subtheme is “Skin color issues.” Several participants told me how lighter-skinned people are treated better than darker-skinned people by both Creole people and other people.

i. **How Creoles with lighter skin are treated differentially better than Black people**

My participants told me that Creole people with lighter skin are treated better than Black people. Turner (1995) examined intraracial discrimination in the workplace with both people of the same race (Black) and with multiracial people and Black people. Legal precedent was set for people of the same race but a different color, such as light-skinned and dark-skinned Black people, to sue for discrimination according to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Turner writes of the relative advantages that a light-skinned minority has over a dark-skinned minority. My participants were aware of this too. I asked Ophelia, “OK, well can you tell me any pressure that you feel to choose a particular identity; does anybody pressure you to be Black or to be White?” She responded,

The people other than my uh I hate to say race, but you know they have always accepted me differently and I see it and I feel it you know...And I've seen it in the features and the characteristics. I see the way things are done, we're treated different. We are treated different. (Ophelia)



Then I asked her,” You mean differently from Black people?” She replied, “Uh huh.” Then to clarify I asked her, “So you feel Creole people are treated better than Black people?” She replied, “Let me just put it to you Creole people with a lighter complexion.

In addition, I asked Leona, “Did [White people] pressure you to be Black?” Leona replied,

No I think the only time it makes a difference is when they are going to hire you and they tend to want to hire people who are more like them, uhm, you know a little bit more like them – more acculturated – but that’s what I think. I think they consider you Black, but they are a little more comfortable with someone who is a little whiter. (Leona)

ii. **How Creole people discriminate against darker-skinned people**

My participants also spoke of Creole people discriminating against darker-skinned people. I asked Michael, “Can you mention any discrimination you’ve experienced from Creole people?” Michael replied,

Yes, when here I was having a discussion with another Louisiana Creole person and she brought up a certain thing about how Creoles have to be a certain skin tone, a certain skin – an old myth like – what is it called? – “the paper bag test” and if you didn’t pass that you weren’t – you weren’t thought of as being Creole, so she didn’t see me as Creole so we have our own differences in what we see as Creole. (Michael)

Leona also had something to say about this topic. I asked Leona, “Do you think that because Creoles are lighter and darker that there is any discrimination of Creoles against Creoles?” Leona responded, “Uhm, I don’t know that there is so much discrimination of other Creoles but I do think there is some against people who are not Creole and who are darker.” Finally, in the focus group interview I asked the question, “OK, well the next question is, ‘what discrimination do Creole people face if they racially didn’t identify as Creole to others?’”

I’ll speak just from growing up. Growing up in a Creole community you had the Creole Catholic Church. You had the social events with dances, etc. and that was like if you weren’t light-complected at all, you were not allowed to a lot of these functions and I wasn’t. My father went to a school with Blacks that were much, much darker and one

time he had a date and they said she couldn't come in because she's way too dark, but yes Creoles face racism from both sides. (James)

In summary, participants reported experiences consistent with the idea that lighter-skinned people minorities are treated better than darker-skinned minorities (Turner, 1995) and that this discrimination applies to Creole people as well. According to my participants, Creole people discriminate against people who are generally darker than they. In fact, one of my participants reported that some lighter-skinned Creole people discriminate against darker-skinned Creole people, charging that they are not really Creole people because they are too dark.

d. **Racism**

The fourth subtheme of "Devaluation, Prejudice and Negative Treatment" is "Racism." This subtheme focuses on the racism that Creole people experience and how Creole people can be racist themselves. In my pilot study I found, as was previously stated, that older Creole participants deny having any African heritage. Furthermore, they segregated themselves from Black people. Creole people also are affected by the racism of White people. I asked Iris the following question to begin her interview, "...describe the process, if any, that you went through in forming your Creole identity." Iris replied,

I had interactions on the playground as a kid where kids would basically repeat what their parents had told them about people that were of my ancestry I suppose. So from a young age I saw racism...they would I guess call me things like what would be slurs I guess like 'yellow bone', which is a way to describe somebody of mixed ancestry in Louisiana who is Creole...(Iris)

I asked Grandma, "OK, grandma. What is your network like now? Who are your friends?"

Grandma replied,

It's more the way I think to say is that there's Creole people we be with. Now we have White friends, but the Whites stay in their place and we stay in our place. We'd have Whites over and they treat us just as good as any other people and we treat them good. I don't care what they say, we treat them good. But the Blacks, we stayed in our way and they stayed theirs. (Grandma)

In summary, several of my participants reported having experiences of racism, such as being called racist names like Iris and Francis experienced. Creoles can also be racist. Grandma was 103 years old at the time of her interview and her ideas reflect what I found to be the ideas of older Creole people in my pilot study. Older Creole people often distance themselves from being considered Black by not associating with Black people (Cooke, 2014).

e. **The separation and segregation that Creole people face**

This subtheme is about the separation and segregation that Creole people face. Creole people of the same family were sometimes separated from one another because of racial phenotype. Creole people also separated themselves from others to protect their Creole identity. Creole people also experienced segregation from others because of their racial status.

i. **Many Creole family members of different colors were not allowed to associate with one another**

Ophelia spoke of the separation that some Creoles faced when I asked her, “Well, what are the sources of support for your Creole identity like family, community or other sources?” In part of her response she said,

...a long time ago like I told you, you could look across and see that that person is my brother but I can’t acknowledge him. The White guy, the one’s that’s the white skin or the race couldn’t look across and see his tan brother and know that’s my brother. He couldn’t embrace him ‘cause it was against the rule, it was against the law. (Ophelia)

Some participants also spoke of segregation. I asked JuJu, “Can you tell me a little bit about your Creole experience when you were growing up?” JuJu told me in response,

Um, my experience was that we had in our community, we had separation. We had Blacks, we had basically your Creole and then we had Caucasian. And it was like, like I said before it was kind of like a little clan. Now although the Creoles and the Blacks went to school together, we were not integrated into the White schools until I was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. (JuJu)

Ophelia had personally experienced separation. She told me that as a child in school, Creole children were forbidden to speak Louisiana French. Many Creole people believe that the British who occupied Louisiana mandated that school be taught in English because they wanted to hold the Creole people down. I asked Ophelia, “Excuse me, Ophelia, do you mean that when you went to school you couldn’t speak English?” She responded,

I mean French, our Creole language, we couldn’t speak our Creole language it had to be French...it had to be English, I’m sorry. They did not want you to speak it so a lot of the time we’d speak it in secret you know to one another like say in the playground but as far as inside the classroom was concerned it was forbidden. (Ophelia)

ii. **Creoles are clannish**

Creole people also separated themselves from others. Several of my participants referred to Creole people as separating themselves from others and being clannish. I asked Francis the question, “What do you think are the essential characteristics of being Creole?” As part of his answer he said,

And a lot of Creoles because of external prejudice and more so with the older generations than with the younger because of external prejudice and people refusing to accept them as how they self-identified they became kind of clannish, you know they didn’t interact with a lot of other ethnic groups. (Francis)

I asked Sue, “Like how are you supported in your Creole identity? Family, community, other sources?” She talked about how in the Creole area where she lives everyone is a cousin and further she added,

They’re very, very can be a close-minded society. Very clannish. Yeah very clannish society here and I think some of that is based on ignorance and insecurity and fear of others, fear of others who have been away, you’re coming back to my home base to take something from me – which is not the case, but that’s the way some of the local Creoles, Cane River Creoles view outsiders. (Sue)

Finally, there is the separation that Creoles feel just because they are Creole. John said that people are intimidated by him because he is Creole. He said that people single him out for unjust

treatment. John illustrated that well when I asked him, “But you said this [Creole] is a high stress life?” He replied,

It is. I’m constantly under scrutiny you know people want to make me out to be something that I’m not you know to make them feel better about themselves...they’d rather try and knock me down, you know destroy my career and put me on some other low life level. You couldn’t imagine the things that people shoot at me daily to try and you know make pretend that I’m not who I am and like I told you, you can’t make a king into a serf. (John)

iii. **Many Creoles built their own churches because of racist practices of White churches**

Veronica spoke of the segregation in the churches. In White churches Creoles had to sit in the back of the church. Creoles, then, built their own churches like St. Augustine in Natchitoches, where I recruited some of my participants. Veronica said,

They used to yeah more than now but yeah like that church that my parents were baptized in was built by my great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandfather...Because of that you know if we went to a White church you’d have to sit in the back and you know we never did that; we just had our own church. (Veronica)

In summary, Creole people experienced much separation. Some of that separation was imposed by society, such as during the time families were separated because of phenotypic differences in family members or when Creole children were not allowed to speak Louisiana Creole in school and thus were separated from their culture. However, some of that separation was self-imposed. Creole people, in an effort to safeguard their Creole identity did not associate with non-Creole people who threatened their self-identification. Creole people also experienced segregation because they were not allowed in White spaces during the Jim Crow era.

f. **The devaluation of Creole even if it is in the public imagination**

Creole is not recognized by the U.S. government as a racial or ethnic category. Nor is there a multiracial census category (Cose, 1997). Jolivet (2007) writes of the

debate when a multiracial census category was proposed. The debate centered around whether there should be a multiracial category or whether people should be allowed to check two or more races. The latter option passed. However, Jolivette points out that this decision did not mean a lot for Creole people because their heritage is dramatically different from that of other multiracial people. Juanita spoke of this when she said, “But after I truly identified with [Creole], I just made my own box and I told them I was French Creole.” In addition, society discriminates against Creoles, even when those who discriminate do not realize that they are Creoles. Creoles, because they appear different from the White majority, are often called derogatory names that are used for other minority groups. Francis experienced this devaluation as a child. When Francis was in second grade, the grandmother of one of his White school friends confronted Francis and his brother with racial epithets:

I always remembered knowing we were Creole, but I did not associate it with race...and the first time I associated it with race was when I was in second grade and a friend's grandmother started calling my brother and I names. I had never heard those names, but I knew they weren't nice... 'nigger', 'spic', 'wetback', 'spear chucker', ...and when I got home I asked my mom, 'what's a nigger, what's a spic? (Francis)

#### 4. **Stress and mental health**

This fourth theme speaks to the stress that Creole people experience caused by racism, how this racial stress leads to mental health problems such as anxiety and depression, and the problem of alcoholism among Creole people. There are three subthemes of this theme.

##### a. **The stress of being Creole because of racism**

Thirteen, or more than half of my 21 participants, mentioned experiencing stress because of their Creole identity, and especially because of negative racial treatment. As stated before, most of them had high ethnic identity achievement. However, having high ethnic identity achievement in the present did not erase the memories of the stress of racism that they

had experienced in their lives. The participants spoke of perceived discrimination and racism. In previous research, multiracial people who perceived they were discriminated against were less well psychologically adjusted (Jackson et al., 2012). However, as Mossakowski (2003) suggests, my participants may have been protected psychologically by strong ethnic identity. Despite having experienced perceived racial discrimination, most did not show current signs of depression or low self-esteem.

Cindy did experience ADHD and anxiety. She said those symptoms had always been with her but that the anxiety was exacerbated when her prospective in-laws objected to their son marrying her because of her racial status. JuJu reported experiencing stress and anxiety, though she feels the anxiety might be a side effect of chemotherapy she had 10 years ago. John said that being Creole is a high stress life and that he experienced depression sometimes and that people try to put him down for being Creole; he said you can't "turn a king into a serf." Growing up, Marie experienced stress and anxiety and depression because of problems with White students who teased and bullied her because of her racial status. Juanita, like John, finds being Creole to be a stressful life and because of it she experiences anxiety and depression. Leona experiences the stress of being different because she is Creole and because of that she has experienced anxiety. Sue denies experiencing stress because of her Creole identity but does report that she has been diagnosed with anxiety.

Gracie said she experienced stress and anxiety when she went to a new job because she was not sure how she would be received because of her Creole racial status. Jane experienced stress when growing up because of her racial status in that she felt that she did not belong anywhere because there were not any other Creole people in her town except for her relatives. She experienced anxiety because of this sense of not belonging. She also experienced stress

when misidentified as Black, such as when a policeman gave her a warning and wrote Black for her race.

Other research has shown that psychological distress was predicted by discrimination (Geronimus et al., 2006; Klonoff and Landrine, 1999; Roberts et al., 2004). My participants' stories can be said to support these findings about the damaging effects of discrimination; however, when I administered the BDI-II, my participants did not report experiencing depression. How does one explain these contradictory findings? Perhaps in the past, they were susceptible to experiencing stress, depression, and anxiety and now they have overcome these symptoms with the help of strong ethnic identity, or perhaps when I administered the BDI-II, I just got a snapshot of how they were feeling and they were not feeling any depression in the last two weeks. I cannot answer this question with my research design. However, research on this subject is contradictory (Smith & Silva, 2011).

i. **Many Creoles feel it is stressful that they are put in a racial box where they feel they do not belong**

Joan's response reflected this first subtheme when I asked her, "Have you experienced any of the stress associated with being Creole? I mean you did tell me that being Creole and a woman was stressful. Do you think being Creole is stressful?" Joan replied,

Um, I guess in my own mind in some ways yeah it's stressful because people don't see you as who you see yourself as they see you in a different light or they put you in a category. That's the stress. They put me in a different category, they try to put me in a box that doesn't exist or they put me in a different box than what I should be. (Joan)



ii. **Some Creoles feel that being of any color that is not White is stressful**

Joan also spoke of racial stress when I asked her the question, “What stress, if any, do you have in your life because of your Creole racial status or racial identity?” She replied, “...being Black and a female in society--that’s the stress right there. That’s a stressor. Being of any color not White is a stressor...” While two-thirds of the men interviewed experienced racial stress, more than three-fourths of the women experienced racial stress. I left Nancy out of this question because she did not understand the question of racial stress and thus provided no answer. So more of the women experienced racial stress. There is not a way with the numbers being so small and so close to say whether this gender difference is significant.

Joan’s reflection on race and gender mirrors what Crenshaw (1991) writes about how women of color are situated in two political groups, multiracial race and female gender, that sometimes have opposing agendas. The experiences of these women reflect patterns of racism and sexism that intersect. They sometimes experience intersectional oppression that comes from the combination of these variables which produces a disadvantage which is different from the disadvantage experienced from these factors if each is experienced alone (Reynoso, 2004). Many studies have found that being exposed to discrimination on the basis of race or gender leads to mental health problems and problems with adjustment (DuBois et al., 2002).

iii. **Some Creole people feel they are subjected to stress because they look different**

Bruno also alluded to the problem of stress and race when I asked him in the family interview, “Have you had any stress in your life because of your racial identity or racial status?” He replied,

I’m going to say no, not necessarily because I’ve told people that I’m Creole, but I will say I’ve gotten stress or experienced racism because I’m not Black enough to be Black or I’m not White enough to be White, but specifically because I’m Creole I can’t say.  
(Bruno)

Jane experienced something similar to Bruno. I asked Jane, “What stress, if any, do you have in your life because of your racial status and/or racial identity?” Jane responded,

I don’t feel like I have as much stress as I did – or here now as an adult as I did when I was a kid like I never really felt like I belonged in a wider sense like when I was in school, like I kind of always felt like a sore thumb. When I was in school I was – I’d always say I’m too White for the Black kids and too Black for the White kids. So I never really felt like I belonged and now--I mean I moved away and I have friends of lots of different races. So, I don’t really feel that so much, but I think like when I was a kid it was definitely a stressful thing for me. (Jane)

When Jane was young she lived in a White/Black world and did not feel like she fit in because she was neither. As an adult she lives in a more diverse environment with more races of people present. She previously said that she stuck out like a “sore thumb” when she was young. Now she blends in in a diverse world.

In summary, it is also stressful for Creole people that they are not recognized as their own minority. They feel that they are put into racial boxes that they do not feel they belong in, e.g., Black. Creole people are also subjected to racial stress because they are not White; they are minorities. In addition, they experience stress because they look different than the races society is used to. They are treated as if they are too White to be Black and too Black to be White. To not fit in standard racial categories is stressful for many Creole people.

b. **How Creoles experience racial stress and how that leads to mental health problems**

This subtheme is different from Subtheme a. in that it focuses on how the racial stress experienced leads to mental health problems. Much recent research has reported that exposure to racial discrimination increases the chance for an individual to develop psychiatric problems (Banks and Kohn-Wood, 2007; Brown, 2003; Cooke, 2014; Kessler et al., 1999; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Roberts et al., 2004; Taylor & Turner, 2002; Williams et al., 2003). Racial identity is important in how racial discrimination is experienced. Banks and Kohn-Wood's (2007) study using racial profiles to examine the association between discrimination and mental health outcomes suggests that racial identity moderates the relationship between discrimination and depressive symptoms. Their participants who had a goal of blending with the mainstream and did not have race as a core concept had a strong association between racial discrimination and depressive symptoms. In contrast, my participants had high ethnic identity achievement and did not have a goal of blending in with the mainstream. However, several reported experiencing depression and more reported experiencing anxiety. This subtheme had two sub-subthemes.

i. **Some Creole people feel that stress from discrimination caused them anxiety and depression**

Several Creole people spoke of racial stress and mental health problems. When Marie told me in her interview about the racism she experienced, I asked her, "Did any of this cause you any mental health issues like depression or anxiety?" She replied, "I never thought of it at that point but now that you're asking me that, um it probably did cause me more anxiety than depression, but both were there." I asked John, "Has any of the stress you've

experienced as a Creole person led you to experience any anxiety or depression or any other mental health symptom?” John responded,

No, I haven’t experienced any anxiety uh depression, I guess you could call it a depression. You know I don’t recognize it but I feel a change you know where you become solemn, you know you just fall back into yourself and you just go back over the things that got you to where you are and you have to reevaluate what’s going on and make a decision and move forward regardless of--it’s you know you got to keep moving. So I have experienced some depression I guess. (John)

I asked Juanita, “Well, Juanita, what stress do you have in your life because of your Creole racial status or racial identity?” She had much to say about this subject. I also asked her, “Has any of this stress led to any mental health issues like depression or anxiety or anything?” Juanita replied,

...it’s very difficult when you don’t know who you are, OK? It is very difficult...it gives you stress just to live period, just live and until you can satisfy your own personal wellbeing, you know it’s just kind of hard. But yes, I suffer from chronic depression big time, OK and not just because I’m mixed blood. It’s other reasons too, just life, life dealings, just dealing with life period and I inherited that from my father...So, yes, I had chronic depression and anxiety because you don’t know who’s going to accept you or not. (Juanita)

ii. **Some Creole people experienced anxiety related to the need to get away from the mixed race situation**

Jane also discovered when I was interviewing her that she had that problem too but had just not been conscious of it previous to this interview. I asked Jane, “What stress, if any, do you have in your life because of your racial status and/or racial identity?” She told me about the anger she felt towards people who brought up her racial background. Then I asked her, “Did you experience any anxiety?” She responded,

I don’t really feel like I experienced any anxiety from that. My anxiety was more about when I was a kid getting good grades so I could go to college. Although I guess you could make a case that it was kind of influenced by that because I was like, God I can’t wait to get away from here and go meet some other people.’ Similar accepting people. But I never really – that wasn’t something that was in my mind at that time. It was only

kind of as in right now that I was thinking, oh, maybe that was the reason I was so head up to get away. (Jane)

In summary, nine of the 21 participants reported experiencing mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and ADHD. When I administered the BDI-II, all of my participants scored with minimal symptoms of depression, though four of them told me they experienced depression in the past because of negative racial treatment or just because of their Creole identity. Nine is a larger number of people with mental health problems than expected of a sample of 21 people, even though two of them felt their mental health problems had nothing to do with racial discrimination; seven thought their mental health problems were related to problems with racial stress. Nonetheless, the number experiencing mental health problems is notable. In addition, one of my participants felt that she experienced anxiety because she wanted to get away from the racial stress of being Creole.

c. **Alcoholism**

The final subtheme of Stress and Mental Health is based on a quotation from Leona. She is the only participant who talked about this problem, but I felt it was important enough to warrant making it a subtheme: Alcoholism. I asked Leona, “Well, besides anxiety and depression, have you had any other ...has the stress led to any other mental health problems?”

Leona responded,

Quite a bit of alcoholism in that part of the country, that part of Louisiana. There is a lot of cultural habits of drinking. My father became an alcoholic and that impacted the family and both in many ways emotionally, economically and I see a lot in that part of the country – people with that background. They drink a lot. (Leona)

Leona was the next to last person that I interviewed. If I had interviewed her earlier I could have asked other participants about their experiences with Creole people and alcoholism.

## 5. **Community and community support**

The last major theme of this study is “Community and Community Support.” It contains five subthemes that reflect how Creoles’ identity is seen in the community, the support they get from the community for their Creole identity, how Creole people’s identity differs depending on the cultural context they are in, the network of their friends, and the Creole community as being a touchstone. There are also five sub-subthemes.

### a. **How other individuals feel about Creole as a choice for a racial identity**

Many of the participants had something to say related to this subtheme. Responses ranged from others accepting Creole identity to rejection or invalidation of Creole identity by some people or some groups to the fact that some people did not know what Creole was. Multiracial people, in general, frequently report the experience of invalidation of their multiracial identity (Franco and Franco, 2016; Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009; Shih & Sanchez, 2009).

#### i. **Many other individuals have trouble accepting Creole as a racial identity**

In a study of the impact of identity invalidation for multiracial people mixed with Black, Franco and Franco (2016) found that multiracial people reported their racial status was invalidated the most by Black people and that invalidation by Black people hurt the most. My participants did not report being hurt the most by invalidation of their Creole identity by Black people; however, several of them did report that Black people invalidated their identity the most of any ethnic group.

I said to Marie, “OK, well, tell me about how other individuals feel about your choice of Creole as a racial identity.” Marie responded with the statement, “I don’t talk with people about that...I’ve talked within my family about that, but outside of my family I don’t think so. I don’t remember ever me discussing Creole as a separate race.” I asked Grandma, “Let me see, tell me about how other individuals feel about your choice of Creole as a racial identity.” Grandma replied, “I guess they don’t know what to say ‘cause they don’t know what we is.” Several participants said that people don’t know what Creole is. Sue reinforced that idea when I asked her, “OK, tell me about how other individuals feel about your choice of Creole as a racial identity.” Sue responded, “Well, I never really voiced that I am Creole and nothing else. I mean I’ve always lived as Negro African American because when we leave the Deep South Creole... people don’t know what that is anyways.”

ii. **Some individuals accept Creole as a racial identity**

I asked Iris, “So, how do other individuals feel about you identifying as Creole maybe as a racial identity or however?” Iris replied,

People are very accepting of it and I’m very vocal about it and I educate people about it because believe it or not people that have grown up in Louisiana their whole lives don’t understand it and they don’t understand Creole and what Creole is and they think it means Black francophone speakers and so people are very accepting when I come forward I guess appearing the way I do which is I guess...their idea is Creole means Black so when they see me presenting myself as Creole and opening up a conversation and educating them about it intrigues them so they want to learn about it and they always do learn something new from me about it so people are very receptive to me identifying myself as such. (Iris)

Iris presenting herself as Creole is probably not given the same response as other participants identifying as Creole. Iris is phenotypically White and so her identifying as a minority is not the same as a more phenotypically minority person identifying as a minority.

- iii. **Many Creole people have a negative reaction from Black people when they tell them they are Creole; they think it is divisive**

I asked Michael the same question, “Tell me about how other individuals feel about your choice of Creole as a racial identity.” Michael responded,

With the Black community...for the most part, I won't say this is every individual, but for the most part they get...have a negative reaction because they feel I should only be saying Black and that saying anything else is divisive and then with the White community, for the most part it's always...I want to say positive – I mean it's positive, but it's more like indifference, you kind of just – whatever you feel the most pride in then you say what you are and then when I'm in the Hispanic community it's the same.  
(Michael)

Leona said something similar to Michael. I asked Leona, “Um, could you tell me how other individuals feel about your choice of Creole as a racial identity.” She replied,

Um, I would say that more White people are more fascinated by it and I think...their first thing is to think maybe you are biracial but I think they are more fascinated by it and they sort of think you're different than other Black people. And then I think Black people...they have attitude they'll go. I remember in high school I tried out for cheerleader and one of my friends who were more brown and didn't have a Creole background...I didn't get it and she did and she said, ‘Oh I thought you were gonna get it because you're lighter and have longer hair and I thought you would get it because of that.’ And actually she got placed as the cheerleader. (Leona)

Relatedly, as previously stated, Gracie and Francis reported that they had experienced Black people pressuring them to identify as Black.

In summary, my participants' Creole identity was often invalidated as was confirmed by the literature cited above. Iris, who is phenotypically White, had her Creole identity validated, but other phenotypically minority-appearing Creole people were often reassigned to Black identity. My participants reported that Black people wanted them to identify as Black. Furthermore, Michael found that saying he is Creole to Black people was seen by them as divisive.



b. **The support that Creole people get for their Creole identity**

Results of a study that assessed ethnic identity, self-esteem, racial/ethnic legitimacy testing experiences, and family support of multiracial identity found that for a majority of participants, people of racial groups that comprise their racial/ethnic heritage tested the legitimacy of their ethnic/racial identity (Adams, 1997). Family support of multiracial identity and diversity of the neighborhoods in which the participants grew up were also significant predictors of ethnic identity (Adams, 1997). Many of my participants felt their families and communities supported their Creole identity.

i. **Support from family**

I asked James, “I mean what supports you in wanting to identify as Creole?” James replied, “The main support I have is of course who I am and where I’m from. You know uh I come from that. That’s where our parents were from so they were and I’m just a product of my parents.” Also, I asked Marie, “Well, Marie what are the sources of support for your Creole identity then?” Marie responded, “I think it’s a familial thing; it’s just within the family...” Sue also is supported by family. I asked Sue, “OK, what are the sources of support for your Creole identity? Family, community, other sources?” Sue replied, “Well, living in this unique place, it does--you know who you are, you know where you came from...everybody’s a cousin, so it makes it--it makes it a little easier.” Leona was explicit about her family support. Leona said, “I would say family and extended family um you know other people with a similar background...So I’d say family and extended family you know relatives...a very much family support system, extended family.”

ii. **Support from community**

The majority of my participants remarked on whether they get support for their Creole identity from the community. I asked Veronica, “OK, well what are the sources of support for your Creole identity?” She responded,

Um, wow we have books written about...there is a book about my ancestors called, The Forgotten People. That’s kind of when we started getting into it and then there is a whole center here at the college in Natchitoches here in Louisiana, uh a Creole Heritage Center. We have festivals, we have all sorts of books written about us and we have our newsletters that someone publishes. It’s in New York and she has Cane River roots and she publishes all of the things going on with our people that are from the same you know uh lines of people here in Natchitoches that she produces quarterly and just lots of things like that. (Veronica)

John also spoke of support for his Creole identity from the community when I asked him, “What are the sources of support for your Creole identity?” John responded,

The sources of support? The people in my area that have created Creole groups online. I think I’m a member of four or five of them, you know maybe six to where we communicate, you know we try and keep the spirit of our elders moving forward and share you know the joy of life, the joy of class and dignity and integrity you know to teach each other as we were taught individually. Our DNA you know we try and represent our DNA to the fullest and that’s the support I get from my Creoles. (John)

I also asked Michael, “What are the sources of support for your Creole identity? Family, community or other sources?” Michael replied, “...I am a part of a community that’s based in New Orleans and we help try to revive the Louisiana Creole language so that’s also a source of support for me, yeah.” There were also participants who felt as if they did not get community support. I asked Marie, “So do you feel that there is community support for your Creole identity?” Marie simply responded, “No.” I also asked Gracie, “How does community support your Creole identity?” Gracie replied,

They do not. I don’t feel like they support it. I’ve never been in a situation where I’ve had to look for their support or ask or even be um to know whether or not they would embrace it or not. I’ve never been in that situation really except for a job and so I don’t

think other than our own Creole friends that we grew up with, I don't think we had any support from any other races White or Black. (Gracie)

In summary, whereas I think the other speakers were talking about the Creole community when I asked if they have the support of community, I think Marie and Gracie were talking about the broader community when they say they do not receive community support. Once again, the so-called "clannishness" of Creole people is demonstrated in that they, for the most part, spend the most time where their Creole identity is supported--with other Creole people. Marmarosh and Corazzini (1997) researched group identity and found that those group members who "keep the group in their pocket," or keep aware of their group affiliation and consider it a positive thing, have a benefit of higher self-esteem than those who do not keep their group membership elevated and in mind. My participants had, for the most part, high ethnic identity achievement and high self-esteem.

c. **Many Creole people feel they have a certain racial identity depending on the cultural context they find themselves in**

Many multiracial people have flexible social boundaries. They can adapt to the needs and expectancy of the cultural context they are in. They can fit into more than one racial world and feel comfortable (Miville et al., 2005). However, this pertains to those multiracial people who because of their phenotype are able to "pass" as more than one racial group. Some of my participants were able to do this.

Iris spoke to this subtheme. For example, I asked her, "So what part of your identity do you think you got from elsewhere?" Iris replied,

Social interactions with my peers and I guess observing who accepted me into their group as one of their own and like I said either group be it Black or White because that was what was predominant where I lived...I guess observing how those groups ...so I was never just all about being with one social group like just being with Whites or just being with Blacks. I was with both of them and that theme followed me throughout my life. I

don't just section myself off to being with one type of people, one skin color of people...music wise and verbal things have influenced me from both Black and White. I'm kind of like uh I feel like I'm a chameleon in ways... (Iris)

Cindy's identification is situational. I asked Cindy, "So, do you have any experience with saying that you're Creole to people who are not Creole?" She responded,

No, I usually would refer to myself as Creole to other people I felt were Creole. If not, if it was to someone who is African American or someone who is a White person, I would say I'm biracial. I'm not sure if everybody understands what Creole is because like my mom told me years ago, people don't really use that anymore. (Cindy)

As these quotations illustrate, Creole people are used to thinking about themselves and referring to themselves in different ways depending on the context they are in.

d. **The races of the network of friends that Creole people have**

I asked the participants about their network of friends and they named the different percentages of the races and ethnicities that were in their networks. Usually when they were younger, their networks contained more Creole people, though many participants still had many Creole associates now. Except for participants who lived where there were few Creole people, the most common proportion of Creole people in their networks was 50%. I asked James, "So what would you say would be the percentages of the races of your network of friends? What percentage of different races?" James said,

Oh I would say uh for Creole I would have about 60% and that other 40% would be a mixture of African American and White...Nowadays it's still a large and heavy percentage Creole, you know maybe not 60% might be maybe 50% now and the other side would be a combination of White and uh African American. (James)

Marie reported a similar trend. I asked Marie, "OK, well what was the racial composition of your network of friends when you were growing up and what is it now?" Marie responded,

My friends were primarily Black and Creole and my friends now um encompass Black, White, Creole, and Hispanic, Indian....The percentage of Creole people probably at an earlier stage in life was more than 75%. At this point in life I would guess um probably less than 50%. (Marie)

Leona reported a different trend. I asked Leona, “OK, well what is the racial composition of your network of friends when you were growing up and what is it now?” Leona said,

I would say 80% of my family friends were the Creoles and people we were allowed to spend the night with other people outside of those circles and that was always the comfort level of ...trust level with her. As I got older my circle broadened to you know very multi-ethnic environment so I have friends of all different ethnic groups...The percentage um ...maybe three percent of White kids uh hardly any...two or three Asian American and 60-70% African American and maybe 25-30% of those or half of those are some family, Creole family from Louisiana and their children. Growing up after high school, I did go to college in Louisiana and lived in that area as well as New Orleans and so that's like almost everybody's got a Creole background. I would say 90% of the people of African descent has Creole background. (Leona)

Jane and John have a dearth of Creole people in their networks now. I asked John,

“What was the racial composition of your network of friends when you were growing up and what is it now?” John replied,

When I was a young kid 'til I was about ten years old the racial composition was Creole mixed, Creole and Negro. Those two that was the racial composition. There were no other people. Now it can be anybody, I mean you could be from Saudi Arabia, you could be from Venezuela or from Pakistan...from Mexico you know or Scotch Irish, Italian, you know my girlfriend is Italian, you know you could be from anywhere in the world now. (John)

I then asked John, “What percentage of your friends are Creole now?” He said, “Very few, very few, next to none...next to none...” I asked Jane, “OK, well what was the racial composition of your network of friends when you were growing up and what is it now?” Jane responded,

OK, let me break it down like this, at school it was like 50/50 White and Black and like for the Creole people, it was more of my family that was like the Creole people, right?...Okay so alright well, if I lump my school friends and then like my cousins and stuff together, it's probably like 60% Creole and then the other 40% was the White and Black together...So, I would say most of the people I associate with like in person where I live, like none of them are Creole. But like if I'm on Facebook or Instagram, like probably – like 90% of the people on my Facebook or Instagram are my family. (Jane)

For the most part, the interview responses suggest that, when they can, these Creole individuals associate with others intra-ethnically, reflecting the “clannishness” participants spoke about earlier.

e. **The Creole culture or community as being a touchstone**

Creole people are well aware of their cultural and racial/ethnic uniqueness. As previously stated, several of my participants thought of themselves as exotic. As Ophelia and James indicated, Creole is made up of a lot of influences, but when you put them together, Creole is like a good “gumbo.” Creoles in this study described themselves as “clannish.” In fact, my Creole participants, on the whole, felt that Creole should have its own category on official forms, including the census.

Marie summed up how many Creole people feel about Creole culture as a touchstone when I asked her, “What do you think are the essential characteristics of being a Creole”? She said,

I think it’s a way of life, a way of looking at living...in the Creole culture I think it’s essential we honor our children, we honor people in general in the culture, that we especially honor our parents...I also see us as very hardworking and ambitious people. I see us as taking a step down in general and not looking at ourselves as being better than anyone. We just want to do the best we can. (Marie)

Popinno of the Smith Family was talking about Creole being global and I asked him, “What makes it global?” He replied,

Global because if I’m in China, what are they going to call me in China? What are they going to call me in Spain? What they going to call me in Brazil? What they going to call me in Puerto Rico? I don’t fit none of them peoples’ race. I don’t look like them. And now, the younger race now, like I said they marry all kinds of folks. You got a whole other generation, and then they can claim themselves to whatever race they want, but they all going to come back to this Creole race. They know that’s what they come from. They all do, whether they’re Black, whether they White, whether they brown, whether they Mexican, whether they speak Spanish, Brazilian, it doesn’t really matter because they know who they are, all my cousins, they Hawaiian, they speak Hawaiian, They belong to

about 4 or 5 different natives of Hawaiian people and they also are Creole people from Louisiana. So it is a multinational race. (Popinno)

Popinno's quote seems confusing, but I think he means that many different kinds of people can identify as Creole. Popinno's words about Creole being global illustrate how Creoles can feel support wherever they are and how different aspects of Creole culture provide a benchmark for Creole people in leading their lives.

Many Creole people I interviewed spoke of having and not having a sense of belonging. When I did the Focus Group interview, I asked the group the question, "What are the effects of the stress of racial discrimination, if any, on the mental health of Creole people? Does the stress of racial discrimination have any effect on Creole people?" I received many replies to this question, but something Joan said in the ensuing discussion is germane to this subtheme. Joan said, "That's one reason why it would be good to have Creole as a race in the U.S. To check that Creole mark and have those people that you belong to. Yeah, that's just my opinion."

Several Creole people spoke of Creoles having their own groups. I asked Nancy if she had support for her Creole identity. She told me she did and added, "Yes, I have a lot. A lot of people. We had our own circle. We had our own society, our own clubs, and things like that..." Gracie also spoke of Creoles having their own groups when I asked her if she could elaborate on what she meant by her statement about little Creole society. She responded,

That Creole population that went to our school and our church. That we, just the friends that we grew up with and that we hung out with...We did have lawn parties and they mainly stuck together...at lawn parties they were together...(Gracie)

Grandma also spoke to this theme in the family interview. I asked Grandma, "Is there anything else important about your experience as a Creole person that I should know?" Grandma replied, "No, I just don't have no kind of feelings, I know we Creole and we be with each other...and we all feel like we're a family of people." This is Grandma's precursor to the Creole pride that her

grandson Bruno has. As stated above, Bruno delighted in Creole people having a distinctive appearance and in his looking like other Creole people. I asked Bruno, “OK, what was the racial composition of your network of friends when you were growing up and what is it now?” Part of his response was, “I’ve always had a pretty good base of Creole people, family members that I’ve always had like in my corner.” Bruno is talking about a connection he feels to Creoles all over the world. JuJu also talked about Creole people having each other’s backs. I asked JuJu, “OK, what do you think are the essential characteristics of being Creole?” She responded in part,

Um, I think a characteristic, a big characteristic is that we are very, very close-knit, we’re very family-oriented and sometimes I tend to say we were clannish to where we have our little group and we tend to try to hold to that little group because we feel safe and we don’t want to venture out. (JuJu)

Other Creole people echoed this sentiment of feeling safe in groups of Creoles. For example, when I asked Leona, “OK, well has any of this stress led to any anxiety or depression?” Leona replied,

I’ve had some uncomfortableness. I know it’s psychological, but had some uncomfortableness around the whole thing, “your family is different and you’re not like other African Americans.” So, I don’t know if that is fitting in. I have found that I have a comfort level with other people of the same background, a higher comfort level. (Leona)

A recurring and overarching theme of these interviews is that Creole people have an enduring sense of identification with one another. They do express, as Grandma says, feeling like a “family of people.” Creole is truly a touchstone for Creole people.



## VII. DISCUSSION

In the Results chapter I presented my findings, and in this Discussion chapter I will discuss what the findings mean and whether and how the research questions for this study were answered by this research. The purpose of this study was to find out how Creole people of color form their Creole identity and to investigate the impact of unfair racial treatment on the mental health of this group.

As previously stated, I interviewed 21 Creole people of color. In addition to the interviews, I learned more about my participants by administering three instruments to them: the RSE to measure their self-esteem, the BDI-II to see if they had symptoms of depression, and the MEIM to find out about their ethnic identity achievement. Most of my participants had relatively high ethnic identity achievement and high self-esteem. None of them was experiencing symptoms of depression at the time of the interview.

### A. **Creole Identity, Racialized Stress, and Mental Health**

As stated in the Results chapter, 12 or more than half of my 21 participants experienced racial stress. Nine of my participants experienced mental health problems. Because six of my participants experienced a mental health problem that they think was linked with their experience of stress related to negative racial treatment concerning their Creole identity, I could make the case that a major finding of this study is that having high Creole ethnic identity achievement does not buffer Creole people from the stress associated with negative racial treatment and, in turn, does not buffer them from developing mental health problems. This would appear to contradict Mossakowski's (2003) hypothesis regarding the psychologically protective effects of high ethnic identity achievement. However, because they all have relatively high ethnic identity achievement and the BDI-II revealed minimal symptoms of depression, I could make the case

that although they experienced mental health problems in the past, they have overcome them, and their resilience in the face of racialized stressors could be related to their strong ethnic identity.

My research design offers only one opportunity to measure their level of depression. However, this just produces a snapshot of their mental health. I would have had to test them repeatedly over time in a longitudinal study to be able to reliably track their experiences with depression.

Participants in my study who did not report experiencing stress had relatively high ethnic identity achievement as well. The 12, or just greater than half my participants, who reported experiencing stress all had relatively high identity achievement scores, again, except for Gracie, who had the lowest score of all my participants. This study reveals a relatively large number of Creole persons experiencing stress related to their Creole identity. A limitation of this study is that I did not adequately clarify with my participants whether this stress experience was just in the past or also in the present as well, or if they reacted differently to the stress across the course of their identity development.

I read about Mossakowski's (2003) research when I began this study, so I was open to the idea that Creole identity might buffer racial stress and prevent my participants from experiencing depression. However, as stated in the Literature Review, Smith and Silva (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 184 studies and their conclusion was that having high ethnic identity does not buffer racial stress. Yet many of the studies they examined found that participants with high ethnic identity achievement did not develop mental health problems. Therefore, the meta-analysis does not necessarily illuminate the complexities of the relationship

between ethnic identity and mental health. It would be a good idea to produce more critical meta-analyses of this phenomenon.

Early models of biracial and multiracial identity development show identity formation taking place in stages. Root (1996) introduced a different model in which she proposed that racial identity development was dependent on resolutions of the problems that biracial and multiracial persons face, such as uncertainty of where they belong and ambiguity concerning their identity. Only two of my participants, Leona and Joan, formed their Creole identities as a resolution of their uncertainty as to where they racially/ethnically belong. Leona resolved conflicting feelings surrounding her Creole identity and Joan took on the identity of those in her environment until age thirteen when she was placed into a Creole environment and realized that that is where she belonged.

Two-thirds of my participants embraced a Creole identity from a very young age via intergenerational transmission. Of the other seven, three in their younger years identified as Negro. However, John was told at the age of fourteen by his grandfather that he was Creole, so he can be viewed as learning his identity through intergenerational transmission, even though it was at an older age. The other two of the three identified as Creole in their teen years. A fourth participant, Gracie, identified as Creole at the age of eleven or twelve because of being labelled Creole by others, though she mentioned that she was raised by her mother to be Creole without her mother using the word "Creole." JuJu and Jane thought they were different growing up, but they did not come to realize that they were Creole until they were adults and someone introduced Creole identity to them.

## B. Revisiting the Research Questions

As far as the research questions are concerned, the first research question is “In terms of stress, how do Louisiana Creole people of color experience negative racial treatment?” Twelve of my 21 participants reported that they experienced stress in response to unfair negative racial treatment. They experienced this stress in a variety of ways. For some it was just a negative experience that did not have consequences beyond that. Some of them reported feeling anger, some anxiety, or as participant John reported, feeling like he was under scrutiny.

In Subtheme a. (The Discrimination that Creole People Feel They Face from Both Black and White) of Theme 3 (Devaluation, Prejudice and Negative Treatment), several participants complained of not being Black enough for certain things nor White enough for other things. In addition, Creole people are seen as African American by most White people and as participant Nancy said, “[I] had to follow the rules of the Black man.” This meant that Creole people felt they experienced the same racial discrimination from White people as Black people experience. Creoles find themselves situated in the middle of the Black and White experiences because, for example, my participants said that African Americans resent Creole people for not wanting to identify as African American and White people discriminate against them, labelling them African American.

Participant Francis stated that most of the discrimination he experienced came from African Americans. Most of the participants who experienced this negative treatment experienced stress; some did not. Cindy, Leona, Jane, Marie, Gracie, John, Popinno, James, Joan, Francis, Michael, and Juanita experienced stress with this negative treatment. Other Creole people were insulted and angry but did not experience stress. James confronted and argued with the White people who were discriminating against him. He was not stressed by their behavior.

JuJu was also angry about being discriminated against by White people. It is interesting to note that the expression of anger over unfair treatment might be associated with less subjective experience of stress.

To sum up, there was a variety of responses from Creole people to negative racial treatment. Therefore, the first research question “In terms of stress, how do Louisiana Creole people experience negative racial treatment?” can be answered by acknowledging that they experience it in a variety of ways. The situation of Louisiana Creole people of color forces us to recognize that we cannot just think of race in the U.S. in either/or terms. There is a gray area that we must acknowledge and work with.

The second research question is, “What is the relationship between the multiracial identity of Louisiana Creole people of color, adjustments to the stress of negative racial treatment and mental illness? How does multiracial identity mediate stress and the mental health of Louisiana Creole people of color?” My participants often experienced stress because their Creole identity was not validated. Cathy complained, “You know most people don’t think of it as no Creole; they call it Black. You know our skin is not Black.” Some of the negative racial treatment including being teased also led to stress. When Marie was in high school one of her teachers gave the students an instrument to fill out that asked the students what color they were. Marie wrote “beige” and one of her White classmates made fun of her answer. She said this caused her stress. I asked her if she experienced any anxiety or depression as a result of the stress. She said, “I never thought of it at that point but now that you are asking me that, it probably did cause me more anxiety than depression, but both were there.”

Juanita linked stress with her identity when I asked her what stress she had in her life because of her Creole racial status or identity. She replied, “I have lots of stress. I used to have

lots of stress. Until you could make up your mind that you accept who you are as a person...you can have identity problems.” I asked Juanita if this stress led to any mental health problems like depression or anxiety. She replied, “Absolutely. Of course it did...I suffer from chronic depression big time.”

Subtheme b. of Theme 4 is How Creoles Experience Racial Stress and How That Leads to Mental Health Problems. Nine of my 21 participants reported that they had experienced mental health issues. Six of those nine reported that they thought their mental health problems were related to the stress they experienced because they were Creole. This should matter to everyone because other groups in society can have analogous relationships. For example, LGBTQ people and people of religious groups out of the mainstream, or people who find themselves situated in more than one group, can experience stress from not fitting in prescribed categories that we are familiar with. This can lead to mental health problems for them, alienating them from the rest of society.

The relationship between the multiracial identity of Louisiana Creole people of color and their adjustments to the stress of negative racial treatment is that a person with a multiracial identity is treated by society in a way that can cause stress and can lead to mental health problems. Many of my participants thought this stress led to mental health problems, and they demonstrated this reaction in their younger years. However, a strong racial/ethnic identity also may mediate stress which causes mental health problems, because my participants with high ethnic identity achievement did not score in the range of having symptoms of depression, though two said they experience depression.

The third research question is “How does one’s particular path to identity affect mental health outcomes from the perspective of Louisiana Creole people of color?” Of the nine

participants who experienced a mental illness in their life, only one of them, JuJu, definitely developed her Creole identity in stages. Jane, who experienced anxiety knew she was different, but her family did not use the word “Creole” and she did not know to use the word “Creole” for herself until she was older and her sister, who became immersed in genealogy and Creole culture told her they were Creole. Leona’s path to Creole identity was a process over time, a resolution. Sue learned of her Creole identity from an encounter experience where she learned she was Creole from other people in high school.

The other five who experienced a mental health problem learned their Creole identity through intergenerational transmission, as did most of my participants. Because this is, for the most part, qualitative research and I have a small sample, I cannot conclusively say whether the path to developing one’s Creole identity is necessarily related to the outcome of mental health problems for Creole people. Cindy, Juanita, Marie, John and Gracie all experienced mental health problems but developed their Creole identity in the way that most of the participants did whether they experienced mental health problems or not: through intergenerational transmission. (It should be noted, however, that Juanita said that although she always knew she was Creole, she did not know what Creole was.) In contrast, all of the participants who did not develop their Creole identity through intergenerational transmission--JuJu, Sue, Leona and Jane--experienced mental health problems. Perhaps the lack of family transmission of Creole identity early in life reduces Creole individuals’ resistance to the stress of negative racial treatment. This part of the study should be repeated with a larger group because it is hard to tell with such a small sample if one’s path to identity really matters in the question of developing mental health problems. Therefore, it appears from these data that the answer to the research question “How does one’s particular path to identity affect mental health outcomes from the perspective of Louisiana

Creole people?” is that one’s path to identity does not necessarily determine whether a Creole person develops a mental health problem. Five of the 14 participants who developed their Creole identity through intergenerational transmission at any early age experienced mental health problems but all four participants who did not develop their Creole identity through intergenerational transmission experienced mental health problems.

### C. **Ethnic Identity, Race, and Culture**

Because two-thirds of the participants identified as Creole at a young age and three more were uncertain of what they were until it was pointed out to them that they were Creole, this study seems to indicate that more Creole people establish their Creole identity through intergenerational transmission than through other ways. Even the ones who initially identified as Negro began identifying as Creole once they knew the truth of their background. This trend indicates that Creole people demonstrate, in contrast to other multiracial people, that they do not generally establish their multiracial Creole identity in stages or as a resolution of problems associated with their identity, as Root (1996) professes. This is important because it suggests that Creole people do not necessarily behave as the broad category of “multiracial” people do.

Another important way in which Creole people of color behave differently from other multiracial people is reflected in their MEIM scores. As stated in the Results chapter, multiracial people generally score lower than other minorities on the MEIM (Roberts et al., 1999). African Americans generally score higher than Latinos and Whites, with multiracial people scoring slightly higher than White people. However, my Creole participants’ mean score on the MEIM was higher than African Americans’ mean scores. In the Roberts et al. (1999) study, the mean score for African Americans on the MEIM was 3.07 with a standard deviation of 0.56 and multiracial people’s mean score was 2.94, with a standard deviation of 0.60. My Creole of color



participants' mean score was 3.35, with a standard deviation of 0.51. Therefore, one can see that Creole of color racial/ethnic identity is salient in this study. This finding supports the work of advocates who assert that "Creole" should be a government category such as a census category and that it should be recognized in public spaces. Seventeen of my 21 participants thought Creole is or should be a racial status, while four (Leona, Ophelia, James, and Iris) did not. All Creole people in the study except for Sue and Leona, who had identified initially as Negro, and Ophelia, who always identified as Creole, thought that Creole should be a census category. All my participants thought that Creole is a culture.

This is somewhat in contrast to what my key informants, Diane Honore, Lolita Cherri, and John LaFleur, stated. All my key informants said that Creole is not a race, but it is a culture, though John LaFleur, the author of books about Creole, said that Creole is a Latin ethnicity. However, it is important to note what everyone has to say, as usage often determines fact. Most of my participants think that Creole should be a race; however, they are referring to mixed-race Creoles.

These Creole participants, at least, seem not to see themselves as other multiracial people see themselves. The majority of my participants do not assimilate to Black even though hypodescent tells them they should. Creoles seem to see themselves as a distinct social group. Young (1989) argues that contemporary social movements of the oppressed assert pride in "group specificity against ideals of assimilation" (p. 251). There should be more research done examining this supposition in a large quantitative study to determine if these qualitative findings are statistically significant for all Creole people of color.

One can also say that Creole people behave as a group because they have certain practices, ideas, and beliefs in common; they have a culture. Creole people have their own

language, and this language, which has been lost to a certain extent, is experiencing revival. Even Creole people who do not speak the Creole language, Kouri Vini, know certain Creole words and phrases such as the Creole words for godparents, that is, “nenin” for godmother and “parin” for godfather. My participant Ophelia said that “Creole here is a culture whereas years ago it was the color, if you were mixed blood you were Creole, so now they are beginning to find that...this is who we are, it’s a culture.”

Many cultural aspects reflect Creole. As mentioned, Creole people now are taking an interest in their language. Though there are pockets in Louisiana where Kouri Vini is spoken, in places like north central Louisiana there are few Creole speakers. However, the Louisiana state government has instituted a program in public schools called CODOFIL to revive French in Louisiana. Louisiana Creole is likely a dialect of French (Mosadomi, 2000). Across Louisiana, groups of young people are teaching themselves Louisiana Creole. This is part of the Creole Renaissance in Louisiana which began in the 1980s (Brasseux, 2005).

Ophelia’s opinion that Creole is a culture but not a race, is shared by few of my participants. All of my participants thought that Creole is a culture and the majority of them thought it is a race. Ophelia does not call Creole a race. Michael, like Ophelia, speaks Kouri Vini, as does all of his family. However, he feels that Creole is a race and a culture. He wants a Creole census category.

It is not a shift for Ophelia to think of Creole as a culture. In her interview she stated that as a child she knew that she was Creole because her family spoke a different language--a cultural marker. Further, she does not want to see Creole as a census category because of her children. She said that her children are used to identifying as African American and it would be too confusing for them to start to identify as Creole.

Creole also has a history of being thought of as a racial category. In 18<sup>th</sup> century Louisiana, multiracial Creole people were categorized as griffes (3/4 Black), mulattos (1/2 Black), quadroons (1/4<sup>th</sup> Black), octoroons (1/8<sup>th</sup> Black) and other categories. Creole was a racial distinction. Creoles were distinguished from Black people and had certain privileges that Black people did not have, such as owning land and some had education (Dominguez, 1986). However, as stated in the literature review, when the U.S. bought Louisiana, White Creoles distanced themselves from Creoles of Color, who were then reassigned to the Black population. This was cemented when the Supreme Court upheld segregation in the 1896 Plessy vs. Ferguson case. Plessy, a Creole man, sued to not sit in the Black compartment of a train and he lost the case. This is where the distinction for Creoles of color was finally lost and this lost distinction persists today in the eyes of society in general. Creole identity is not validated by society (Brasseux, 2005; Dominguez, 1986). Creoles of color self-validate their racial identity.

Creoles have a sense of culture in their daily lives. For example, Creole people have certain practices they follow when a Creole child is born, according to my participant Sue, though she did not describe these practices in detail. Most participants spoke of Creole food as being important to them. Jane, who lives in the Midwest where she has not encountered other Creole people, says that the link she uses to her Creole identity is Creole food. Sue spoke of Creole entertainment – Zydeco – as a Creole phenomenon. Several participants spoke of how well Creole parents honor and treat their children, including giving them a Catholic education because Catholicism is important to Creole people and the Catholic Church supports Creole identity. Thinking of Creole as a culture might be a shift for some of my participants. Cindy, for example, said she was raised to believe Creole is a race and now she is coming to see it as a culture as well. Perhaps this is because of the Creole Renaissance in Louisiana in the last 35 - 40

years with Creole culture being celebrated. Also, with the advent of the Creole Heritage Center in Natchitoches, Louisiana, La Creole in New Orleans, and other Creole organizations which are being established, Creole culture is more widely known.

Creole racial identity and Creole culture for the most part intersect, but sometimes are in tension. All my Creole of color participants do believe that Creole is a culture. Creole people do have their own distinctive music (zydeco) and their own foods, such as boudan and gumbo. This culture does intersect with Creole racial identity. Several participants described Creole racial identity as a “gumbo” in which several heritages go in to make the racial identity like gumbo is made with several kinds of food. Creole people understand themselves racially in terms of their culture. Creole culture is in tension with Creole racial identity when a Creole person sees their heritage in terms of their culture, but they do not see themselves as belonging to a Creole race.

This dissertation research revealed additional markers of culture. These Creole participants were Catholic, as my pilot study revealed. In addition to their food and music, many Creole people are proud of the way they look, and they feel they have a distinctive look. Not all Creoles look the way that many Creoles describe that they should look. One of my participants tells of the “paper bag test” in which if you are darker than a paper bag you are not considered Creole. As this demonstrates, Creoles do discriminate against other Creoles, and perhaps in their determination not to be considered Black, some Creole people disassociate themselves from Creoles who are darker. Several of my participants spoke of this.

I did not see any clear patterns involving the Creole participants who developed a mental illness as opposed to those who did not, whereas the pilot study seemed to suggest that those who did not grow up in a Creole community experienced mental health problems as adults. In this dissertation research, most participants grew up in a Creole community and some did while

others did not experience mental health problems. Creole people of all income levels and all socio-economic statuses when growing up were represented among those who developed a mental health problems. However, only those from skilled, technical and professional occupations at the present developed a mental health problem. There may be no significance to this because 15 of 21 of my participants were in the skilled/technical and professional occupations. All of them except Gracie, and perhaps JuJu, had a relatively high level of ethnic identity achievement.

#### D. **Experiences of Racism and Comparing These Findings to Past Research**

One level two subtheme of the theme Creole Identity is “the betweenness of being Creole, between Black and White, we ain’t Black, we ain’t White.” Creole people experienced this “betweenness” in part because of the racism they experience from the standard racial groups of Black and White. This impacts how they understand their own race. Many spoke of not belonging. Because of not belonging to a standard recognized racial group, Creole people experience much racism. They are often called racial slurs such as Iris reported (“yellow bone”) or as Francis reported racial slurs of other minority groups (“nigger,” “spear chucker,” and “spic”). As Joan noted, one experiences racial stress in the U.S. if one is of any race except White.

Most of the findings in the dissertation research confirm my previous pilot study. In the pilot study, I identified four themes: 1) Identity, 2) Creole Culture, 3) Negative Racial Treatment, and 4) Stress and Mental Illness. These findings are similar to the findings of this dissertation research. In my dissertation research, the big picture themes I found included 1) Identity, 2) Culture, and 3) Community. Within these themes, the common threads that link the literature to my results were 1) Mental Health and Stress and 2) Discrimination and Prejudice.

The findings of the dissertation and the pilot study agree on several specific points, including that Creole people feel they are more than an ethnicity and want Creole to be a census category, that the Catholic religion was important to Creole people, and that Creole people experience stress sometime in their lives because of racial issues. One finding of the pilot study not mirrored in the dissertation research is that those who grew up in a Creole community where their identity was supported, but do not live in a Creole community now, do not report experiencing racial stress; those who did not grow up in a Creole community report experiencing alienation, stress, and mental illness. However, the samples in these two studies were not equivalent in that almost all of the participants in the dissertation research grew up in a Creole community. Jane, Iris and Michael are exceptions to this. Jane and Iris grew up with Creole relatives, but in a town that was predominantly White and Black. Jane did not know she was Creole until later in life while her sister Iris knew she was Creole as a young child. Michael lived 15 of his 21 years in L.A., but he is part of a community in New Orleans that promotes Creole language and his family speaks Creole and is steeped in Creole culture.

Identity was a central issue for my participants. There is little literature on Creole identity, but Susberry's (2004) mixed methods dissertation, "Racial Identification and Ethnic Identification in Louisiana Creole People of Color," explored ideas about Creole identification similar to mine. One place where Susberry's finding and my findings agree is that Susberry's participants, who for the most part identified as Black or Black Creole and for the three of my participants who identified as Black, did think of Creole identity as a cultural concept and not a racial concept. However, there were more places where Susberry's findings and my findings did not agree.

Susberry found that most Creoles in her study identified as Black or Black Creole. In contrast, in my study I found that the overwhelming majority of my participants identified as Creole as distinct from Black or African American. Most of my participants complained of being lumped together with African Americans and then being identified as Black. On forms, 18 of my participants reported that they checked “Other” as race and wrote in Creole or French Creole and one of them sometimes checked African American and sometimes checked “Other” and wrote in Creole. Two always identified as African American on forms.

Although Creole is a socio-positive identity for many Creole people, it can be a defensive identity as well which helps Creole people steer other people away from classifying them as Black. Some of my participants did this. This is understandable because the average age of my participants is 61.62 years and their median age is 64. So, my participants were, for the most part, old enough to remember America before the Civil Rights era during which Black people were discriminated against and highly devalued. Therefore, some Creole people are loathed to be classified as Black. However, my participants who felt this way were in the minority. Most of my participants celebrated their Creole heritage--the French and/or Spanish and/or Native American and the African. As Joan said in her interview, “If someone can be Mexican, why can’t I be Creole?” Francis, who was stigmatized by his family for being dark, states that he accepts all his bloodlines, including the African.

There could be varying reasons for differences in how Creole people racially identify in research studies. As stated in the Methods Chapter, in qualitative studies the researcher is the primary instrument. In her dissertation, Susberry (2004) stated that she was dark-skinned and identified as Black Creole. I am more racially ambiguous and I identify as Louisiana Creole of

color. Perhaps the researchers' choice of racial identity had an influence on the participants' choice of racial identity.

Susberry (2004) circulated a survey for her participants to answer that was qualitative. Perhaps an answer to the participants' choice of racial identity can be found in the fact that in Susberry's survey where participants are asked to mark which race they are, choices included "1) Asian, 2) Black, 3) Hispanic, 4) White, 5) American Indian, 6) Mixed, parents are from two different groups, and 7) Other" (p. 83). In my demographic screening sheet the choices for race included 1) White, 2) Black, 3) Asian or Pacific Islander, 4) Hispanic, 5) Native American, 6) Other, 7) Mixed and then asks the participants to specify which races they are mixed with. Therefore, a person in my study can be mixed race, meaning they themselves are composed of different races and their parents can be mixed as well. Also, in my study under mixed is an option for the participants to say that they are Creole. Susberry and I see "Mixed" differently. My study allows participants to be intergenerationally mixed as some scholars define Creole to be (Jolivet, 2007).

Another way in which this dissertation research differed from Susberry's (2004) research is that Susberry found that a factor associated with Creole as a multiracial identity was fluency in Creole dialect. All of my participants, including those who spoke the Louisiana Creole dialect, Kouri Vini, stated that it was not necessary to speak Creole to be considered Creole. Perhaps this difference can be explained by the fact that Susberry recruited her participants exclusively from Lafayette, Louisiana where there is a large French-speaking population. My participants were living around the state of Louisiana in many places and also in Texas and California. One of my participants, Michael, who spoke Louisiana Creole and Louisiana French lived in California and



though he said it was necessary in his family to speak Louisiana Creole, he did not believe it was necessary for other families to speak it to be considered Creole.

Of the three Kouri Vini speakers that enrolled in my study, two were from southwestern Louisiana where many Creole people still speak it, and one is in California. My northern Louisiana Creole participants reported that they thought Creole was lost two generations ago because their grandparents were the last in their families to speak it. Even the Creole speakers in southwest Louisiana acknowledge that Creole speaking is not widespread and so they do not feel it is necessary to be able to speak it to be considered Creole.

In addition, Susberry (2004) found that Creole people in her study who had an exclusively border (i.e., mixed race) Creole identity had predominantly White childhood peers. I asked my participants what their network of friends was when they were growing up and what it was at the present. The only two who had a number of White childhood peers were the two sisters who grew up in a town where there were few Creoles except their relatives, and so they had both Black and White peers. The rest of my participants had a predominance of Creole childhood peers. For my participants, a predominance of Creole childhood peers presaged an exclusive Creole mixed race identity. In fact, although Susberry (2004) reported that those Creole people whom other people thought were Black tended to identify themselves as Black, my participants who were perceived as Black by others still identified as Creole.

Many of my participants defined Creole as being of mixed race. Most of my participants thought that Creole exclusively meant being mixed with French, Spanish, Native American and African. Only two of my participants, Gracie and Iris, spoke of White Creoles and Black Creoles. Many also reported being discriminated against by both White people and Black people as well because of being mixed. Francis spoke of the external prejudice that older generations of

Creole people experienced which they felt assaulted their identity. Because of this external prejudice, which is more with the older generation than the younger generation, Creole people became very protective of themselves and consequently very insular and clannish as a way of protecting their identity, according to Francis.

Susberry (2004) hypothesized that negative treatment by Blacks, negative treatment by Whites and perceived social status of Blacks would be push factors that would lead Creoles with multiple heritages to espouse an exclusively Creole heritage. However, she did not find this to be true. Most of her participants identified as Black. She concluded that perhaps these are not significant factors for Creoles. However, in my study Creoles of color reported being discriminated against by both Black and White people and did still identify as Creole.

However, some Creoles of color tried to evade this discrimination by either “passing” for White or “passing” for Black. For the obvious reason of having one’s life perceived to be made easier, some Creoles of color who could, did pass for White and were able to evade the discrimination that some of their brothers and sisters could not. In some cases, there is a hierarchy of skin colors of Creole people. Francis spoke of a picnic he went to and saw more beautiful Creole girls than he had seen before. His uncle told him not to get his hopes up because these young women were all looking to marry White or White-looking men and he was too dark for them. Another participant, James, spoke of his father bringing a date to a Creole event and at the door the young woman was not allowed in because she was too dark. Participant Leona spoke of how some Creole people discriminate against darker people. This does reflect the White privilege that is seen in broader society.

Francis coined the term for passing for Black: *Passé Negre*. Some Creole people found it advantageous because of things like affirmative action to pass for Black. They also passed for

Black to not be discriminated against by Black people and reduce their stress or just because Creole was not a recognized race, as participant Juanita stated.

Overall, for the most part, my participants were pleased with their physical features. In addition, several of my participants spoke of Creole pride. They are an exception to the research of Rockquemore (2002) who reported that much research shows that people need validation of their identities in order to live with that identity. Creoles' identities have for the most part not been validated by society. Yet they have strong ethnic identity achievement. My participants generally scored high on the MEIM, except for Gracie. So Creole people are validating each other's experiences as Creole, even if the rest of society is not doing so. As participant Veronica said, "[We have] a Creole heritage center, we have festivals, we have all sorts of books written about us, and we have our newsletter that is published in New York and she has *Cane River Roots* and she publishes all the things going on with our people..."

Several participants spoke of pride in being Creole. Juanita spoke of how, as a Creole, she came from some very prominent and successful people. Sue also said that "[Creole] is a very proud heritage, a very unique heritage." This Creole pride was reflected in my participants' MEIM scores. All of them had relatively high scores for ethnic identity achievement, except for Gracie, who had a relatively low score. Gracie said that she "never hid being Creole, but never celebrated it." Even though several of my participants spoke of Creole pride, one can see with Michael's description of the "paper bag test" that there is a tension between celebrating being Creole and the boundaries of who can be considered Creole.

Several of my participants in their description of what a Creole looks like alluded to lighter skin tones, "good (i.e., more Caucasian) hair," and "good features." In fact, when I was recruiting participants for my pilot study at a Creole conference in St. Charles, Illinois, a

phenotypically Black woman stood up and asked a question. I heard a light-skinned Creole woman say, “Who invited her?” Some of my study participants complained of being misidentified as Black, which did cause some negative reactions from these participants. However, only four of my 21 participants reported experiencing depression and several reported experiencing anxiety, though the majority reported experiencing racial stress.

Even though Creole people face much external racial stress from society at large, some Creole people also, as mentioned above, inflict racial stress on Creole people who are darker than they are. As Michael said earlier, a Creole woman did not consider him Creole because he did not pass the “paper bag test.” Michael, a fluent Creole speaker, said he had a disagreement with this woman over whether he was Creole. So the question is asked about what happens if one’s own ethnic group does not recognize one? Does that person not have high ethnic identity achievement? Francis is a good case of this. As a child, Francis was stigmatized by his relatives for being darker than his brother and sister. Francis, however, has high ethnic identity achievement and identifies as French Creole. Because all my participants except for Gracie, and perhaps JuJu, had relatively high ethnic identity achievement, for my participants the answer is seemingly that being discriminated against by other Creole people does not deter one from developing a Creole identity.

Several of my participants complained about the “one drop rule,” meaning that if you have one drop of Black blood, you are then considered Black. Most of my participants complained about being considered Black. Therefore, one question to answer about Creole people is if their Creole identity is a socio-positive one such as Jane developed or is it a defensive identity to categorize oneself as something other than Black. Though most of my participants did say that Black was in their racial mixture, they did not consider themselves

Black. However, one of my older participants, Cathy, who identified as French, said that there was no Black in her background even though she said her parents identified as mulatto. She did not know the meaning of mulatto.

My participants complained of the stress of being put into a racial category that they feel they do not belong in. Several also complained about feeling stress because they are not White enough to be White nor Black enough to be Black. They experience racial stress from feeling they do not belong anywhere. Several of my participants complained that this racial stress led to mental health problems. For most of them, it was more of a problem when they were younger, but some of them still experience that problem as adults.

Community and Community Support was the last theme of the study. Several participants voiced that other people do not know what Creole is. When I went to Louisiana to recruit Creole participants for this dissertation research, I stayed in an Airbnb home of a White Louisiana woman. When I told her I came to recruit Creole people at the 300<sup>th</sup> birthday party of a Creole man, she said, “Oh, a Black man.” This echoes what my Creole participants were saying about being assimilated into the Black racial category.

Some of my participants felt that they had community support for their Creole identity. By that they meant the Creole community, because other participants told me they got no support whatsoever for their Creole identity from the community. My participant, Iris, said that people who have lived in Louisiana their whole lives do not know what Creole means. It appears that the Creole Renaissance is by Creoles for Creoles. The general population continues to, as participant Leona said, “... consider anybody you know who is tan or brown or whatever, they clump you altogether as Black people”.

A critique many Creole people made of Creole people is that they are clannish and tend to stick together. If Creole people want to be considered a distinct racial or census group by society, they are going to have to educate other people. There should be public education about what Creole is. Most of the research on Creole people has been done by White scholars. This pattern may contribute to the view that Creole people are what my participant Marie says is “a lighter-skinned Black person.” Race scholars as well as the general population need to understand that Creole people can be proud of all their heritages – the French, the Spanish, the Native American and the African. Certainly, there is Creole pride, but because of the colorism exhibited by Creole people against darker-skinned Creole people, this Creole pride also comes into tension with the broader social pattern of the privilege of whiteness. However, according to what my participants told me, Creole people who discriminate against darker Creole people are in the minority, at least with the Creole people I interviewed.

The Creole Renaissance has energized Creole people and even informed some people who were not sure before that they are Creole. Participant JuJu cemented her identity as Creole when Creole activist Terrell Dauphin of the Creole Heritage Center helped JuJu and her parents realize they were Creole. However, a limitation of the Creole Renaissance has been that they are “preaching to the choir,” that is, they are informing Creoles of the knowledge about Creoles. The Creole Heritage Center and other organizations like La Creole are organizations by and for Creole people. These organizations would be performing a service for society if they also educated society at large about what Creole is.

#### E. **Limitations**

This study was primarily qualitative and therefore produced rich, in-depth data that suggested some patterns, such as the achievement of a strong Creole of color racial/ethnic

identity may buffer Creoles from the lasting psychological damage of racial stress. Qualitative approaches are useful for exploring under-investigated phenomena and, therefore, were appropriate for this study. However, the information gleaned is not directly generalizable. Even though I found trends, such as how the majority of my participants formed their Creole identity through intergenerational transmission, I cannot state with high statistical probability that this information reflects the larger population.

In addition, the sample was purposive with some snowball sampling as well. Purposive sampling allowed an in-depth exploration of the research questions to uncover theoretically interesting information, but the results would be more generalizable with a random sample. This study's results should be followed up in a larger quantitative study.

Recruitment produced a sample that was also limited in key demographics. Although the sample was diverse in terms of income, education, vocation, and, to some extent, area of residence, most participants were middle age or above, placing them in a cohort that grew up prior to or early in the Civil Rights era. Most participants also grew up in a Creole community and received a strong identity through intergenerational transmission. These sample characteristics made it difficult to compare different identity pathways or experiences of racialized treatment. Even though I used the demographic screening questionnaire to help me choose participants, and I was able to recruit individuals from different parts of Louisiana and elsewhere in the country, my choices were limited. Future studies would benefit from representation across a broader range of ages and identity pathways.

Another potential limitation of this study is that the results of the RSE and BDI-II might not be accurate because these scales are vulnerable to response bias. It would have been good if the results of these scales could be triangulated with responses from similar surveys, or if the

surveys were repeated throughout the study. The results of the BDI-II are particularly difficult to embrace as an overall response because they measure depression for only a two-week period before the scale was administered. To get a more accurate picture of participants' experiences of depression, the scale would have to be administered several times over the course of the study. Despite these drawbacks, I obtained interesting information that produced some promising answers to the research questions as well as further questions for inquiry.

#### F. **Future Directions**

The findings of this research can contribute to future studies on race, ethnic identity formation, and mental health. More specifically, the social and psychological well-being of Creole people of color has been severely under-investigated, and these findings help develop a long-needed knowledge base. A critically important area of future work will be the development and testing of interventions and social supports for Creole children and adults who experience discrimination and prejudice.

As mentioned before, in addition to further qualitative inquiry into the life experience of Creole people of color, their identity and mental health experiences should be investigated in a larger quantitative study to test the statistical significance of findings that are suggested in this study. A quantitative study can examine whether Creole people of color generally form their Creole identity through intergenerational transmission. Also, a large quantitative sample can answer the question of whether Creole of color is a highly salient identity according to many Creole individuals' MEIM scores. Finally, a longitudinal study would be helpful to investigate whether Creole people of color experience mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. My findings are just a snapshot and may not hold up as reliable over time.



## G. **Conclusion**

### 1. **Addressing gaps in the literature**

For the Literature Review of this dissertation I found little research on Creole identity and Creoles' experience of stress and mental health. I first discussed my pilot study which informed this research. The pilot study and this dissertation study had many similar findings and a few differences. Similarities included how Creole people choose to racially identify, that many Creole people report having ethnic pride, and that Creole people feel they are pressured to racially identify as Black. Differences include how Creole people who grew up in Creole communities reported experiencing less stress from negative racial treatment in the pilot study, but not in the dissertation research. However, despite the fact that more than half of the participants in the dissertation study reported experiencing stress from racialized treatment toward Creoles, they scored high in self-esteem and low in depression. Their apparent psychological resilience in the face of negative racial treatment may be related to their notably high levels of ethnic identity and expressed cultural pride. This pattern aligns with past research studies suggesting that strong ethnic identity enhances psychological well-being (Mossakowski, 2003).

The Literature Review also focused on multiracial identity and how multiracial people racially identify in other ways than Black (Rockquemore, 1998; Root, 1996). There was also a section on Creole background and history beginning with their ancestors, the gens de couleur libre of the 18<sup>th</sup> century up until the Creoles of the present day. Gender played a part in the Creole experience, so there was a section on the effect of gender and other intersectional dimensions on multiracial identity (Rockquemore, 2002; Root, 1998). I did not find any literature on Creole mental health specifically except for articles on Haitian Creoles' psychological

responses to the 2010 earthquake (James, 2013; McShane, 2011). However, I found literature on multiracial people, stress, and mental health (Bratter and Eschbach, 2005; Roberts et al., 2004) which reported that multiracial people experience more psychological distress than other groups.

The Results chapter reported the findings of the quantitative instruments for my participants, and the themes and sub-themes found in the qualitative thematic analysis. The RSE indicated that my participants, for the most part, had high self-esteem. The MEIM reported that almost all of them had high ethnic identity achievement. The BDI-II revealed that none of them had symptoms of depression when the scale was administered. Thematic analysis produced five major themes--Creole Identity; The Place of Race in Creole Experience; Devaluation, Prejudice and Negative Treatment; Stress and Mental Health; and Community and Community Support--and many sub-themes.

In the Discussion chapter I answered the research questions and discussed additional concepts that the data yielded. For the first research question, "In terms of stress, how do Louisiana Creole people of color experience stress?" The data revealed that they experience stress in a variety of ways. For some it was just a negative experience that did not have further consequences, while some of them experienced strong emotions such as anger and anxiety. The second research question was, "What is the relationship between the multiracial identity of Louisiana Creole people of color, adjustments to the stress of negative racial treatment and mental illness? How does multiracial identity mediate stress and the mental health of Louisiana Creole people of color?" I found that society's reaction to multiracial identity can be a source of stress for Creole people and several of my participants thought this stress led to mental health problems. The third research question, "How does one's particular path to identity affect mental health outcomes from the perspective of Louisiana Creole people of color?" led to the discovery

that the majority of the participants developed their Creole identity directly through intergenerational transmission. Because five of the individuals who developed a mental illness developed their Creole identity through intergenerational transmission and four of them did not, the results are inconclusive. I used a relatively small sample of 21 participants. This study should be repeated as a quantitative study with a larger sample in order to answer this research question.

This research helped establish a foundation of information about identity and mental health in the literature of Creole people of color. In the Literature Review, I mention that there was no information about the mental health of Louisiana Creole people of color. This research revealed that Creoles of color experience mental health problems such as depression and anxiety that they feel are related to the stress of perceived unfair racial treatment. Though my participants experienced mental health challenges growing up, the BDI-II revealed that none of them was experiencing depression, at least not during the two weeks prior to the interview. This could be interpreted as how Creoles of color are very resilient and have adjusted to the racial stress they experience or perhaps if they were screened at another time some of them would have symptoms of depression.

Another gap this study spoke to is how Louisiana Creole people of color form their Creole identity. Though most multiracial people form their racial identity in stages or as a resolution of the problems that biracial and multiracial identity pose for the individual (Root, 1996), the Louisiana Creole people of color in this study formed their Creole identity through intergenerational transmission. This finding and the fact that their mixing is intergenerational makes them unique multiracial people.

Previous literature has not delineated how Creole people are unique among multiracial people. When I administered the MEIM, the results supported Creole of color as a unique, salient

identity. Whereas African Americans had a mean score of 3.07 and multiracial people had a mean score of 2.94 on the MEIM in a study by Roberts et al., (1999), my Creole participants scored higher than both groups, with a mean score of 3.35. African Americans are generally thought to have a salient identity, but this group of Creoles of color scored even higher and not as other multiracial people do. This idea of uniqueness is reinforced by the finding that the study participants formed their Creole identity in ways different from how multiracial people form their racial identity. I feel this supports Creoles of color in wanting to identify other than African American. Whereas Creoles of color are generally considered Black, and key informant John LaFleur stated that Creole is a Latin ethnicity, an interesting finding of this research was that the majority of the Creole of color participants in this study saw themselves as a culture and a race.

## 2. **Closing reflection**

I will end with a reflection on the question of researcher bias and representation. Because I had a Creole mother and grew up in a Creole community, I can be viewed as an insider to this group. I tried to maintain a reflexive stance. Charmaz (2006) states, “*What* we define as data and *how* we look at them matters because these acts shape what we *can* see and learn.” (p. 132). I knew I had certain opinions and had to make sure that I let the data tell me what the participants meant. I was co-constructing their stories with them and I had to be true to their ideas.

I tried to reach that goal and hope my efforts were successful. I feel encouraged about two other goals: 1) A researcher who identifies herself as a Creole of color conducted this research and is writing this dissertation. 2) Relating the multiracial identity of Creole people to the stress of negative racial treatment and relating the stress of this unfair racial treatment to mental health issues is a new contribution to the literature on Creole people of color.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

#### ROSENBERG SELF-ESTEEM SCALE

Scale:

##### Instructions

Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

- |   |                |       |          |                   |
|---|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| 1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.                                  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 2. At times I think I am no good at all.                                      | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.                             | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.                       | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.                                  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 6. I certainly feel useless at times.   | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others. | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.                               | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.                     | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.                                 | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

## APPENDIX B

### Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure

54

#### *12- Item Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure*

In this country, people come from many different countries and cultures, and there are many different words to describe the different backgrounds or ethnic groups that people come from. Some examples of the names of ethnic groups are Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, Asian American, Chinese, Filipino, American Indian, Mexican American, Caucasian or White, Italian American, and many others. These questions are about your ethnicity or your ethnic group and how you feel about it or react to it.

Please fill in: In terms of ethnic group, I consider myself to be \_\_\_\_\_  
Use the numbers below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

(4) Strongly agree (3) Agree (2) Disagree (1) Strongly disagree

1- I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.

2- I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group.

3- I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.

4- I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership.

5- I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to.

6- I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.

7- I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.

8- In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group.

9- I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group.

10- I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs.

11- I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.

12- I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background.

## APPENDIX C

### Beck Depression Inventory – II (BDI-II)

BDI - II	
<p>Instructions: This questionnaire consists of 21 groups of statements. Please read each group of statements carefully. And then pick out the one statement in each group that best describes the way you have been feeling during the past two weeks, including today. Circle the number beside the statement you have picked. If several statements in the group seem to apply equally well, circle the highest number for that group. Be sure that you do not choose more than one statement for any group, including Item 16 (Changes in Sleeping Pattern) or Item 18 (Changes in Appetite).</p>	
<p><b>1. Sadness</b></p> <p>0. I do not feel sad.</p> <p>1. I feel sad much of the time.</p> <p>2. I am sad all the time.</p> <p>3. I am so sad or unhappy that I can't stand it.</p> <p><b>2. Pessimism</b></p> <p>0. I am not discouraged about my future.</p> <p>1. I feel more discouraged about my future than I used to.</p> <p>2. I do not expect things to work out for me.</p> <p>3. I feel my future is hopeless and will only get worse.</p> <p><b>3. Past Failure</b></p> <p>0. I do not feel like a failure.</p> <p>1. I have failed more than I should have.</p> <p>2. As I look back, I see a lot of failures.</p> <p>3. I feel I am a total failure as a person.</p>	<p><b>4. Loss of Pleasure</b></p> <p>0. I get as much pleasure as I ever did from the things I enjoy.</p> <p>1. I don't enjoy things as much as I used to.</p> <p>2. I get very little pleasure from the things I used to enjoy.</p> <p>3. I can't get any pleasure from the things I used to enjoy.</p> <p><b>5. Guilty Feelings</b></p> <p>0. I don't feel particularly guilty.</p> <p>1. I feel guilty over many things I have done or should have done.</p> <p>2. I feel quite guilty most of the time.</p> <p>3. I feel guilty all of the time.</p> <p><b>6. Punishment Feelings</b></p> <p>0. I don't feel I am being punished.</p> <p>1. I feel I may be punished.</p> <p>2. I expect to be punished.</p> <p>3. I feel I am being punished.</p>
<p><b>7. Self-Dislike</b></p> <p>0. I feel the same about myself as ever.</p> <p>1. I have lost confidence in myself.</p> <p>2. I am disappointed in myself.</p> <p>3. I dislike myself.</p> <p><b>8. Self-Criticalness</b></p> <p>0. I don't criticize or blame myself more than usual.</p> <p>1. I am more critical of myself than I used to be.</p> <p>2. I criticize myself for all of my faults.</p> <p>3. I blame myself for everything bad that happens.</p> <p><b>9. Suicidal Thoughts or Wishes</b></p> <p>0. I don't have any thoughts of killing myself.</p> <p>1. I have thoughts of killing myself, but I would not carry them out.</p> <p>2. I would like to kill myself.</p> <p>3. I would kill myself if I had the chance.</p> <p><b>10. Crying</b></p> <p>0. I don't cry anymore than I used to.</p> <p>1. I cry more than I used to.</p> <p>2. I cry over every little thing.</p> <p>3. I feel like crying, but I can't.</p>	<p><b>11. Agitation</b></p> <p>0. I am no more restless or wound up than usual.</p> <p>1. I feel more restless or wound up than usual.</p> <p>2. I am so restless or agitated, it's hard to stay still.</p> <p>3. I am so restless or agitated that I have to keep moving or doing something.</p> <p><b>12. Loss of Interest</b></p> <p>0. I have not lost interest in other people or activities.</p> <p>1. I am less interested in other people or things than before.</p> <p>2. I have lost most of my interest in other people or things.</p> <p>3. It's hard to get interested in anything.</p> <p><b>13. Indecisiveness</b></p> <p>0. I make decisions about as well as ever.</p> <p>1. I find it more difficult to make decisions than usual.</p> <p>2. I have much greater difficulty in making decisions than I used to.</p> <p>3. I have trouble making any decisions.</p>

## APPENDIX C (continued)

### 14. Worthlessness

- o. I do not feel I am worthless.
- 1. I don't consider myself as worthwhile and useful as I used to.
- 2. I feel more worthless as compared to others.
- 3. I feel utterly worthless.

### 15. Loss of Energy

- o. I have as much energy as ever.
- 1. I have less energy than I used to have.
- 2. I don't have enough energy to do very much.
- 3. I don't have enough energy to do anything.

### 16. Changes in Sleeping Pattern

- o. I have not experienced any change in my sleeping. 1a I sleep somewhat more than usual.
- 1b I sleep somewhat less than usual.
- 2a I sleep a lot more than usual.
- 2b I sleep a lot less than usual.
- 3a I sleep most of the day.
- 3b I wake up 1-2 hours early and can't get back to sleep.

### 17. Irritability

- o. I am not more irritable than usual.
- 1. I am more irritable than usual.
- 2. I am much more irritable than usual.
- 3. I am irritable all the time.

### 18. Changes in Appetite

- o. I have not experienced any change in my appetite.
- 1a My appetite is somewhat less than usual.
- 1b My appetite is somewhat greater than usual.
- 2a My appetite is much less than before.
- 2b My appetite is much greater than usual.
- 3a I have no appetite at all.
- 3b I crave food all the time.

### 19. Concentration Difficulty

- o. I can concentrate as well as ever.
- 1. I can't concentrate as well as usual.
- 2. It's hard to keep my mind on anything for very long.
- 3. I find I can't concentrate on anything.

### 20. Tiredness or Fatigue

- o. I am no more tired or fatigued than usual.
- 1. I get more tired or fatigued more easily than usual.
- 2. I am too tired or fatigued to do a lot of the things I used to do.
- 3. I am too tired or fatigued to do most of the things I used to do.

### 21. Loss of Interest in Sex

- o. I have not noticed any recent change in my interest in sex.
- 1. I am less interested in sex than I used to be.
- 2. I am much less interested in sex now.
- 3. I have lost interest in sex completely.

Total Score: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX D**

## Focus Group Guide

How do other people racially identify Creole people? What do Creole people think of Creole people passing as white? What do Creole people think about Creole people identifying as African American?

What are the essential characteristics of being a Creole, e.g., do you need to speak the Creole language or have a certain physical appearance? Probe: Is Creole a race or ethnicity? Probe: Should Creole people have their own Census category

Do Creole people suffer any discrimination if they racially identify as Creole to others? Does the stress of racial discrimination, if any exists, exacerbate mental health problems in Creole people like depression, anxiety and other mental health issues?

Does the racial composition of the friends and close family when a Creole person is growing up and when they are an adult affect how they racially identify?

I will read the questions I plan to ask individual Creole persons in a telephone interview. Are there any comments on the questions and how they are worded? Should any questions be added to capture the Creole experience?

**APPENDIX E**

## Semi-Structured Individual Interview Guide

1. What do you think are the essential characteristics of being a Creole? (Probe: Do you need to speak the Creole language to be Creole? Probe: Do you feel that Creole is a racial status?). Tell me about how other individuals feel about your choice of Creole as a racial identity?
2. This project examines how having an identity as a Creole person influences the lives of persons who are Creole. Describe the process, if any, that you went through in forming your Creole identity.
3. What stress, if any, do you have in your life because of your racial status and/or your racial identity? (Probe: Describe incidents of discrimination, if any you have experienced because Of your racial status? Probe: Has this stress led to any mental health issues like depression, anxiety or other mental health problems?)
4. What are the sources of support for your Creole identity? Family? Community? Other sources? (Probe: What was the racial composition of your network of friends when you were growing up and what is it right now? Probe: Describe any pressure you feel from any individuals to choose a single racial identity.)
5. How do you feel about the physical features you have acquired from your different racial heritages. (Probe: How do you feel about the features related to your (Caucasian, French, African – use the participant's own words)?).
6. Is there anything else important about your experience as a Creole person that I should know?



## APPENDIX F

### Institution Review Board (IRB) Approval Letter

#### UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS)  
Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research (MC 672)  
203 Administrative Office Building  
1737 West Polk Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60612-7227

#### Approval Notice Initial Review (Response To Modifications)

May 13, 2013

Andrea Cooke, MA  
Disability and Human Development  
3445 S Rhodes Ave, #1207  
Chicago, IL 60616  
Phone: (312) 328-6655 / Fax: (312) 996-0885

**RE: Protocol # 2012-1050**  
**"Experiences, Identity, and Mental Health of Creole People and White/Black**  
**Multiracial Individuals"**

Dear Ms. Cooke:

Your Initial Review (Response To Modifications) was reviewed and approved by the Expedited review process on April 29, 2013. You may now begin your research

Please note the following information about your approved research protocol:

**Protocol Approval Period:** April 29, 2013 - April 29, 2014  
**Approved Subject Enrollment #:** 70  
**Additional Determinations for Research Involving Minors:** These determinations have not been made for this study since it has not been approved for enrollment of minors.  
**Performance Sites:** UIC  
**Sponsor:** None  
**PAF#:** Not Applicable  
**Research Protocol(s):**  
a) Research Protocol (no date); Version 1;  
**Recruitment Material(s):**  
a) Screening Tool; Version 1; 02/23/2013  
b) Recruitment Flyer; Version 2; 02/27/2013  
**Informed Consent(s):**  
a) Creole People, White/Black Multiracial Individuals and Stress; Version 2; 02/27/2013  
b) A waiver of documentation of consent has been granted under 45 CFR 46.116(d) for screening purposes only; minimal risk; written consent will be obtained at enrollment.

Your research meets the criteria for expedited review as defined in 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) under the following specific category(ies):

Phone: 312-996-1711

<http://www.uic.edu/depts/over/oprs/>

FAX: 312-413-2929

## APPENDIX F (continued)

Page 2 of 2

- (6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.,  
 (7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including but not limited to research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

**Please note the Review History of this submission:**

Receipt Date	Submission Type	Review Process	Review Date	Review Action
11/28/2012	Initial Review	Expedited	11/30/2012	Modifications Required
03/01/2013	Response To Modifications	Expedited	03/07/2013	Modifications Required
04/24/2013	Response To Modifications	Expedited	04/29/2013	Approved

Please remember to:

→ Use your **research protocol number** (2012-1050) on any documents or correspondence with the IRB concerning your research protocol.

→ Review and comply with all requirements on the enclosure.

**"UIC Investigator Responsibilities, Protection of Human Research Subjects"**

*(<http://tiger.uic.edu/depts/ovcr/research/protocolreview/irb/policies/0924.pdf>)*

**Please note that the UIC IRB has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.**

**Please be aware that if the scope of work in the grant/project changes, the protocol must be amended and approved by the UIC IRB before the initiation of the change.**

We wish you the best as you conduct your research. If you have any questions or need further help, please contact OPRS at (312) 996-1711 or me at (312) 355-0816. Please send any correspondence about this protocol to OPRS at 203 AOB, M/C 672.

Sincerely,

Alison Santiago, MSW, MJ  
 IRB Coordinator, IRB # 2  
 Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

Enclosure(s):

1. **UIC Investigator Responsibilities, Protection of Human Research Subjects**
2. **Informed Consent Document(s):**
  - a) Creole People, White/Black Multiracial Individuals and Stress; Version 2; 02/27/2013
3. **Recruiting Material(s):**
  - a) Screening Tool; Version 1; 02/23/2013
  - b) Recruitment Flyer; Version 2; 02/27/2013

cc: Tamar Heller, Disability and Human Development, M/C 626  
 Carol J. Gill (Faculty Advisor), Disability and Human Development, M/C 626

## APPENDIX G

### Research Consent Form



**University of Illinois at Chicago**  
**Research Information and Consent for Participation in Social Behavioral Research**  
**Experiences, Identity, and Mental Health of Creole People**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Researchers are required to provide a consent form such as this one to tell you about the research, to explain that taking part is voluntary, to describe the risks and benefits of participation, and to help you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Principal Investigator Name and Title: Ms. Andrea M. Cooke  
 Department and Institution: Dept. of Disability and Human Development, University of Illinois  
 Address and Contact Information: 1640 W. Roosevelt Road, Room 436, Chicago, IL 60608  
 Faculty Sponsor: Carol J. Gill, Ph.D.

**Why am I being asked?**

You are being asked to be a subject in a research study about racial identity formation and the mental health of Louisiana Creole people of color.

You have been asked to participate in the research because you are 18 years of age or older and you are a Creole person of color.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future dealings with the University of Illinois at Chicago. **If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.**

Approximately 30 subjects may be involved in this research at UIC.

**What is the purpose of this research?**

The purpose of this research is to learn more about the racial identity of Creole people and to learn how certain factors affect their mental health.

## APPENDIX G (continued)

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### **What procedures are involved?**

This research will be performed over the telephone or in person. Participants will either be interviewed over the telephone individually, in a group interview, or in focus groups. Each interview or group will take approximately 90 minutes. The individual interviews and the group interview will be guided by a set of specific open-ended questions and the focus groups will be given a number of general questions designed to elicit information on the Creole experience, identity, and mental health and will contain approximately 6 people each. In addition each participant will be asked to give answers to three questionnaires about their experiences and feelings. All interviews (individual, group, and focus) will be audio-recorded. The audiorecorded interviews will be transcribed within three weeks of audio-recording.

### **What are the potential risks and discomforts?**

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life except for the risk of loss of privacy or loss of confidentiality.

### **Are there benefits to taking part in the research?**

This study is not designed to benefit you directly. This study is designed to learn more about the Creole experience, identity, and mental health. The study results may be used to help other people in the future.

### **What other options are there?**

You have the option to not participate in this study.

### **What about privacy and confidentiality?**

The people who will know that you are a research subject are members of the research team. Otherwise information about you will only be disclosed to others with your written permission, or if necessary to protect your rights or welfare or if required by law. Those in the family group interview will know who participated. Also, UIC OPRS may monitor the research too.

Study information which identifies you and the consent form signed by you will be looked at and/or copied for checking up on the research by the University of Illinois Office for the Protection of Research Subjects.

When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity. Your interview transcript will not contain any information that can identify you. Your name will not be associated with your interview; your interview will be given a number. Your personal information will be kept separately in a locked file cabinet that is only accessible to the Principal Investigator and her academic sponsor. The tapes of the interviews will be destroyed one year after the study is completed. If you prefer not to be recorded, please check here \_\_\_\_.

*For the focus group and group interview:* If you participate in a focus group discussion, other participants will hear your responses to questions. Although we ask everyone in the group to

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## APPENDIX G (continued)

respect everyone's privacy and confidentiality, and not to identify anyone in the group or repeat what is said during the group discussion, please remember that other participants in the group may accidentally disclose what was said.

The State of Illinois auditors may monitor the research.

### **What are the costs for participating in this research?**

There are no costs associated with participating in this study.

You will not be offered payment for being in this study.

### **Can I withdraw or be removed from the study?**

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time. You only need to inform the Principal Investigator, Andrea Cooke, that you wish to withdraw from the study.

The Researchers also have the right to stop your participation in this study without your consent if they believe that it is in your best interests, for example, if participation is causing you too much emotional distress.

### **Who should I contact if I have questions?**

Contact the researcher, Andrea Cooke, M.A. at [a-cooke@sbcglobal.net](mailto:a-cooke@sbcglobal.net) or 708-381-9088 or contact Carol Gill, Ph.D. at [cg16@uic.edu](mailto:cg16@uic.edu) 312-355-0550.

- if you have any questions about this study or your part in it
- if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research.

### **What are my rights as a research subject?**

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, including questions, concerns, complaints, or to offer input, you may call the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) at 312996-1711 or 1-866-789-6215 (toll-free) or e-mail OPRS at [uicirb@uic.edu](mailto:uicirb@uic.edu).

### **Remember:**

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

Do you consent to be recontacted for clarification of your answers and to share project findings with you?      yes      no. Please place a check in front of your answer, yes or no.

**APPENDIX G (continued)**

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**Signature of Subject or Legally Authorized Representative**

I have read (or someone has read to me) the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research. I will be given a copy of this signed and dated form.

---

Signature

---

Date

---

Printed Name

---

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

---

Date

---

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

## APPENDIX H

### Research Screening Questions

Dissertation Research Project Screening Tool



P.I. : In order to determine your eligibility to participate in the study, please answer the following questions:

1. Are you 18 years of age or older?
2. Do you racially identify as a Creole person ?

**APPENDIX I**

## Recruitment Flyer

**SEEKING LOUISIANA CREOLE PEOPLE OF COLOR  
FOR RESEARCH STUDY**

ALL AGES 18 AND OLDER WANTED TO PARTICIPATE IN A

RESEARCH STUDY THAT

FIRST LOOKS AT HOW STRESS ASSOCIATED WITH PERCEIVED

UNFAIR RACIAL TREATMENT AFFECTS THE MENTAL HEALTH

OF LOUISIANA CREOLE PEOPLE OF COLOR AND, SECONDLY,

LOOKS AT RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN THIS GROUP

OF PEOPLE. THE RESEARCH INVOLVES EITHER PARTICIPATING

IN INDIVIDUAL TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS OR PARTICIPATING

IN TELEPHONE FOCUS GROUPS. LOOKING FOR INDIVIDUALS

WHO HAVE NOT EXPERIENCED MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

AND FOR THOSE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED DEPRESSION AND

OTHER MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS.


YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY WILL BE PROTECTED. TO PARTICIPATE



APPENDIX J

Recruitment Brochure

*CREOLES SOCIAL CLUB*



To volunteer to participate in this study contact:


Andrea Cooke  
Phone: 312-328-6655  
Email: [acooke3@uic.edu](mailto:acooke3@uic.edu)

OR

Dr. Carol Gill  
Email: [cq16@uic.edu](mailto:cq16@uic.edu)


**APPROVED**

DATE: 6/12/2018

 UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Experiences, Recruitment Brochure, V.2, 8/18/16 Page 4 of 4

**CREOLE RESEARCH  
STUDY**



*Principal Investigator, Andrea Cooke*

Experiences, Recruitment Brochure, V.2, 8/18/16 Page 1 of 4

APPENDIX J (continued)

Creole Research Study

This study, *Experiences, Identity and Mental Health of Louisiana Creole People of Color*, looks at racial/ethnic identity formation in Louisiana mixed-raced Creoles and also looks at the impact of race-related stress on the mental health of these Louisiana Creoles of Color.



Andrea Cooke, the researcher, self-identifies as a mixed-race Creole, and hopes that this research will be of benefit to the Creole community. There has been in the past much misunderstanding of what a Creole is. Dubois and Melancon (2000) identify three kinds of Creoles:

1. Black Creoles – descendants of slaves brought by the French from Africa to Louisiana by way of Haiti.
2. White Creoles – descendants of white French people who immigrated to Louisiana during the 18th and 19th centuries
3. Creoles of Color – descendants of the unions of African slaves and persons of one or more of French, Spanish, and/or Native American heritages.

This study looks at the lives of Creoles of Color. The researcher hopes to bring the identity of these Creoles to the public eye and by finding out information about how race-related stress impacts the mental health of Creole people of color to help create interventions that might prevent the development of mental illness in this population.

METHOD

Each participant (research subject) will be interviewed either individually in person or over the telephone OR in a group over the telephone from 30- 90 minutes, and the interview will be audio-recorded. Participants will also have to answer three short psychological questionnaires about their experiences and feelings.

PARTICIPANTS

Each participant must be 18 years of age or older  
Must identify himself or herself as a Creole of Color

INCENTIVE

Everyone who agrees to participate in this study will have his or her name entered into a drawing to win an AMAZON FIRE  
TABLET. Chances of winning the tablet are approximately 1 in 30

## APPENDIX K

**TABLE IV**  
**PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC DATA AND INSTRUMENT SCORES**

Name	Income	SES Childhood Background	Mother's Racial Background	Mother's Education	Father's Racial Background	Father's Education	MEIM	RSES <sup>1</sup>	BECK -II <sup>2</sup>
Cindy	35,001- 50,000	lower middle bracket	Creole	1 year college	White	high school diploma	3.5	36	6
Nancy	doesn't know	poor	Creole	no high school diploma	unknown	unknown	3.42	35	9
Bruno	35,001- 50,000	middle bracket	Creole	some college	Creole	some college	3.17	36	4
Popinno	50,001- 65,000	poor	Creole	no high school diploma	Creole	no high school diploma	3	39	2
Grandma	below 11,171	poor	Creole	no high school diploma	Creole	no high school diploma	3.08	40	4
Cathy	20,001- 35,000	lower middle bracket	Creole	no high school diploma	Creole	no high school diploma	2.75	34	6
Joan	100,001- 500,000	middle bracket	White	B.A.	Creole	no high school diploma	3.75	40	6
Veronica	35,001- 50,000	lower middle bracket	Creole	no high school diploma	Creole	no high school diploma	3.83	38	4
JuJu	50,001- 65,000	lower middle bracket	Creole	high school diploma or GED	Creole	no high school diploma	2.83	35	10

<sup>1</sup>Scores < 16 = low self-esteem; <sup>2</sup>Scores < 14 = none or minimal depression; 14-19 = mild depression; 20-28 = moderate depression; 29-63 = severe depression

**APPENDIX K (continued)**

**TABLE IV (continued)**  
**PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC DATA AND INSTRUMENT SCORES**

Name	Income	SES Childhood Background	Mother's Racial Background	Mother's Education	Father's Racial Background	Father's Education	MEIM	RSES <sup>1</sup>	BECK -II <sup>2</sup>
Juanita	20,001- 35,000	upper middle bracket	Creole	some college	Creole	high school diploma or GED	3.75	40	3
James	100,001- 500,000	upper middle bracket	Creole	high school diploma or GED	Creole	Associate's degree	4	39	0
Marie	100,001- 500,000	poor	Creole	no high school diploma	Creole	no high school diploma	3.25	30	8
Gracie	11,171- 20,000	lower middle bracket	Creole	no high school diploma	Creole	high school diploma or GED	2.17	35	8
John	80,001- 100,000	poor	Creole	high school diploma or GED	Black	no high school diploma	3.17	40	4
Ophelia	20,001- 35,000	poor	Creole	no high school diploma	Creole	no high school diploma	3.83	36	12
Iris	35,001- 50,000	middle bracket	Creole	high school diploma or GED	Creole	technical college	4	40	2

<sup>1</sup>Scores < 16 = low self-esteem; <sup>2</sup>Scores < 14 = none or minimal depression; 14-19 = mild depression; 20-28 = moderate depression; 29-63 = severe depression

## APPENDIX K (continued)

**TABLE IV (continued)**  
**PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC DATA AND INSTRUMENT SCORES**

Name	Income	SES Childhood Background	Mother's Racial Background	Mother's Education	Father's Racial Background	Father's Education	MEIM	RSES <sup>1</sup>	BECK- II <sup>2</sup>
Francis	100,001- 500,000	middle bracket	Creole	M.A.	Creole	B.S.	3.92	39	1
Sue	100,001- 500,000	middle bracket	Creole	high school diploma or GED	Creole	high scholl diploma or GED	2.92	37	8
Michael	35,001- 50,000	lower middle bracket	Creole	no high school diploma	N/A	N/A	3	40	1
Leona	65,001- 80,000	middle/ upper middle bracket	Creole	high school diploma or GED	Creole	no high school diploma	4	40	3
Jane	50,001- 65,000	lower middle bracket	Creole	high school diploma or GED	Creole	high school diploma or GED	3	39	3

<sup>1</sup>Scores < 16 = low self-esteem; <sup>2</sup>Scores < 14 = none or minimal depression; 14-19 = mild depression; 20-28 = moderate depression; 29-63 = severe depression

## **VITA**

ANDREA MARIA COOKE

### **EDUCATION**

Ph.D. Candidate in Disability Studies, University of Illinois at Chicago, Expected Graduation: August 2020

A.M. in Social Work, University of Chicago, 2002

A.M. in General Studies in the Humanities, University of Chicago, 1986

A.B. in Linguistics, University of Chicago, 1976

### **CERTIFICATIONS**

Certified Paralegal, 1984

Licensed Social Worker, 2005 – present

Certified Recovery Support Specialist, 2010-present

### **HONORS**

Diversifying Higher Education Faculty in Illinois Fellowship, Illinois Board of Higher Education, 2017-2020

Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy Dissertation Research Grant, 2016

Abraham Lincoln Fellowship, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2015-2016

Abraham Lincoln Fellowship, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2013-2014

Ann and Edward Page-El Scholarship, Department of Disability and Human Development, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2013

Carlos Drazen Memorial Scholarship, Department of Disability and Human Development, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2013

University Fellowship, Department of Disability and Human Development, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2007-2012

University Trustee Fellowship, University of Chicago, 1979

### **RESEARCH EXPERIENCE**

Experiences, Identity and Mental Health of Louisiana Creole People of Color, University of Illinois at Chicago, Principal investigator, January 2016-present

- Travelled to Louisiana twice and found and screened approximately 60 potential participants for the study
- Conducted a focus group and a family interview
- Conducted 18 individual in-depth interviews
- Completed thematic analysis for 20 interviews
- Wrote dissertation with the findings

Creoles: Identity and Mental Health, University of Illinois at Chicago, Principal Investigator, July 2008 – present

- Interviewed 14 participants who racially identified as Creole about how their racial identities were formed, whether they experienced race-related stress, and whether they experienced mental health issues
- Transcribed the data, organized the data using Atlas-ti, performed the data analysis
- Presented findings at Illinois Latino and African American Higher Education Association

Consumer Attitudes on Involuntary Commitment, Co-Investigator (Daniel Luchins, M.D., Principal Investigator), University of Chicago, Department of Psychiatry, July 2003 – September 2005

- Collaborated with principal investigator and co-investigators to formulate hypotheses for study
- Co-authored a questionnaire to define attitudes of this target population
- Performed literature review

University of Chicago Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, Research Intern, Tinley Park, Illinois, October 2000 – June 2001

- Extracted data from the Consumer-Operated Services Project on the lives of mental health consumers and created a sub-study
- Statistically demonstrated that mental health consumers who are also substance users use self-help more than those who are not substance users

Barriers for Consumers Seeking Services in Illinois in the 1990s, Mental Health Consumer Education Consortium (MHCEC), Principal Investigator, October 1999 – June 2001

- Adapted a questionnaire for the study
- Recruited 178 participants from the readership of MHCEC quarterly newsletter
- Analyzed the data using SPSS
- Presented findings at the National Conference on Mental Health Statistics, 2001

Women's Wellness Study, Research Intern (Sarah Gehlert, Ph.D., Principal Investigator), Missouri Institute for Mental Health, St. Louis, Missouri, June 1999 – October, 2000

- Examined the cases of women who appeared to have Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD) to find potential symptoms they had in common in an effort to help define PMDD
- Created a table of frequencies of occurrence of PMDD in the different populations studied
- Helped train field research assistants in how to administer the questionnaire for the study and how to collect the specimens

### **SELECTED RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

- Thornton Heights Terrace, Chicago Heights (psychiatric nursing home) , Illinois, Certified Recovery Support Specialist, 2017- present

- Brain Hurricane Inc., Chicago, Illinois, Lead Tutor, 2013-2014
- Smarthinking, Inc., Washington D.C. (online), Online Writing Tutor, 2013
- University of Illinois, Chicago, Illinois, Graduate Assistant, 2008-2011
- Thornton Heights Terrace, Chicago Heights, Illinois, Recovery Group Facilitator, 2007-2008
- Thresholds, Chicago, Illinois, Recovery Group Facilitator, 2006-2007
- Matteson School District #159, Matteson, Illinois, substitute teacher K-8, 2003-2006
- Education Specialties, Chicago, Illinois, Grant Proposal Editing Consultant, 2004
- National Opinion Research Center, Chicago, Illinois, Research Assistant, 2002-2003
- Mental Health Consumer Education Consortium, Chicago, Illinois, Executive Director, 1997 – 1999, Project Coordinator 1995-1997 (Developed mental health education programs; mentored mental health consumers in self-esteem and self-advocacy; advocated on behalf of mental health consumers with state agencies; performed public speaking statewide to create a mental health consumer network; produced newsletter; managed budget and fund raising.)

## **PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

National Association of Social Workers, 2007-2012, 2017- 2018

Chicago ADAPT, 1999-2001, 2004

World Federation for Mental Health, 1996

British Sociological Association, 2017-2020

## **COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIPS AND DIRECTORSHIPS**

- Illinois Mental Health Planning and Advisory Council, 2007- present, co-chair 2015-2018
- Region 1 Behavioral Health Regional Network (Illinois), 2012- 2013
- Community Mental Health Council Institutional Review Board, 1997- 2007; 2011-2012
- Chicago Consortium for Stigma Research, 2001-2006
- Public Policy Committee, Mental Health Association in Illinois, 1997-2007
- Mental Health Policy Round Table (Washington, D.C.), 2001-2004
- Equip for Equality, Board of Directors, 1998-2000
- National People of Color Caucus, 1998-1999
- Managed Care Subcommittee of the Joint Advisory Council of the Illinois Mental Health Service System, 1995-1999
- Joint Advisory Council of the Illinois Mental Health Service System, 1994-1999

## **PUBLICATIONS**

**Cooke, A.** (2017). Race and Mental Health. In: Heller, Parker Harris, Gill and Gould (Eds.) Disability in American Life: An Encyclopedia of Policies, Concepts, and Controversies. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLI



Angell, B., **Cooke, A.**, and Kovac, K. (2004). First-person accounts of stigma. In P. W. Corrigan (Ed.), *On The Stigma Of Mental Illness: Practical Strategies for Research and Social Change*, Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Rasinski, K. A., Woll, P., and **Cooke, A.** (2004). Stigma and substance use disorders. In P. W. Corrigan (Ed.), *On The Stigma Of Mental Illness: Practical Strategies for Research and Social Change*, Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

**Cooke, A. M.** (1997). The long journey back. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Skills*, 2(1), 33-36.

**Cooke, A.** (1996). Rights are universals. *The National Empowerment Newsletter*, Spring, 1996 (Selected by the National Empowerment Center as a top article for public dissemination).

## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

2020 “Experiences, Identity, and Mental Health of Louisiana Creole People of Color, presenter,

Diversifying Faculty in Illinois in Higher Education Conference 2020, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois

2018 “Experiences, Identity, and Mental Health of Louisiana Creole People of Color, presenter,

Illinois Latino Association of Higher Education Conference, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, Illinois

2014 “Creole People: Identity and Mental Health”, presenter, Illinois African American and Latino Higher Education Association Conference, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, Illinois

2010 “Professional Responsibility,” co-presenter, Division of Mental Health Certified Recovery Support Specialist training, Northwestern University, Chicago, Illinois

2008 “The Impact of Globalization on the Third World and on People with Psychiatric Disability, Presenter, Disability Studies Conference, Lancaster University, Lancaster, England

2007 “Secondary Conditions and Barriers to Health Promotion,” presenter, Illinois Division of Mental Health Region 1 Consumers’ Conference, Hillside, Illinois

2005 “The Role of the Consumer in Mental Health Research,” presenter, World Congress for Mental Health, Cairo, Egypt

2005 “Three Stakeholders’ Attitudes on Involuntary Treatment,” presenter, National Conference Mental Health Statistics, Washington, D.C.

2004 “The Effects of Stigma Upon the Formulation of Mental Health Policy.” Plenary Presenter, National Conference on Mental Health Statistics, Washington, D.C.

- 2002 “The Dually-Diagnosed and Self-Help,” presenter, National Mental Health Block Grant Conference, Washington, D.C.
- 2001 “Barriers for Consumers Seeking Services in Illinois in the 1990s,” National Conference On Mental Health Statistics, Washington, D.C.
- 1998 “Consumer Rights Under Managed Care,” Behavioral Healthcare Tomorrow, Chicago, Illinois

### **GUEST LECTURES**

“Creoles: Identity and Mental Health,” University of Illinois at Chicago, Disability Studies Program, Disability and Human Development 546 Qualitative Research, April 2012.

“The History of the Mental Health Consumer Movement,” University of Illinois at Chicago, Disability Studies Program, Disability and Human Development 501 Introduction to Disability Studies, September 2006.

### **DELEGATIONS**

- 2005 One of ten consumers nationwide selected by the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS) to present at the World Congress for Mental Health, Cairo, Egypt
- 2004 One of five consumers nationwide selected by CMHS to attend the International Conference on Functioning, Health and Disability, Halifax, Nova Scotia
- 1995 One of eight consumers nationwide selected by CMHS to attend the World Congress for Mental Health, Dublin, Ireland