

**BICULTURALISM AND IDENTITY**  
**IN**  
**CONTEMPORARY GULLAH FAMILIES**

by

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# **Biculturalism and Identity in Contemporary Gullah Families**

Peggy MacLeod Vogel

## **Abstract**

A qualitative study, using an oral history method was completed. Seven participants (2 men, 5 women) of Gullah descent from the St. Helena's Island and Charleston, South Carolina area were extensively interviewed. Symbolic interactionism provided the theoretical framework for the study. Findings included the recognition of the Gullah as a unique cultural group and the possible effects of slavery on identity formation for individuals as well as the Gullah community. Striking differences in physical space utilization between Gullah and non-Gullah residents were suggested. The presence of conflict between African and European beliefs and practices were seen in areas such as religious traditions, child rearing, and language. The pervasive effect of racism on identity and its relationship to biculturalism was discussed. Biculturalism appeared to be strongly related to survival as well as being an integral part of the participants' identities.

## **Dedication**

To my children,

Ricky Zimmermann

Sarah Zimmermann

Samantha Vogel

Adam Vogel

Philip Vogel

Judy Pearman Wheeler

To my husband,

Mike Vogel

To my parents,

Norman and Isadore MacLeod

To my brothers and sister,

Alex MacLeod, Dan MacLeod and Lynn Strom

To my godmother and her brother,

Sybel Fellows and Charlie Fellows

To my very best friends,

Sandi Brenner, Judy Hoffman, Rebecca Lowry, Nancy McGee and Sue Stroman

For all your sacrifice, love, and support, I dedicate this work to you.

Peggy MacLeod Vogel

February 25, 2000

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“Een all tings gee t’enks.”

Peggy MacLeod Vogel

February 25, 2000

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### Statement of the Problem

The Gullah are a unique group of African Americans descended from slaves brought from the Sierra Leone area of Africa to the Sea Islands off the coast of South Carolina, Georgia, and northern Florida during the 1700's and 1800's. Slaves from that area were thought to be able to physically tolerate the hot, humid conditions better than their owners or slaves from other areas. In addition to their physical hardiness, they also possessed specialized rice growing knowledge which was highly valued by the Sea Island plantation owners. These qualities were specifically sought by slave owners in the Sea Islands and the surrounding area. As a result, slaves from the Sierra Leone area tended to be concentrated in the Sea Islands area while slaves from other areas of Africa were often dispersed throughout the southern United States.

During the 1700's through the 1890's, the Gullah residents of the Sea Islands were fairly isolated. The plantation owners did not often come to the islands due to their difficulty tolerating the climate and their lack of immunity to diseases which often flourished in that hot and wet climate. Because of their isolation and the large number of slaves who came from the same area of Africa, the Gullah were more able to retain many



of their traditions and language from Sierra Leone than were slaves who came from other areas of Africa and who were scattered throughout the South.

The relative isolation of the Gullah continued until bridges to the mainland were built in the 1920's (Opala, 1987). Improved transportation, the influence of the media, and the advent of tourism have lessened the isolation of the Gullah community by increasing contact with people from the mainland and other countries. Presently, there are efforts underway, such as those of the Penn Institute on St. Helena's Island and of the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition, to preserve the Gullah culture before it is lost forever.

As more and more Gullah sons and daughters move to the mainland, as more and more non-Gullah influence is exerted on the community, and as more and more land is lost to development, how can Gullah families retain their Gullah identity while also being a member of the larger, more heterogeneous American society of the 21st century?

### **Purpose of the Study**

Much of what has been written about the Gullah community deals with history, linguistics, and the preservation of folklore and traditions (Branch, 1995, Green, 1996, Jones-Jackson, 1987, Opala, 1987). There is a paucity of information about contemporary Gullah families. The purpose of this study is twofold: to explore the processes by which generations of Gullah families pass on and use traditions and knowledge unique to their culture and to explore biculturalism and identity among contemporary Gullah families.

### **Theoretical Framework Guiding the Study**

Symbolic interaction was used to provide the theoretical framework for this study.

LaRossa and Reitzes (1993) stated that “symbolic interactionism is well suited for historical family research because historical data are often verbal. Letters, diaries and other personal documents - the mainstays of the historian - are symbolic interactions” (p. 158). May (1990) concluded that:

The symbolic interactionist viewpoint was an encompassing and broad perspective from which research can be productively conducted.... It should be viewed as a viable, if not preferable, base for future work pertaining to the development of the self in social contexts. (p. 492)

### **Operational Definitions of Key Terms and Concepts**

The following key terms which are pertinent to the study are herein defined:

1. Gullah - the term “Gullah” has two meanings in this study. It refers to a unique group of African Americans descended from slaves who were brought from the Sierra Leone area of Africa to the Sea Islands off the coast of South Carolina, Georgia, and northern Florida during the 1700’s and 1800’s.

The term “Gullah” also refers to a language often spoken by Gullah people. Opala (1987) described the Gullah language as an English - based creole language in which:

The vocabulary is largely from the English ‘target language,’ which is the speech of the socially and economically dominant group. The African ‘substrate

languages' have altered the pronunciation of almost all the English words, influenced the grammar and sentence structure, and provided a sizable minority of the vocabulary. (p. 15)

2. Family - the term "family" is used as defined by Gilgun (as cited in Gilgun, J.F., Daly, K. & Handel, G., 1992, p. 24). Family members include "persons who mutually define themselves as family, are in committed relationships, have a shared sense of personal history, and who usually, but not always, have legal and biological ties."

3. Multigeneration - the term "multigeneration" refers to more than two generations within the same family. The generations may or may not live within the same household.

4. Identity - the term "identity" refers to Stryker's definition of identity as self-meaning in a role (Stryker, 1968, p. 650).

5. Salience - the term "salience" refers to the probability of an identity being invoked in a given situation or in a variety of situations. Identities are hierarchically organized by "salience" (Stryker, 1968, p. 650).

6. Role - the term "role" refers to shared norms applied to the occupants of social positions (Heiss, 1981, p. 95).

7. Bicultural - the term "bicultural" refers to having two identities, one of which is as a Gullah and the other is as a member of the larger, multicultural American society.

8. Qualitative family research - although qualitative family research has been in use for decades and has its' roots in a number of different disciplines and theoretical perspectives, the term "qualitative family research" will, for the purposes of this investigation, be used as defined by Gilgun (as cited in Gilgun, J. F., Daly, K. & Handel , G. , 1992). It refers to:

Research with a focus on experiences within families as well as between families and outside systems; data are words or pictures and not numbers; the data are conceptualized, collected, analyzed, and interpreted qualitatively, the subjects or informants of the research are persons who mutually define themselves as family, are in committed relationships, have a shared sense of personal history, and who usually, but not always, have legal and biological ties. (p.24)

9. Sea Islands - the term "sea islands" refers to the islands located just off the coast of South Carolina, Georgia, and northern Florida. Islands such as St. Helena's Island, Hilton Head, and Daufuskie Island are included in this term.

### **Overview of the Study**

Indepth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals aged 18 years and older and who identified themselves as being "Gullah."

## **Participants**

In order to obtain different perspectives, participants included: (a) people who represented different generations within the same family; (b) people who were born or lived in the Sea Islands area at some time during their lives but who are not currently residing in the Sea Islands area or who have returned to the Sea Islands area to live after living somewhere else for a number of years; (c) people who are religious or secular leaders in the Gullah community; (d) people who were born in the Sea Islands area and who have remained in the area throughout their lives.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

As data was collected, it was coded and analyzed. Results were used to inform subsequent interviews. Results were compared across individuals and families as well as within families in order to “see differences and similarities more clearly, gaining insight into meanings and experiences that may be common to several families or unique to one family” (Murphy, 1992, p.155). This comparison involved investigating concepts and theoretical relationships derived from the verbal data provided by the participants. The analysis of each participant’s data helped to refine emerging theoretical concepts.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions were explored:

1. What does “being Gullah” mean to the study’s participants?
2. What is the role of biculturalism in contemporary Gullah families?

3. What role does the generational transmission of Gullah traditions and knowledge play in the development of identity?
4. How are Gullah child rearing practices linked to the development of identity?

### **Scope and Delimitations of the Study**

The present study was confined to an analysis of the participants' indepth interviews and to an analysis of field notes and observations made during the course of the investigation . As a qualitative study, the purpose was not to generalize to other unique cultural groups, but to explore contemporary Gullah family life and the development and maintenance of bicultural identity.

Interviews were conducted at mutually agreeable times and at mutually satisfactory locations. Interviews were audiotaped. Two tape recorders were used simultaneously in order to minimize possible recording difficulties. The audiotapes were transcribed. Informal observations of my interactions with the participants of this study and during events in the community were documented in field notes. These notes were made during the course of my interviews and during the ongoing analysis of the data.

After my proposed research was approved by the Institutional Review Board for Research involving Human Subjects (IRB), participants were selected using a snowball sampling process. Prospective participants were recruited based on recommendations from people who had already agreed to participate. Participants were primarily selected from the Beaufort, South Carolina area, due to the concentration of the Gullah

community within the Beaufort area. Confining my study to the Beaufort, South Carolina area allowed the exploration of relationships between participants as well as a more thorough exploration of community resources.

The results of this study are available to both Gullah and non-Gullah people in the hope that it may be of benefit to them.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Personal Narrative

“Gullah girl!” Her brow furrowed, her eyes intense with hurt, she paused to look at me before continuing her story. I wasn’t sure what it all meant, but I knew I needed to listen, so I focused my attention upon her and nodded for her to go on. “Yes sir,” she said, “I am a Gullah.” Although I tried to be supportive, I parted from her feeling uneasy and ignorant. What was Gullah? From her account, it seemed to be a slur, a put down, a statement of contempt. Having just moved to South Carolina, I thought that perhaps “Gullah” was a local expression. So I asked a colleague what Gullah meant and was amazed by her response. Emboldened by my new knowledge, I approached the “Gullah Girl” a week later and asked her if we could continue our conversation. I admitted my ignorance about the Gullah and asked her to tell me more about the Gullah. She very graciously agreed, describing characteristics of the Gullah, their language, and the Sea Islands, and concluded by reciting a poem in Gullah. Now I could understand the intense feelings of hurt that the incident had provoked in her, how the very best of her character had been depreciated by the person who called her “Gullah Girl” and what courage it took for her to confront her adversary and then to relate her story to me.

Once again, I felt uneasy, but also invigorated. Since moving from Virginia to South Carolina, I had put my dissertation “on hold.” I realized that the “Gullah Girl” had



given me a great gift. My discovery of the Gullah people would lead to my formal exploration of biculturalism and identity in contemporary Gullah families. By studying Gullah families, I became familiar with my new home and could pursue my interests in family relations, identity and unique cultural groups. Hopefully the results of this study have contributed to the understanding of family relations, identity, and biculturalism in some small way. For this opportunity to make a contribution, I am eternally grateful.

### **Research Related to the Theoretical Framework**

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, a qualitative approach was appropriate. Symbolic interactionism provided the theoretical framework for this research.

According to LaRossa and Reitzes (1993), symbolic interactionism focuses on the connection between symbols (i.e. shared meanings) and interactions (i.e. verbal and nonverbal actions and communications). It is essentially a frame of reference for understanding how humans, in concert with one another, create symbolic worlds and how these worlds, in turn, shape human behavior. LaRossa and Reitzes (1993) continue on to say that symbolic interactionism's unique contribution to family studies is:

First, the emphasis it gives to the proposition that families are social groups, and second, its' assertion that individuals develop both a concept of self and their identities through social interaction, enabling them to independently assess and assign value to their family activities" (p.136).

According to LaRossa and Reitzes (1993, p. 143) there are seven assumptions that reflect three central themes in symbolic interaction. The first theme deals with the importance of meanings for human behavior. From that, come the following assumptions:

1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.
2. Meaning arises in the process of interaction between people.
3. Meanings are handled and modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with things he or she encounters.

The second theme focuses on the development and importance of self concept.

The assumptions associated with this theme are:

4. Individuals are not born with a sense of self, but develop self concepts through social interaction.
5. Self concepts, once developed, provide an important motive for behavior.

The third theme relates to symbolic interactionism's assumptions about society.

Symbolic interactionism focuses "on social process and the relation between [individual] freedom and [societal] constraint" (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). These final two assumptions flow from this theme:

6. Individuals and small groups are influenced by larger cultural and societal processes.
7. It is through social interaction in every day situations that individuals work out the details of social structure.

LaRossa and Reitzes (1993, p. 158) conclude that “symbolic interactionism is well suited for historical family research because historical data are often verbal. Letters, diaries, and other personal documents - the mainstay of the historian - are symbolic interactions.” Meighan (1981) raised concerns that symbolic interactionism theory neglected power, context, and change. Karabel and Halsey (1977) suggested that the knowledge generated in symbolic interactionism is not considered problematic. Baker (1993) described the fundamental assumptions of symbolic interactionism as including the following: Individuals are actors who play a part in the social construction of reality and therefore attention is given to how people use symbols, what symbols indicate and define in speech and behavior, and an analysis of family discourse. Gubrium and Hofstein (1990) argue for a resurgence of a symbolic interactionist perspective on families, suggesting that serious consideration be given to the interactional basis of domestic meanings, of how culture is formed, and of exploring, describing, and explaining the relations between family members, and the effects of social context on the lives of individuals and living groups.

Shrauger and Schoeneman (1979) reviewed the interactionist literature and cast doubt on the tenability of the symbolic interactionist viewpoint. They stated that three relationships must be demonstrated in order to validate the symbolic interactionist position that individuals’ self concepts are determined through their symbolic interactions with others. There must be a congruence between “people’s self perceptions and how they feel others see them... self perceptions and others’ actual perceptions of the person, and ... perceived other-evaluations and actual other-evaluations “ (p. 552). They found

evidence that people's self perceptions agree with the way they think others see them, but when evaluating the linkage to others' actual appraisals, they stated "there is no clear indication that self evaluations are influenced by the feedback received from others in naturally occurring situations" (p.549). Schafer and Keith (1985) refuted Shrauger and Schoeneman's view, noting that researchers who expected to find parallel relationships between self and reflected self perceptions and between self perceptions and others' actual perceptions "may be making an uncritical use of the symbolic interactionist model of the self concept" (p. 964). They stated that the symbolic interactionist perspective does not imply similarity of actual and perceived appraisals of others toward the self. Their research supported the view of a causal chain in which others' actual perceptions influence reflected self perceptions which in turn, influence the self concept (Schafer & Keith, 1985; Schafer, Keith, & Lorenz, 1984). Felson (1989) noted the mediating function of reflective perceptions: "The effect of actual appraisals should disappear when reflected appraisals are controlled" (p. 965).

May (1990) noted that other limitations in past symbolic interactionist research, such as the presence of demand characteristics, single measurement methodology, and variability in the measures used to represent the self concept, may have contributed to the perception that the symbolic interactionist perspective lacks utility. The need for repeated observations has been noted (Schafer & Keith, 1985; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979) because researchers have often tested the symbolic interactionist paradigm on only single occasions. "If self perceptions are influenced by reflected self appraisals from others, then one might expect self, reflected, and other perceptions to become more

closely linked as relationships with others developed” (May, 1990, p. 484). Support for the primary components of interactionist theory as defined by Cooley (1956a) and Mead (1956) was found by May (1990) who also found that individuals are more likely to distort their reflected perceptions in areas of greater personal importance. May concluded that:

The symbolic interactionist viewpoint was an encompassing and broad perspective from which research can be productively conducted. It should be viewed as a viable, if not preferable, base for future work pertaining to the development of the self in social contexts (May, 1990, p. 492).

Hinchman and Zalewski (1995) used symbolic interactionism as the theoretical framework for their qualitative study of reading at the secondary level due to the social context of the reading they were investigating. The use of a symbolic interactionist “lens” permitted the authors to learn about the participants’ perspectives. The use of a qualitative symbolic interactionist approach allowed Hinchman and Zalewski to provide a possible explanation for the interactions among the participant’s perspectives.

In qualitative research, the oral history method appears to be well suited for use with symbolic interaction theory. The challenge to appreciate and develop the power of empathy over the past decade has issued from feminist scholars who were exploring the psychology of women and gender differences and from American legal theorists informed by multicultural perspectives. Using a qualitative approach:

Stories at times can overcome that otherness, hold that instinctive resistance in abeyance. Stories are the oldest, most primordial meeting ground in human experience. Their allure will often provide the most effective means of overcoming otherness, of forming a new collectivity based on the shared story (Kornfeld, 1992, p .27).

Kornfeld (1992, p. 28) suggested that “oral histories can further develop our students’ empathic powers by giving them access to those who leave no written records and are usually silent in traditional histories.” She continues “even transcribed, oral interviews often reveal the emotional texture of an experience much better than written sources can” (p.28).

Official history, according to oral historian Paul Thompson (1990), may be challenged and “a more realistic and fair reconstruction of the past” produced through an emphasis on “the under-classes, the unprivileged, and the defeated.” Addressing the personal experiences of ordinary people involved in the historical process not only creates a “richer, more vivid, and heart rending” construction of the past, but may also help us construct a more specific and credible history (p.571). Brennen (1996) asks “Whose story will these oral histories tell?” (p. 578). The “emancipatory potential” of oral history is developed through examples of how an oral history approach will allow historians to move away from a linear notion of progress which supports the dominant institutional perspective toward a reconceptualization of history “ as a process of continuity and discontinuity, of evolution and revolution” (p. 579). Poll (1995) noted that

“although oral histories differ in form and methodology, they are all long first person accounts of extended periods of a respondent’s life, which are usually tape recorded” (p.145). Poll states that reviewing existing literature prior to interviewing a person “prevented the possibility that the interviewer would use an oral history of one person to represent all people in the group” (p. 146). It served as a point of comparison between the interviewee’s experiences, and those of his or her peers. Loflands’ study (1984) suggested that the “face-to-faceness” of the oral history interview provided a student with the opportunity to enter the other person’s life, mind, and definitions. Through this process, genuine sharing may be facilitated and may increase the possibility that the interviewer and the interviewee would become aware of similarities between themselves. Sonnenschein (1988) noted that “such similarities might reduce ethnocentric thinking and bias because they personalize theories and challenge stereotypes” (p.146).

### **Substantive Literature**

Peters, writing in the seventies, stated that “the contemporary view of the Black family usually emphasizes concepts of deviancy, pathology, and/or uncontrolled sexuality” (1974, p. 349). She stated that many of the studies had perpetuated the myths about Black people. Black families were usually excluded from many family sociology text books. Even when they were included, they were viewed most commonly as problems affecting White families (Peters, 1974, p. 350). She noted the need for research which has balance and perspective.

Littlejohn-Blake and Darling (1993) stated that the traditional method of studying families has often focused on the pathological rather than on the strong family. Families studied were often of European American origin in which all or most of the functions and activities of family life are carried out in isolation from other kin. African Americans however, have historically met the needs of their families differently. The African American family “often includes the extended family with which it shares family functions and activities” (Littlejohn-Blake & Darling, 1993, p. 460).

Works by several other authors contradict Littlejohn-Blake and Darling’s (1993) assertion that the traditional method of studying families has often focused on the pathological rather than the strong family. Billingsley (1968), Frazier (1932), Goode (1963), and Mead (1955) are among authors who researched extended family relationships and strengths of non-European American families. M.J. Sporkowski, Professor and Head of the Department of Human Development at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (personal communication, February 28, 2000), also took issue with Littlejohn-Blake and Darling’s (1993) assertion that the traditional method of studying families has often focused on the pathological rather than the strong family:

Historically, the study of families has not been focused on pathology. In Marriage and Family Therapy maybe, but the study of families goes far beyond Marriage and Family Therapy . [It includes] anthropology, comparative sociology, etc. The works of William Goode, Margaret Mead, and Bronislaw Malinowski focused on norms across cultures and normative and typical



behaviors. Those studies talked about cross-generational relationships and not isolation. The European American origin statement is only appropriate to recent family study of relatively “modern” families, probably since the turn of the century (1900). Nobody talked about isolated nuclear families until the 1940s and later.

While some studies have emphasized “the concepts of deviancy, pathology, and/or uncontrolled sexuality” (Peters, 1974, p. 349), there have also been studies which emphasize the strengths of Black families. Crosbie-Burnett and Lewis (1993, p. 244) saw European American families as based on the adults’ legal relationships while African American families are more often centered around the children, including all those people involved in the nurturance and caring of the children, regardless of whether or not they live in the same house as the children. They state that roles within the family are more flexible across generations and genders than in European American families (p. 244).

Wilson and Stith (1991) suggest that “despite variations in family composition, the historical and current experiences of racism and prejudice seem to be an organizing and universal experience that links Black American families” (p. 32). Hill-Lubin (1991, p. 175) spoke of the tendency to interpret differences between European American and African American families as weaknesses. She stated that “despite the upheaval and damage created as a result of slavery, Blacks in America have shown evidence of possessing many of the characteristics associated with the strong family and community life of their ancestors in Africa” (Hill-Lubin, 1991, p. 175). She suggested that the

grandmother has been one such strength and has contributed greatly to the stability and continuity of the Black family. Hill-Lubin (1991, p. 175) stated that “her function, role, and importance can be traced to the revered station, position, and responsibilities grandparents held in West African society.”

Strom , Collinsworth, Strom and Griswold (1993) found that Black grandparents had notable strengths in teaching effectiveness and in range of instruction, willingness to spend time with grandchildren, acceptance of family obligations regardless of distance from loved ones, offering continuity of support even during old age, and in making an effort to guide grandchildren as they become adolescents. Strom, Collinsworth, Strom, Griswold and Strom (1992, p. 544 ) found that, compared to Anglos, Black parents were more likely to give money to grandparents, take them places, do their shopping, run errands and provide care to them when ill. Black grandparents were more likely than Anglo grandparents to assist their sons and daughters by taking grandchildren into their homes to care for them.

Ruggles (1994, p. 136) stated that Blacks are more likely than Whites to become single parents and to reside in extended families. He investigated the possible reasons for this difference between African American and European American families. Moynihan’s (1965) study, The Negro Family: The Case for National Action concluded that the “pathological” nature of Black communities could be traced to the deterioration of Black family life. But other theorists, such as Hofferth and Stack (1985) had a different interpretation. They suggested that the disadvantaged position of Blacks is not the

consequence of single parent families but rather the cause of them. Studies by Hofferth (1984) and Stack (1974) found that Black extended families function as a means of coping with both poverty and single parenthood.

Fictive kin are often considered to be family members. Fictive kin are people who are not blood relatives, but are considered to be family. For example, a woman who is fictive kin may be called “aunt.” She may participate in the family as an aunt, having all the responsibilities and rewards associated with being an aunt. Crosbie-Burnett and Lewis (1993, p. 245) note that “there is a tradition of fictive kin relationships that allows for those most able to take care of the children in the community to do so.” Lewis (1990) suggested that additional work is needed to examine the linkages between changes in family structure and alterations in family relationships and functioning in the household structure.

Survival is one of the most critical functions of the Black family. Toliver (1993) states that “while family is highly valued within American culture, the family in African American culture has been touted as one of the most important mechanisms contributing to the very survival of African Americans throughout history” (p. 120). One of the ways in which African American families ensure survival is by helping their members to navigate the waters between the dominant American culture and the subdominant Black culture. This duality or biculturalism is closely linked to survival. Bilides (1991, p. 44) defines “bicultural” as both qualitative and dynamic. It refers not only to characteristics of individuals, groups, or situations involving more than one culture, but also to the

movement between different cultural contexts. Knowing the expectations and the behaviors of the dominant culture may facilitate employment and social relationships. But Black people are also faced with the problem of how to retain their identities as Black people at the same time that they are also members of the larger, multicultural American society.

Van Den Burgh (1991, p. 72) proposed a bicultural conceptual framework. That paradigm suggests that exposure to several cultures can be additive in the sense that an individual will maximize her/his coping mechanisms to be comfortable both with the dominant culture and one's own ethnic heritage. To become bicultural, an individual must engage in a dual socialization process. The individual acquires values, beliefs, communication and behavioral styles from a culture of origin as well as from a majority culture. At the same time a person is gaining the skills and knowledge necessary for negotiating the dominant culture, affirmation for the basic values, beliefs, and behavioral styles of ones' minority culture occurs.

Buriel (1993) discusses biculturalism and acculturation. Gordon (1978) refers to acculturation as changes in cultural patterns toward those of the host society. Biculturalism is closely related to acculturation, but assumes acculturation can take place without a corresponding loss in ancestral cultural patterns. Ramirez (1984) defined biculturalism as an integration of the competencies and sensitivities associated with two cultures within a single person. LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton (1993, p. 395) discussed bicultural models such as assimilation, acculturation, alternation, multicultural,

and fusion models which have been used to describe the psychological processes, social experiences, and individual challenges and obstacles of being bicultural.

According to LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton (1993, p. 396), the assimilation model assumes an ongoing process of absorption into the culture that is perceived as dominant or more desirable. The underlying assumption is that a member of one culture loses his or her identity as he or she acquires a new identity in a second culture.

The alternation model assumes that it is possible for an individual to know and understand two different cultures. It also supposes that an individual can alter her or his behavior to fit a particular social context. This model assumes that it is possible for an individual to have a sense of belonging in two cultures without compromising her or his sense of cultural identity. Rashid (1984) defined this type of biculturalism for African Americans as the ability to function effectively and productively within the context of America's core institutions while retaining a sense of self and African ethnic identity. According to LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton (1993) the alternation model suggests that it is possible to maintain a positive relationship with both cultures without having to choose between them. It is possible for an individual to assign equal status to the two cultures, even if he or she does not value or prefer them equally. An individual can choose the degree and manner to which he or she will affiliate with either the second culture or his or her culture of origin. In this model, the bidirectional impact of cultural contact is considered.

A pluralistic approach to understanding the relationship between two or more cultures is promoted by the multicultural model. In this model, it is recognized that it may not be geographic or social isolation per se that is the critical factor in sustaining cultural diversity but the manner of multifaceted and multidimensional institutional sharing between cultures. This model suggests that a person can maintain a positive identity as a member of his or her culture of origin while simultaneously developing a positive identity by engaging in complex institutional sharing with the larger political entity comprised of other cultural groups.

Berry, Poortinga, Segall, and Dason (1992) explain that the integration approach is a model that focuses on the process of group and individual adaptation within plural societies. According to this approach, there are four choices that the group or individual can make in such a situation: assimilate, integrate, separate, and marginalize. Two main issues emerge for individuals and groups in plural societies: whether to maintain one's culture of origin and whether or not to engage in intergroup contact. This integration approach places emphasis on the relationship between the two cultural groups and its implicit assumption that they are tied together within a single social structure.

Can a multicultural society be maintained? Fishman (1989) suggested that cultural separation of groups demands institutional protection and ethnocultural compartmentalization. He also suggested that there is little evidence for such structures surviving for more than three generations of cross cultural contact. He noted that groups, which chose separation, such as the Old Amish and the Hasidim, or groups actively

discriminated against by the majority group, such as American Indians or African Americans, may be able to maintain their unique identities. Mallea (1988) suggested that it may be difficult to maintain a truly multicultural society over time. Various groups may intermingle, evolving into a new culture.

The fusion model represents the assumptions underlying the “melting pot” theory. Cultures sharing an economic, political, or geographic space will fuse together until they are indistinguishable or form a new common culture. There is no assumption of superiority of one culture over another culture. However, it seems that the minority groups become assimilated into the majority group at the price of their ethnic identity.

The psychological impact that contact with members of the minority group has on those of the majority group was discussed by Weatherford (1988). Through examples of how the American Indians have influenced the way life is lived throughout the world, it was suggested that minority groups may have a positive impact on the majority culture.

La Fromboise, Coleman, and Gerton (1993) emphasize that these models are not mutually exclusive. It is “the process by which people acquire a second culture that accounts for the major differences between these models” (p. 402).

The alternation model led to the development of the concept of bicultural competence, which is “the ability to experience more benefits from living within two cultures than from living within a single culture” (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, p. 402). Knowledge of cultural beliefs and values, positive attitudes toward both majority

and minority groups, bicultural efficacy, communication ability, role repertoire, and a sense of being grounded in a well developed social support system were identified as dimensions in which an individual may need to develop competency so as to effectively manage the process of living within two cultures.

Perhaps one of the most obvious situations where biculturalism would be advantageous is in intermarriages between people of different racial backgrounds. According to Kouri and Lasswell (1993) Black/White interracial marriages were known to exist soon after the first Black people came to this country as indentured servants in the seventeenth century. Eventually, Black/White marriages were made illegal in most states. In 1967, miscegenation laws were declared unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court. Between 1970 and 1988, Black/White interracial marriages rose from 65,000 to 218,000 (Monroe, 1990), suggesting that the change in the law may have had a positive effect upon the rate of interracial marriages in the United States.

Kouri and Lasswell (1993) suggested that there are two broad categories of theoretical explanations for why some people choose to marry people of different racial backgrounds. According to the structural approach, interracial marriages are more frequent when the community structure sanctions such unions. Structural theories propose that interracial couples marry for the same reasons that racially homogenous couples marry. They also suggest that as interracial marriages become more common, society becomes desensitized to what previously may have been socially unacceptable to most of the population.



In contrast, the racial motivation theory proposes that many interracial marriages occur because of the racial differences instead of in spite of them or with indifference toward them. It suggested that individuals may go against the social norm of racial endogamy as a form of rebellion or as a sign of independence. Kouri and Lasswell (1993) interviewed 29 interracial couples. They concluded that neither the structural nor the racial motivation theories were sufficient in and of themselves to explain interracial unions. They cautioned that “to speak of interracial marriages as though they were all alike is a patent fallacy” (p. 253).

St. Jean (1998) found that interracial couples’ notion of color undergoes a positive transformation, speaking of marriage rather than intermarriage and suggesting that the interracial couple is microcosmic of a color blind society. Despite this suggestion that interracial couples may be color blind, the couples reported overt racism toward them and toward their children, who are a “concrete manifestation of intermixture and a visible threat to the existing racial order” (p. 405). Couples appear to be involved in two separate, conflicting lives: one public, one private, reflected in a two sided identity. The public identity is based on their physical appearance or pigmentation. The private identity, which includes their intermarriage, is seldom revealed to outsiders for fear of consequences. Because “Black/White unions deconstruct the traditional significance of color and associated role expectations, they are potentially chaotic, confusing, and troubling to society” (St. Jean, 1988, p. 407). St. Jean concluded by noting that “although for couples the salience of color seems to diminish after marriage, race consciousness does not diminish” (p.411).

Stephan and Stephan (1991) investigated the effect of intermarriage on children. They suggested that there are at least four major ways in which children reared in mixed heritage families may differ from children growing up in single heritage families. To varying degrees, socialization of children is likely to be bicultural. Children may be exposed to values, norms, roles, attitudes, behaviors, and perhaps languages, of two cultures. Biracial children will have more options in establishing their identities than children of single heritage backgrounds. Mixed heritage children may experience some degree of rejection by their extended families. They may also experience rejection in the larger society. Stephan and Stephan (1991) addressed the issue of whether bicultural socialization has negative or positive effects on children. They found that “consistent with earlier quantitative studies of mixed heritage children, no evidence was produced for the hypothesis that being socialized in bicultural homes has negative effects” (p.247). Their results lent some support to the hypothesis that bicultural socialization has positive effects. They also found that mixed heritage students had more informal voluntary contact with the single heritage groups than the single heritage groups had with each other, suggesting that mixed heritage students were more tolerant of single heritage groups than single heritage groups were of each other.

Racism is a chronic factor in Black family life. Bond’s unfinished manuscript Forty Acres and a Mule (as cited in Fairclough, 1997) placed an individual lynching in the context of one Black family’s history since slavery. He found that race relations in rural Washington Parish, Louisiana, where the lynching occurred, were strongly influenced by family ties between Blacks and Whites, which had resulted from interracial

unions during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Ties of kinship to White families helped to account for the high incidence of Black land ownership in Washington Parish. Bond drew attention to the economic importance of interracial kinship. He believed that Black land holding had promoted family stability. According to Fairclough (1997, p. 11) Bond “turned the tragedy of Jerome Wilson into a metaphor for the larger historical tragedy of African Americans since slavery.” Bond demonstrated the link between racism and economics and showed how quickly racism could destroy positive relationships between Black and White families.

Hillis (1995) suggested that the work of Allison Davis, an African American psychologist and social-educational anthropologist, was an important influence in multicultural education. Davis’ major sociological studies, such as Children of Bondage, Deep South, and Social-Class Influences Upon Learning were written in the 1940’s when psychoanalysis and behavioral theory were the predominant theoretical viewpoints of the time. Davis described the tremendous intraethnic diversity that existed within the African American community of the time. Davis pointed out the role played by familial, cultural, and societal values in the education process. He showed how inequality can become entrenched in a society and maintained that the only barrier separating many Whites and Blacks is their skin color, which signals cast location. Davis noted that racism exists not only in the lives of individuals but also within institutions. Because “the institutionalized nature of racism is part of the insidious nature of race relations, it is often difficult to perceive and describe” (Hillis, 1995, p.37).

Feagin (1992) found that “there is a general denial among White Americans, male and female alike, that Black Americans face serious problems with racial discrimination in this country” (p. 404). He suggested that “the denial of White racism and blaming Black victims of racism have become intellectually fashionable in the last decade” (p.405). He noted that the reality of discrimination today is very different from the common place portrait of a declining significance of race. For example, he interviewed one woman who expressed the sentiment of many of the other Black people Feagin interviewed, when she said, “We have to be one way in our communities and one way in the work place or in the business sector. We can never be ourselves all around” (p. 406).

Asante (1970) proposed a developmental progression of African American awareness which had five levels: skin recognition, environmental recognition, personality awareness, interest and concern, and Afrocentricity. These levels represented a developmental progression from a basic physical acceptance to an integrated psychological and socio/political commitment to an African centered orientation.

Hillard (1985) proposed that African American identification is not a unitary process, but can be broken down into four parameters of group identity: color, caste, culture, and consciousness. Helms (1990) looked at the role of non-demographic factors that might influence racial identification and proposed that development occurs in response to transactions among a variety of factors, including parental, family, school, and institutional influences.

Racism, both institutional and individual, affects all aspects of Black family life, including identity formation. Sanders Thompson (1991) examined the effects of demographic and intergroup interaction and conflict variables simultaneously. The results indicated that attitudes toward race and perceived experiences with racism were more important in determining racial identification than were sex, income, education, or age. Sanders Thompson (1991) also found that the perceived experiences of racism have an important impact on each parameter of racial identification. She discussed the positive psychological effects of a strong racial identification such as a stronger sense of purpose, greater security in self, enhanced school performance, and an easier acceptance of frustration.

Martin (1994) looked at the effects of racism and sexism. She found that the combination of a person's race and gender status led to both unique problems and perspectives for Black women. The interaction of racism and sexism resulted in each form of expression modifying the nature and impact of the other. Ogbu (1979) pointed out that involuntary minority groups (those who enter a country through conquest, slavery, or colonization) tend to define themselves and their culture in opposition to the cultural values of the majority. They cannot adopt any of the majority's ways without losing their own identity. Through slavery, African Americans fall under the definition of involuntary minorities.

Increased knowledge of their cultural roots on the part of both members of the minorities and members of the dominant society is a possible way out of the

impasse of an oppositional identity, a step toward the recognition of underlying cultural identities (Ogbu, 1979).

According to Martinez and Dukes (1991, p. 320), the cultures of Native Americans, Blacks, Chicanos, and other groups have been greatly influenced by the dominant group and its' culture. They concluded that institutionalized racism and sexism have a negative impact on the public domain component of self esteem, whereas the private domain component seems to be a function of other factors such as indigenous cultures.

Herbert (1990) explored the impact of racial dynamics and racism on men's lives. As a result, he proposed two additional tasks of adult psychosocial development: to form an individual racial identity that both acknowledges and frees the individual of her or his own racism and prejudices and to form an individual self concept dedicated to the eradication of racial discrimination and racial prejudice from society (p. 433). He based his research on Daniel Levinson's work on adult psychosocial development. Herbert noted that Levinson's work was based primarily on White males. In Herbert's research, he found race to be a clearly salient issue for men during all developmental periods. He recommended that the effects of race and racism on the adult development of both Blacks and Whites be systematically investigated.

Cross and Helms (1985) created a model in which there are four types of racial identity attitudes. The Pre-Encounter stage is characterized by dependency on White cultural norms for self definition and approval. In the Encounter stage, there are feelings of racial identity confusion but an increasing desire to cultivate a Black identity. An

absorption in the Black Experience characterized the Immersion-Emersion stage. The last stage is the Internalization stage where one sees strengths and weaknesses in both races, while viewing one's Black identity as a positive and valued aspect of self.

Using Cross and Helms' model of identity, Watts and Carter (1991) attempted to understand racism in organizations as perceived by African Americans and to determine the relationship between perceptions of racism and racial identity. Power and mobility were found to be hallmarks of institutional racism. The lack of Blacks in powerful positions, their abundance in low level positions, and their lack of decision making power were cited as evidence of institutional racism. Watts and Carter suggested that, in regard to racial identity, organizations' training and consultation activities must reflect the heterogeneity of African American culture. By targeting specific Black subgroups, interventions may be more effective. The authors conclude by stating, "It is not enough to open organizations to people of color; truly diverse organizations value a plurality of perspectives, world views, and identities" (p. 342).

Evans and Herr (1991) noted that education, social sciences, medicine, and law are careers often chosen by African American women. They suggested that the career choices of these women were influenced by their perceptions of racism and sexism. By choosing careers in these and related areas, they would be providing services primarily for the African American community. The authors found that the combined effects of racism and sexism in the workplace subject the African American woman to more discrimination than Black men or White women.

Dillard (1972) found that, whatever their aspirations, African American women have low expectations for fulfilling their goals. Dillard (1972) suggested that racial and sexual bias on the job may create anxiety so great that African American women tend to avoid those careers in which they perceive or anticipate sexual or racial bias. Falkowski and Falk (1983) found that African American women perceive significantly more external locus of control than do White women. Savage, Stearns, and Friedman (1979) found that African American women who were externally influenced expressed more fear-of-success imagery because they were more concerned with societal expectation than with their own expectations. This fear-of-success imagery may be a function of internalized racial and sex stereotyping. To cope with the effects of racism and sexism in the workplace, Evans and Herr (1991) suggested that African American women tend to avoid potentially harmful working environments. They also tend to lower or alter career goals. Evans and Herr concluded that the internalization of attitudes associated with racism and sexism “has a negative effect on the career aspirations of the African American woman. This has contributed to the concomitant deterioration of self esteem and self confidence in African American women” (p. 134).

Bell (1992) while reflecting on the confirmation hearings for Clarence Thomas in 1991, stated that “Within the Black community there is a strong norm of putting sexism on the back burner of major concerns while putting racism on the front burner” (p. 72). She contended that the Thomas - Hill event revealed a number of myths about Black professional women. While there are narratives available on the lives of Black slave women, the circumstances that informed their lives and the conditions under which they



lived differed greatly from those of contemporary women. Bell asserts that Black women have a code of silence which is practiced when speaking out against sexism or sexual harassment when the perpetrator is a Black man. Because the experience of racism serves as a powerful bond between Black men and women, Black women practice this code of silence in order to protect the fragile status of Black men. Bell noted that the code of silence among Black women was established during slavery, and its legacy has been passed down from generation to generation.

Black people of Gullah descent have been the focus of more frequent research over the last two decades. The origin of the word “Gullah” is mixed and varied. “Gull” may mean God, and “ah” is a word usually placed before or after another word, usually referring to a blessing. This would mean that Gullah could be translated as “the blessing of God” or “the people blessed by God” (Opala, 1987). Historically, the Gullah people are descendants of slaves brought from the coast of West Africa, usually from the Sierra Leone area. They reside predominantly in the Sea Islands, which are located off the coast of South Carolina, Georgia, and northern Florida. According to Montgomery (1994) the Sea Islands are composed of a 250 mile long stretch of barrier islands. These islands and the coastal basin which extends inland for as much as 30 to 40 miles, are known as the Low Country. Montgomery (1994) noted that the Low Country has long been recognized as a cultural zone of special interest for three reasons: (1) its population has been overwhelmingly African derived since the early 18th century, outnumbering Whites as many as 10 to one in some districts; (2) Africans continued to be imported directly from Africa until the very eve of the Civil War, a half century after the official

prohibition of slavery in 1808, which provided a degree of ongoing cultural continuity with Africa; and (3) residents, particularly Sea Islanders, were long isolated from the mainland. Many islands were not easily accessible until well after World War II.

Consequently, there was only marginal contact with outsiders.

Wood (1974) estimated that:

Well over 40% (more than 200,000) of the slaves reaching the British mainland colonies between 1700 and 1775 arrived in South Carolina. Most of these were brought to Charleston, “the Ellis Island for Africans coming in bondage to North America” (p. 5).

This view of the arrival of slaves was challenged by Roslyn Saunders, the Curator of Cultural History at Brookgreen Gardens in Murrells Inlet, South Carolina. Responding to the description of the pest houses on Sullivans Island (near Charleston, South Carolina) as the “Ellis Island for Black folks,” Saunders stated that “People didn’t come to them of their own accord. We’re not talking about the huddled masses. They were brought there in chains” (Howard, 1998).

According to Twining and Baird (1991), the family is the single most important organizing principle in the Sea Islands as in other African and African American communities (p.viii). It is the intimate core from which everything else radiates. Twining and Baird (1991) encourage us to see the Sea Islands “as a matrix of African American family traditions since it is the historical presence of Africans in isolated circumstances which insured the survival of families in the culture” (p.1). The patterns of family membership, conjugal pairing customs, child rearing practices, and other family

related aspects of Sea Island culture can accordingly be seen in the positive framework of the continuity of African precedents. They should also be understood in the context of the life of a people taken unwillingly from their own homeland, who consciously and unconsciously passed on to their progeny elements of their traditional way of life which made at least survival possible in the new, alien, and oppressive situation in which they found themselves (Twining & Baird, 1991, p.2). The Sea Islands is an area where these ancestral patterns have been seen possibly more clearly than in other African American populations and therefore constitute a useful showcase of culture through the study of which a fuller understanding of the definite autonomy of African world culture may be obtained. “More particularly we can appreciate the lasting vigor, and the value for group survival, of the African American family” (Twining & Baird, p.3).

One of the most distinctive characteristics of the Gullah people is the use of their own language, Gullah. According to Turner (1949), Gullah had its roots in Africa. Opala (1987) described Gullah as an English based creole language. The vocabulary is largely from the English “target language,” which is the speech of the socially and economically dominant group, but the African “substrate languages” have altered the pronunciation of almost all the English words, influenced the grammar and sentence structure, and provided a sizable minority of the vocabulary. Turner (1949) noted similarities in Gullah and the languages spoken in West Africa in the use of nouns, pronouns, verbs, and tense. Branch (1995) stated:

Almost all Gullah nouns are singular, and in the Ibo language the singular form of a noun is the same as the plural. No distinction is made between the singular and

plural of a verb in the Gullah either. This practice is also common in African languages. Little importance is placed on the actual time when something took place. Therefore, the form of the verb used to refer to the present is also used to refer to the past. (p. 61)

Branch (1995) noted that “an interesting relationship between the Gullah and the languages of West Africa is the use of the proverb to advise or instruct” (p.64). African and Gullah proverbs use metaphors to relate to real life situations. Branch (1995) provided these examples: “Take no more on your heels than you can kick off with your toes” , “Day is just an arm long, you can reach clean across it”, “Don’t fly so high dat you lit on a candle,” and “Fire don’t crack a full pot” (p.64).

People who speak Gullah were sometimes called “Geechees” which Branch (1995) noted was also a reference to people who ate rice and talked poorly. “Geechee” has sometimes been used to refer to the Gullah people who live in Georgia, and has also been thought to be a derivative of the name of another African tribe.

Awareness of the Gullah culture seems to be increasing. As recently as January, 1998, an article appeared in the magazine, Southern Living, which discussed the Emmy nominated television series, Gullah, Gullah Island. The article quoted Ron and Natalie Daise, who are the creators of Gullah, Gullah Island. Ron Daise stated, “Ten years ago there was a very negative connotation attached to the Gullah language and culture” (p.74). Natalie Daise continued, “Many people didn’t know what Gullah was. Others were ashamed of it. Now the word is so common most people know it. And little children who are Gullah are very proud of it.” (p.74). The article concluded with this

quote from Ron Daise, “Your culture is a light, and you should always let your light shine” (p.75). Gullah historian, Marquetta Goodwine, in an interview in June, 1998, agreed that Gullah, Gullah Island has promoted familiarity with the term “Gullah” but noted that the series is actually multicultural in orientation and does not accurately reflect Gullah culture.

It has been proposed that four features be used as indices when thinking about cultural retentions in population enclaves: language, education, religion, and demography (Twining & Baird, 1991). In the Sea Islands, Gullah, the local creole language, is spoken mainly by the older people and the children (Twining & Baird, 1991, p.11). They estimate that a significant portion of the African American Sea Island population, possibly as high as 60%, is at all times retentive of the creole. Another, perhaps slightly less numerous group, is at least partially retentive, even though subject to the influence of contact with the dominant European American language habits. The persistence among the Sea Islanders of Gullah to the degree noted is a significant indication not only of the extent of linguistic retention, but also of the nature of the familial interaction which has been a factor in the transmission and preservation of the language.

Education is closely related to language as an index of cultural retention. The geographical isolation from the dominant metropolitan (mainland) culture influenced the acquisition of formal learning among the African American population. Twining and Baird (1991, p.13) note that two additional factors served to put a brake on the acculturation of Sea Islanders. The first factor was an unexpected consequence of civil

rights legislation. The percentage of enrollment decreased in South Carolina when school attendance became voluntary rather than mandatory following the 1954 Supreme Court decision concerning school desegregation. So, although children may have been registered in school, attendance was not compulsory according to state law and some children did not always attend. This can also be considered to be an example of racism which has been a prominent factor in Gullah life. Access to education, transportation, and employment was often controlled by the White dominant society. The legality of noncompulsive attendance can be interpreted as a subtle means of denying educational opportunity to Gullah children.

The second additional factor slowing the process of acculturation was the predominantly agricultural basis of the Sea Islands' economy. As a result of the change in attendance requirements, young people of school age could make themselves available to work in the fields and with their earnings, contribute to their families' support.

Religion is the third index of cultural retention (Twining & Baird, p. 13). Compared with European American forms, a singular situation arose in the Christian church of the Sea Islanders, whose practices related as much to West African religions as to European American Christianity. The Christianity of the Sea Islands resembles the Africanized religious forms of ceremonials of Cuba, Haiti, and Brazil, where Santeria, Voodoo, and Umbanda all have a strong mixture of European and African elements. From the surface, the European contribution is more apparent in the Sea Islands, but it is more accurately a blend of European and African religious practices.

Seeking and shouting are two religious practices found in the Sea Islands. Branch (1995) stated that seeking combined the European practice of being instructed in the catechism, a book of questions and answers about the scriptures and Christianity, and the African initiation ceremonies in which the young were required to go into the bush to be instructed by the older members of their tribe. Making the decision “to give your life to the Lord” was, and still is, taken very seriously among the Gullah. In the Gullah churches, each person was required to go through the lengthy process of seeking before being accepted into the fellowship of a church. The seeker began his faith walk with a dream or a vision. The seeker was matched with a “leader,” a “spiritual teacher,” or a “spiritual mother,” who guided the seeker through the seeking experience. Then he was required to remove himself from the rest of the world, including family and friends. He spent time alone in meditation and prayer, usually in the backyard or often in the woods at night. The seeker gave up every thing while praying. Each evening the seeker told his dream to his spiritual leader who interpreted the dream or vision. When the spiritual teacher was confident that her charge had “come tru” (through), she called all of the elders of the church together to listen to the seeker’s dream. If they were all satisfied that the seeker’s experiences were genuine, the seeker was taught the catechism to help him understand his faith. The seeker was then quizzed on his knowledge of the catechism by the praise house committee and the deacons of the church. If he passed, he became a candidate for baptism. The time between “seeking” and “coming tru” could take months. Most seekers, but not all, were able to come through (Branch, 1995, p.36).

The “shout” was another religious tradition. Worship in the Gullah church followed a precise order of service, probably the influence of the Episcopal and Presbyterian churches. The meetings opened with a spiritual followed by a hymn and prayer. Another passage of scripture was read, followed by another prayer and testimony from the members. The scripture was read and interpreted by the leader. The last part of the praise meeting was the “shout,” which could go on for hours into the night. Branch (1995, p.40) stated that the old fashioned “ring shout” combined the African traditions of the circle and ring dance with Christian values. Religion was often seen as a way to help ensure survival, and also served as a means of socialization. While many of the old religious practices are no longer part of the religious services, the shout, seeking, and a unique hand clapping technique to accompany hymns sung by worshipers are still common practices in many Gullah churches and praise houses.

The demographic index is the fourth parameter of cultural retention (Twining & Baird, 1991, p. 14). The Sea Island population is estimated as close to 70% African American. Taken together with the implications for the family of the linguistic, educational, and religious factors, the significance of the numerical majority of African Americans is readily apparent. The presence of a Black majority, the ownership of fertile lands, and the isolation and independence of the Sea Islands have created a unique psyche for Blacks in the Sea Island area.

Self sufficiency and independence were means by which the Gullah survived over the years. Jackson, Slaughter and Blake (1979) noted two survival patterns. One pattern is found in the philosophy of time and the utilization of time. In many of the islands they



found that the older Gullah people had a different relationship to time than many younger Gullahs. The older people tended to keep very busy with productive activities, such as fishing, and doing household chores, and did not usually engage in activities such as playing cards or watching television. However, they found that the older Gullahs spent a major portion of their time reminiscing and telling stories.

The ability to cope with the environment was a second survival pattern noted by Jackson, Slaughter and Blake (1979). Some Gullah became skilled local weathermen or possessed specialized fishing techniques. Being able to “read” the weather improved the chances of planting and harvesting at the best times. Understanding the marine climate aided fishing and navigation. These skills improved the odds of physical survival, while the raconteurs (story tellers) helped to nurture the spiritual and intellectual survival of the Gullah.

Demerson (1986) , found that among traditional African Americans in South Carolina, there are domiciliary complexes or “compounds” consisting of several households assembled on the basis of kinship and economic constraints. This residence pattern closely resembles its African counterparts. There is a high degree of communication, interdependence, and cooperative work patterns which foster familial interaction and material productivity.

Twining and Baird (1991) note an African tradition utilized by the Gullah was the use of “basket names.” The basket name is usually given soon after birth, when the infant is still in the cradle (or basket). This name is known and used only in the family circle and within the individual’s home community. A person may also have a nickname,

which is usually acquired later, because of some physical or temperamental characteristic or some incident in which the person has been involved.

Baird and Chuks-Orji (1972) state that:

In the African tradition, today as yesterday, a name is not a mere identification tag; it is a record of family and community history, a distinct personal reference, an indication of present status, and an enunciated promise of future accomplishment (p.86).

Acculturative influences, according to Twining and Baird (1991) may account for the fact that fewer parents have been bestowing basket names on their children in recent years. Moreover, the greater mobility of the Sea Islanders today, together with their rising socioeconomic expectations and achievements, move the younger element into a wider sphere of activities in which the more formal, official, European American name is more appropriate. "To the extent that basket names continue in use, these names form a part of the intimate family and community relationships between people in the culture" (p. 37).

The "root doctor" is highly respected and valued by some Gullah in the Sea Islands. He/she is seen as one who is able to manipulate the forces or spirits of good or evil. She/he may function as a counselor in spiritual matters, provide herbal medicines for various illnesses, cast spells ("fixing") or release someone from a spell. Among some Gullah, there is a belief in the existence of "hags" who are thought to be old women who come out of their skins at night to suck the blood of a sleeping victim. Some Gullah also

believe that passing a child over the coffin of a parent just before burial, will prevent the deceased parent from returning to get the child.

Metaphors and stories are an important means by which the Gullah have traditionally transmitted knowledge. Symbolic interactionism's focus on the meanings people attach to things may be especially salient in understanding the importance of metaphors and stories in contemporary Gullah life. Branch (1995) notes that the Gullah folktales so familiar to many people are the Brer Rabbit tales, featuring the cunning rabbit as the hero. The basic idea of the weak outsmarting the strong found in most African stories remained in Gullah stories. Symbolic interactionism theory would support the idea that these stories, particularly with their emphasis on the weak outsmarting the powerful, were important ways that the Gullahs passed on survival information. The Gullah people also used their stories to explain various phenomenon in nature. The oral tradition of story telling is well respected and represents a time tested method of communicating the wisdom originating from Sierra Leone and refined by years of survival in the Sea Islands. Holidays and family gatherings still provide the occasions for story telling and singing in many closely knit Gullah communities.

Art and crafts reflect the creativity of the Gullah. Basket weaving is one of the best known activities of the Gullah today. Originally it was the men's job to make baskets. But "women took over the craft because men migrated to cities and towns to find work on military bases, in factories, and hospitals to earn better incomes" (Branch , 1995, p.70). The baskets are made of sweet grasses, and are very similar to those woven in Sierra Leone.

Beoku-Betts (1995) noted that “Black feminist studies... show that cultural beliefs, values, and traditions are transmitted largely in woman dominated contexts such as the home, the church, and other community settings” (p. 536). Reagon (1986, p.79) argues that “African American women have helped to create and maintain a cultural identity in their communities that is independent of the dominant culture.” Beoku-Betts (1995, p. 543) found that Gullah express cultural identity through food practices. She linked Gullah food practices with the food traditions of West African rice cultures. By conforming to the traditional rice cooking practices, women serve as a medium to control the limits of interaction between their food practices and those of the wider dominant culture. She also supported the assertion that cultural beliefs and traditions are transmitted largely in woman dominated contexts when she stated that “recollections of folklore traditions are narrated by women, because through such stories we learn how marginalized cultural groups construct a familiar and identifiable world for themselves in a dominant cultural setting” (p. 544). Orsi (1985) contends that identity is often constructed through a people’s ability to discover who they are through memory: Although pressure from a dominant culture may weaken their ability to reproduce their knowledge and perceptions of themselves and of their world, the ability to remember and to create a communion of memory in the group provides the foundation for establishing membership and continuity of that group. (p.153)

Hill-Collins (1990, p. 142) stresses the importance of viewing the Black woman as “the something within that shapes the culture of resistance and patterns of consciousness and self expression in the Black community.” In her interviews with Gullah women, Beoku-Betts (1995, p. 544) found that by having their own style of food preparation and seasoning, Gullah women maintain the credibility and validity of the familiar and recognizable tradition in resistance to pressure to conform to dominant cultural practices. When discussing the Gullah’s survival skills, self sufficiency, and environmental concerns, Beoku-Betts (1995, p.541) linked the threat of environmental destruction in the Sea Islands to the endangered cultural heritage of the Gullahs.

During the 1970’s, one of the avenues by which mainland America was introduced to Gullah culture was through art. Jonathan Green is perhaps the best known contemporary Gullah artist. He has been described as “a master story teller whose work draws upon the African oral traditions” (Branch, 1995, p. 97). His paintings include scenes from the praise house, waterways, boatmen, sweet grass baskets, shouts, story telling, and church gatherings. Because each painting has a personal story to accompany it, his work has been labeled “narrative paintings.”

The influences of World War II, the building of bridges to the mainland, the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, the “development” of the islands, the pollution of the rivers and the intercoastal waterway, and the proactive actions of the islanders themselves (such as establishing literacy programs) have resulted in change and some acculturation into the mainland socioeconomic norms. According to Smith (1991):

The Gullah were viewed as southern rural Blacks one quarter of a century ago. Now the Gullah are viewed as a rural subculture much like the mountain Whites and the Cajuns but grounded on older cultural experiences. An educated Black middle class has developed on the Sea Islands. Many were former island residents and the grandchildren of slaves who returned to retire in the Sea Islands in the late 1970s and early 1980s. They were, in large part, a returning Black leadership cadre with a heightened interest in cultural survival and land preservation (p. 285).

One of the ways the Gullah have endeavored to preserve and promote their culture is through the efforts of cultural organizations. The Penn Center on St. Helena's Island has been a pivotal force in the preservation and promotion of Gullah culture. It was established on the site of the Penn School, which was the oldest school for freed slaves in America. Over the years, the Penn Center has provided many educational programs for the community as well as other types of assistance such as the Land Retention Program which helps Gullah people obtain the legally available exemptions for tax on their land and to gain funds for taxes. According to Branch (1995):

The York Bailey Museum, the Sea Island Translation/Literacy Project, the Sea Island Land Project, and the Sea Island Preservation Project are projects which the Penn Center has established to preserve the Gullah culture. Designated a National Historic Site in 1974, Penn Center has become the oldest and most complete center for the study of Gullah culture on the East Coast. (p. 86)

Currently the Penn Center has entered into a partnership with the University of South Carolina, enabling many needed repairs and renovations to be completed and for knowledge about the Gullah culture to be made available to a wider audience. It has also changed the manner in which the center is operated and has affected the mission of the Penn Center, resulting in controversy within the Gullah community.

The Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition is a contemporary organization dedicated to the preservation and promotion of the Gullah culture. Based on St. Helena's Island, the Coalition sponsors educational programs and assists scholars in researching the Gullah culture. Its' founders and scholars actively promote the Gullah culture through public performances, community assistance, publications related to Gullah culture, newsprint and electronic dissemination of information, and through the hospitality extended through the Hunnan Home and other facilities maintained by the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition.

It is through the efforts of organizations such as the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition and the Penn Center, in addition to the efforts of individuals, that the Gullah culture will continue to survive as we enter the 21st century.

### **Analysis of Research Related to Method/Measurement/Instrumentation**

The oral history method was used to collect data during this study. "Although oral histories differ in form and methodology, they are all long first person accounts of extended periods of a respondent's life, which are usually tape recorded" (Poll, 1995, p. 145). Roberts (1997) states that oral histories are especially appropriate for historical

labors and that use of this method allows “attentiveness to the traces of the oral accessible to us and by cautious extrapolations backwards from the implications of twentieth century lore” (p. 375). When discussing the meanings of African riddles, (Roberts, 1997) he stated:

One requires the lilt and tilt of oral recitations ... to impart its message most effectively in its oral form. The performance and intonation would capture a spirit of resistance at the same time as they guided the audience toward hidden plays and symbolic connections. (p.375)

Brennen (1996, p. 571) noted that in many disciplines, oral histories “give voice” to otherwise voiceless groups and individuals. Thompson (1990) maintained that “addressing the personal experiences of ordinary people not only creates a ‘richer, more vivid and heart rending construction of the past,’ but may also help us construct a more specific and credible history” (p.571).

Kornfeld (1992) when discussing how to develop empathic power and contextual thinking in students, noted that students must be introduced to the many lost voices of the past. She stated that “oral histories can further develop our students’ empathic powers by giving them access to those who leave no written records and are usually silent in traditional histories” (p.28).

Allen and Pickett (1993) found that:

Not only does oral history allow researchers to verify and cross check material from other sources, by utilizing oral history the researcher has the advantage of



interviewing living persons who have lived through a particular time or were present at a specific event. (p. 106)

Schvaneveldt, Pickett, and Young (1993) discussed the drawbacks to using the oral history method. The use of retrospective data, with the potential problems of faulty memories or the respondents' desire to present themselves in a better light may be serious concerns affecting the quality of the information derived from using oral histories. However, despite the limitations imposed by the use of this method, the potential richness of the information to be gained, made it the method of choice to use in this investigation of Gullah families.

### **Significance of the Proposed Research in Relation to Existing Research, Theory, and Practice**

Families of different ethnic backgrounds and various family member compositions have been studied and are continuing to be studied. Research has been cited which looks at the Gullah community from historical, sociological, linguistic, and artistic perspectives. Now that the Gullah are not as isolated as they were earlier in this century, understanding traditions, identity and biculturalism in Gullah families may be especially important to ensure the survival of the Gullah culture as we enter the 21st century.

Branch (1995) addressed the need for additional research:

The Sea Islands is an area where these ancestral patterns have been seen possibly more clearly than in other African American populations and therefore constitute a useful showcase through the study of which a fuller understanding of ...

African world culture may be obtained. More particularly we can appreciate the lasting vigor, and the value for group survival, of the African American family. An analysis of contemporary Gullah culture is very much needed. It is probably the most unique pattern of Black culture to be found anywhere. (p.98)

The opportunity to study how families in this unique culture deal with the issues of biculturalism is a rare opportunity indeed. Hopefully, the results of this study have contributed to understanding biculturalism as well as to the preservation and promotion of the Gullah culture.

# CHAPTER THREE

## METHODOLOGY

### **Overview of the Research Design**

In order to further knowledge about contemporary Gullah families, it was necessary to obtain indepth information from Gullah family members, religious and secular leaders, and from Gullah people who no longer reside in the Sea Islands. An oral history method was used to obtain this information. Symbolic interaction theory formed the theoretical framework of the study. Initially, a pilot study was conducted. Based on the results of the pilot study, the indepth, semi-structured interview guide was modified for use in subsequent interviews. There were seven participants who were selected using snowball sampling. Each participant was interviewed twice for at least 60 minutes per interview. The interviews was audiotaped and transcribed. Data was analyzed using a coding scheme based on categories developed from the research questions and from topics which evolved based upon the data. Analysis results, conclusions, and recommendations were reported in a narrative form.

### **Description of the Population and Sample**

The population studied were people of Gullah ancestry. The sample was composed of men and women who are at least 18 years of age or older. These participants either lived in the Sea Islands area or were born in the Sea

Islands/Charleston, South Carolina area but now live on the mainland. In order to obtain different perspectives, participants included: (a) people who represented different generations within the same family, (b) people who were born or who have lived in the Sea Islands area at some time during their lives but are not currently residing in the Sea Islands area, (c) people who are religious or secular leaders in the Gullah community, (d) people who were born in the Sea Islands area, but lived on the mainland for some period of time before returning to reside in the Sea Islands area, (e) people who have resided in the Sea Islands area since birth.

### **Sample Selection Procedures**

Six of the seven participants were selected primarily from the St. Helena's Island community. Having the majority of participants reside in the same community facilitated the exploration of community influences and interpersonal relationships between participants. The seventh participant was a woman who resided on the mainland. She was selected in order to gain her perspective as a Gullah woman living in the dominant mainland society.

Snowball sampling, in which participants are recruited by referral from somebody already participating in the study, was used. The initial participant was recruited from the Gullah/Geechee Sea Islands Coalition. The five other participants from St. Helena's Island were recruited based on referral from this initial participant. The seventh participant was a woman of Gullah ancestry who had moved from Charleston, South Carolina to Conway, South Carolina after completing college. She was a friend and

colleague who initially inspired this study by her recounting of her “Gullah Girl” experience.

After approval was secured from the Institutional Review Board for Research involving Human Subjects (Appendix A), participant recruitment began and was completed over a five month period. As a result of the selection process, two men and five women participated in this study.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

A pilot study was completed with the first participant who was recruited from the Gullah/Geechee Sea Islands Coalition. In this pilot study, an indepth, semi-structured interview guide was used and was modified according to the participant’s responses and recommendations. Please refer to Appendix B.

The participant in the pilot study, and every other participant in this study, was asked to read and sign an informed consent form prior to being interviewed. Please refer to Appendix C. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality.

Data was collected using audiotaped recordings of participants’ interviews and also through the development of field notes. Each interview was at least 60 minutes in length. Each participant was interviewed twice in order to build rapport with the participants and also to gain more indepth information. Interviews were held at a mutually convenient location, such as the Hunnan Home, which is a facility maintained by the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition, or at a local public facility. The audiotapes

from each interview were transcribed. Audiotapes were kept in a locked file cabinet in my home office.

Field notes were written after each interview. They contained my impressions of the interviews, topics I would like to investigate further, and suggestions for future interviews. Notes were also taken when I attended events in the Gullah community. These notes consisted of my observations of the local area and of the events that I attended.

### **Pilot Study of Procedures and Measures**

A pilot study was conducted prior to recruiting and interviewing other participants. One person was interviewed, using the proposed, indepth, semi-structured interview guide. Please refer to Appendix B. Based upon her responses and recommendations, the interview guide and the procedures for sample selection were modified. This participant was asked to give her informed consent (see Appendix C) prior to the first interview. There were two interviews. Each interview was at least 60 minutes in length and was audiotaped. The tapes of the interview were transcribed. The participant's responses were analyzed and coded. Please refer to Appendix D for the final coding scheme. The information obtained in these interviews was used to modify the interview guide for subsequent interviews.

### **Description of Instrumentation/Measurements**

Guided by the results of the pilot study, an indepth, semi-structured interview guide was used with each participant. The first part of the guide consisted of demographic questions, such as name, age, address, years of school, employment, marital status and number and ages of children. The second part of the interview guide consisted of open ended questions concerning the participant's family life, identity, Gullah traditions and related areas. Each research question was addressed in the questions contained in the second part of the interview guide. Participants were encouraged to share any information they wanted to share, which may not have been addressed by questions in the interview guide.

### **Data Analysis Process**

As each interview was completed, the data was analyzed and coded. These preliminary findings were used to modify the topics discussed during subsequent interviews.

The data was analyzed using symbolic interactionism theory as a framework and as a "lens" from which to view the information from different perspectives, such as from that of an individual or a group.

Coding consisted of developing categories based upon the four research questions and upon themes generated by the data itself. A process of collapsing and merging categories was undertaken, resulting in a decrease in the number of initial categories from 16 to a final count of nine categories. Although there is some overlap in these categories,

the nine final categories are substantively independent of each other. The four research questions as well as five additional topics formed the final nine categories.

The final nine categories used in the data analysis process were:

a) Gullah identity, b) biculturalism, c) generational transmission of Gullah traditions and customs, d) Gullah child rearing practices, e) Gullah language, f) racism, g) spirituality, h) physical space utilization, and i) survival.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

#### **Island Bound: Places and Participants**

If I take Route 701, I can miss the traffic congestion in the Myrtle Beach, South Carolina area. It takes about four hours to drive the 195 miles from my home in Conway, South Carolina to St. Helena's Island, South Carolina. Leaving by 6 a.m., I drive south down 701, passing acres of pine trees, hoping I don't get behind a logging truck or a slow moving tractor. Mostly I am traveling in a caravan of other motorists hoping to avoid the Grand Strand's grand traffic tie-ups. About an hour south of Conway is the city of Georgetown, which lies almost at the northernmost reach of the original Gullah areas. Part of it portrays the deep sea port that it has been for years and years. Picturesque, historic clapboard homes, a renewed waterfront featuring eateries and local artists, and boats. Lots of boats, ranging from little fishing dinghies to great ocean going vessels waiting to load the steel that is produced there. People of Gullah ancestry live in this city, and it is rumored that Dr. Buzzard, the well known root doctor from St. Helena's Island, used to come to Georgetown from time to time.

Besides the quaint waterfront and the steel mill, Georgetown also has its share of fast food restaurants and discount department stores. A high bridge, soaring over the deep water channel and the marshes below it, carries me out of Georgetown, heading

toward Charleston. Driving through this sparsely populated, rural area, I am nearing Mount Pleasant, which heralds your arrival with dozens of road side stands where ebony Gullah women sell their intricately woven sea grass baskets. "I'll have to stop at one of these stands on my way home," I think to myself as I speed by. I entertain this same thought every time I pass this way, even though when I am returning home, I don't usually have enough money to buy a basket. These beautiful baskets are priced at about \$50.00 and up, depending on the size and how intricately woven the basket. I take the bypass around Charleston, which is elevated over the vast stretches of lowland marshes and waterways. It stretches skyward for a distance to allow large ships to pass beneath it, laden with foreign goods for eager American consumers.

Once I am past Charleston, I head south again. Only an hour and a half to go. I usually stop in Beaufort, stretching my legs and getting a cold drink from one of the many local fast food places. Beaufort lies on the cusp of the sea islands. It is a very old town, with historic homes and lovely old oak trees laced with Spanish moss. Paris Island, well known for the Marine Base located there, is close by. I am only a half hour away from my destination now. I wait in line to cross over the drawbridge that connects Beaufort with Lady's Island. When the last boat has passed beneath it, the line of cars slowly moves over the bridge, looking like a caravan bound for the nearby Atlantic Ocean. Now on Route 21, I drive across Lady's Island to St. Helena's Island. Back in the "old days" these islands could only be reached by boat. The mainland seemed to be a whole different world. Now, there are bridges linking many of the islands, and the exchange between the mainland and island cultures ebbs and flows like the tides of the

surrounding waters. Like most of the Low Country, St. Helena's Island is flat and lush with water loving greenery. None of the buildings appear to be more than two stories tall. Many of the homes are older, small, clapboard structures. Some are trimmed in bright blue, a color that has the reputation of keeping the evil spirits away. Other homes are newer, often made of brick, and are ranch style houses. There are a few large homes; most of these belonged to yesterday's prominent citizens. Large garden patches adorn the area, interrupting the pastures and wooded areas which lie on either side of the highway. Turning right onto Lands End Road, I drive past the Penn Center. It is an amazing place; home of the first "Black" school, a refuge where Martin Luther King could walk undisturbed near the water's edge, a community center where people learned skills, helped each other, cried and laughed together. Today, it is also the center of a controversy. Having recently entered into a partnership with the University of South Carolina; there is a lot of disagreement about the changes that have been made in the administration and the mission of the Penn Center.

One more mile, around the curve and I arrive at the Hunnan Home. There are three small white clapboard buildings which have been recently renovated. These are adjacent to a dilapidated large clapboard structure which was once the hotel for Black people. The Hunnan Home is operated by the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition, and is available for use by researchers and others interested in the Gullah/Geechee culture. Most of the time, I only stay for the day, returning home about midnight. This time though, I am staying all weekend, interviewing people and taking the ferry from Hilton Head Island to Daufauskie Island for the Daufauskie Day festivities. I unpack quickly

and prepare for the first interview of the day. I have been here several times. It is a place where both I and the participants in the study are comfortable talking and sharing for hours on end.

There are seven participants ranging in age from the early 30's to the late 80's. Five of the seven participants lived full time on St. Helena's Island. The sixth participant lived part of the year on St. Helena's Island and part of the year in New York City. The seventh participant grew up in the Charleston, South Carolina area and has resided in the Conway, South Carolina area for many years. Excerpts from the participants' transcribed interviews served to support the various categories and the eventual conclusions and recommendations at the close of the study. Each participant was provided with a pseudonym in order to ensure confidentiality.

"Linda" participated in the pilot study as well as providing a great deal of additional information in informal conversations over the course of the study. She is a petite woman, with coal black hair and large, expressive brown eyes. Her complexion is very dark, in contrast to the bright smile with which she often lights up the room around her. Linda described herself as "one of 10 children, nine girls and one boy. All the girls have a college education. Seven of the girls have careers in education." As a teen, Linda was active in the Civil Rights Movement. She is now in her mid-50's, married, has two adult children, and a grandson. Linda was interviewed shortly before her retirement from the public school system.

"Cynthia" is in her early 30's and is the youngest child in her family. She describes herself as "ageless." Cynthia is tall and slender. A self taught dancer and

singer, her presence commands attention when she enters a room. Intelligent, compassionate, and eloquent, Cynthia's passion for promoting and preserving the Gullah culture is evident. She is fluent in Gullah, which she speaks with her family and friends, as well as when making presentations. Cynthia has a college degree in a computer related field. She is a Gullah historian and the founder of the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition. Married, with a preschool age son, Cynthia is employed full time as a scholar, author, and performance artist. When not on the road performing at various cultural events, she divides her time between her home on St. Helena's Island and her home in New York City. Cynthia was the person responsible for the eventual selection of most of the other participants. She provided the names of potential participants, many of whom were her friends or family members.

Cynthia's mother, "Sarah" was essential to the success of the study. She made sure that participants arrived at the Hunnan House, were well fed and comfortable, and in general facilitated every aspect of the interview process. In her sixties, she is a tall, energetic, intelligent woman. She works full time doing domestic work in homes on Hilton Head Island. Although it takes an hour each way to drive, she stated that is was worth the drive because the pay was so much better on Hilton Head than what you could get locally or in Beaufort.

Sarah was the second oldest child in her family. By the time she was a teenager, she was raising her younger siblings with assistance from her older sister, due to the deaths of her parents. She lived in New York City for a while with her first husband, but returned to live on St. Helena's Island after her divorce. She eventually married again, to

a man she had known when they were both children. Besides working full time, Sarah is active in the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition with her youngest daughter, Cynthia. She cooks traditional Gullah cuisine for the Coalition's fund raisers, makes quilts to sell for their fundraisers, and tries to help in any way she can to promote and preserve the Gullah culture.

Sarah's husband, Luke, was exceedingly generous in his participation. He was born on St. Helena's Island, the oldest of 10 children. Luke has eight children from his first marriage, who range in age from 30 to 47, in addition to step children from his second marriage. Luke is now 69, and is enjoying his remarriage. He retired from the Navy after 20 years, then worked in manufacturing, security and service positions until he retired again several years ago.

"Alice" is Cynthia's cousin. In her 30's, she is divorced and has 2 children. She was born on St. Helena's Island, leaving only to attend college in Georgia. After her graduation, she returned to St. Helena's Island to live and has a career as a guidance counselor with the local school system. She is the youngest of seven children and is the only child in her family to reside on St. Helena's Island as an adult. Tall and slender, she has a thoughtful intensity about her. She marvels at the change in perception of the Gullah language. Once considered "improper English" when she was a child, Alice is now happy to report that "people will actually pay to hear you speak Gullah!"

"Jim" is in his late 30's and has been a friend of Cynthia and her family since he was a child. Brought to Beaufort from Maryland when he was an infant, Jim was raised by his aunt and uncle, whom he considers to be his parents. Jim's biological mother was

also raised by his aunt. She lived with them for a time when Jim was a child, but she is now deceased. Jim's biological father stills lives in the surrounding community and is described by Jim as a "friendly guy." He implied that his father's "friendliness" was responsible for the existence of Jim's numerous brothers and sisters in the community. After graduating from high school, Jim served in the Air Force until he was 30 years old. He then used his Veteran's Benefits to attend college where he earned a degree in electronics. Eventually Jim married and returned to St. Helena's Island where he now lives with his wife and children. Jim is the president of the local NAACP chapter and is also very active in his church.

"Dora" is the oldest participant. She is 87 years old and is a widow. She and her husband adopted two children who are now grown with children of their own. Dora is very active both at home and in her community. She finished cutting her lawn just prior to being interviewed initially. As a member of civic and church organizations, Dora works hard to improve the quality of life in her community and also to preserve the Gullah culture. One of the most meaningful times in her life was when she was active with Dr. King in the Civil Rights Movement. She proudly displayed the certificate she earned as a result of her work with Dr. King.

### **Thematic Analysis**

The majority of the interviews were conducted at the Hunnan Home on St. Helena's Island. I gathered a vast amount of data which was recorded on audiotapes and subsequently transcribed. The transcriptions of the audiotapes totaled over 500 pages. In

addition I had copious field notes which I made during the interview process and also when I participated in cultural events such as Daufuskie Day and at theatrical productions sponsored by the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition. Distilling this data into a palatable and potent product was an arduous task. I began by establishing categories based on my research questions. As I analyzed the data, I added additional categories, based upon the themes which emerged from the data.

The first four categories reflected the content of the research questions: a) the meaning of being “Gullah” to the participants, b) bicultural identity, c) generational transmission of Gullah traditions, and d) Gullah child rearing practices.

An additional five categories evolved from the thematic analysis of the data. They are: e) Gullah language, f) racism, g) spirituality, h) physical space utilization, and i) survival. Although there is some overlap among the categories, efforts were made to ensure that each category was as distinct from each other as possible. The findings in these categories are discussed in the following sections.

### **Born Gullah: “Being Gullah” and Identity**

Identifying oneself as being Gullah was a critical and often life defining experience for the seven participants in this study. Most participants started out with the perception that being Gullah and speaking Gullah was undesirable and backward. Sometime later in life, usually in early adulthood, the perception began to shift to a more positive view. In middle and late adulthood, the participants seemed to develop great



pride in being of Gullah heritage and a strong interest in preserving the Gullah language and culture.

Near the end of the second interview, Luke was asked what being Gullah meant to him:

Gullah, to me, is a culture of people who lives in a certain area, that we're called Gullah because we're descended from certain people from what they're saying from Sierra Leone. We're finding this out now. The majority of the people came from Sierra Leone and was brought out and spread out in this area. But the Gullah is called the Gullah because of the southern term that is being used because of our ancestors, our dialect was different. But our dialect is only different on the coastal area because that's where the slaves are brought in to Charleston, coastal areas. So we came in with that type of language and if we didn't move out of that particular area and if we were in South Carolina and we never moved to North Carolina, in a coastal area, we would still all be speaking the same language. It starts down in Florida, comes around into Georgia, and up in South Carolina and part of North Carolina. But we'll always speak in a certain way, because our ancestors were speaking that, so we will just pass it on from generation to generation. It will never go away! Like I say, it will never die! And it's the thing, the part of it now, is good, because it's tradition. You don't let tradition die! I could see that from the other nationalities that I've been around in the service and associated with after I got out of the service. The Jew never lets his culture die. I don't care where he's at. He comes around you and

accepts you whatever you do, but his culture never dies. Italians, his culture never dies. He stays around here, but he will do something every chance he gets. It's cultural stuff that goes way back! We're the ones that are not preserving our culture like other nationalities. We're the ones that are not trying to preserve it. Like I said, I've learned through experience, other nationalities have their culture there, always!

Having control of your own life, especially in matters such as employment, was important and helped to maintain Luke's Gullah identity:

The Jehovah Witnesses, they teach their members to be independent as much as possible. If they can, or try to find something, their own independent small businesses to support themselves. The Jehovah Witnesses teach this. I have several family members and I worked with several and I know this much, try to have your own business instead of working for someone else and having to punch a clock, try to work your own hours instead.

Flexibility, living in harmony with nature, and taking adversity in stride also seemed to be part of what "being Gullah" meant to Luke. Even in matters like gardening, Luke's philosophical approach to life was evident. After two years of being unable to plant a garden due to adverse weather conditions, he said:

Like I said, it is the second year that we haven't had anything planted in the garden. We usually have squash, beans, okra, watermelon. It's frustrating! But you know, that's life! Sometimes you get it, sometimes you don't. But we were taught that growing up.

Although Luke generally took life's hardships in stride, he could be confrontational at times:

In the South Carolina area, they said that to us, "Oh yeah, you're a Geechee cause you like to eat a lot of rice." The only thing I could say to them, when I was away in the service, "So that makes a China man a Geechee, huh?" You know, I wasn't put down too easy.

When Sarah was asked what being Gullah meant, she immediately framed her response in terms of the benefits of speaking the Gullah language:

And the Gullah, what the Gullah means to me, Gullah language, it's wonderful to speak it in the presence of others who don't understand it! So you can be talking about them and yet they don't know. So that's what I like! If a group of us get together and we could be talking to a stranger, could be another guy and here the two of us is talking about them and he don't know it. We've done that several times! OK, so that's with the Gullah.

Most of the participants spoke at length about the meaning of being Gullah. The majority of the participants changed their perception of being Gullah as they grew older and experienced a variety of significant social interactions. For instance, Dora is an 87 year old widow and was the senior participant. She remembered being taught that Gullah language was poor English. Often corrected and told to speak standard English, she nevertheless learned to speak Gullah. Dora attended the Penn School, but left after completing fifth grade. After being raised to think that being Gullah was inferior, and after experiencing the effects of segregation, she began to get very involved with the

Civil Rights Movement. Working in Dr. King's organization and listening to his teachings helped Dora to develop a positive identity as a Black woman. She said:

Dr. Martin Luther King started visiting Penn Center. He had people come from Alabama, Kentucky, and part of Georgia. He came down and he would come on weekends and he would have meetings on Friday and Saturday. And he'd teach you how to do. He had this, we went into Savannah and we integrate the Walgreen Drug Store. And they had this singing group. They would sing and get them booked and Dr. King would get up in church and talk and tell them about these things. He was like a prophet to me! And everything God put before him, he did. He didn't do it to suit anybody. He did it like he was instructed to do. And that he wanted some of them people that drive the bus, those that clean up to be raised up, to get up higher. And so they could go on. And when he said our people could do that, he changed the dynamics. He's trying to get people out for the poor people and let everybody live.

Before her involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, Dora appeared to accept the status quo. After she began to attend meetings where Dr. King spoke, she began to see herself as being able to have an effect in the wider arena instead of solely on St. Helena's Island. After her involvement with Dr. King, Dora thought she and other Black people no longer had to be second best. In the early 1980's, Dora began to take pride not only in her Black heritage, but also in her Gullah heritage. She was involved in Penn Center activities and was becoming aware of a change in the perception of what being Gullah meant. Through her involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, Dora developed

more confidence and increased self esteem. She eventually became involved with the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition and became an advocate not only for Black people but especially for people of Gullah ancestry. To this day, she has continued her involvement with the Penn Center, the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition, and is active in her church.

While attending a community presentation of two Gullah women in a play, Dora stated that “People used to think we were backward, but now they see we have our own language, our own traditions. We do like our ancestors did.” During the performance, she quietly kept up a commentary on the play as it progressed. She nodded her head and murmured affirmations as the two Gullah women on stage spoke about what their lives had been like and how they were determined to live their lives with dignity.

Dora continues to be active in Penn Center activities and also in activities sponsored by the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition. At this point in her life, she is very proud of her Gullah heritage and is concerned that the traditions be passed on to the younger generations.

Alice, in her 30's, is a guidance counselor and the mother of two children. She was born in her parents' home, with the help of a midwife, and has lived on St. Helena's Island continuously, except for the four years she went away to college. She experienced a dramatic change in her perception of what it meant to be Gullah:

So that's how I went and then, when I went away to college, I used to be ashamed, because Gullah was not the thing. You didn't want people to know that's where you are from. You didn't want to be called a Geechee or anything

like that. You didn't want to be called that. When I went to college, which was right in Georgia, they would say, "Where are you from?" And I would tell them, "Beaufort." I wouldn't say St. Helena's, I was from Beaufort. And they would say, "Oh, that's where those people who work the roots are." And I would say, "Yeah."

And I remember bringing home about four friends of mine, and they were really kind of afraid of coming in this area. But they came and we went to the beach and went to a club. I remember everything was fine. But that stigmatism, they have that stigma. You are from this area, so you work roots, and you them Gullah people and them Geechee people. But now, who cares? They want to come and see what it is all about!

Well, I graduated from college in '82. So I guess probably after I moved back home. Just started getting into the working spiel and every thing. Probably right around that time, '83 or '84. I moved back home. I wasn't as immature as I was back then [when I first went to college]. I didn't really know nothing. When you grow up here, a lot of times, you don't know a lot about your surroundings. When I started to come back home [after graduating from college], I started to know more about how I grew up, or what was more important than being ashamed of, if I am going to move back home, I shouldn't be ashamed of who I am. It doesn't make any sense. And then also, I started, and I was in that group, 'The Hallelujah Singers.' As a matter of fact, I was one of the original ones. So I stayed in that group, and then I started seeing also, in that time too, Gullah, that's

something you should not be ashamed of. People are coming here to see our heritage, our language, and everything about the Gullah community. So, at that time I started feeling more and more that I should not be ashamed of where I came from.

Jim, like Alice, is in his thirties. Except for the first six weeks of his life, and in the years during which he was in the service, attended college, and held a civilian job on the mainland, he has lived on St. Helena's Island. At one point, Jim was speaking about his experiences working at an electronics plant on the mainland:

And that tied in with being from this area, years later, I started feeling ashamed of where I was from, 'Geechee' and all that. Then they would tease me, "You're from the islands?" And then they'd say it like being from the Caribbean, "You from de islands, man?" So those little type things like that, you know, when I would tell people where I'm from.

After spending several years working on the mainland, Jim returned home to St. Helena's Island. He is now married and has two young children. He has changed from the man who didn't tell people where he was from to a man who is now the President of the local NAACP Chapter and who is now quite proud of his Gullah heritage and wants to preserve it for future generations.

Despite Jim's positive perception of the Gullah culture, he still has reservations about sharing his Gullah identity with outsiders. When asked if he would describe himself as a Gullah to other people, he replied:

No, not necessarily. I mean it all depends. If I were asked the question, I wouldn't not tell them. But see, the good thing about Gullah and the good thing about coming from this area, I can go in the circles and I can speak, I believe quite eloquently without really letting people know that I can speak Gullah also. Here you can say "dis and dat" but over there, you have to be quite normal, a little more formal.

Linda is an administrator in a public school system. In her 50's, she was contemplating retirement during the time she was interviewed. One of 10 children, she grew up in Charleston, South Carolina. As with most of the other participants, her first awareness of being Gullah coincided with her college experience:

I was born about a little over 50 years ago in Charleston, South Carolina and never really left home until I went to college which was in Charlotte, North Carolina. And there was when I first realized that there was a difference in my speech patterns when I came to Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte.

When asked if she was aware, when she was growing up, that she was of Gullah heritage, Linda replied, "No, I did not have the slightest idea. Because the folks on the island dialect was so distinct. Much more than mine. And mine is really much more so than other folks."

Now, more than 25 years later, Linda states: "I question survival right now, because a lot of folks still seem so interested when listening to this dialect, but there are others who look at it as a deficiency."



Toward the end of the interviews, Linda was asked what she wanted people to know about being Gullah. She replied:

It is a part of history, that I think, needs to be shared. Needs to be appreciated. And to know that there is still a semblance of the dialect that exists today, and that there are still remnants of the dialect and that the reference is not a demeaning one. These are people who are different only in their use of the dialect. Just like other people, and I always say this, I don't know how many people believe it, but I believe that they tend to be some of the friendliest people, most giving and caring people that I know. I firmly believe that. As much as I believe that Charlestonians are friendly people too, I don't know if that is because they choose to surround themselves by people of like character or whatever, but that's what I believe!

One dramatic way that Linda differed from the other participants was in her definition of what Gullah actually encompassed:

I don't think it is something that you are really born into per se. Blood ties is not it. I don't know enough about my family background to know if there was a connection to Sierra Leone. These are people who are different only in their use of the dialect. Just like other people.

Cynthia, a tall slender woman in her early 30's, is a Gullah historian and performing artist. She writes prolifically about the Gullah culture and is often on the road, performing at colleges, cultural events, or leading tours of her own which focus on the

Gullah heritage and community. When asked what “being Gullah” meant to her, Cynthia replied:

And like I always say to people, “the way we speak is the way we live.” A lot of us who don’t speak Gullah or are ashamed to speak Gullah, also are ashamed of any kind of discussion about anything that our ancestors did to survive, that our grandparents did, in terms of healing remedies and other things like that, because we’re too caught in the mainstream. So for me, it’s very important for all types of people to understand who we are, and respect who we are. With all the races and all the oppression, the whole period of chattel slavery, that these people can maintain a language and a heritage and a culture, that is not just akin, but also distinct, that you can then map it back to the continent that you stole people from in the first place. But I think that’s why it is important that people around the world understand we are here before we are eliminated by people with a mainstream mentality, and people coming in with other cultural perceptions and trying to superimpose that on us. I think it is just essential that people do understand because I know, in my spirit, that it’s been a ploy for people not to know about Gullah. Because in the larger societies, “his story” books, that people learn from everyday in school, there’s never any mention of the Gullah in there. Why wasn’t I learning it? Why wasn’t I taught that? Now it’s like if I knew that then I wouldn’t think that we were just too lazy, no account people running around the jungle and somebody saved us from that and brought us here. I would have thought differently. And someone couldn’t tell you, you’re the

descendent of a slave! And that's all you are. There are people right here, on these islands, they don't really know our history.

Like other participants, Cynthia was a young adult, away from home, when she first became aware that being Gullah was different. "You just grow up, you're part of it, that is you. You don't think you're really anything different until you do leave. Like Alice was mentioning, about going off to college. That is a common story!" She also became aware of the change in perception of Gullah, changing from being negative "Don't speak Gullah. Don't be around the Gullah folk" to a more positive, almost trendy one:

Everyone is running here, in droves now. And it angers me sometimes because like I was saying to someone what I'm speaking from are my years of experience. I've been bringing people back and forth here. So that people see for themselves what our culture is all about. What's so interesting to me is that some people now have amnesia, that I have been doing it [bringing in tour buses to the St. Helena's Island area] that long. And even though it may be someone who was born and raised here that brought them, the person didn't go and really find out more about the history and it is just because they figured "I can make some money. I'll bring some folks down and I can make some money." So it is really for me, my work is so that I can bring all people to understanding and recognizing who we are. And to have my people, the Gullah folks, the Geechee, to stand up like our ancestors did, and protect what we have, whether that's language, heritage. It's up to us to do that.

### **Acting White: Dueling Identities and Biculturalism**

The responses to this question about the role of biculturalism were especially interesting. The six participants who lived on St. Helena's Island unanimously declared that it was not a problem to maintain their Gullah identity, even though most of them went on to relate incidents which strongly suggested that it was, in fact, difficult to maintain their Gullah identity when interacting with the larger American culture. The seventh participant, who has lived "away" for all of her adult life, was at times painfully aware of the struggle between preserving her Gullah identity and maintaining her identity within the non-Gullah community.

Cynthia, the Gullah historian and performance artist, has a college degree in computer science. She was speaking about working in "the corporate world" versus the work she does now, when she said:

I ended up going into computer science and I ended up being able to use computer science for myself. They would love to have me trapped in a cold computer lab and paying me 60 grand a year, or whatever. I'd rather make less than 60 grand and be here, helping to preserve culture and heritage because it's so important. And get so many people of other cultures to recognize my culture, respect it, and even have them reflect on their own.

When asked directly if she acted differently when she was in those corporate places, Cynthia was adamant:

No! I'm me. I was just telling someone from Virginia Tech that I did not have that as a problem, but it would always be an issue. When I worked in corporate America, we had a saying "that I speak with my mouth wide open." Meaning that you are just really direct. And so, I used to have that. In corporate America, people told off-color jokes and I didn't find it amusing, so I would let them know, and, oh my God, all the other African American people in the room would want to die, sink in the floor, because I said this stuff to this Caucasian group. "How did you say this stuff to these people and you're still here?" I started realizing, being in corporate America started making me realize a lot of the difference in terms of the way I was brought up. I'm always different. You just live who you are.

Yet, when she was talking about relationships with people who have moved into the St. Helena's Island community:

Sometimes people look at you and we have so many people who moved here now, where you don't know sometimes if these people are Gullah or these are the new folks. So you go to say "hello," you can immediately tell. If you go on and say, "hi" and the person go on and say "hi" at the same time, then I know this is one of ours. If I go and say "hi" and the person looks at me and then says "hi" then I know this is some new person to the area.

Cynthia attempted to assist a woman who moved into the community, but was having trouble being accepted, even though her family was originally from the St.

Helena's Island area:

What you gonna have to do is, and probably people don't know your momma and daddy because they left so long, you need to know who your family is. What your grandparents and your other people is and when you encounter other people, let them know that, "I'm from such and such, Cedar Grove, or whatever, because my grandmama and them was from there." That's what will make the difference for people to understand that she really wants to be part of our heritage.

Cynthia continued on to talk about the relationship between the Gullah culture and the larger mainland culture:

Then among the regular African American society and the regular American society, people didn't know us, that we still had our own distinct society. And sometimes, I have a very close friend here, and for a long time I guess, he wouldn't say he was a Gullah. He was from more what we call "mainland," even though they're actually still on our island, cause kind of the whole thing was an island. He's from what we call, "up the road there." And so, it's funny though, as close as he and I are, we just had a Gullah connection and Beaufort and everything, we'll talk and we'll start in Gullah. I'd rather be doing this than stuck in somewhere in corporate America. I wouldn't go back if I had to. I was the "lively" one anyway around the office. People were always telling me that, asking me for history about the Gullah, or asking me "What do Black people think of this issue?"

It appears that Cynthia was juggling her identities as a Gullah, an African American, and as an urban corporate professional. While her "core identity" may remain

constant, Cynthia seems to navigate the different cultures using behaviors which are appropriate to each. On St. Helena's Island, she is identified as Gullah, the daughter of her momma and daddy, the grandbaby of so and so. When away from the Gullah community, she is more "urban," appearing on programs, editing and writing, using e-mail, and usually speaking in standard English. She does not hold herself out as a representative of the Gullah community to the corporate world but may be perceived as a representative of the African American community in spite of her insistence that she is not.

Alice, Cynthia's cousin, also maintains that she did not have any difficulty going between the Gullah community and the mainland community. However, that wasn't always the case:

When I went away to college, I used to be ashamed, because Gullah was not the thing. You didn't want people to know that's where you're from. There's nothing wrong with speaking the way you speak. But, certain places you speak Gullah or our language.

After Alice's return home from college, she began to feel more comfortable with her Gullah identity, and would at times, identify herself as being Gullah when encountering non-Gullah people. "Since that time [1983 or 1984] I started feeling more and more that I should not be ashamed of where I came from." While in college however, she was not so comfortable:

And only those few people, my friends who knew me and they knew alone that I was from, but as a whole, a lot of, I'm kind of like a loner. I don't like crowds,

so, a lot of people didn't know that I ever existed, or where I was from or anything. So it was just a few people, my friends who were close to me, who really knew. And they would tease me every once in a while about that. I mean it wasn't nothing that I was, that bothered me. But I just didn't think or didn't talk much about it. It wasn't something that I tried to keep a secret, what I knew I would let them know and it wasn't something they branded me with.

When asked how being Gullah fit in with the larger Black community, Alice again denied any difficulties:

I don't see any conflict. I am comfortable wherever I may go. As a matter of fact, a couple of times, my sisters and brothers are away from home so I would always go and visit them, whether Chicago, Indianapolis, North Carolina, wherever. And I've had a couple of people tell me, "You don't sound like you're from Beaufort or the South." So I don't see a problem fitting in outside the Gullah culture. I don't have a problem with that. Sometimes, a lot of times, you're working with some people, you get away from somebody, you want to go back to that Gullah and you're in the other room, talking away.

Jim, a man in his late 30's, was confident that now he was quite able to navigate the mainland American culture while being true to his Gullah identity. As with the other participants, he was not always as confident as he is now:

And that, tied in with being from this area, years later, I started feeling ashamed of where I was from. "Geechee" and all that. Then they would tease me, "You're



from the islands?” And then they’d say it like being from the Caribbean, “You from de islands, man?”

Explaining how he wouldn’t usually tell people where he was from, Jim stated: Well, they laugh at you for the way you talk and stuff. Nobody likes to be laughed at. But then as you have an appreciation for the way you talk, a lot of folks laugh at it, cause they can’t do it.

As Jim grew older, he also seemed to become more comfortable in his identity as a Gullah. “And I know that God is helping me now. I could care less who likes Jim, who don’t like Jim.”

Perhaps one of the ways that people are able to maintain their Gullah identities while also being part of the mainland American culture is to adjust their expectations in the face of overwhelming odds and to try to retain as much control of their personal lives as possible. Luke, who was 69 years old and retired at the time of this study, was talking about his experiences in the Navy as well as the experiences he had during his employment in the years spanning the time after he retired from the Navy until he retired again from employment in the hospitality industry:

There’s lots of things I learned at the Marriott. And like I said, I was fortunate. I was able to explore other countries. I was fortunate and blessed. Wherever I went, I was always treated fairly. I will never be able to sit and tell anyone, White or Black, or any other nationality, to say that I was discriminated against, because I was Black. I got minor discrimination, no more than normal, because that was

part of the way of life, and still is, but I have never went in a foreign country where I was discriminated against, because I was Black.

Having a positive attitude about your self worth and refusing to become a victim also seemed to be key elements in developing bicultural competency. Frequently Luke would state “I was fortunate,” when talking about his experiences. He seemed able to deal with the harsh realities of his world, such as segregation, racism, and economic inequities in a manner that promoted problem solving and enhanced his survival. He valued hard work, persistence, and education, both formal and through his life’s experiences. He didn’t agree with the way things were, and tried to combat the wrongs in his own fashion.

Talking about his childhood, Luke continued:

Yes, although I was born here, I should say in the Sea Islands, St. Helena’s Island. We were what you would call, poor. But then, we weren’t poor like some of your friends and neighbors. My dad provided for us and we always had a decent meal and decent clothing. And I accepted certain things. This was the Depression.

Luke’s focus on the larger picture and his refusal to accept the stereotypes sometimes presented of Black people may also have contributed to his bicultural competence. Luke was recounting his employment as a deputy in an Ohio county jail, and the advice he gave his children:

And we had a lot of murderers and I said one or two of them weren’t Black. What I’m saying is that the majority of people in certain areas are Black, and then when they are showing a documentary on it, that’s what they are projecting to some

people. The majority of the people projected on the screen are Black people.

And that's why I tell my kids:

Don't be brainwashed with that, yeah, you can get in trouble like everybody else, end up in jail, but who knows what your life will be. But don't think just because you made a mistake, you think, "Oh well, that's what they expect of me any way." And just go along for the joy ride.

Dora was probably the least "bicultural" of the participants. This I attribute to several factors. Now 87 years old, she had spent her entire life on St. Helena's Island. Her excursions to the mainland, other than those during the Civil Rights Movement, were usually brief. The most important people in her life, her family and friends, were, for the most part, residents of St. Helena's Island. Dora, who was comfortable with her identity as a Black woman and as a Gullah woman probably had the least need to be bicultural of all the participants. She described herself as getting along with White people who she met in places like the grocery store or at a medical facility on St. Helena's Island. Relationships with White people outside of St. Helena's Island seemed to be limited to those Whites who she met through someone she knew in her home community. Beyond that, she really did not have much daily contact with non-Gullahs, except for those she saw on television programs.

Linda was the only participant who did not reside on St. Helena's Island. She had gone to college, married and was employed in a public school setting for many years on the mainland. To Linda, the development of a bicultural identity was essential for survival.

I'll tell you for me it is no more for me the "acting White." I know it is more of a survival technique for me and for others who may have to do it. So the "Whiteness" of the situation doesn't come into play. But as we were coming up, if one of our friends heard us, we called it "proper," speaking proper, and the Gullah used to say, "twissy tongue, twissy tongue," meaning that they were speaking very politely and correctly. I don't know, but if we spoke correct English coming up, it was "acting White." Now today, it is, and it could still have that underlying belief, but that's not the primary reason for doing it. The primary reason now is survival.

When asked how Gullahs fit into the larger Black community, Linda talked about the Black community in Charleston, South Carolina:

I don't know if there is any such thing as non-Gullah versus the Gullah-like might exist in Charleston, because there are some that don't have the dialect. They have lost it over the years, so I don't know who they are, is what I am saying.

For Linda, going to a Black high school and to a Black college promoted the development of a positive identity, even though she saw "light skinned kids got preferential treatment. It was the same old thing I had to face." Nevertheless, she found the experience of attending a Black high school and college:

A beautiful experience going to a Black institution whether it was through my high school experience, which was all Black, or going to college the way I did. One of the thing is, it puts you in tune with your identity, but it also awakens you to the fact that the same kind of experiences I had in high school, I thought once I

got to college it would be different. But I had to understand real quickly, at that time, we were still dealing with perceptions and attitudes and mind sets. So when I went to college, the same things existed. And I became pretty rebellious. And being rebellious, it was a challenge to me. OK, my rebellion comes in different forms than the others. It then becomes a challenge. Those obstacles that I had to face became challenges. And none of my experiences has caused me to be bitter. It gave me a better understanding of people.

Again and again, Linda emphasized the importance of biculturalism for survival: But again, one of the very first statements you had in that consent thing that I signed, encapsulated all of that in that you had to prepare yourself and be able to be bicultural and be able to, I guess, fit in even if it means reverting to more cultured standards. You know, language. You have to do that in order to survive. So, I think the term “acting White” now has a different kind of meaning. Before it is more derogatory, but we know, in instances we have to do it, in order to survive in society today.

For Linda, as well as for most of the other participants, biculturalism initially meant “acting White” in order to survive. Over time however, biculturalism became a genuine part of their identity, generally meaning that they engaged in more formal English and adopted mainland cultural mores when in the workplace and when interacting with non-Gullahs, whether Black or White. The Gullah language was reserved more for home use with close friends and family. The Gullah language and traditions appear to be associated more with informality and a level of comfort and

relaxation that participants can enjoy when not interacting with the outside world. Linda continued:

There is a level of comfort you have when you feel like you are speaking the same language as folks to whom you are communicating. And when that doesn't happen, the feeling that comes over you is an emotional kind of baggage that you don't really need. And I know I was able to overcome mine, and to survive, but I don't know what it is gonna take for this generation of kids to do it. That's why I'm saying to you, I can go back home and feel real comfortable, not have to worry about the way I say anything, more concerned about what I say, so I don't even have to worry about the way I say it. Cause I am among those who understand the dialect and are just comfortable with it.

Again Linda emphasized, "Well, I think folks perhaps like me may have found that for survival, they have to shed that [Gullah language]. And become more formal in their speech. And I think that is what has happened."

### **What Those Ol' Folks Do: Tradition and Identity**

Generational transmission of cultural traditions and knowledge plays an integral part in the development of bicultural identity. Some of this knowledge is communicated through religious institutions; some through home arts traditions, and some through cultural means such as stories and art work. Gullah traditions appear to be related to survival; survival of the individual as well as the survival of the community. According

to Luke, “The tradition of what they are doing is being passed on, to continue from generation to generation. This was great survival for people years ago.”

Luke went on to explain that a lot of the traditions involved fishing and farming: Yes, this was things that each family did. What you were taught, part of your teaching in coming up. It was what you did! You learned to get something from the soil. Some things here were traditions. You were expected to, each family was expected to go from year to year to year. You got what you could from the creek to survive for yourself and to sell when it was possible; all to survive, the maintenance of your life. Land, it was the same thing, you were taught to plant a harvest. Another part of the maintenance and survival was to maintain what you had. This was the cycle of survival of tradition. This was what we were taught that our ancestors did over the years. And we kept the same cycle of survival. Traditional survival! You did certain things to survive. This is how great grandparents came up. And this is what my granddaddy told me. And Momma said, Grandma said.

To Luke, tradition meant survival. He was worried that the younger generation did not realize the importance of tradition:

But the tradition is what a lot of what we are throwing away right now! A lot of the younger ones, middle age and younger men right now, would not go in that creek to cast a net to get a meal of shrimp or fish. They won’t do it! Times have changed! It’s because that’s what them old people do. “I don’t want to go in there.” That’s what they did years ago. Some of us are throwing away our

traditions. A lot of them right now have their land, or have some family land right now, that they could till the soil, and plant and harvest, but they said, “ I did that as a little boy or a little girl coming up. I don’t need to go out there now and dig in that ground.”

Traditions associated with spiritual values and religion played a large part in the development of identity. According to Luke, religion and spiritual values were “very, very important. We were taught to always be involved in something.”

Luke eloquently stated his cases for the value of tradition and its importance in the continuance of the culture:

Yes, like I say, it will never die! And it’s the thing, the part of it now, is good, because it’s tradition. You don’t let tradition die! I could see that from the other nationalities that I’ve been around in the service and associated with after I got out of the service. The Jew never lets his culture die. I don’t care where he’s at. He comes around you and accepts you whatever you do, but he will do something every chance he gets. It’s cultural stuff that goes way back!

We’re the ones that are not preserving our culture like other nationalities.

We’re the ones that are not trying to preserve it. Like I said, I’ve learned through experience, other nationalities have their culture there, always!

Dora, the oldest participant, was 87 years old. A petite woman, her eyes sparkled and her voice trembled with passion when she described traditions and how important they were in terms of identity development and cultural preservation. Dora had left school after completing fifth grade at the Penn Center in order to work to help support her



family. While at Penn, she was educated in home arts skills such as cooking and canning. She was able to use these skills to gain employment. To Dora, like Luke, traditions were also associated with survival, both physical and spiritual. She spoke fondly of traditions such as Farmers' Day at Penn:

And they had a thing they used to do called Farmers' Day. They would have these men cook a calf, cause they had animals and they would cook that calf and the next day would be Farmers' Day and they had big trays of crackers and meat. And boy, the next day it was so good and tasty. And people came from everywhere, everywhere! They came from everywhere to get to Farmer's Day! And every thing that you canned you could take there and show it and you got prizes.

One of the most widely celebrated traditions according to Dora was participation in the annual Heritage Day activities at the Penn Center on St. Helena's Island:

Heritage Day for Penn, we have three or four of those. We have all of Paris Island. People from everywhere and for three nights we have classes, artists, singing, and we tell people to cook the crab and we have people to stand in line to get them. So people enjoy the oyster. They have three nights of that. One of the nights would be that and the cook-off meal would be on Saturday. And that's when they could get the money and prizes. And people volunteered because this is for Penn!

According to Dora, there was "singing" every third Sunday at the Penn Center,

“We used to have it the last Sunday with a dinner and then people came up with the program to sing and tell stories, Bible things, and have a program for teenagers. We ask the churches to come in.”

Praise houses and activities at the Penn Center have been discussed in the literature review in Chapter Two. It appears that what is written about praise houses in the literature is supported by the participants’ own experiences. Other traditions however, were not supported by the participant’s experiences. None of the participants had ever heard of “basket names” which were supposed to be informal names given to infants at birth and used by immediate family. It was not the same as a nickname which was usually given based on some characteristic associated with the person. When asking Dora about basket names, she initially thought I was asking about “bastard’s names.” According to Dora, “that means you have a child and you are not married.” Once I clarified what I was asking about, Dora replied:

Oh, a basket name, we call it in our culture a nickname. Like they would call me “Come See.” I don’t know why. They would say when you don’t raise the kids, you take a chance on a “come see.” That means you just come to see them! You don’t stay long. So that’s my nickname.

As with other participants, traditions were an important part of Alice’s life. Some she experienced directly, some she learned about by listening to oral accounts from other family members or friends. To Alice, speaking Gullah was an extremely important tradition. Declared “taboo” by her father when she was a child, Alice is now pleasantly astonished to see that people are now speaking Gullah more openly and “You know, we

getting paid now [to speak Gullah]! We getting paid now! It would be a big asset to speak it!” In her youth, many of the traditions associated with the Gullah culture, such as cooking “red rice” , which supposedly had menstrual blood as an ingredient and was used to control men, and “working roots” had negative connotations associated with them. Not only did Alice feel embarrassed by reference to practices such as these, but she also felt there was a conflict between traditions such as these and her Christian faith. In Alice’s case, it may be that some of the traditions contributed in a negative way to her development of a bicultural identity. “Don’t put me in that classification! I’ve heard about it, but I’ve never seen how they work it.” Her parents emphasized speaking “proper English” rather than Gullah. Alice acknowledged that it was necessary to speak “proper English” in the business world, and in her work as a guidance counselor, stressed the need to ‘speak properly’ when outside of the home, and suggested to students that they reserve the Gullah language for home use.

Traditions associated with land use played a strong part in Alice’s eventual identity. She was justifiably proud of the fact that:

We have a lot of property, we keep a lot of our property in the family. We will not let it go away in taxes and let somebody else come and take it away. We still have our family property. None of it has been lost for not paying taxes.

Alice talked about working on her family farm as a child and about trying to instill the virtues of hard work in her own children, “They pick blueberries until they’re old enough to go and get another job.” Alice alluded to the unconscious effects of some traditions.

She was speaking about disciplining her children and how, sometimes, without even realizing it, she did some of the same things her parents did:

Like a lot of times you grow up with your parents and say, “I’m not gonna do that! But I find I do some of the same things that they did. Using the same things like, “Confound your soul!” and “Confound your soul if you don’t get out of here!” My children are doing the same thing. So a lot of things have been passed down but still a lot have not either.

Age and experience helped Alice not only to accept her Gullah heritage but to become proud of it:

When I started to come back home [after college] I started to know more about how I grew up. I shouldn’t be ashamed of who I am. And then also, I was in that group “The Hallelujah Singers.” So I stayed in that group and then I started seeing also, in that time too, Gullah, that’s something you should not be ashamed of. People are coming here to see our heritage, our language, and everything about the Gullah community. So, at that time, I started feeling more and more that I should not be ashamed of where I came from.

Traditions associated with praise houses were a very important influence on Alice:

My father was one of the deacons. There was three praise houses down in the Eddy’s Point-Jenkins area. One deacon from these different churches were over each praise house. And I remember going on a third Sunday, with all the second set of children, my mother and father, going on a Sunday night and that was

something that lasted a long time. I mean that was tradition. But it is still going on. The praise houses are still going on. My father is no longer over it, but it is still going on. We would just go, sing, people would shout and read the Bible. It was like a long devotional service. A devotional service is just reading the Scripture, a prayer, and just singing and shouting. That's where you got our training from, the praise house. By the time you got through learning to read the hymns and praying and you get to church, you can read now. And also, the way that they teach us to read the hymns, that's how I learned all of the hymns. Spiritual traditions have continued to exert a strong influence on Alice and have become more internalized, forming a vital part of her identity:

I have gotten stronger in my faith as I have gotten older. I mean, when I was younger, it was like a ritual, something that I just did. But I mean that is something that has always been in our family. Like I said, my belief has gotten stronger and stronger as I have gotten older. That's just something that my parents taught us.

Alice passionately spoke of the dangers she perceived from other cultures:

But I like it, even the tone, it's different from now, and it is something you have to learn, to hold onto. But problems with all the structure. People are saying we have to change, change, change. And really, those are other people's cultural elements that have come in!

Traditions related to the land and the water probably influenced Jim the most.

Growing up on a farm, he was used to hard physical labor. According to Jim, his

upbringing gave him an edge later on when he enlisted in the service and was in basic training. The physical work which was supposed to “break you down” was not any more difficult than the work he did on the farm as a child and adolescent. Jim also talked about going shrimping with his father, and how, even as an adult, he was no match for his father:

We were going shrimping on the river that day. Me being young and smart, he being old and not that wise, I figure I’m gonna show this old man up. So I’m showing him how strong I am and how much better I can throw the net than he can and every time I’d throw it, it would double up. Double up! He watched me for a while, then he said, “Boy, you’re so green the cow wouldn’t eat you!”

Every time he would throw it, it would be like a butterfly. Smooth as silk, but he was my partner.

As Jim matured, he realized the value of traditions that he had been exposed to as a boy. “He [his father] taught me a lot of stuff. Sometimes I wish I had learned more like knitting nets. Some of the stuff that I thought was ridiculous. As I got older, I realized it was an art.” Like Alice, Jim had initially been embarrassed by his Gullah heritage. As he grew older, he was able to see the value of many of those traditions which enabled him to survive and to be independent. While he did not continue some of the traditions directly associated with farming and fishing, variations of those traditions are evident in his daily life. Although not farming like his parents did, Jim does have a garden and “loves playing in the dirt.” He also has a similar Saturday morning ritual at home with his family when chores are done, such as cleaning the house and washing

clothes. Many of the specific tasks, such as wiping down the baseboards, are done in the same manner as when he was a child. And while Jim no longer observes some of the traditions that he experienced as a child, he has learned from them and those underlying lessons have become part of his identity:

Simple stuff, getting kindling, raking corn, shelling corn, you learn how to saw, do other things, go home from school, know you got to get the kindling, shell the corn, feed the hogs. Do all this stuff. Do all that before it gets dark. And you still got to do your homework. You got to be in bed by a certain time. You ain't got no choice. So you learn management skills. You learn creativity. There ain't no TV so you make up games and stuff like that.

Like the other participants, Sarah spoke about traditions related to farming and how those traditions made survival possible:

So I and my brother was the main two that worked the farm, the fields. So every morning, I had one cow to milk, to get fresh milk. And my brother had me to get the fresh milk before we go to school. But my first quart of milk, I drank that. And then the rest that I get, I take it in the house. So that was fun for me!

And like the other participants, Sarah was discouraged from speaking Gullah in public, yet she became quite fluent in it:

That's right, my mother didn't want us to speak Gullah. She wanted us to go to school to learn to get an education and be able to manage to go out and work. But yet we all speak Gullah in the back yard! We couldn't speak it in the front, in front of them, but we did it in the back yard! And so did our friends when we got

together. But no, you couldn't really speak Gullah in front of them because they would say, "What are you saying?" But I thank God I still learned the Gullah. And they could speak it. They speak it to their friends. But they didn't want us to speak it. But we learned it because we got it from them. They were speaking Gullah! There's no reason why we should be deprived of it. Because we sit and listen when it was time and speak Gullah in the back yard. It worked out well.

Sarah's daughter, Cynthia, was in her early 30's. Born in New York City, she and her family moved back to St. Helena's Island while Cynthia was in elementary school. Because she was unlike her siblings who were all older than her and had been born on St. Helena's Island, Cynthia felt that she "had a different perspective on things." Perhaps it was her chosen avocation which made Cynthia champion the cause of the Gullah culture. Although her college studies focused on computer science, her passion and her livelihood now centered on the Gullah culture. When asked about the role of traditions in the formation of identity, Cynthia was very eloquent. She felt that the Gullah people needed to protect themselves from exploitation and needed to keep their culture distinct in order to survive.

According to Cynthia:

She is not just here trying to exploit the culture or whatever have you. There are people, you know, you have to protect yourself. If you feel that people are doing such exploitation, you put up a defense. You have to protect yourself. And a lot of defense is keeping people at a certain distance. I think that it is essential in terms of just looking at how people think about us, there are a lot of myths and



craziness and a lot of it now is being perpetuated academically. And I think that it needs to be stopped. It's not helping us. It's misinformation that is out there. So that's getting back to why I do what I do. I would have to say "yeah" because I don't think it can survive if it's not kept distinct. It's not Gullah anymore. I don't endorse a separatist thing. Purist no, it's just that I believe every culture needs to be autonomous in certain ways for there to be different cultures. That is what we need. I think we all need to be preserving our individual cultures and then coming together to celebrate those things and to share in those common bonds and to understand the things we don't have in common. I don't think that we need to be melted and stuck together! I don't think it is any problem with being able to do it because the Gullah Community has had to do this all these years and all these generations we've been here. Then among the regular African American society and the regular American Society, people didn't even know us, that we still had our own distinct society. I don't know what they are looking for. I think they are looking for the little quaint picture out of the books that me and you talked about, people walking around with baskets on their heads and standing out in the fields. And they don't see it and they go. It's interesting to know that there are so many people and so many cultures all around and people don't understand the importance of preserving them. And that doesn't mean that there is anything wrong. That's nature, self preservation. And that's really what I want to do, is just I want people to share in our culture, but don't try to annihilate our culture and then celebrate it out of a book! Instead of having pictures up about what we

used to be, we should be here, living, breathing, showing you who we are, not what we used to be.

Cynthia's bicultural identity was formed at an early age. She was speaking about her early childhood when she lived in New York City but visited St. Helena's Island during the summers:

But the thing about it is that I was always here in the summer time, so I kind of knew both worlds. I was never completely a city child. So it was like you have those two things going, so it was like I was in this sandwich position and like I had that in a lot of different teachers' classes. Like I was the translator between them and the rest of the students. At the same time I say, but you don't come here and disrespect the people here, based on whatever you knew from the city! I realize I'm not in the city when I'm here.

Cynthia clearly related traditions to the survival of the Gullah people:

So for me, it's very important for all types of people to understand who we are, and respect who we are, because I have went back and read the academic work. I know from living and growing up here, working in the field, and being around older people, hearing how they had to work in the fields, when I had a choice to work in the field or not. And like, how can you disrespect that? How can you turn around and say that with all the races and all the oppression, the whole period of chattel slavery, that these people can maintain a language and a heritage and a culture, that is not just akin, but also distinct, that you can map it back to the continent that you stole people from in the first place. You can only give the

Creator credit for that kind of sustained power in the face of all the other odds.

But I think that's why it is important that people around the world understand we are here, before we are eliminated by people with a mainstream mentality and people coming in with other cultural perceptions and trying to superimpose that on us.

One way Cynthia's interview differed dramatically from those of the other participants was her insistence that the history of the Gullah people has deliberately been omitted from written history texts:

I think it is just essential that people do understand because I know, in my spirit, that it's been a ploy for people not to know about the Gullah. Because in the larger societies, history books, that people learn from everyday in school, there's never any mention of the Gullah in there. There's none whatsoever. Yet still, linguists, anthropologists, sociologists, and all of this will let you know point blank, if there is any place in America that has a part of Africa, it's the Sea Islands! These people have all these African renditions that nobody else who is African American has. You find little strings of it through out the whole country within the African American community, but nothing this firm and this solid, that like I said, you could match it back to some group of people on the continent of Africa, to this day. And so, why if something is that powerful, wouldn't you let people know about it? This area, for instance, St. Helena's, Port Royal area, Beaufort County, was a major hub for the Civil War. Why isn't that important? Why wasn't I taught that? Because if I was, then they would have to tell me who

a lot of those forces were, who were working with them, and I could find out that a lot of those forces were people of African descent. Off of these islands. These are my ancestors.

Cynthia's explanation for why Gullahs were omitted from "mainstream" history speaks to the development of identity:

Now if I knew that then I wouldn't think that we were just too lazy, no account people running around the jungle and somebody saved us from that and brought us here and all that. I would have thought differently, like "Wow, you mean to tell me we were in the military forces, we were doing this?" It's like, you're kidding me. These people had this kind of training, they had these kinds of skills, before they even got to this country? Anyway, you start to look at things a different way. And someone couldn't then tell you, you're the descendent of a slave! And that's all you are. And then you accept that as "Oh, we've been downtrodden since we got here cause we were slaves." And you know that whole, slave, we were beaten down thing, it's what you think cause it's what you've been told. "Wait a minute now. That can't quite be true." Maybe some people were, but here were all these people had pride and were still standing up and had the culture. So it would make you think totally differently. By then, people of African descent in America or some other part of the world would see that African people did create things, they did maintain things, even here, even during chattel slavery, that would change a lot of people's views on everything now. Even as they tell us of racism, that people still think there is a superiority

thing, about Whites getting privilege versus being a person of African descent. I think it would change all of that! It's like we're here on these islands, it was intentional to begin with, and it seems to be remaining so.

Cynthia alluded to the incorporation of cultural practices into people's identities. She was speaking about how some aspects of voodoo have become part of daily life and may not even be recognized as being anything other than just something people in the Sea Islands have traditionally done:

There are things that people do, throughout the Sea Islands, that other people who like, say they come from Haiti or somewhere, that is a major religion there. They probably would see it and say "That is voodoo." We don't call it that though. For us it would just be an everyday thing! Like you know, going out and grabbing a herb from the yard, boiling it in a pot and drinking it. That for us would be just part of that whole ritual culture of voodoo. We don't realize that!

Cynthia also recognized how traditions which may conflict with each other can be incorporated into identities, "Most people here who practice voodoo, it is not a separate thing anyway. They go to church! You have different ways of people trying to survive." To Cynthia, the influence of the larger, non-Gullah culture has not been positive:

Here we have been taught for so long to be ashamed of who we are, that's the first thing and then after the shame started to ease up a little, and because people have been exploited and our cultures have been exploited too. We see all this distorted stuff that people are putting out there.

Generational transfer of traditions was seen as very important:

So they might sit you down and say, “OK, this is lesson one, Gullah.” You don’t do it that way, you just live who you are and everyday you’d learn. For us, it’s just a natural process. Like you’d be with an older cousin or your parents, your brother. It’s like they just kind of think it is there, not realizing that really your parents, or whoever is raising you or with you is teaching you stuff as you go. But it is never a “sit down, let me teach you.” I mean people don’t do it now. I might say to my mother, “ All right, how are you attaching the back of the quilt?” I already know how to make a quilt top. Then she will actually sit down and show me how to do it. But other than that, everybody just sit in the house and do it. That’s how I know how to make the top of a quilt. I watched her and my sister when I was little sew these things. I know how to make the top of a quilt, but I don’t know how exactly to attach it inside. So she had to show me that. But, most times, here it is just a sharing process. It’s just a natural way to do stuff.

Sharing traditions on a community wide basis was also seen as a way of sharing knowledge and establishing identities:

Just standing on the corner, like up at Martin Luther King Park, just stand there on a nice afternoon like this and you’d be surprised what you’d learn, hearing people talk. So it’s like you learn all this stuff just by being community instead of being neighbors, you know, just living at the door. When you’re community, you have that common thread. Everybody that’s there shares it.

Even minor traditions can be a way of identifying fellow Gullahs:

Sometimes people look at you and we have so many people who moved here now where you don't know sometimes if these people are Gullah or these are new folks. So you go to say, "hello" you can immediately tell. If you go on and say "hi" and the person go on and say "hi" at the same time, then I know this is one of ours.

Cynthia spoke at length about the transmission of cultural traditions through the media such as through television or the movies as well as through books and articles. The effects of the various media seemed to be a double-edged sword. On one hand, television shows such as Gullah, Gullah Island and movies such as Daughters of the Dust helped to increase awareness of the Gullah culture throughout the entire country. On the other hand, she thought that Gullahs were inaccurately portrayed in these productions. Cynthia noted that Gullah, Gullah Island had more of a multicultural format rather than attempting to address contemporary Gullah life. She also noted that some of what has been written about the Gullah community, in both the popular and the academic press, is erroneous. Cynthia seemed to reconcile these two extremes in her comment, "At least it makes people aware that we exist. It gets them talking."

Cynthia also addressed generational transmission of Gullah traditions through institutional means. She spoke passionately about the Penn Center. Built originally in 1862, it was the first school for former slaves. It is now a National Historic District and has recently entered into a formal partnership with the University of South Carolina. From Cynthia's perspective, this was a necessary evil. Traditionally, the Penn Center had served as the educational and community center for the Gullah population on St. Helena's

Island as well as for the neighboring Sea Islands. Generations of Gullah families had passed through the portals of the Penn Center, where they had learned traditional skills such as basket weaving, food preservation, sewing, farming and academics. Some students at Penn later became teachers there. Many of the buildings and the improvements to the land were labors of love by community members. In recent years however, while Penn still has functioned as a community center and has held some educational programs, it became seriously in need of a major infusion of funding to repair, renovate, and reclaim Penn's position of importance in the community.

According to Cynthia, the University of South Carolina has provided substantial financial support so that many repairs and renovations have been made. However, along with the support there has been a change in the structure and mission of the Penn Center.

Cynthia stated:

A lot of people who are working there [Penn Center] are from USC. They're not from here! Or other people who are from here "up the road" or other areas, so we go in there and it's not like before. You can't do that now. They don't mean any harm. They're thinking they are just running an office, but this is a community thing as far as we are concerned. The University of South Carolina is now tied in with it. I'm afraid one day it will no longer belong to the Blacks. The benefit of the community is secondary.

An especially sensitive topic for Cynthia was the subject of Penn's archives:

Because another thing about Penn, is that what hurts me is that the majority of Penn's archives, the real essential things, the works and photos, are in North



Carolina! They are at the University of North Carolina. I forget which campus. It is supposed to be so they can be preserved because they don't have the proper things to preserve them with here. So like I would like for my mother, my stepgrandfather, to see these pictures, so I can know who was family members, who were these people, what these people used to do. I would love to be able to go and have people name those faces [in the photographs]. We should have it here.

### **Raising Up the Chil'en: Gullah Child Rearing Practices and Identity**

All participants in this study are parents, and in some cases, grandparents or even great grandparents. There seemed to be a consensus among the participants that methods of child rearing have changed significantly over the years. Most of the participants seemed to feel that the changes were not for the best. Most of the participants seemed to link this decline in the quality of child rearing to the rise in enforcement of child abuse laws and in the provision of welfare services. Participants were divided on the topic of if families and communities were closer now or if they were closer years ago. Some participants felt that there was more concern for other people's survival years ago, while other participants stated they were closer to their families and communities now. It seemed that years ago, children were disciplined not only by their parents, but also by other adults in the community. Much of the discipline consisted of physical punishment. It was interesting to note that among the younger participants who themselves had young children; none utilized physical punishment as a means of discipline. Yet each

participant in the study lamented the lack of physical punishment when disciplining today's children. Some of the participants also thought that some of the traditional beliefs, such as the alleged ability of elderly women to turn into "haints" at night were really just ways of controlling other people, particularly children.

Linda spoke at length about the child rearing her parents used when she was a child. Although both parents worked outside the home, her mother was seen as the main disciplinarian. She could appeal to her father to lessen a negative consequence imposed by her mother, but most of the time, her mother had the final word. Linda described her family as "poor, but rich in other ways." She spoke about how her parents encouraged their children to get a good education and to be responsible. Methods of discipline appeared to consist mainly of "whoopings" and isolation:

Momma found out what I had done and she chased me. She could not catch me.

So she got the fellows to catch me and she put a whooping on me! And my form of punishment was she took me to the attic, screwed out all of the light bulbs, so I stayed in that attic all night. I'm afraid of the dark to this very day!

Linda recalled how her sister had performed a dance at her high school variety show. She had learned this dance "Push the Carriage" from a friend who had spent the summer in New York City:

And the moves were so suggestive and it was not like any thing these folks had seen before. So they decided to get on the stage and the adults, I mean, they got up and closed the curtain, and our phone was ringing off the hook. My sister got a whipping that was unlike anything she's probably ever seen.

Linda also spoke about how adults could give you the evil eye or “eye” you:

It could be no more than a form of discipline like I told you. The evil eye was intended to prevent some behaviors that were inappropriate, that weren't good behaviors, so usually you would find it in the case where older people are chastising you for doing something wrong in the neighborhood and they give you that eye. It's no more than a look, but through the years, it is passed on like the evil eye, and based on the stories that you heard coming up, that flat eye, is what they call it, what folks called it.

Luke had warm memories of his childhood. As in Linda's case, Luke's mother was the main disciplinarian, although his father would occasionally do the disciplining, which usually meant a whipping. Also, as in Linda's family, he was encouraged to get a good education. Family activities centered around farm tasks necessary for survival. Frequently, Luke's mother would read to him. Some of his fondest memories are of her reading “Dick Tracy” stories to him. In the wintertime, when the family was in the house for longer periods of time, his family would often sing together:

The family was close. When I was coming up, we used to sit around the fire in the winter time. Mostly in the winter. It brought you closer cause it was cold outside. We had either this big wood stove or the fireplace and everybody sits around at night and sing, laugh, and talk together. I enjoyed that. I really did. I used to sing with my mother and my father. I would sing with my mother a lot. I enjoyed her.

As with the other participants, Luke was encouraged to use “correct English.” If he did not:

Well, that way was the way I was taught. And I got a lot of slaps in the face, and shook sometimes. They’d think that was child abuse now. That’s another thing the Supreme Court and the federal government did that ruined our nation. But anyway, my mother was just like that.

Luke related an incident in which he was “in trouble” which illustrated discipline typical of Luke’s family and also of how the community participated in a child’s upbringing:

I remember just having fun until I was 12 years old. If I did something, I was afraid of a whooping. I would take off. My mother used to run behind me and run behind me and fear would cause me to get beat and tired. And a couple of the neighbors would say “catch him, catch him, catch him.” As I got older, she would give me a whooping, but she didn’t say “I gotcha” cause then I’d be gone. But then, when I would come back, somebody would run up on me and I’d run, I didn’t care. I was mischievous and I’d run. “Don’t you run. You can run if you want to, but I’m gonna get you when you come back!” Oh boy, I stayed gone. Came back to the house and she’d see me. Say “come on in, go wash up.” Everybody would have supper. “Eat your supper.” OK, everybody eating. “Go on and eat your food, boy.” I’d start eating. She would walk around and walk up and say “I gotcha!” I’d jump. Then she’d pat me on my shoulders and say “Don’t jump boy. I’m gonna get you when I’m ready.” Once she would tell me

that, the food had no taste in my mouth. No taste! But you could believe after she said she was gonna get you, I'm gonna get it before I go to bed. But she beat me tonight, but if I do something bad tomorrow, I'm gone again.

In most of the participants' families, the mother was the chief disciplinarian.

Luke reminisced:

[My mother did] most of it yes. But see, I could brainwash my dad! I got a few whippings from my daddy but I would run from my daddy. And then I would walk around and he was doing something. I'd hem and haw and he wouldn't say anything. I'd say, "Do you want me to help you with so and so? Do you want me to do it?" He'd say, "I need you to do something." And I'd start talking, talking, talking! And if I got him to talk, it was over. Yes, I could get to my father. I couldn't get to my mother. My mother would call me "Junior!" And I'd say, "Lord, let me die now and come back later!" I was wondering if I died and came back later, everything is all forgotten? Like I said, the Supreme Court of this nation ruined all that system. Cause you never heard of anybody being sent to jail or fined for beating their kids. You was told "spare the rod and the child will get unruly." You whip a child to keep a child intact. Keep a child respectful. The same thing was taught at home that teacher would teach you eighty to ninety percent of the same thing in school. Disciplinary action! And if you got unruly, or disrespectful, it would get put on you with a paddle or a switch or whatever at school. That's the way it was! And then if it happened, and some of your big mouth neighborhood friends and buddies tell your parents, or their parents tell

your parents, then you got another whipping! That's the way it was. It wasn't abusing a child. It's abusing a child the way they are now. That's why you got so many kids now, shoving, kicking, killing their parents. No respect. Like I say, some of these rules or regulations was never properly studied. Just like welfare. It became an abuse of the system too. Making everybody nonresponsible.

Luke's wife, Sarah, had a different upbringing. As a child, Sarah lived with both of her parents and was one of six siblings. She quit school in the ninth grade to help support the family. By the time she was 18, both of her parents had passed away. Sarah and her older sister assumed the responsibility for raising the other four children. Both sisters worked and made sure the other children were fed and clothed. Help from other relatives was minimal. Sarah assumed the role of disciplinarian, while her older sister was described as more lenient and not liking to do the difficult things that needed to be done for the rest of the children. When asked how she raised her younger siblings, Sarah replied:

Well, for them, they had to listen, number one. And if they didn't listen, they got a beating. My oldest sister didn't do the beating. But my baby sister said my older sister was more lenient than me. Wherever she went they went. Wherever I went, they couldn't go. They don't understand that you're providing a meal every time there's a meal on the table, that you can't go around telling people you're hungry. That's important!

By the time Sarah had her own children, her parenting style had changed. While she still "promised a whipping" she never did it. In fact, her parenting and discipline

consisted of talking and reasoning with her children. Consequences were “natural” ones which resulted from the decisions her children made:

I have always told my kids that if you ever do anything in school I will be there. And I was gonna whip them right in front of the class. I never had to go to school one day for none of them doing wrong. Today I feel good because the family to me now is closer than back then [when Sarah was a teenager]. Today, me and my family, my children, are closer than some of the families I noticed back then when I was coming up. [It has to do with how I ] raised them, trained them and treat them. Cynthia can say or ask any question. That’s why Cynthia is so far ahead because she would say, “OK, Momma.” She would wait till I’m just getting ready to go to bed and she would get her pen and pencil and start saying something. “Don’t bother me.” “Oh,” she said, and she started talking and before I knew it, I’d just start blurting it out. She’d say, “See, you didn’t know none of this stuff.”

Cynthia, Sarah’s daughter, was the youngest participant in the study. She was her mother’s youngest child and was herself the mother of a preschool age son. Her style of parenting seems to be similar to that of her mother. Reasoning, talking, and natural consequences are the main techniques Cynthia used with her son.

Alice, Cynthia’s cousin , was the youngest of seven children. She was considered to be “sickly” as a result of having asthma. Her parents were very protective of her and also very strict. As in the other participants’ families, the older children would help with the younger children:

My mother called us, out of the seven, she called us “her first set of chil’rens and her second set of chil’rens.” “My second set of chil’rens, you ain’t nothing like my first set of chil’rens!” There is nine years in between me and my sister. So there was a big difference. It was like a different world. We were a different generation all together. The older ones were expected to help take care of the younger ones and to do their chores as well.

In addition to raising her own children, Alice’s mother also raised some of her grandchildren:

A lot of people in this area raise a lot of grandchildren. My mother, my oldest sister had nine children, but she raised a lot of my sister’s children also. So, as a community, a lot of grandmothers raised a lot of their grandchildren. A lot of people in New York will send their children back for the grandparents to raise and then, they will move away or they will stay here.

Alice made the point that, while her life style is quite different from her parents’, she still endeavors to instill the same values in her children as her parents did with her:

My father no longer does farming, so my children, they know nothing about what I went through, none of the grandchildren do, as a matter of fact. It’s a lot different. But I try to instill in them what my parents instilled in me, to work hard, not to be dependent on anybody. A lot of parents, even if they don’t have, they give, give, give. I don’t do it. My parents didn’t do it with me. I instill the same things with my children. I want them to be independent.



Despite making deliberate choices not to do some of the things her parents did, Alice occasionally amazed herself by acting and speaking in ways similar to her parents:

Like a lot of times you grow up with your parents and say “I’m not gonna do that!” But I find I do some of the same things as they did. Using the same things like “Confound your soul!” My children are doing the same things.

Jim, in his late thirties, was adopted at six weeks of age by his aunt and uncle, who also raised his biological mother. His biological father lived in the area and Jim had frequent contact with him. Jim spoke at length about how his aunt and uncle, who he considered to be his parents, raised him. His description of his childhood suggested that while his family may have been financially limited, there was an abundance of love. Firm, sometimes harsh, discipline was practiced, with his mother being the chief disciplinarian. While Jim associated the lack of corporal punishment in discipline today with higher incidents of juvenile delinquency, it is interesting to note that he did not use corporal punishment with his own children. Speaking of his parents, Jim stated:

And then you know, my parents were like T.I’s [training instructors in the Air Force boot camp] anyway. Cause when they say something, you listen or there were consequences. So, I mean, I was prepared! Mohammed Ali had nothing on my Momma! She had that quick backhand and could pop you quick. No blood, no nothing, but it would sting! She was rapid fire! But now I understand why. But my father, he didn’t beat often, but when he did, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord!

When asked what made the difference between his mother and his father administering “discipline,” Jim continued:

I think with him it might be a strength thing in that he might not want to go to jail cause he might hurt you. He wouldn't mean it, but in the Navy, they called him "Black Out." And after seeing him taking coals out of the stove, putting them in his hands to light a cigarette, you don't think you want to mess with him too much! Plus, he loved me too much. I talk my crazy talk but he loved me a lot. My mother loved me too but she was kind of quick draw. She was quick with a stick, or a broom or a backhand, fly swatter, or whatever. But you know, now that I have children, I see what she was doing.

### **Don't Talk That Backward Talk: Gullah Language**

For Luke, some of his earliest memories involve his mother and her disapproval of "that backward talk":

Yes, I was born and raised here on St. Helena's Island, but my mother was very punctual and I was not permitted to use the Gullah slang like some of my associates that I went to school with and my friends, folks in the neighborhood. But if I spoke any of the Gullah, and I spoke a little, my mother would say, 'Junior, what are you saying? Don't talk that backward talk. Don't be ignorant. I don't want to hear any talk like that again.' So I was discouraged quite a bit. Right today I think about my mother and coming up. But that's the way she

taught me to be like that. She was a Gullah born person. She was born here and raised here, but she went to school. And some of the family members were like teachers and elevated in the church and school system. A couple had small businesses and they spoke the standard English. They were not perfect in English, pretty good, but that was the way my mother wanted me to talk.

Later, when Luke was in the Navy:

They asked where I was from, I would say I was from South Carolina. 'Oh,' they'd say, 'you one of those Geechee boys and that Geechee talk.' They didn't say Gullah, it was Geechee. 'You are one of them Geechee boys from Souse Carolina.' I said, I would correct them, I said South Carolina, not Souse Carolina. You were asked that question a lot.

Luke's wife, Sarah, had similar experiences:

My mother didn't want us to speak Gullah. She wanted us to go to school to learn, to get an education, and be able to manage to go out and work. But yet we all speak Gullah in the backyard! We couldn't speak it in the fronton front of them, but we did it in the backyard! And so did our friends, when we get together. But you couldn't really speak Gullah in front of them because they would say, 'What are you saying?' But I thank God I still learned Gullah. And they could speak it. They speak it to their friends. But they didn't want us to speak it. But we learned it because we got it from them. They were speaking Gullah! There's no reason why we should be deprived of it. Because we sit there

and we listen to them speaking Gullah. So we sit and listen when it was time and speak Gullah in the backyard. It worked out well.

Alice was in her '30's. She recalled that when she was a child, her father discouraged her from speaking Gullah:

Like I told you before, he did not like us to speak Gullah in the house. I guess since Daddy went away and he was like, worked among other people who didn't speak Gullah, he just didn't think, I guess, that it was a proper language to speak, especially if we went to school and we knew how to speak proper English. He wanted the best for us. He wanted us to do the right thing, which was, speak proper English. When I got on the phone to talk with my friends, Dad would say, "You mean to tell me you went to school and you don't know how to speak better than that?" And I would have to correct my English. That's why I don't speak Gullah like Cynthia. I wish I did. You know, we getting paid now! We getting paid now! It would be a big asset to speak it! Anyway, he would always say that, so I would have to correct my English.

Now that Alice has children of her own, her approach to speaking Gullah differs from that of her parents in some ways:

My children, I've taught them, you know, how to speak Gullah, so speak it. When you get in the professional world or when you go to school, speak English. And that's what we're trying to teach the children at school. There is nothing wrong with speaking the way you speak. But, certain places you have to speak English, certain places you speak Gullah or your language. At home, speak

anyway you want to speak, but when you come to school, you got to learn to speak English because you will not get anywhere going in the professional world, speaking Gullah.

Not only did Alice experience changes in her perception of herself as a Gullah woman, but also in her perceptions of the Gullah culture and language as part of the larger American culture:

A lot of people are more accepting of it. Now, it's really a second language. It's not improper English! I see it as being accepted all over as a second language. And we used to think of it as improper English! Now it's a language among a community of people. People paying now to hear people speak Gullah!

When talking about why he used to avoid telling people where he was from, Jim said :

Well, they laugh at you for the way you talk and stuff. Nobody likes to be laughed at. But then as you begin to have an appreciation for the way you talk, a lot of folks laugh at it cause they can't do it. Yeah, they can't. I can be talking with somebody and others wouldn't know what we're talking about. That's a fact. But if you get something good you don't talk too much about it, cause right away, somebody wants to squeeze the fruit. If you get a good fruit, you don't want it squeezed.

It's almost a "flow" thing. Like you're hanging out at the oak tree and then you're talking to people. Then things start going one way and you know, like me and Joe, we speak that way. But it is a gift cause it comes from slavery.

Nobody knows what you're talking about. Usually all it comes down to is that it is a form of communication that is specialized so people can understand what is going on without others knowing what we are talking about. I mean, when you cut through it all, it is just a means of communicating without others knowing what we're saying. It had to do with slavery, right? You couldn't tell the man you're fixing to run away. So you had to fix a way around it. That's about all.

Speaking again about college and the "difference in my speech patterns", Linda related:

Another unique experience was when I got to college, folks did not know what hit them. From Charleston to Johnson C. Smith, North Carolina. I can remember we would get our letters that came to the school. We would line up in this room to go and get our mail. The Post Office, they had a Post Office, cubby holes and every thing, and they would place the student mail in the mail room. Well, in Charleston, as in everywhere else, the mailman delivers the mail. So, the dialogue you would hear between two Charlestonians in the mail room would be similar to this: "Debra, how much mail you got?" "I got one mail. How much you got?" "I got two mail." And everyone is listening to this sort of thing and this dialogue is going on. So they couldn't understand. Our thinking was mailmen delivered the mail. But, across the country and every place else, I guess, they were using the word "letters." But this dialogue in the Post Office got people attuned to these Charlestonians. Because I knew that my language was a barrier, I

did some things that I thought would help to correct it and to overcome this feeling that I had. So I decided to major in English.

As Linda completed her college studies, she became aware of negative perceptions of the Gullah language. “The dialect did not carry with it any kind of refinement. It wasn’t a sign of, I guess, class, style. The thinking at the time.”

Perception of the Gullah language seemed to vary over the years. About 20 years ago, Linda was employed in a coastal city as a guidance counselor and she was talking about interpersonal relationships between staff members:

They formed these committees. I, of course, became the editor of the committees. Who would have thought that a Gullah/Geechee person who spoke in the dialect would have any knowledge or idea of how to write grammatically correct sentences in the structure that was needed and varied according to the work. And these folks were sitting there amazed. So a thought came to me, I said, “Linda, as unpleasant as this might be, this is something you are going to have to do.” So I decided that I would do these presentations in the Gullah dialect.

Something that each participant alluded to was the use of the Gullah language to survive and to communicate something secretly to other Gullah while at the same time, appearing to be communicating something different to outsiders, or to those in socially “superior” positions. For instance, Linda related an incident:

In the story I was telling you about the superintendent who said “Gullah girl,” he did not like the way I used the word “sir” in reference to him. “Sir” is one of those words that I had to enunciate and pronounce distinctly, so from the Gullah

background, we used terms of politeness and we put emphasis on those words. It came from that slave/master era where you had to use the words. When you used them in reference to the master, you had to make sure that you were convincing enough that he knew you had respect for him whether you did or not. You had to convey that. And so, with the Gullah dialect, we place emphasis on words and certain expressions to convey the meaning. We put more expression to let them know that this is much more significant in transferring meaning than not.

Despite years of living and working in the mainland culture, Linda still is more comfortable when she can use the Gullah language rather than the more formal standard English of the workplace:

I am relaxed when I revert back to terms and expressions that, when talking, when going back home, everybody sounds the same, speaking the same language, so to speak. I am the most comfortable when I can articulate the way I want to versus when I am in more formal settings, having to be formal. Even in my home today, I'm just not a formal person. We don't formally set tables, any of that. I mean, we can sit at the dining room table, but you're not going to get all that formality involved in it. If somebody wants to do that, it's fine, and the setting is conducive to it. But beyond that, I am just sick of it. That's all there is to it. I'm a Geechee!

Even though Linda is most comfortable when she is in a setting when she can speak Gullah, she acknowledges another theme about being Gullah that the other participants also expressed. When in the workplace and the larger "outside" world,



Gullah people need to be proficient in “standard” English in order to survive and to succeed:

And when you talk about the stigma that I had to deal with and the barriers I had to overcome in order to survive in this world, those folks [Gullah students graduating from high school in the Sea Islands area] are not going to be understood to that extent. And they are not going to understand that in the interview process, when those folks pick up on that, it is going to be a strike against them anyway. It is just not the dialect that some of the kids use that bothers me. It is the fact that they have not learned to either revert back to whatever or that there are certain environments that could allow for that. So, I am mightily concerned that those folks are going to face some real challenges.

Alice spoke about the conflict between speaking Gullah and standard English that occurred within the public school where she is employed. Even in her work as a guidance counselor in a middle school in the Sea Islands area, it appears that there is some difficulty in accepting Gullah as a legitimate culture and language. Talking about how children are taught in her middle school, Alice noted that children were taught in standard English:

But we, any children that I come in contact with, I let them know, it’s fine to speak it, but you have to learn the English language. When you get back home, you can speak your language, the Gullah. But I don’t think all the teachers do that, especially White teachers. I’m sure they don’t do that. They just correct

them. They don't let them know it is OK to speak. They probably don't know much about it themselves because they can't speak it and they can't understand it.

Despite the best efforts of the parents of the participants to prevent it, most of the participants learned to speak Gullah. Luke's parents were no exception. "I was not permitted to use the Gullah slang like some of my associates that I went to school with and my friends, folks in the neighborhood." It raises an interesting question. Why are some things, like the Gullah language, passed on from generation to generation, despite efforts to the contrary, while other things, like casting nets and gardening, not continued by the younger generation despite their parents' efforts to foster those behaviors?

One of the most obvious traditions, and perhaps the most controversial, was the use of the Gullah language. Speaking Gullah in public was forbidden by the parents of all seven participants in this study, yet some of the participants had at least a "listening" or receptive vocabulary, and others had the ability to speak eloquently in Gullah. Why? Is it because it is human nature to desire the forbidden? Is it the qualities of the Gullah language itself that appeal to the participants? Or perhaps the ability to speak freely with close friends or family without non-Gullahs being able to understand what is being said? It is also interesting to note that, to this day, none of the participants speak Gullah in public, unless they are "performing" or wish to speak with other Gullahs privately or in the comfort of their own homes. According to Luke:

Now the difference in the language, I've had people ask me if I was born and raised on St. Helena's. Yes, I was born and raised here on St. Helena's Island, but my mother was very punctual and I was not permitted to use the Gullah slang like

some of my associates that I went to school with and my friends, folks in the neighborhood. But if I spoke any of the Gullah, and I spoke a little, my mother would say, “Junior, what are you saying? Don’t talk that backward talk. Don’t be ignorant. I don’t want to hear any talk like that again.” So I was discouraged quite a bit.

In addition to the unique linguistic characteristics of the Gullah language, there is another characteristic of the Gullah language which was also significant. The Gullah participants may speak “standard” English in certain situations, but their frequent use of metaphors seemed to be a characteristic of the Gullah language which was used in both “Gullah” and “standard” English situations. Jim’s recollections were liberally illustrated with metaphors such as “Boy, you’re so green a cow wouldn’t eat you!” Alice alluded to the unplanned use of sayings and metaphors when she was talking about how she would sometimes use the same sayings that her parents had used when she was a child. When disciplining her children, she would sometimes exclaim, “Confound your soul!” Perhaps some of the best known metaphors are found in the Brer Rabbit Tales where the weak often “outsmart” the powerful. It appears that the use of metaphors and sayings are a way to pass down traditional Gullah knowledge and to sometimes “outsmart” others. Metaphors and stories may also serve to help people “connect” with each other and to establish a common background.

### **No More Than Usual: Racism**

All the participants addressed racism. Some looked at it from a more individual, personal stance while others took a broader, more systemic view of racism. To some of the participants, racism meant solely discrimination by White people toward Black people. To others it meant discrimination by Whites toward Blacks as well as other minorities, and also color consciousness or bias within the Black community itself.

Linda was very conscious of racism. She spoke of racism as being discrimination by Whites against Blacks and also of Blacks discriminating against Blacks based on the darkness of their complexions:

My mother always had her mother present in the family structure, so my maternal grandmother was a vital part of my upbringing. And um, she was what they refer to as “high yellow,” an almost near-White person because of her physical features. She had hair that she could sit on. I always thought that she was pretty much prejudiced in that she catered to different family members for one reason or another. I always accused her of being a little bit prejudiced because I was one of the darker ones in the family and I think in terms of our early childhood experiences. Because of not just the division of races in Charleston, but within the Black race itself was a sort of a class conscious thing where the folks, even some friends of mine, who were light skinned folks, had preferential treatment than the dark skinned folks. Within the Black race in Charleston, there were some internal struggles that we had to face. And even as early as the early sixties, when there was a concerted effort on the part of the Black community to try to

desegregate some of the facilities, those that were hired first were the very light, near-White looking Blacks that were in the community. So therefore, it was another outcry on the part of the Black community, to try to put some of what we refer to as “people of color” into those business establishments. So I guess in the late sixties you started seeing some darker skinned Blacks in positions in the businesses.

Linda spoke about how even schools which served only Black students were divided by the hue of the students’ complexions:

And she was my complexion, very dark, but went to that school now, we always were amazed at how did that happen? And how did she fit in that environment, because everybody, I promise you, were light skinned folks. But anyway, she went through that school and it was only until we got to college where I had an opportunity to be a friend to other girls from ICS [Immaculate Conception School]. Only when I got to college did I realize that there could be some kind of close relationship established, because we were divided within the race itself.

Even within the Black college which Linda attended, “the same things existed.” “The light skinned kids were the school queens, got preferential treatment.” Perhaps one of the reasons Linda was so successful in her adult life was her attitude toward racism:

And even in Horry County, when I see what I know is pure, blatant racism, when I see situations where somebody is being more preferential, or prejudiced, I know what it is. But I’ve learned how to deal with those things, coming up. And I have to weigh situations to see if it is worth it to get out there and deal with the

situation now or what are some options you have. Or what alternatives you have so that you don't lose self control and still face that. And sometimes it causes me to be angry. And I find myself in situations where there is clear, blatant racism in that I have to be, use my head and think through things before I know to take any action. To make sure, that if I have to fight a battle, I'm going to fight and win. And not lose, like a lot of Black kids in the sixties when I came up. My early experiences have prepared me a lot for dealing with some situations in life.

Linda made a comment which illustrated how individuals and small groups are influenced by larger cultural and societal processes:

It was the time [during the Civil Rights Movement] when things were changing. Black then was becoming beautiful. Even in the eyes of the Black people. And the lighter skinned folks started looking at Blacks in a more favorable light, because as I became older, going through high school, I would find that there was more mixing and mingling of light skinned and dark skinned folks.

Jim looked at racism differently than did Linda. Taking a broader view, he discussed how he thought the different races came to be, and how racism affected everybody:

But I'll say this, Black folks have tried so much to be like White folks till they have forsaken some of the things that made them strong. On the flip side, White folks try to be like Black folks and have forgotten their strong points. And everybody should just be themselves. Cause you know when the Great Ordeal came up in Africa and all that kind of stuff everybody went to their own area of

the world. The dark people went to where the sun is, the White people went to where it is cold. Because of that, people became different. But that's where we all came from, we all came from the same blood. That's why certain sports White folks gravitate to, that's why Black folks came to this area, because we could deal with the climate. That's why you have the Black folks can deal with the sun but the White folks can't. Different but the same! Then it becomes a racial thing.

Slavery has done such a job on people because of our Black folks being inferior and our White folks being superior. But the Bible and that's why Black folks, when they say the Bible, it's the White man's Bible. Because of the Garden of Eden, you know that area that came from, Africa. You're talking the Nile River and all that kind of stuff. You get down to Adam and Eve, they had to be dark people. There's no doubt about that today. In order for one blood to make all kinds of shades of people, you have to have the kind of blood that is flexible. Black, dark blood is flexible. Adam would have to be a dark person as well as Eve, so the blood could change into these other colors. It is uncomfortable to talk differently, but that is just the way it is. But still, we all come from one blood. We got different shades. We are all one race. Cause God say He created man and then He created woman. He didn't say He created Black man and White man. So the seed, race, anytime you can divide, see that's what racism is. As soon as a Black person talk negative about a White person or a White person talk negative about a Black person, you automatically got some walls up there. So that's automatically a prescription for division. And that's what people do for years.

But when it comes down to it, we are all one people. But that race thing sells.

That's why I think this generation, cause see, the main reason that racism get in the church. That is the most segregated place you will find, the church.

Jim also discussed the effects of racism in the workplace:

If affirmative action is wrong, how come it is right for me to give a job to my nephew, just because he's my nephew. That ain't nothing fair about that, it's just what they do. But now that there is affirmative action, you gotta do this and you gotta do that. But what I'm saying, racism will sell. Sexism will sell.

Jim then spoke about racism in the context of the bigger picture:

This guy, I can't think of his name right now, but he was a slave trader in the 1700's. But he said he had a plan. As long as you can pit people against each other, you will always have problems. Literally, that's what we have in society.

Cause when you break it down from the White against the Black, you got the old against the young, you got light skin against the dark skin, North against South.

In addition to the institutional nature of racism, Jim spoke about his personal experience with racism while serving in the military: "This major comes to the window, looks out at my car. Somebody had the audacity to ask me, they made references that 'You driving a White man's car.' There are little subtle things like that."

One result of racism, according to Jim, was that young Black men were deliberately incarcerated:

Some of it goes back to what Black men are in jail for. Some did stupid stuff.

They ain't violent. It's drugs, but they may leave the Black men in jail to supply



the industry, which is jail. Cause they gotta keep the jail running, see. So you gotta have Black men in jail. Plus now, I'm gonna say this and if you get mad, if all your Black men are in jail, then you've got the pick of the women. So that's not an accident that there are a lot of Black men in jail.

Luke is about 30 years older than Jim. He too had been in the service, retired, then worked in the Midwest until he retired again. Finding himself divorced, Luke returned to his father's home on St. Helena's Island, where he rekindled his acquaintance with a woman who had been his girlfriend when he was a teenager. They eventually married and Luke began to work on Hilton Head Island in the maintenance industry until he retired for the third time. Luke had an international perspective on racism. He spoke about his days in the Navy, contrasting the treatment he received overseas and at home:

Like I said, I was fortunate. I was able to explore other countries. I was fortunate and blessed. Wherever I went, I was always treated fairly. I will never be able to sit and tell anyone, White or Black, or any other nationality, to say that I was discriminated against, because I was Black. I got minor discrimination, no more than normal, because that was part of the way of life, and still is, but I have never went to a foreign country where I was discriminated against because I was Black.

It seems that discrimination was and still is, a staple of daily life. Despite Luke's apparent acceptance of "normal" discrimination, his anger and pain were evident as he continued to speak:

I was telling someone just days ago that I was over in Ireland and Scotland [when he was in the service]. I attended church in the Church of the Nazareth. Sang

solos in the church and after services, I was the only Black there, visiting. And they would ask me the background of my religion, or the background of my brotherhood. They want to know what it is like to be Black, what it is like to be in the service, and I was telling them the other day, I said, while I was being asked these questions, I was invited to supper. This lady, she and I were walking hand-in-hand, and I said to the fellas a few days ago, “Can you imagine me, a Black man, walking down the street with a White Scottish woman, walking hand-in-hand, as though we were close friends or lovers?” It was just the treatment. I was just another person and she was walking hand-in-hand with me. And we were in front of her husband! Because this was 1960, no, 1958-59, that would never have happened here in Beaufort County. Then I would never have been able to walk the streets hand-in-hand with someone in Beaufort County in the streets. I would have been stopped and questioned! Stopped and questioned!

Luke recalled the days when Black people had to sit in the back of the bus:

The middle of the bus was your boundary line. And if you were in the middle of the bus and some White person got on the bus, I don't care of what age, and they needed a seat, and you were sitting in a seat, the driver of the bus would ask you to give your seat to that White person and you would either have to move to the back or stand on the bus. That's the way it was. Just certain things were accepted. And you were in full uniform, supposed to be fighting or defending or representing your country with other men who could possible have been the driver's son! You understand! That was the law of the land, the law of this area

at the time. You were not accepted! Even though you were in the military service, a lot of establishments you would not go in, like restaurants or bars. You were not accepted to go in these areas. You and another man were on the same base together or same ship together and he was in the next bunk, two and a half feet away from you. But you couldn't associate with him once you got in town. That's the way it was.

Luke attributed racism in the military to:

It's the way the U.S. has been set up and some of the laws. Look how long, according to history, it was before Blacks were permitted to fight in the wars. They said, "You weren't smart enough, strong enough, fast enough. You don't have the intelligence." It was the same thing with the military. Blacks weren't accepted. I've been told, when the war, rumors of the war back in 1937 or 1938, there were several fellas who volunteered for the service. They were never drafted. Volunteered and the Navy was the first one to do the open volunteers. When he volunteered for the service, he had to be recommended from someone in the town!

I don't care what you did, you were never accepted or recognized because you weren't supposed to be that smart, you weren't supposed to be able to think, you were not good enough to do this or accomplish this, or destroy a building.

That is why a lot of them did not get medals.

Luke placed his view of racism within the context of the times:

In some ways, it made you resent them other Whites. But I guess it didn't bother me that much because of being from the South. I knew the ways of the South! It's not that you didn't get along with people, but there was a certain way they had certain things set up that you were only supposed to go so far and stay on that level. Don't try to move above it. Cause they'll leap you like all of a sudden if you think you're superior. You and I can get along, you and I can be buddies, but you'll never be superior to the White guy. That's why there's a term that's being used in the South here, and a lot of times, is still being used, "Die Hards." It's because some of the older Whites that can never accept the Blacks. Regardless of who you are and what you do, I will always be your boss. So "Die Hards" was a term we used. Regardless of how smart you are, how high you've gotten, wherever you think you'll go, I will still be superior to you. In all his ways, he will never change. He will die before he will change. He feels that he will always be superior to you and that will never change.

When talking about his experiences reenlisting in the Navy in 1948, Luke described the procedure employed when transferring from one base to another:

If you transferred from one base to another, if you were gonna send six men over to the other end of a big base in different departments, then one man would carry all the records. They didn't change that until a little after '48. They made a big change in '49 or '50. Now you can send a guy to Alaska and he'll have his own service records, even if he's with 10 other guys. And he goes by himself. Back then, if you went anywhere by yourself, it would have to be a White man, a White

soldier, a White sailor to travel with you 'cause he was supposed to be the smartest, most intelligent, senior man. But it changed. In some ways, it made you resent them other Whites. But I guess it didn't bother me that much because of being from the South. I knew the ways of the South! It's not that you didn't get along with people, but there was a certain way they had certain things set up that you were only supposed to go so far and stay on that level. Don't try to move above it. Cause they'll leap you like all of a sudden you think you're superior.

Dora, the eldest participant, spoke about the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) during the time of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's. She described what it was like when she was working to register Black voters:

When I get back home, I had to get three people to work with me to register people. How we used to do it, anybody who owned property, all they had to do was sign. They didn't have to read it and then you could learn them to read the Constitution and register them. And so, they came to Penn and sit and burned a cross. It was the Ku Klux Klan.

During the 1960's, according to Dora, Blacks and Whites did not interact very much:

And I'll tell you what happened in Beaufort. Beaufort people [Blacks] don't care for the Whites and they [Whites] don't care for them [Blacks]. They [Blacks] weren't their [Whites] type. And they [Whites] didn't treat them [Blacks] really badly. They [Whites] thought, "Get out of here. We don't need you here."

Cynthia, the Gullah historian, looked at racism from a more institutional perspective. She spoke about the deliberate omission of Gullahs and other Blacks from the history books:

I think it is just essential that people do understand, because I know, in my spirit, that it's been a ploy for people not to know about the Gullah. Because in the larger societies, "his story" books, that people learn from everyday in school, there's never any mention of the Gullah in there. Now, it's like if I knew that then I wouldn't think that we were just too lazy, no account people running around the jungle and somebody saved us from that and brought us here and all that. I would have thought differently. Even as they tell us of racism, that people think there was a superiority thing, about Whites getting privilege versus being a person of African descent. I think it would change all that!

Alice, Cynthia's cousin, recalled when most larger farms were owned by Whites who employed Blacks to do the actual farming:

But now there is a lot of homes placed on the farms, because the farmers sold their property. Especially the White farmers. And they went out of business, especially when they started saying you had to pay Social Security. And who were on their farms? Blacks! They had made their money already so they feel, "OK, so we not gonna pay Social Security for them." And they went as far, as you know, the Coastal Seafood factory, the people that work in that factory down there. They were taking their money. They were not giving it to the Social Security Department. People who worked in those factories, they didn't have

nothing, not even Unemployment [Insurance]. They couldn't draw

Unemployment when that guy went out. They took advantage of them.

Despite this and other examples she gave, Alice denied that she was affected by racism:

I have never had that problem with the racial thing. It never touches us here. I've never experienced it. I remember my mother telling me a story about she used to work with this White lady and you know, she had children by then, and the White lady wanted her to call her little child, Mr. Jones. And she quit that job cause she wasn't gonna call a child, give him a title.

Racism may be a possible factor in how well people are able to be bicultural; to keep their Gullah identity while also being part of the larger non-Gullah society. Another incident Alice related described social interactions between Blacks and Whites in public:

I've never experienced it. I remember, because when I had asthma, my parents used to be up and down the road, going to the doctor. But I remember going to Dr. Smith, in Savannah, that was a dermatologist. And I remember having to go around in the back. There was a small back waiting room. I remember that as a child. Having to go around the back and the Whites were in the front. The front was the air conditioned part, but the Blacks were in the back. I remember that.

It appears that racism, whether overt or subtle, whether individual or institutional in scope, has had a substantial effect on the lives of each participant. It seems to affect how they view themselves, how they interact with non-Gullah people, as well as their daily life, whether at work, at school, or retired. It will probably remain a significant

factor in the lives of the participants as well as the Gullah community.

### **Seeking and Shouting: Spirituality**

Spirituality was important to all the participants. Most of the participants were Christian and were active in their churches. Spirituality was seen as being more than being religious. It was the essence of what made life meaningful and often served as a guide or compass while navigating life's troubled waters.

Alice, in her thirties, described spirituality as being very important to her. She also linked her spirituality with her parents' child rearing practices:

It's very important to me. That's how I was raised. I was always in the church. My mother has always been in the church. I mean they have a really strong spiritual base. And that's where I got it from. When I was in college, I kind of strayed away a little, but I came back. After coming home, I really, really found within myself that it was something very important to me. I have gotten stronger in my faith as I have gotten older. I mean, when I was younger, it was like a ritual, something that I just did. My belief has gotten stronger and stronger as I have gotten older. And I have learned to depend on the Lord a whole lot more. I know that I'm not the reason that I'm here. It's because of God and his son, Jesus. And he is the one who is keeping me and everybody else. But that is just something that I'll never stray away from. It gets stronger and stronger everyday as I learn more about the Lord and get stronger and stronger everyday. That's my goal, to be



with the Lord one day, not anywhere else but with the Lord! That's just something that my parents always taught us. And we have not strayed away from the Lord.

When asked about spirituality, Luke emphasized its importance in his life as well as in the lives of other people in his community:

Very, very important. We were taught to always be involved in something. It was a custom with a lot of Blacks to go by yourself to pray, to isolate yourself from your friends and family certain hours in the evening and pray. You were supposed to go off, like he would go off someplace isolated in the woods, and pray to God that he would get spiritual knowledge. And then there was certain things that you would say to them that you would feel or see visually, sort of like imagery, that would come to you in your mind, and you'd experience. And certain things would come to you in a dream. And they would have Scriptures to back it up, according to what older writers and prophets did years ago. Because certain things would come to you, mentally and spiritually, and when you tell these older, what you call a teacher, who was your guide, somebody who was keeping you constantly under supervision, to see if you're really serious about getting yourself in the church spirit. Most times it would be a child about 12 years old. Becoming an adult, your majority, you have the knowledge, but your whole mental and physical body is changing, so this is when you are spiritually taught. But they would encourage you to get in some sort of church. It was called "seeking." Go out in the wilderness and seek. Go out and pray.

Luke spoke about his baptism at the age of 24:

And they figure you should be baptized in the river. Went down to the river, waded so far, submerged three times. It was a real powerful experience. After it is all over, you see, I wanted to change my life. But what made me do it? Because like I said, it was uncontrollable.

To Luke, spirituality manifest itself in religious practices, but not necessarily Christian religious practices. Here Luke is speaking about voodoo:

It's real! But it is like they tell you about spiritual belief. They will tell you about voodoo or witchcraft. If you are strong in your mind, a person can't do it to you. It's when you are weak in your mind or fearful that it can be done. It's like a religious belief. If you believe in the healing power, really believe that you can spiritually heal, you'll be healed. But if you don't believe, you won't be healed. But as far as healing and prayer, you got to believe in your mind. And it is the same thing for witchcraft.

Dora equated spirituality with being religious:

We had a praise house on Aynes Road. Sometimes people have a program for the people of the church. Why did they have that? Because you see you go to church on Sunday, but Tuesday night and Wednesday night and Friday night they have to go to the praise house. It's just a little building. Just like this little house right here that people will come to. And you go to read the Bible and pray and sing and you shout and you enjoy the Lord like that.

Cynthia, who had a Christian upbringing, appeared to be more African and non-Christian in her approach to spirituality and religion. She spoke about the Creator and

about having a predetermined purpose in life. Not only did she see the Creator as strongly influencing her own life, but as also influencing the survival of the Gullah people. “You can only give the Creator credit for that kind of sustained power [surviving slavery] in the face of all the other odds.” Speaking of her career as a Gullah historian, Cynthia stated:

I think that I know that this is a mission to which I’ve been called for by the Higher Power because I could be doing a hundred other things based on what my degrees are and what my experience has been in corporate America and the whole scene. But that’s not what I am to do. Every time I’m at something, somehow it comes back to the Sea Islands. It just seems to always happen! So that’s really kind of why I do what I do. It’s from my ancestors, maybe. The Creator will make it so that I will always be fine.

Jim, like Alice, attributed his spirituality to his parents’ child rearing practices. “My childhood was really blessed. They introduced me to God at an early age. But now I know there was more to it than what I realized back then.” He attributed some of the problems in today’s communities to a move away from spirituality:

What hurts me spiritually is the spiritual basis transformed from being people conscious and community conscious into being more a well, more from a spiritual focus to an emotional focus. See, emotional come and go. But if you’ve got a spiritual connection, you get something to tap into all the time.

Jim viewed his community as being a spiritual one. “One thing, this place is so deep spiritually, that there are so many spiritual people here, fighting for those who aren’t

as spiritual to keep things spiritual for the rest of the people. This is what makes it special here.”

Spirituality was important not only on a community basis, but also in terms of developing an individual’s identity:

However, that’s why I say it’s critical to have the spiritual experience, because then you’ll have enough because that equation says, “I’ll always be your provider.” I don’t have to be like this or that. That’s the spiritual aspect. That’s why the spiritual aspect is so important. Because the self aspect, you don’t know what’s in front of you. Then I came to the central part of the issue, spiritual attitude. When you connect with the spiritual, you might wiggle, you might drift, but your airplane is not gonna get off course too much. Because something is gonna be there to pull you back. And I think that’s one of the greatest things, spiritual renewal. And I say that humbly and as truthfully and sincerely as I can. All of it is true. You gotta have a head and God is the head. If you don’t have no head there trying to steer things in some sort of direction, then things are gonna go helter skelter. But the biggest thing is not to get bogged down by the mundane. Cause life can be mundane. Spiritualism is the driving force. Life is not fair, that’s why it’s critical that everyone have their spirituality. Then you got your road map, so then you won’t get off too far.

Linda explored the conflict between Christian and African beliefs:

If you understand the concept of a root person, a palmist, or whatever, they don’t necessarily go hand-in-hand with being a Christian. And if you had a firm belief

in God, and believed that He could do all things then you wouldn't have any need for these people.

As an adult, Linda relied on Christianity. As a child, she was deeply influenced by African values and traditions:

Another custom that I remember, was the passing of newborns and young babies across the grave. It was supposed to be passing over the evil spirits and there were some superstitious people. And of course, that too is an African tradition, the voodoo and all that. Sometimes, people look at me and are afraid that I put voodoo on them, you know, voodoo dancing, and things of that nature. And the old lady who lived at the corner, we did everything we could think of, and the reason we could tell they were witches is because when we sprinkled some powder around their fence, they would go crazy! But you know, now I know they were going crazy cause we were messing up their property! But you sprinkle this powder, this voodoo dust that is supposed to transform these witches. We had to do something at night, to keep the "haints" [witches] away, to keep these evil spirits away. So we put a broom stick across the door before we went to sleep every night. The witches, if they come, they would have to fly around that broom, so the witches stay away. And we also sprinkled powder around our beds, at night, when we were young children. We just grew up with those myths and the beliefs that these things were actually true. They weren't but folks used it a lot to keep us in line.

Christianity, heavily flavored by African traditions and beliefs, appears to be the medium through which spirituality is experienced by the participants. Some struggle with integrating the different ideas, others seemed to favor one approach over another. One thing all the participants agreed upon was that spirituality was very important, both to the individual and to the community. For some people, religious traditions provided a rite of passage into adulthood. Luke, describing a process called “seeking” recalled:

Certain things come to you in a dream. And they would have Scriptures to back it up, according to what older writers and prophets did years ago. And they would know if you were telling them a lie or not. Or if it was something that you were serious about. Because certain things would come to you, mentally and spiritually, and when you tell these older, what you call a teacher, who was your guide, somebody who was keeping you constantly under supervision, to see if you’re really serious about getting yourself in the church spirit. Most times it would be a child 12 years old. Becoming an adult, your majority, you have the knowledge, but your whole mental and physical body is changing, so this is when you are spiritually taught. But they would encourage you to get in some sort of church.

Being baptized as an adult was also described by Luke as an identity altering experience:

But anyway, I, ah, was encouraged by her [his wife], I was with her and the teacher that was there. I went to several Bible studies, I smoke and drank and all that. I dropped all that within a year. I wasn’t drinking or smoking. So I can’t

explain it, cause I was in the audience and I got up and walked up the aisle and next thing I know, I'm in the front of the podium area and they are talking to me. And oh, the adrenaline in my body! I started crying! Later my wife and I got married. We were both baptized. And they figure you should be baptized in the river. Went down to the river, waded so far, submerged three times. It was a real powerful experience. After it is all over you see, I wanted to change my life, but what made me do it? Because like I said, it was uncontrollable.

According to Luke, traditions associated with death also contributed to the development of identity. He was describing a tradition, still used by some Gullah today, of passing children over the casket of a deceased person:

And I knew that was a tradition that they did. They passed a child over the casket prior to burial, saying that was so that the spirit could not come back and wouldn't claim the life of this living child. Now can you imagine something else, a young child, because there is still fear of dying with a lot of people, regardless of what they say, it's a fear of death or the dead. There's a lot of fear in a person, child or grown up, in the death of a person or a dead body. Can you imagine, a child, from generations and it's been passed on in their genes, "Oh no, that dead body in that casket, that dead man or dead grandma is not gonna get me." This is something that would put fear in her.

According to Luke, this tradition of "passing over" was "an old African tradition." They did not want old evil spirits to come back to "claim you." Perhaps the most obvious

tradition stemming from Africa involved “working roots.” Luke talked about a well known local root doctor named “Dr. Buzzard” :

Yeah, I never had any encounter with him, but the nickname “Dr. Buzzard” was given to him. He worked witchcraft. But that’s real. Whatever people hear about it, it’s real. It’s nothing new because sorcery was being done in the Biblical times. Witchcraft is being discouraged religiously, but people are doing it anyway. When people had children who were troubled or misbehaved a lot, they would take them to Dr. Buzzard and get a potion. It’s real. But it is like they tell you about spiritual belief. They will tell you about voodoo or witchcraft. If you are strong in your mind, a person can’t do it to you. It’s when you are weak in your mind or fearful that it can be done. It’s like a religious belief.

One of the ways that the power of the root doctor increased was by having different men consecutively assume the title of “Dr. Buzzard” over the years. According to Luke, at least three men have been known as “Dr. Buzzard” over the past several decades. “Yes, there was one when I was a boy, and then there was this fellow who died here, not long ago. Now this fellow married to his niece and that’s how he got into it.”

By assuming the title of “Dr. Buzzard” the power of the root doctor continued unbroken, and the knowledge of roots, used for curing and cursing, is passed from generation to generation. All the participants admitted that they knew of Dr. Buzzard, knew of people seeking his services, knew of herbal practices which had been in use in many Gullah homes, but denied ever having consulted a root doctor themselves. Most of the participants saw a conflict between the African traditions such as “working roots” and



the traditions of Christianity, even though some of the African traditions, such as the distinctive “hand clap” and “stomping” are still present in some Christian church services today.

Dora spoke of traditions associated with religion which were important, such as attending Sunday School. In addition, she also attended services at the praise house.

According to Dora:

A “praise house” was just a little building. Just like this little house right here that people will come to. And you go to read the Bible and pray and sing and shout and you enjoy the Lord like that.

### **Foot Paths and Fences: Physical Space Utilization**

The utilization of physical space was a topic addressed by several of the participants. It appeared that the manner in which space is utilized by Whites and Gullahs differed greatly. Gullahs tended to have more of a community orientation while Whites were seen as more individualistic. Luke eloquently lamented what he saw as a negative use of space. He was speaking about younger Gullahs who no longer wanted to own their family land. Oftentimes that land was bought by Whites. The differences in how they used the land was seen as symptomatic of the relationships between Gullahs and Whites:

They don't care about a house here, land here, from where they live. I got four or five people who say, “I don't need that land back there. I'll sell that land.” Well, where I'm staying, this is all I need right here at my house. Next thing you know,

somebody comes in there, moves in. Once a person moves in, that whole environment changes. Cause that is happening to a lot of Blacks in the county here. I can't speak for other counties or areas of the state, but I've seen, right here in this county, you can see right here, there are several Whites living right there. You see the fences around their houses? You notice how it may take this land that your forefathers had nearby. Years ago, you had what they called "foot paths." It was called "foot paths" because it was how you could walk through a certain area. It was not wide enough for a car or wagon, but it was wide enough for you to walk. A short cut. So many areas that people were walking through, later on, some of the Whites buy that property. It was your forefather's property. Time he buys it, he sets off the property with a fence, and that same foot path and that same short cut is gone. You got to drive around it. You have no right-of-way. I can take you to an area on Seaside Road where people used to go down to the river with their boats and go fishing. Whites bought that property, shut that section off. They can not go down to the river any more except for a round about way.

In all honesty, the adult Whites and Blacks, they're sneaky! They work together but once they get property, they're private, in their own private area. By the time they maintain a piece of property, fence it off, they will speak to you in the grocery store, work with you on a job, but once he obtains that property, he will fence it off. I don't care what your cultural world is. Years ago, that property wasn't fenced off, now it is automatically fenced any more.

When it was Black property years ago, you could almost walk through a man's field. And I'm serious! A man may see you walking. "How come you walking through my field?" "Oh, sir, the reason I come through your field is that it's shorter than coming around there." He said, "Don't come through my field no more." Before, nobody won't get a shot gun or fence it off and say "You might walk here today, but you won't walk here tomorrow." It was good communication!

Cynthia saw the Whites' use of space as directly interfering with Gullah customs and traditions:

But I think that's why it is important that people around the world understand we are here, before we are eliminated by people with a mainstream mentality, and people coming in with other cultural perceptions and trying to superimpose that on us. Like when people come here and they move onto these islands and want to live here. They set up this gated community, which blocks out areas that we have always come and gone through. They don't see anything wrong with that.

Because they come from the perspective that "we need protection," or "we need to, our little space, we want to make sure we are secure." And then they are having car thefts and all these other things, house break-ins and like that, behind their gates, but they don't see it. Where we live wide open and don't have that. I can leave my car unlocked in the yard, leave the purse out there right on the road, and not think about it. They all say, "Oh my God, I better lock the doors." But I'm not doing that.

At times, the differences in land use between the Gullahs and the Whites produced out right conflict:

And the only thing people got to hear about down here is “Come to these resorts. Come for golf.” And even when they come for that, they don’t know that there is all the history all around them. They have no idea at all. They don’t even know that the golf course they’re on was probably a field they used to plant in, that they raised their whole families on. They don’t know that a whole family was displaced in order for them to have recreation. But that doesn’t mean now, you should remain behind your gate and block out the community. So really, this is our community before you got it. We let you in! So how dare you tell us now where to go, where not to go, this, that, and the other thing! You’re calling the cops on us, you know, we don’t have a pass? What is this? I mean this is an apartheid regime you got going right here. It’s like, I don’t have a pass. I can’t come through the gates and go to my family cemetery. I have to check the laws because right now we have a situation now on Dataw Island, the cemetery over there. We’re told one minute, “It’s no problem. All I have to do is leave my name at the gate and go in.” And when I got there, Security told me, point blank, they were told no one can come in for any reason. And you know, this has been going on at Hilton Head for the longest time now. So it’s ridiculous! And at a point, you get so enraged you have to leave it alone. People know it’s not correct.

Linda’s focus on the use of space differed. She discussed space within households and within family relationships. Raised in Charleston, South Carolina, the

homes differed from those on St. Helena's Island. Homes on St. Helena's Island tended to be one story, with small out buildings. Relatives often lived close by, often on the same property. It wasn't unusual to have three or more generations under the same roof.

In Charleston, Gullah families often had three or more generations under the same roof, but due to the construction of the houses, where they lived in the houses differed. A typical Charleston house stood three stories tall. Often the first two floors were divided into apartments or "flats." Sometimes the attic was divided into apartments as well, but more often, it served as the sleeping quarters for the children. Homes were not air-conditioned when Linda was growing up, so children tended to be in their rooms only at night to sleep, not to play in there like children often do today. As a result, children often played outside until dark, or visited with family members who lived on the lower floors of the home. Linda described her childhood home in Charleston:

When we came up, there was two houses, two story houses, and all these houses have attics, not like some who have basements, our homes had attics to it. And the children invariably lived up in the attic or on the third floor. And then when we left that area because they were, you know, revitalizing that entire area and buying up homes to build the downtown, they needed community things. We were forced out of our homes and we moved a few blocks down. We had one three story house. I had one aunt who had, at the time, maybe four or five children. She lived downstairs, and my grandmother lived downstairs also. She had a living room, dining room, and kitchen kind of thing. A big wood stove in there, and then one bedroom. On the second floor, my family lived. We had one

bathroom, a kitchen, a dining room, a bedroom, a living room. Then, in the dining room, we had cots and things of that nature. I lived upstairs in the attic with her [my aunt's] two sons. On the left side of the attic, there were three rooms up there. My aunt had a kitchen, a little living room, and one bedroom where she had her two sons. Of course, they had cots and beds that pulled out. In the other room, my brother, I can remember, sleeping up there. When the family got larger, my dad bought the house, and then the family got even larger. Then the aunt died and we rented her space to some family. The baby aunt moved out of the attic, and that put us, the children in my family, up in the attic. The girls had the two rooms to the right, and my brother had the room to the left. And then, that is pretty much how they stayed pretty close together. My two aunts moved two doors down to another house. They had enough space there.

Why people utilize space in particular ways is open to debate. Does living in close physical proximity promote close family and community relationships? Are there cultural differences between how Gullahs and Whites utilize space? The use of space was not the primary focus of this study. Preliminary results suggest that it would be a fertile field of study, hopefully yielding information which could be used to facilitate improved relationships among the residents of the Sea Islands.

### **Secrets and the Cycle of Survival**

Survival was a theme woven through out all of the life stories of the participants. Gullah customs and traditions were described as facilitating both physical and spiritual

survival. Biculturalism, the main focus of this investigation, emerged as a sophisticated strategy for survival of both the individual and the Gullah community. The spirituality of the Gullah people seemed to enhance the chances of survival by offering hope; hope of a better future, of overcoming obstacles, of surviving. Linda was very conscious of the constant struggle for survival:

But again, one of the very first statements you had in that consent thing I signed, encapsulated all of that in that you had to prepare yourself and be able to be bicultural and to be able to, I guess, fit in even if it means reverting to more cultured standards. You know, language. You have to do that to survive. I'll tell you for me it is no more for me the "acting White." I know it is more of a survival technique for me and for others who may have to do it. I don't know, but if we spoke correct English coming up, it was "acting White." Now today it is, and it could still have that underlying belief, but that's not the primary reason for doing it. The primary reason now is survival.

Linda continued to speak about the language which was unique to the Gullah community:

So, I think what started out as a stigma, or a barrier, language barrier, has allowed me to do a lot of self examination and make me a survivor. I question survival right now because a lot of folks still seem so interested when listening to this dialect. But there are others who look at it as a deficiency.

One way the Gullah found to survive was by out smarting or "out foxing" the Whites in power. Linda spoke about the Brer Rabbit and the Fox Tales:

The African background to the Brer Rabbit Tales, I think you have to go back to the slaves and the slave master and the mentality that was there. Connected to the spirituality that I alluded to earlier, there was always a story to tell. But whatever stories that had to be told by slaves had to carry a message that was not understood by the master. So invariably, they were trying to out fox the master. Those kind of stories were told from one generation to another. There was always somebody trying to outsmart the master. Trying to be smarter than him. Even when you think about the Underground Railroad concept and the coded messages, information was in the songs that were sung. Coded when and at what times, whatever needed to be told. When you think about those tales, and what I was told, a lot of times, it was a way of maintaining some type of hope and giving information. It also meant that you do what you have to do, not always just outsmarting the master. To get the job done, accomplish whatever, to be safe from danger or risk, so those songs that were passed on were not just about out foxing, but more about surviving.

Luke directly linked traditions to survival. Speaking about the recent governmental limits imposed on fishing, he stated:

People are not fishing to throw it away. The tradition of what they are doing is being passed on, to continue from generation to generation. This was great survival for people. Yes, this was things that each family member did, what you were taught, part of your teaching in coming up. It was what you did! Number one, you learned to get something from the soil. You got what you could from the



creek to survive for yourself and to sell when it was possible. All to survive, the maintenance of your life. Land, it was the same thing. You were taught to plant a harvest. Another part of maintenance and survival was to maintain what you had. This was the cycle of survival of tradition. This was what we were taught that our ancestors did over the years. And we kept the same cycle of survival.

Ironically, the advent of welfare, which was meant to help people to survive, was seen by Luke as actually undermining people's ability to survive:

The difference now is and what has changed some of the traditions is the welfare. Somebody put a law in saying that we have to help these people because they are in a bad way. A lot of people needed it and it's good, but what they did, they didn't study close enough what they were doing. Welfare, that's what changed a lot of the traditions as far as what we were taught; the older ones coming up and what the younger ones learned and aren't paying attention to. It was about survival! Traditional survival! You did certain things to survive. This is how my great grandparents came up. And this is what my granddaddy told me. And Momma and Grandma said.

Some of the traditions that Luke recalled also strengthened the spirit of community among people:

We killed a hog for Christmas and when we killed a hog, at that time, you were closer with neighbors than now, and if you knew someone that didn't have meat that they could cure, you'd take part of yours, say 10 or 15 pounds, and someone else would do the same thing, so the cycle would stop. They'd have enough. And

that same cycle would help in what's called survival because some of that people that had vegetables, somebody put them there for you.

Cynthia spoke of the various ways people survived and also what she thought the Gullah culture needed to do to ensure its' survival:

So, like Dr. Buzzard [a well known root doctor] who passed away three months ago, was part of our church. The other two Sundays of the month, he said he has so many customers that come to him, he doesn't come to church on those Sundays. You have different ways of people trying to survive. I don't think it [Gullah culture] can survive if it's not kept distinct. It's not Gullah anymore. It is just like you can be cooking a pot of something, add a couple more ingredients, and it becomes another recipe. I don't endorse a separatist thing. It's just that I believe every culture needs to be autonomous in certain ways for there to be different cultures. That is what we need.

Cynthia concluded her remarks with this poignant statement:

You understand that to survive here the way we do, that people did most of these interviews in English. That is our method of survival, to keep hidden the things that the other people don't relate to. Gullah language, certain Gullah traditions, or whatever. And so, I'm sure half the people here will keep on doing that. Just to survive.

### **Summary of Findings**

The Gullah culture is a rich and long lived one with its' roots in the soils of Sierra Leone and the nearby western coast of Africa. Transplanted to America during slavery, the culture survived due to the geographical isolation of the Sea Islands and the nearby coastal mainland areas and also because of the inextinguishable drive to survive of the Gullah people themselves. Neither adverse physical conditions, social and economic inequalities, nor racism could snuff out the flame of hope and the determination to survive of the Gullah people.

Among the findings discussed here, three findings emerge as unique to this study. The Gullah are a unique cultural group. Unlike many other minority groups, they did not have a great deal of knowledge about their ancestors until the last several decades. Separated from their ancestors in Sierra Leone by slavery, the Gullah did not really know that many of their traditions, such as weaving sea grass baskets and eating rice based cuisine were the same traditions that were practiced in Sierra Leone. The participants all spoke about how recent it had been that they knew, with some certainty, that they were descended from ancestors in the Sierra Leone area. Not only were they unable to have a continuous link to their ancestors because of the disruption caused by slavery, but the Gullah often had to rely on outsiders, such as researchers, like Turner (1949) and Opala (1987) to provide information about their language and cultural connections to Sierra Leone. Because of that "disconnect" between the Gullah and their Sierra Leone ancestors which was caused by slavery, their identity as a culture and as Gullah individuals may have been delayed.

Another significant finding was the presence of great conflict and tension within the Gullah culture and community. This tension seemed to be incorporated into the identities of the participants as well. Numerous parallels were found between conflicts which are part of contemporary Gullah life. The tension between Christian and African beliefs may be expressed in the differences between the more European American type Christian churches that the participants attended on Sundays, and the praise houses, occasionally attended during the week. At the praise houses, more African type practices, such as clapping and shouting were found. Numerous other conflicts were found. There was conflict between speaking Gullah and standard English, between becoming bicultural and trying to isolate the Gullah from the mainland influences, and between “development” of the Islands and the traditional land use and ownership by the Gullah.

The third unique finding involved differences in the use of physical space between the Gullah participants and the non-Gullah newcomers. The Gullah use primarily oral language and have an interdependent, community orientation which seemed to clash violently with the non-Gullah newcomers’ more individualistic, technical, and legalistic orientation. These clashes and their unintended consequences frequently provoked changes in the traditional lifestyles that were not always welcomed by the Gullah participants. While this was not a primary area of focus for this study, the potential differences in physical space utilization and the underlying reasons for these differences may be very helpful in understanding the differences in different cultural groups and biculturalism.

To outsiders, the Gullah language is the most obvious distinguishing characteristic of the Gullah people. Indeed, the Gullah language is sometimes used by Gullah people to exclude non-Gullah and to establish a sense of community among its' speakers. Yet, as important as the Gullah language has been throughout Gullah history, it is the spirit of the Gullah people themselves which, in my opinion, defines the Gullah culture. Deeply spiritual, albeit expressed through Christianity, Voodoo, African religions, or any number of other ways, connected to nature through the culture's emphasis on farming, fishing, and gardening, having a strong spirit of community rather than being predominantly individually oriented, an emphasis on family as a means to survive in a hostile world, a place to nurture family members and a means to hand down the traditions and knowledge of the Gullah culture, are some of the characteristics that contribute to making the Gullah culture the special and vibrant culture that it is. The fruits of this culture are evident in its' rich oral history, its' intricate crafts, such as woven sea grass baskets and fishing nets, and its' cuisine, which boasts a bountiful banquet of local sea food, meats, fruits and vegetables, prepared in a manner unique to the Gullah culture. Less obvious, but more important fruits of this culture, are the legacy of the Gullah culture with its' emphasis on interdependence and survival.

The results of this study address biculturalism and identity in contemporary Gullah families. Biculturalism is inexorably linked to survival. In many instances, the ability to move between the dominant culture and the Gullah culture successfully determined whether an individual or the community would survive. Originally, when Gullahs were forcibly brought to the Sea Islands, it was their knowledge and expertise in

raising rice that enabled them to live in close geographical proximity to each other as slaves. To have survived the voyage from Africa to the Sea Islands and then to survive the hazards of the Sea Island climate and the hostile plantation environment bespoke the strong physical and spiritual constitution of the Gullah people. Life was not much easier once slavery officially ended. But despite the rigors of everyday life, hope and determination to survive continued to flourish. Gullah spiritual songs, the distinctive hand clap used in worship services (which developed as a means of communication when slave owners outlawed the use of drums), the Brer Rabbit Tales, in which the rabbit outsmarts the powerful adversaries and survives, all of these are adaptations; ways to keep hope alive and to survive in a hostile world. To somehow keep the Gullah identity alive when slavery went to great lengths to destroy individual identities was not easy task. It seems to me, based upon the data gathered from the participants' interviews and the literature review, that bicultural identity in the Gullah culture evolved as a necessary way to survive. Perhaps those slaves who could successfully present themselves to the slave owners as being more similar to Whites had a better chance to survive than those who did not do so. In recent times, "acting White" may have been a strategy used to survive in the dominant culture. According to the participants of this study, this strategy was often looked upon negatively as going outside of your own culture and assuming an air of superiority. When the Gullah communities were physically isolated from the mainland, there was not much need for a bicultural identity. According to the study's participants, people usually lived and worked on the Sea Islands. Contact with non-Gullahs was minimal and was usually limited to employment situations or when it was

necessary to go to the mainland for medical care or some other infrequent reason. But, once bridges and highways were built, communication was improved with the provision of telephone service, and linkages to the outside world became more common via radio and television broadcasts, then it became necessary to develop additional strategies to continue survival of the Gullah culture. With the implementation of desegregation and opportunities for advanced education came the need to have contact with the dominant American culture. Economic factors sometimes contributed to some Gullahs relocating on the mainland, often “up North”, and having little contact with the Gullah remaining on the Sea Islands. As often happens with many minority groups within the American culture, people sometimes minimized or ignored their own heritage and sought to blend into the dominant culture. The price of this homogenized society to the minority person was often loss of identity, loss of self esteem, and loss of her/his heritage and language. In this “salad bowl” of American society the dominant society also lost. The uniqueness of a person’s own culture, the skills and knowledge which could have enriched American society with its’ contributions was lost. Instead of an intricate tapestry of different cultures, we had a “one size fits all” culture which tended to “fit” the White dominant culture best. Based on the participants’ comments, it appears that bicultural identities evolved when Gullah people began to live and work in the dominant American culture, and became much more well established and accepted after the Civil Rights Movement flourished in the 1960’s. As one participant described it, “Black became beautiful, even to the Black people themselves.” As pride in Black heritage grew, assimilation of minority cultures no longer seemed inevitable. At one time, most of the

participants either lived and/or worked on the mainland and had frequent contact with the dominant society. Speaking in general terms, it seems that as the individual participants aged and matured, they were also influenced by the Civil rights movement and began to see their culture in a positive light. Most of the participants reported that at some point in their lives, they stopped saying they were from Beaufort (on the mainland) and began to identify themselves as being from St. Helena's Island (which once had a reputation as a backward and superstitious community). The participants' individual identities became more positive, yet when encountering the dominant White society, there still was an awareness of having to straddle two cultures. For most of the participants however, it was less uncomfortable than before the Civil Rights movement.

Language accommodations were perhaps the most apparent changes. Even though most of the participants were "strongly" encouraged by their parents to speak "correct English" especially when in the community and when dealing with non-Gullahs, every one of the participants stated they still feel a higher degree of comfort when hearing or speaking Gullah in their homes or with friends and family.

Bicultural identity, which to me, means feeling fairly comfortable in two cultures and possessing the skills necessary to participate successfully in each culture, seemed to be deeply embedded into the identities of each of the participants. Some of the participants appeared to be more "bicultural" than others. Data suggests that living and working somewhere else other than the Sea Islands tended to emphasize the benefits of being bicultural. Although some theories of biculturalism suggest that a person could be equally "bicultural," none of the participants' comments supported that possibility. All



participants, except one, described themselves as being primarily Gullah, then either Black or African American. The sole participant who saw herself as being first Black and then Gullah had lived on the mainland, in a largely urban setting, most of her life. This participant eloquently made the point that “acting White” was no longer a conscious effort to appear “better than your own culture.” Speaking “standard English,” dressing in a certain manner for the business world, and participating in the mainland culture are now incorporated into the bicultural identity rather than being an artificial action taken by a person from a nondominant culture.

True equality among people of different cultural groups is needed before “true biculturalism” can occur. As the Gullah people began to regard themselves and to be regarded by other African Americans and the dominant White culture as gaining in equality, then biculturalism began to develop. However, as long as racism, sexism and classism exist, I do not think “true bicultural identities” will exist because it is not yet possible to be a member of two cultures and be equally comfortable in either one. The original purpose of biculturalism, survival, continues to be valid today. The participants’ comments suggest that “biculturalism” may play an increasingly important role in the survival of the Gullah culture. All of the participants indicated their concern that the Gullah culture could be washed away by the incoming tide of mainland influences, and by the surge of non-Gullah people moving to the Sea Islands to live. Data from the study strongly suggest that the Gullah people themselves need to take leadership in the preservation efforts of the Gullah culture. Gullah child rearing practices have drastically changed over the last few decades, becoming in the eyes of the participants, less

effective. Generational transmission of traditions and knowledge occurs with some frequency; however, much of what is “handed down” is no longer used on a daily basis by contemporary Gullah families. Skills and traditions seem to be relegated to special occasions and festivals.

Each participant could be considered to be bicultural to some degree. All participants, except one, identified themselves as primarily Gullah. They saw the language and the fact that their ancestors were descended from Sierra Leone, Africa, as being the primary factors which distinguished them from other African Americans. It is important to remember that being bicultural does not necessarily mean that a person’s identity is necessarily composed of “equal parts” of two different cultural identities. The participants’ “bicultural identities” evolved in order to survive. As the outside world continues to press upon the Gullah culture, bicultural identities may become even more established. No living individual, family, or culture remains static. Rate of change may vary, but change itself is inevitable. The challenge to the Gullah culture will be to continue to adapt and survive in the twenty first century. Participants varied in their ideas of how to accomplish this, but they seemed to reject the idea of attempting to isolate themselves from the rest of the country. Instead proactive efforts to preserve, protect, and promote the Gullah culture were favored by the participants. Each participant made the point that the Gullah people themselves needed to take the primary responsibility to preserve their culture, rather than rely on other people or agencies to preserve their culture for them.

In sum, the results of this study suggest that “being Gullah” is the larger portion of most of the participants’ bicultural identifies. “Being Gullah” seems to be defined by having been born and/or raised in the Sea Islands or the nearby coastal areas. The ability to speak, or at least to understand, the Gullah language is an essential component of the Gullah identity. Adhering to the traditional Gullah values of survival and interdependence are also a large part of “being Gullah.”

All participants considered themselves bicultural to a greater or lesser degree. Those participants who worked on the mainland tended to be more “bicultural” than those who lived and worked primarily within the Gullah community. An interesting twist on the question of bicultural identity involved awareness of acting in a bicultural manner. The participants’ awareness of being bicultural ranged from deliberating choosing to act in certain ways in certain situations in the dominant society to complete denial that there was any difference in the way a participant acted whether or not she/he was interacting with the dominant society or not. Linda, the sole participant who defined herself predominantly as an African American and secondarily as a Gullah, was extremely conscious of being bicultural. She spoke about the necessity of being bicultural in order to survive. She was very aware that she acted differently in different situations depending on whether the situation involved interacting with the dominant society. In contrast, Alice emphasized that when visiting her siblings, who lived in several areas of the United States, people commented that she did not seem like she came from the Sea Islands. Alice also pointed out that when she worked with students, she stressed the importance of speaking “standard English” and of acting certain ways when in public.

She told the students that they could speak Gullah and act differently at home if they chose to do so.

The role that generational transmission of Gullah traditions and knowledge play in the development of identity is a complicated one. On the surface, it appears that the effects of passing down traditions, skills, and knowledge does not have much effect on most of the participants' daily lives. None of the participants use the traditional skills of fishing, farming, herbal remedies, or speaking Gullah to any great degree in their private lives. Traditional cooking methods seem to be the most frequently used tradition for all participants. Special occasions, festivals, and educational settings were the most likely times for Gullah traditions to be demonstrated for both Gullah and non-Gullah people. Based on the data gathered during this study, it appears that generational transmission of traditions and knowledge does play a significant but subtle role in identity formation. Viewed through the symbolic interactionism lens, self concept is developed through social interaction. Self concepts then provide an important motive for behavior. The participants all related incidents when interacting with family members, in which they shared in some traditional Gullah tasks, such as fishing, hunting, farming, or cooking. All related times when they were told local history by family and community members.

Religious services and rites, as remembered by the participants, focused upon the individual's relationships with God, the family and the community. All the participants childhoods were heavily influenced by their religious upbringing. Emphasis at home, in school, and in the churches appeared to be on the individual as part of something greater than him/herself. Traditions and knowledge, whether secular or religious, appeared to

function as a way to “ground” a person in her/his family and community. By emphasizing communal aspects, traditions and knowledge increased survival not only of the individuals who could depend on each other, but also of the Gullah culture. It appears that generational transmission of traditions and knowledge helped to define people as members of the Gullah culture in a broad manner. While many of the traditions are no longer a part of daily life, the values that underlie those traditions have continued to be honored and observed by the participants. Survival, interdependence, thriftiness, respect for the environment, and being helpful to others are among the values which have been passed down from generation to generation.

The participants have adapted many of the traditions of the Gullah community. Gardening and fishing have become more recreational in nature. As Jim stated, he “loves to play in the dirt, growing things.” While the participants no longer go to the praise houses on a regular basis, most participate in their churches and value spirituality. Crafts, such as weaving sea grass baskets and fishing nets, or quilting were infrequently practiced by the participants. However, people within the community who did continue to practice the traditional arts were afforded great respect in the community.

Perhaps the most important area where traditional values are evident is in child rearing practices. All the participants were raised traditionally by two parents or by adults who functioned as substitute parents. There was an emphasis on respect of elders, working hard, and contributing to the family. Discipline was usually physical, which usually meant being hit by a parent or other adult authority figure. Isolation and withholding privileges were also used, but not as frequently as were physical means.

There appeared to be great involvement by parents and adults in the community in the care and discipline of children.

Contemporary child rearing practices have changed. Of the younger participants who had minor children, none used physical punishment as the principle means of discipline. Some of the participants attributed the change in discipline to the advent of child abuse laws. Most of the participants associated the rise of child abuse laws with the decline of child rearing practices. Jim remarked that it was the parents' responsibility to whip a child when necessary. Without this, children became unruly and disrespectful. Parents were afraid now to whip a child, for fear of being arrested for child abuse. That's why, he thought, children were so disrespectful and were hurting others, sometimes even hurting or killing their own parents. All the participants with minor children now used methods such as talking to their children or withholding privileges rather than whipping or hitting them. These participants, while not practicing the traditional Gullah discipline methods, did make a point of educating their children about the Gullah traditions. Each participant also spoke about how they were trying to raise their children to have the same values that they learned as a child. The method may now be different, but the message was the same. Alice was particularly passionate about this, commenting that while her children did not know what it was like to do farm work like she did as a child, she was raising them to work hard and to be independent. Again, through the lens of symbolic interactionism theory, the social interaction of child rearing, during which the values of the traditional Gullah community are passed on to the children, helped to develop the

bicultural identity of the participants by reinforcing those values in the home, in the community and in the church.

It appears that the development of a bicultural identity draws upon the traditional Gullah values discussed in this study. It may be through the evolution of a bicultural identity that the Gullah culture will continue to survive and flourish in the twenty first century.

## **CHAPTER V:**

### **DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS**

#### **Discussion of Findings in Relation to Existing Research**

Peters (1974, p.349) stated that “the contemporary view of the Black family usually emphasizes concepts of deviancy, pathology, and/or uncontrolled sexuality.” She stated that many of the studies had perpetuated the myths of Black people. She noted the need for research which has balance and perspective.

Littlejohn-Blake and Darling (1993) stated:

The traditional method of studying families has often focused on the pathological rather than on the strong family. Families studied were often of European American origin in which all or most of the functions and activities of family life are carried out in isolation from other kin. (p. 460)

Crosbie-Burnett and Lewis (1993, p. 244) emphasized the strengths of Black families. They found that African American families are more centered around the children, including all those people involved in the nurturance and caring of the children, regardless of whether or not they live in the same house as the children. They state that roles within the family are more flexible across generations and genders than in European American families.

The results of the present study lend support to Crosbie-Burnett and Lewis’ findings. All of the participants related incidents suggesting that the primary purpose of the family was to care for the children and to equip them with skills and qualities



necessary for a productive and satisfying adult life. Roles did appear to be more flexible across generations and gender. The role of “mother” was, at times, assumed by other adult females, such as grandmothers or aunts. In Jim’s case, both he and his biological mother were raised by his aunt. Dora adopted two preschool children. Her mother had also adopted several children in addition to her two biological children (Dora and her brother). Some of Dora’s adopted siblings were actually her cousins. Sarah lost both of her parents by the time she was eighteen. She, with her older sister, raised their younger siblings. In their situation, Sarah assumed more of the traditional “father” role. She worked full time in order to provide for her siblings. She also did most of the physical discipline and “the things that needed to be done.” Sarah’s role, as she described it, appeared to be more typical of a “father’s” role and lent some support to role flexibility across genders.

According to Littlejohn-Blake and Darling (1993, p. 460), the African American family “often includes the extended family with which it shares family functions and activities.” The close geographical physical proximity of most of the participants facilitated extended family sharing functions and activities. For instance, Cynthia, the Gullah historian, relied on her mother and a female cousin to help care for her son when she needed to be away. As a child, Linda lived in Charleston, South Carolina, with at least three generations of her family residing under one roof. By pooling resources and sharing responsibilities, the extended family was able to enhance the survival of individuals as well as the family itself.

Not all extended families shared family functions and activities. Sarah spoke about the isolation she and her siblings experienced following their parents’ deaths. With

the exception of one uncle who would bring them fish to eat, none of her extended family did anything to help these orphaned children. Even when Sarah was an adult and raising her own children, she was only able to get her mother-in-law to watch her children while she worked if she would pay her. Sarah emphasized how she worked hard to have a closer relationship with her children than she had with her extended family.

Wilson and Stith's (1991) findings that "despite variation in family composition, the historical and current experiences of racism and prejudice seem to be an organizing and universal experience that links all Black families" remains true for the participants of the current study. Each participant related incidents where they had experienced racism. Some of the participants seemed to think there was less racism now whereas others thought there was more racism. The nature of racism was thought to have changed to a more subtle institutionalized type rather than what some participants experienced when they were in the service, or as individuals in the community.

Hillis (1995) stated "because the institutionalized nature of racism is part of the insidious nature of race relations, it is often difficult to perceive and describe" (p. 37). Cynthia addressed this most poignantly when she spoke about the Gullah contributions being omitted from history books, so that often people did not even know the Gullah people existed. Luke alluded to the insidious nature of racism when he spoke about how racism's effect was "no more than usual" and how he was able to survive so well because he "knew the ways of the South."

Racism affects life on all levels. According to Sanders Thompson (1991), racism, both institutional and individual, affects all aspects of Black family life, including

identity formation. This appears to ring true according to the experiences shared by the participants during their interviews. Most of the participants reported feeling ashamed of being Gullah when they were teenagers or young adults. Not only were they often discriminated against by Whites, but also by non-Gullah Blacks to whom the Gullah living in the Sea Islands area often represented a backward and superstitious culture. The effects of racism seemed to affect the participants' identity formation, first as a Gullah, and then in terms of becoming bicultural. Symbolic interactionism's assumption that individual and small groups are influenced by larger cultural and societal processes may be applicable here. The Civil Rights Movement and the efforts to establish equality for all races appear to have positively affected the participants' identities. Dora, the eldest participant, solidly linked her experiences in the Civil Rights Movement to the development of her identity as a Black woman, and later to the development of her identity as a Gullah woman. Through her involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, she became more confident and valued herself and her community more. She also, by virtue of her activities in the Civil Rights Movement, interacted with members of the dominant White culture in significantly different, more assertive ways. Her role as a Black woman changed dramatically and quickly, due in great part to her new interpretation of her environment and the different interactions she now had with non-Black, non-Gullah people.

Racism does not exist in isolation. The combination of a person's race and gender status led to both unique problems and perspectives for women. The interaction of racism and sexism resulted in each form of expression modifying the nature and

impact of the other (Martin, 1994). Cynthia spoke most forcibly about gender and racism, linking them to economic and social consequences. The two men in the study also related incidents which suggested, that in terms of social status within the larger, dominant society, Black women were perceived as being lower in status, and generally worked in professions that were perceived to be lower in status and in financial remuneration. Paradoxically, within Black families, according to the participants, women seem to have more responsibility and more authority in terms of family functioning than the men in the family.

Ogbu (1993) pointed out that involuntary minority groups (those who enter a country through conquest, slavery or colonization) tend to define themselves and their cultures in opposition to the cultural values of the majority. They cannot adopt any of the majority's ways without losing their identity. Through slavery, African Americans fall under the definition of involuntary minorities. Ogbu's view that African Americans could not adopt any of the majority's ways without losing their identity was partially supported by the results of this study. By adopting some of the ways of the majority, such as speaking "standard English" the Gullah participants seemed to become more bicultural. It appeared that they did not lose their Gullah identity per se, but that their identities became more bicultural, with aspects of their Gullah identities emphasized in certain settings, while aspects of their bicultural identities were emphasized in other settings.

Martinez and Dukes (1990, p. 320) found that the cultures of Native Americans, Blacks, Chicanos, and other groups have been greatly influenced by the dominant group

and its' culture. They concluded that institutionalized racism and sexism have a negative impact on the public domain component of self esteem, whereas the private domain component seems to be a function of other factors such as indigenous cultures. The participants' stories seemed to support this in part. Jim spoke about Affirmative Action Programs and how in the public sector, Black people received mixed messages. If they were as qualified as other people for a position, why was Affirmative Action necessary? How was it different from the "good old boy" network which operated in the dominant White culture? Self esteem, in the public realm, did appear to be lower than in the private realm where the participants interacted more frequently with family and peers.

At the same time that the participants were maturing physically, they also were developing their identities. This process of identity formation continued throughout their lives. Herbert (1990) explored the impact of racial dynamics and racism on men's lives. He based his research on Daniel Levinson's work on adult psychosocial development. Herbert noted that Levinson's work was based primarily on White males. After finding race to be a clearly salient issue for men during all developmental periods, he proposed two additional tasks of adult psychosocial development: to form an individual racial identity that both acknowledges and frees the individual of her or his own racism and prejudices and to form an individual self concept dedicated to the eradication of racial prejudice and racial discrimination from society (p. 433). The stories of the two male participants suggested that they were experiencing these stages. Jim spoke about the good and bad to be found in all races and noted that Black racism was just as bad as

White racism. Through his work with the NAACP, he was attempting to address racism on an institutional level as well as on an individual level.

Luke alluded to these two additional stages of adult development. After describing the relationships between Black and White people as “sneaky” he spoke about how people act one way in public and another way in private. While he tended to address racism on an individual rather than an institutional basis, Luke was just as dedicated to the demise of racism.

In Cross and Helms’ (1985) model, there are four types of racial identity attitudes. People begin by depending on White cultural norms for self definition and approval. This is followed by feelings of racial identity confusion with an increasing desire to cultivate a Black identity. Afterwards there is an absorption in the Black Experience. Finally one sees strengths and weaknesses in both races, while viewing one’s Black identity as a positive and valued aspect of self. This model becomes complicated when a bicultural component is added. All the participants seemed to go through these stages, or attitudes, sometimes staying longer in certain stages than in others. They had to progress through these steps to attain a mature identity as a Black person. They also had to reconcile being Gullah, belonging to the larger Black community, and interacting with the dominant White culture.

Watts and Carter (1991) used Cross and Helms’ model of identity to attempt to understand racism in organizations as perceived by African Americans and to determine the relationship between perceptions of racism and racial identity. The lack of Blacks in powerful positions, their abundance in low level positions, and their lack of decision

making power were cited as evidence of institutional racism. Watts and Carter suggested that, in regard to racial identity, organizations' training and consultation activities must reflect the heterogeneity of African American culture. Just as it would be inaccurate to think of Whites as composing one unified group, it is also inaccurate to think of Blacks as composing one unified group. Cynthia spoke to this when she was negotiating to provide a column for the weekly Gullah newspaper, The Gullah Sentinel. Even though the paper was owned by Blacks, there were no Gullah writers until Cynthia pointed that out to the editor.

Several authors investigated the effects of racism and sexism in Black women. Evans and Herr (1991) found that the combined effects of racism and sexism in the work place subject the African American woman to more discrimination than Black men or White women. Education, social sciences, medicine and law are careers often chosen by African American women. The career choices of these women were influenced by their perceptions of racism and sexism. By choosing careers in these and related areas, they would be providing services primarily for the African American community. They suggested that racial and sexual bias on the job may create anxiety so great that African American women tend to avoid those careers in which they perceive or anticipate sexual or racial bias. The participants' life histories lend some validity to these findings. Of the five female participants, two worked in domestic work and three were in education. However, one of the educators worked in a primarily Black setting, but the other women all worked in settings in which there was a great deal of contact with Whites, suggesting that perhaps their choice of career did not have much to do with providing services

primarily for the African American community and thereby avoiding some of the effects of racism and sexism.

Bell (1992) reflecting on the racism and sexism found that “within the Black community there is a strong norm of putting sexism on the back burner of major concerns while putting racism on the front burner” (p.72). She asserted that Black women have a code of silence which is practiced when speaking out against sexism or sexual harassment when the perpetrator is a Black man. Because the experience of racism serves as a powerful bond between Black man and women, Black women practice this code of silence in order to protect the fragile status of Black men. Bell noted that the code of silence among Black women was established during slavery, and its’ legacy has been passed down from generation to generation. The results of the study are inconclusive in regard to this assertion. None of the participants provided any substantiation of this code of silence. The closest comment was made by Jim who was speaking about the tendency of some men to have a wife and a girl friend at the same time. According to Jim, in the generations preceding his, having that type of relationship was more accepted and generally was not considered to be grounds for divorce. His comment suggests that sexism was present in preceding generations. None of the other participants addressed this issue. So it is difficult to determine if this is indeed the “code of silence” Bell described, or if it was not a factor that the other participants felt impacted their lives, or perhaps something else entirely.

Cynthia, the Gullah historian, was critical of the literature pertaining to the Gullah community. According to Cynthia, some of it has been romanticized and some is just



inaccurate. She spoke about the need to actually talk to and observe people within the Gullah community, rather than rely on previously published materials. Cynthia also made the distinction between literature or media pertaining to Gullah and literature or media pertaining to multicultural issues. She discussed the television program Gullah, Gullah Island which has a Gullah man and his family as the principal characters in the show. According to Cynthia, it is misleading because the title of the program suggests it is focused on the Gullah culture, but the actual program is multicultural in nature, having Hispanic, Asian and Caucasian characters in addition to a Gullah family. Cynthia had mixed feelings about this program, but finally stated support for it because it heightened awareness of the Gullah culture, even if it was inaccurately portrayed.

Much of what has been written about the Gullah language is from a linguistic view point. According to Turner (1949), Gullah had its roots in Africa. Opala (1987) described Gullah as an English based creole language. Turner (1949) noted similarities in Gullah and the languages spoken in West Africa in the use of nouns, pronouns, verbs, and tense. Branch (1995) stated that almost all Gullah nouns are singular, and in the Ibo language the singular form of a noun is the same as the plural. No distinction is made between the singular and plural of a verb in the Gullah language either. According to both Cynthia and Linda, both of whom have researched the Gullah language previously, this information is accurate. My observations of some of the participants and other people in the community speaking Gullah appear to support Branch's findings about the forms of nouns and verbs and tenses used. However, not having a linguistics

background, I am unable to provide an informed commentary on the literature relevant to the Gullah language.

Branch (1995) noted that “an interesting relationship between the Gullah and the languages of West Africa is the use of the proverb to advise or instruct” (p. 64). Linda and Cynthia both provided examples of proverbs used in their own families and again agreed that the use of proverbs was an accurate finding about the Gullah culture.

The term “Geechee” held a variety of meanings for the participants. Most of the participants thought that “Geechee” referred to people who ate a lot of rice, were usually from a rural area, and spoke “substandard English.” One participant thought “Geechee” referred to the person, while “Gullah” referred to the language itself.

According to Branch (1995) people who speak Gullah were sometimes called “Geechees.” It was also a reference to people who ate rice and talked poorly. Branch (1995) noted that “Geechee” has sometimes been used to refer to the Gullah people who live in Georgia, and has also been thought to be a derivative of the name of another African tribe. The comments of the participants generally support the idea that the term “Geechee” applies to all the situations described by Branch (1995). It appears, that among the participants, it most frequently applies to people who speak Gullah. At times, the terms “Gullah” and “Geechee” were used interchangeably.

Popular press, such as the magazine, Southern Living and the Myrtle Beach, South Carolina newspaper, The Sun News, have published articles pertaining to the Gullah culture. Cynthia succinctly summed up the comments of the other participants

when she suggested that people read this type of literature critically, as there were often frequent inaccuracies in these articles.

Twining and Baird (1991) used four features as indices when thinking about cultural retention in population enclaves: language, education, religion, and demography. The first feature, language, seemed to be the strongest indication of cultural retention. According to the participants in this study, most Gullah residents of the Sea Islands can at least understand the Gullah language and many can speak it fluently. Indeed, according to the participants, speaking the Gullah language is sometimes used as a way to shut out outsiders and to convey a connection between the people speaking Gullah.

The second feature, education, seemed more open to controversy. Twining and Baird's (1991) assertion that education became voluntary following the 1954 Supreme Court decision concerning school desegregation was thought to be false by the participants. Those who were old enough to be in school themselves, or to have school aged children during that time, agreed that school attendance was always mandatory. Failure to attend school usually meant a visit from the Truancy Officer. The participants also agreed that young people did not generally quit school to work in the fields. Many times they worked in fields in addition to attending school. Those who did quit school and went to work did so long before the 1954 Supreme Court decision. Dora, in her late 80's, had quit school in fifth grade to become a cook. She would have been in her 40's when the Supreme Court made their decision. Luke and his wife, Sarah, both in their late 60's, had quit high school. He enlisted in the service, while she went to work full time to help her ill parents and later to provide for her orphaned siblings. Both Luke and Sarah

were in their 20's when the desegregation decision was made. Linda was enrolled in school during the time of the desegregation decision. She not only completed high school, but went on to graduate from college and earned an advanced degree. The younger participants, Alice, Cynthia, and Jim, were all born after the 1954 Supreme Court decision. According to Twining and Baird (1991) they should have been the ones affected most by the desegregation order and most likely to quit school to work to contribute to their families. In fact, the opposite is true. All three did work in addition to going to high school and all three went on to earn advanced degrees, either at four year colleges or at technical schools. It appears that Twining and Baird's allegations regarding education are inaccurate for this group of participants.

The third feature relative to cultural retention was religion. Religious practices, as described by Twining and Baird (1991) appear to be fairly accurate for the older participants. While there are still praise houses in existence, none of the participants were attending them on a regular basis. Practices such as "shouts" and "seeking" were remembered by the older participants. The younger participants could recall stories told to them, but had not actually participated in seeking or shouting themselves. The authors' conclusion that religion was often seen as a way to help ensure survival, and also served as a means of socialization appears to be validated by the comments of the participants. All the participants regardless of their religious affiliations, found religion to play an important part in their own survival and in the survival of the Gullah community.

Twining and Baird's (1991) fourth parameter of cultural retention was the demographic index. The authors state "The presence of a Black majority, the ownership of fertile lands, and the isolation and independence of the Sea Islands have created a unique psyche for Blacks in the Sea Island area" (p.14). This scenario appears to be changing. The Sea Islands, particularly areas such as Hilton Head and Daufuskie Island, are rapidly being developed and now feature a number of expensive gated communities and golf resorts. According to several participants, areas of St. Helena's Island are also being developed in similar ways. This has led to a clash between traditional Gullah land use and the newcomers' use of the land. Gullah communities can no longer be considered to be isolated and independent. Gullah communities have been the object of interest of the mainland community for economic as well as cultural reasons. Tourism is being encouraged by some Gullah citizens.

Jackson, Slaughter and Blake (1983) found that self sufficiency and independence were means by which the Gullah survived over the years. They found the way in which time was utilized and the ability to cope with the environment as ways in which survival was enhanced. The comments of the participants did not support the idea that time was utilized differently by older or younger Gullahs. The ability to cope with the environment, in ways which enhanced the chances of successful farming and fishing, was supported by the participants. Among the older participants, the ability to farm, fish, and survive in the physical environment was critical to everyday survival. The younger participants still work hard to survive, but their environment was more likely to be the office or another work place. The "forces of nature" they had to contend with may be

more related to economic and racial issues. It appears that the Gullah survival techniques have adapted to the changing environment and to the challenges to the survival of the Gullah people.

Demerson (1986) found that among traditional African Americans in South Carolina, there are domiciliary complexes or “compounds” consisting of several households assembled on the basis of kinship and economic constraints. This residence pattern closely resembles its’ African counterparts. The findings of the present study were mixed in this regard. Sarah’s home was built on an acre left to her by her father. Each of her siblings had been given an adjoining piece of land which they still owned. However, most of her siblings lived elsewhere. Sarah herself had lived in New York City for years before returning to St. Helena’s Island and building her home on her family land. Alice’s family still had family land, but her siblings all lived great distances away on the mainland. Luke lived with his wife, Sarah, in the home she built on her land. Their home was located only a few minutes drive from where Luke’s father has lived for years. Cynthia lives on St. Helena’s Island for part of the year. When she was there, she usually lived at her mother’s house. She also had a home in New York City which she shared with her husband and son. Linda’s family home in Charleston had been demolished to make way for downtown revitalization in Charleston. She and her siblings were scattered throughout the country. It appears that, in the participants’ cases, those who still lived on St. Helena’s Island tended to live on or near family land, but that it wasn’t the sort of “compound” or “domiciliary” arrangement that Demerson discussed.

Perhaps the most obvious contradiction between Gullah literature and the results of the study was in the exploration of the existence of basket names. According to Baird and Twining (1988) an African tradition utilized by the Gullah was the uses of “basket names.” They noted that the basket name is usually given soon after birth, when the infant is still in the cradle (or basket). This name is known and used only in the family circle and within the individual’s home community. A person may also have a nickname, which is usually acquired later, because of some physical or temperamental characteristic or some incident in which the person has been involved. None of the participants had ever heard the term “basket name.” Dora, the eldest participant erroneously thought it might have something to do with bastards; children born out of wedlock. All the participants had at least one nickname, but none of the participants had heard of the practice of bestowing “basket names” on infants. It is possible that this practice occurred in other Sea Island areas, but the results of this study did not support their existence.

Branch (1995) noted that the Gullah folktales so familiar to many people are the Brer Rabbit Tales, featuring the cunning rabbit as the hero. These tales are a good example of how metaphors and stories are used by the Gullah to transmit knowledge necessary for survival. The oral tradition of story telling is well respected and represents a time tested method of communicating the wisdom originating from Sierra Leone and refined by years of survival in the Sea Islands. The results of the study lend credence to Branch’s assertions in this area. All the participants could relate tales and metaphors used in their families and by themselves to illustrate a point or to teach a lesson. Linda gave several examples of Gullah humor which involved metaphors. Even though she no

longer lives in Charleston, she continues to use Gullah folk tales and metaphors in her work within the school setting. Cynthia travels extensively in the United States and in other countries giving presentations of Gullah story telling as part of her efforts to promote and preserve the Gullah culture.

Branch (1995, p. 70) talked about the importance of arts and crafts, such as weaving sweet grass baskets. Beoku-Betts (1995, p. 543) found that Gullah express cultural identity through food practices which are linked with the food traditions of West Africa rice cultures. Arts and crafts were occasionally practiced, or at least appreciated, by all the participants. Crafts were seen as a way to hand down traditions from generation to generation. Food preparation practices were seen in much the same way with certain dishes being prepared in the same way as their ancestors had done.

Beoku-Betts (1995) asserted that cultural beliefs and traditions are transmitted largely in woman dominated contexts when she stated that “recollections of folklore traditions are narrated by women, because through such stories we learn how marginalized cultural groups construct a familiar and identifiable world for themselves in a dominant cultural setting” (p.544). The participants’ comments gave some support to this assertion. The use of folklore to construct a familiar and identifiable world appears to be supported by the participants’ comments. Stories seemed to provide continuity from generation to generation. The participants provided numerous examples of stories they heard as children and then passed on to their children. The stories of each of the participants were familiar to the other participants, suggesting a cultural, rather than an idiosyncratic basis for the stories. While Beoku-Betts (1995) contended that it was



primarily women who passed down the oral folklore, most of the participants gave examples of stories or “sayings” being narrated by fathers, uncles or other males, as well as by their mothers, grandmothers, or other females in the community.

Orsi’s (1985) contention that identity is often constructed through a people’s ability to discover who they are through memory seemed especially applicable.

According to Orsi (1985, p. 153):

Although pressure from a dominant culture may weaken their ability to reproduce their knowledge and perceptions of themselves and of their world, the ability to remember and to create a communion of memory in the group provides the foundation for establishing membership and continuity of that group.

Interpretation of the data through the lens of symbolic interactionism appears to support Orsi’s contention. According to LaRossa and Reitzes (1993) symbolic interactionism focuses on the connection between symbols (i.e. shared meanings) and interactions (i.e. verbal and nonverbal actions and communications). It is essentially a frame of reference for understanding how humans, in concert with one another, create symbolic worlds and how these worlds in turn, shape human behavior. Orsi’s “communion of memory” suggested symbolic interactionism’s “symbols” while “the foundation for establishing membership and continuity of that group” suggested “interactions.”

Art has been important in the Gullah culture. Branch (1995, p. 97) described a famous contemporary Gullah artist, Jonathan Green, as a “master story teller whose work draws upon the African oral traditions.” Through his paintings of praise houses, sweet

grass baskets, shouts, story telling and other traditional aspects of Gullah life, the importance of symbols to everyday interactions becomes more apparent.

A host of influences have endangered the traditional Gullah life styles. Among these are the effects of desegregation, the building of bridges to the mainland, the “development” of the islands and the improved means of communication between the Sea Islands and the rest of the world. When discussing the Gullah’s survival skills, self sufficiency and environmental concerns, Beoku-Betts (1995, p. 541) linked the threat of environmental destruction in the Sea Islands to the endangered cultural heritage of the Gullahs. These same forces, and others, may contribute to the development of a bicultural identity among the Gullah. Through interactions with the dominant, mainland culture, shared meanings and memories may be modified, leading to changes in how people interact. Changes in identity may occur in order to enhance survival in a world containing a dominant mainland culture as well as the traditional Gullah culture. Becoming bicultural may confer a tremendous advantage when it comes to surviving in the contemporary world.

In addition to the development of biculturalism as a means to survive, organizations have been formed to promote and preserve the Gullah culture. The Penn Center is now engaged in a partnership with the University of South Carolina. Grass roots organizations such as the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition, have dedicated themselves to the preservation and promotion of the Gullah culture. Their activities, such as sponsoring and producing educational programs, and participation in cultural events, are designed to heighten awareness of Gullah contributions and culture. According to the

comments of several participants, involvement with the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition appeared to affect several of the participants significantly. Their growing awareness of Gullah contributions and pride in the uniqueness of the Gullah culture seemed to increase their self esteem and to make their identifies as Gullahs more prominent. Involvement in activities or programs sponsored by the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition seemed to strengthen community participation. Ironically, participation in the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition also appeared to strengthen the bicultural identities of several of the participants. Perhaps by having to develop skills to present programs to non-Gullahs and to interact with the non-Gullah society, participants honed skills necessary to be bicultural as well.

### **Discussion of Findings in Relation to Theory**

The Gullah culture is rich with symbolism as evidenced by the spiritual, artistic, culinary and everyday interactions described by the participants. This rich symbolic background coupled with the focus on biculturalism and families required a theoretical framework designed to explore meaning and the development of identity. Symbolic interaction theory, as described below by LaRossa and Reitzes (1993, p. 143), provided an appropriate framework for this study. According to LaRossa and Reitzes (1993), there are three basic assumptions of symbolic interaction theory with seven assumptions flowing from those three themes.

The first theme emphasizes the importance of meanings for human behavior. Three assumptions developed from this theme: (a) Human beings act toward things on

the basis of the meanings that the things have for them, (b) Meaning arises in the process of interaction between people, (c) meanings are handled and modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with things she/he encounters.

The second theme explores the development and importance of self concept. The two assumptions based on this theme are: (d) Individuals are not born with a sense of self but develop self concepts through social interaction, (e) Self concepts, once developed, provide an important motive for behavior.

The third assumption focuses on the larger picture as it relates to symbolic interaction's assumptions about society, with its' focus on social process and the relation between individual freedom and societal constraint. The two assumptions associated with this theme are: (f) Individuals and small groups are influenced by larger cultural and societal processes, (g) It is through social interaction in every day situations that individuals work out the details of social structure.

The first theme, the importance of meanings for human behavior, was illustrated by several incidents related by the participants. Cynthia, the Gullah historian, emphasized this theme when she spoke about the omission of the Gullah culture and the contributions of its' people to history:

Why wasn't I taught that? Because if I was, then they would have to tell me who a lot of those forces were, who were working with them, and I would find out that a lot of those forces [who fought on the Union side during the Civil War] were people of African descent. And now where did those people of African descent come from? Off of these islands. These are my ancestors. Now, it's like

if I knew that then I wouldn't think we were just too lazy, no account people running around the jungle and somebody saved us from that and brought us here and all that. I would have thought differently, like "Wow, you mean to tell me, you know, we were in the military forces, we were doing this?" It's like, you're kidding me. These people had this kind of training, they had these kinds of skills, before they even got to this country? Anyway, you start to look at things a different way. So it would make you think totally differently.

Jim also made comments which demonstrated the importance of meanings for human behavior. Talking about his childhood, he stated:

My life was a lot of fun, a lot of love. I didn't know we was poor until I got big. We always had food. There was so much fish. I can remember, fish all the time. Now that I'm older, we were blessed because that was a delicacy.

It seems that Jim, as a child, interpreted his life as being similar to that of other people he knew. Because of its' similarity, he did not see his behavior as being anything unusual. As an adult however, first in boot camp, and later while employed as a civilian, his perception of his childhood changed. He reinterpreted some events in his life, and while still describing his childhood in positive terms, also described it as having harsher aspects, such as living in rural poverty and having to endure hard physical labor at an early age. The significance of everyday events, such as eating meals, was modified through Jim's interactions with other people as well as by his own interpretive processes.

An example given by all but one of the participants involved acknowledging "where you were from." At some point, six of the participants worked or attended

college on the mainland. To non-Gullahs, these six participants initially gave misleading answers to the question of “where you were from.” They generally gave answers which suggested that they were from a city on the mainland, and were not from the Sea Islands, which had a reputation of being a backward and superstitious area.

Eventually, the participants began to change their responses, first when responding to inquiries from other African Americans, then when responding to any inquiries. This change can be viewed using all three of the themes associated with symbolic interactionism. The first theme, the importance of meanings for human behavior, can be seen in the participants’ initial denial and then embrace of their home in the Sea Islands. As the meaning of being “from the Sea Islands” changed, so did their behavior in regard to their birthplace.

The second theme, exploring the development and importance of self concept, is also evident in this same example. Through social interaction, the participants initially developed a negative self concept which was associated with being from the Sea Islands. This negative self concept contributed to their behaviors of denying where they were from and also acting in ways which the participants perceived as not being associated with the Sea Islands.

Looking at the larger picture as it relates to symbolic interaction’s assumptions about society is the focus of the third theme. In this theme, the assumption is made that individuals and small groups are influenced by larger cultural and societal processes. It is also assumed that it is through social interaction in everyday situations that individuals work out the details of social structure. Using this same example of “where you are

from” it is easy to see how the larger cultural group (dominant American society) and the societal processes which placed a lower value on the Sea Islands culture, contributed to the participants’ initial negative assessment of “where they were from.” The social interactions in everyday situations enabled the participants to work out the details of social structure and to construct a more accurate, and more positive, picture of their homes in the Sea Islands.

Perhaps the most important caveat when using symbolic interactionism to view the data is to remember that these three themes and the seven assumptions derived from them are not independent from each other, nor are they sequential. At times, several processes may be occurring simultaneously and several assumptions may apply to the same data.

Using symbolic interactionism theory to form a framework from which to view and interpret this study’s data was very productive. The first research question dealt with the meaning of “being Gullah” to the participants. “Being Gullah” was the major component of the participants’ identities. The participants’ responses suggested that being born in the Sea Islands area, having the ability to speak, or at least to understand, the Gullah language, having a strong spiritual inclination and the ability to survive were key ingredients in identifying oneself as Gullah. Using symbolic interactionism theory to explore the Gullah aspects of identity highlighted the importance of meanings placed by the participants upon qualities and traditions that they associated with being Gullah. It also emphasized the importance of social interactions between individuals and groups. One of the most important interactions was between an individual and the family group.

Throughout the participants' interviews, frequent references were made to interactions with their parents, siblings, and other family members which were seen as significant in terms of encouraging the participants to identify values such as independence, survival, and spirituality as Gullah and to incorporate them into their identities.

Symbolic interactionism's assumptions about society as stated by LaRossa and Reitzes (1993, p. 143) suggest that individuals and small groups are influenced by larger cultural and societal processes. It is also suggested that through social interactions in everyday situations, individuals work out the details of social structure. These assumptions were utilized to interpret the data resulting from the participants' examples of how their own perceptions of "being Gullah" changed in response to influences from the dominant culture and societal processes. Linda had remarked how "Black was becoming beautiful, even to Blacks." She was speaking about how the Civil Rights Movement had helped people to change their self perceptions and how she had changed her perception and her identity. Her evaluation of "being Gullah" evolved from being embarrassed to be identified as Gullah to becoming proud of her Gullah heritage. The interest of the dominant culture also seemed to influence Linda and the other participants to reevaluate their opinions of "being Gullah" and to see it in a more favorable light. As Alice so abruptly declared, "Now they are paying us to speak Gullah!" While the influence of the dominant culture is not solely responsible for the favorable change in the valuation of the Gullah culture, it does appear to have played a significant part in that change.



The second research question addressed bicultural identity. Symbolic interactionism provided a framework to view this aspect of identity. The participants were all bicultural; some more so than others. Their comments linked the meanings they associated with Gullah and non-Gullah interactions and their actions. Symbolic interactionism's attention to the importance of social interaction in the development of identity is most evident when addressing the question of bicultural identity. Some participants, such as Linda, spoke about the need to be bicultural as a means of survival. They spoke about interactions with members of the dominant society and how at times some participants chose to act in certain ways that allowed them to participate successfully in the dominant culture as well as in their culture of origin.

Symbolic interactionism's assumption that self concepts provide an important motive for behavior was demonstrated dramatically by Cynthia's choice to become a Gullah historian and to focus her activities on promoting the well being of the Gullah culture. Jim, having developed a positive picture of being Gullah, became very active in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and in supporting local Gullah events. Both Cynthia and Jim were highly bicultural. Comfortable in their communities and relationships on St. Helena's Island, they were fluent in Gullah and were well versed in Gullah traditions and customs. They were also comfortable participating in the dominant culture, eloquently speaking "standard English" and interacting with non-Gullahs in ways appropriate to the dominant culture.

The role generational transmission of Gullah traditions and knowledge played in the development of identity was posed in the third research question. Symbolic

interactionism's focus on meanings and social interactions was particularly useful when addressing this issue. All participants spoke of times spent with older relatives and older members of the community during which they learned many of the traditional Gullah ways, such as those associated with farming, fishing, and cooking. These were not "formal instructional sessions" but were often quite educational, not only because of the content of what they learned, but perhaps more importantly, for the meaning attached to these activities by the participants. In most instances, the participants already had a strong emotional bond with their older family and community members. Symbolic interactionism would suggest that this emotional bond would lead to placing a higher value on the particular tradition, or what it represented, thereby making it more likely to be incorporated into their identities. For example, while none of the participants relied on casting fishing nets as a means of feeding their families, most of the participants spoke about the relationship between the tradition of casting fishing nets and survival. They incorporated this value of survival, even though now their methods of survival no longer included casting nets.

The Gullah culture has been primarily an oral culture. Subsequently, transmission of Gullah traditions and knowledge has usually been oral. While this seems to be due to many influences, such as the original African oral traditions, and the prohibition of teaching enslaved Africans to read during slavery in the Sea Islands, it may be the characteristics of the Gullah language itself which contributed to this ongoing oral tradition. Recently there have been efforts to develop a written Gullah language in order to preserve the Gullah language. Despite these efforts, the Gullah language continues to

be primarily oral. The participants all had a strong emotional attachment to the Gullah language. Symbolic interactionism theory would suggest that their efforts to learn and to use the Gullah language, despite at times being discouraged from doing so, may be due to the meaning attributed to the Gullah language by the participants. For many of the participants, the Gullah language meant a great deal. It represented a link to the past; it was a characteristic of a unique group; and it could be used to exclude non-Gullahs.

Gullah child rearing practices were linked to the development of identity in the fourth research question. In this area, the tenets of symbolic interactionism theory were especially applicable. The range in ages of the participants, from early 30's to late 80's, reflected a wide range of child rearing practices that were used when the participants were children as well as when the participants were raising their own children. Despite a variety of child rearing and discipline methods, all the participant interpreted their parents' child rearing practices as being positive attempts to teach their children traditional Gullah values. The participants frequently modeled their child rearing practices after their parents' practices. While differing on the surface, the underlying purpose of the participants' child rearing practices were the same; the instillation of traditional Gullah values in their children. These child rearing practices and their emphasis on the traditional Gullah values became not only part of the participants' Gullah identities, but because of the usefulness of these qualities for survival, also became part of the participants' bicultural identities.

One way in which the symbolic interactionism assumptions about the influence of larger cultural and societal processes on individuals and small groups was evident was in

the participants' interpretation of the meaning of legislative endeavors such as welfare and child abuse mandates. Each participant interpreted these not as attempts to aid and empower the less fortunate or to protect children, but as governmental attempts to interfere in the family and to reduce the family's ability to discipline children properly. Not only did the participants share this belief, but they also shared beliefs that child rearing practices were changed in response to this perceived threat. By changing child discipline to less physical means, the participants felt that parents and communities had less control over their children. As a result, children were less respectful and more likely to act in unacceptable ways. In effect, through the social interaction of child rearing in every day situations, individuals worked out [and changed] the details of social structure [within the family and the community].

These examples of the use of symbolic interactionism theory illustrate how potent the power of meaning and social interaction is in the development of identity, with both its' Gullah and bicultural aspects.

LaRossa and Reitzes (1993, p. 158) conclude that "symbolic interactionism is well suited for historical family research because historical data are often verbal. Letters, diaries, and other personal documents - the mainstay of the historian - are symbolic interactions." Given that the bulk of the data gathered during the study was verbal, it appeared that the choice of symbolic interactionism theory to provide a theoretical framework for the study was appropriate.

Baker (1993) described the fundamental assumptions of symbolic interactionism theory as including the following: Individuals are actors who play a part in the social

construction of reality and therefore attention is given to how people use symbols, what symbols indicate and define in speech and behavior and an analysis of family discourse. The use of symbols, what they indicate and define in speech and behavior and an analysis of family discourse were addressed in the analysis and interpretation of the data. Symbol use by people to construct a social reality was supported by situations described by the participants. For instance, Luke described the social relationships between himself and other people he interacted with while in the service. To him, the uniform and the way he interacted with others represented an equality which he did not experience in the civilian world. Physical symbols, such as the gates at the base opening to the outside world represented the transition in relationships from equality while in the service and on duty to inequality when off duty in the civilian world.

Gubriem and Hofstein (1990) argue for a resurgence of a symbolic interactionism perspective on families, suggesting that serious consideration be given to the interactional basis of domestic meanings, of how culture is formed, and of exploring, describing, and explaining the relations between family members, and the effects of social context on the lives of individuals and living groups. Their emphasis on linking domestic interactions with the formation of culture appears to be especially relevant to this study. Using symbolic interaction theory, meanings and their relationship to actions become more apparent. For instance, when Dora described the time she spent with Dr. King, she spoke about how his statements had the effect of dramatically altering her beliefs about herself and other people. By interacting with Dr. King and participating in the Civil Rights Movement, Dora changed from believing that the options for Black people were limited

to believing that all people had unlimited possibilities. Her actions began to reflect this changed belief. She became active in education and in registering voters. To this day, her actions are still influenced by the changes wrought in her self concept and identity which occurred as a direct result of her interactions with Dr. King. Gubrium and Hofstein's (1990) emphasis on the effects of social context on the lives of individuals and living groups is applicable to this study. The impact of the changing social context within which the Gullah participants live and work was apparent in the narratives of each participant. Several of the participants had lived through integration. They contrasted what life was like when they were expected to ride "in the back of the bus" with when they were living in a supposedly "integrated" community. To several of the participants, interactions with people of other races were more straight forward before integration. As Luke so bluntly put it, he got along with White people because he "knew the ways of the South." Once integration officially began, it seemed to make relationships between people of different races more complicated. Luke related several incidents when it seemed that social context had a major influence on him and how he interacted with others. One example that vividly illustrated this was when Luke was in the Navy and he was given "shore leave" in his own country. He spoke of the contrast in the way he interacted with White servicemen while on his ship and the way he interacted with the same people while on shore. While on the ship, Luke described how Black and White sailors slept within three feet of each other, how they attended worship services together, and ate together. Yet, as soon as he and his fellow service men were granted shore leave in the United States, they would not socialize together in town.

After integration, interactions continued to be complicated. The need to interact with people who were not Gullah seems to have contributed to the development of a bicultural identity among this study's participants. The development of a bicultural identity seems to be more firmly established in the participants who were more involved with the non-Gullah community by virtue of going away from home to attend college or through their interactions with coworkers. Rather than "dilute" their Gullah identities, biculturalism seems to have made the participants more aware of their Gullah identities as well as aware of the identities they needed in order to effectively participate in the non-Gullah community. Symbolic interactionism's focus on the development and importance of self concept may help to explain the development of a bicultural identity. The interactions of the participants with non-Gullah people may have contributed to the development of their self concept especially in areas related to biculturalism. As their self concepts evolved, the participants behavior also changed, in order to adapt to the demands of a bicultural society. The relationship between self concept and behavior is not a static one, nor is it unidirectional. Self concept appeared to influence behavior. Similarly, behavior influenced self concept. The context of the participants' lives helped to define the appropriateness and adaptability of their behavior.

May's (1990) cautions about the limitations in past symbolic interactionist research is applicable to the present study. May (1990) noted that other limitations in past symbolic interactionist research, such as the presence of demand characteristics, single measurement methodology, and variability in measures used to represent the self concept, may have contributed to the perception that the symbolic interactionist

perspective lacks utility. The need for repeated observations has been noted (Schafer & Keith, 1985; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979) because researchers have often tested the symbolic interactionist paradigm on only single occasions.

These limitations are present, in varying degrees, in the current study. The exploratory nature of the study was not compromised by these limitations. In the next section, the limitations of the study will be addressed fully.

Support for the primary components of interactionist theory as defined by Cooley (1956a) and Mead (1956) was found by May (1990) who also found that individuals are more likely to distort their reflected perceptions in areas of greater personal importance. May concluded that:

The symbolic interactionist viewpoint was an encompassing and broad perspective from which research can be productively conducted. It should be viewed as a viable, if not preferable, base for future work pertaining to the development of the self in social contexts (May, 1990, p. 492).

May's emphasis on the use of symbolic interactionist theory to investigate the development of the self in social contexts touches the heart of the current study. The development of a bicultural identity is strongly tied to social context. Given that the Gullah participants often interacted in starkly contrasting social contexts, the use of symbolic interactionism theory was seen as the most comprehensive, appropriate theoretical approach to use.

Hinchman and Zalewski (1995) used symbolic interactionism as the theoretical framework for their qualitative study of reading at the secondary level due to the social



context of the reading they were investigating. Their use of a symbolic interactionist “lens” permitted the authors to learn about the participants’ perspectives and to provide a possible explanation for the interactions among the participants’ perspectives. In much the same way as Hinchman and Zalewski explored their participants’ perspectives, the current study focused on the participants’ perspectives and how those perspectives influenced or were influenced by interactions with Gullah and non-Gullah people.

In addition to using symbolic interactionist theory to “view” the data, the oral history method was employed as the chief means of gathering the data in this qualitative study. According to Kornfeld (1992, p. 27):

Stories at times can overcome that otherness, hold that instinctive resistance in abeyance. Stories are the oldest, most primordial meeting ground in human experience. Their allure will often provide the most effective means of overcoming otherness, of forming a new collectivity based on the shared story.

Kornfeld (1992, p. 28) suggested that “oral histories can further develop our students’ empathic powers by giving them access to those who leave no written records and are usually silent in traditional histories.” She continued, “ even transcribed, oral interviews often reveal the emotional texture of an experience much better than written sources can” (p.28).

In the present study, I was in the position of being an “outsider” by virtue of my purpose for interacting with the participants, my race (White), my cultural background, and my inability to speak Gullah. The participants, while certainly not “outsiders” in their own families and communities, could be seen as being “outside” the predominant

mainland culture and as being among “those who leave no written records and are usually silent in traditional histories.” The ability to touch the “emotional texture of an experience” was a significant benefit of using the oral history method.

According to oral historian Paul Thompson (1990), “a more realistic and fair reconstruction of the past” may be produced through an emphasis on “the underclasses, the unprivileged, and the defeated.” By addressing the personal experiences of ordinary people involved in the historical process a “richer, more vivid, and heart rending” construction of the past can be created which may also help us construct a more specific and credible history (p. 571). Brennen (1996) stressed that the “emancipatory potential” of oral history is developed through examples of how an oral history approach will allow historians to move away from a linear notion of progress which supports the dominant institutional perspective toward a reconceptualization of history “as a process of continuity and discontinuity, of evolution and revolution” (p. 579). These comments of Brennen and Thompson reverberated throughout the current study. Gullah people have traditionally been characterized as unprivileged, primarily by virtue of being Black, rural and often poor. Cynthia, during her interviews, stressed how Gullah contributions to history were not even mentioned in history books, let alone acknowledged by the predominant American culture. She poignantly stated that many Gullah were unaware of contributions made by their ancestors to American history. Cynthia’s comments and those of the other participants suggest that the “dominant institutional perspective” of American history has not only omitted Gullah contributions but has relegated the Gullah

to a nondescript role as “descendants of slaves” if there is any recognition of the Gullah at all.

Poll made a relevant observation about the need for a comprehensive literature review prior to interviewing participants. According to Poll (1995), reviewing existing literature prior to interviewing a person “prevented the possibility that the interviewer would use an oral history of one person to represent all people in the group” (p. 146). It served as a point of comparison between the interviewee’s experiences, and those of his or her peers. Prior to interviewing the participants in the current study, a comprehensive literature review was completed. During the data analysis phase and while completing the final chapters of this dissertation, the literature review was updated. The information gathered from the literature review was used to formulate the semi-structured interview guide as well as to aid in the interpretation of data. The literature review served quite well to enhance sensitivity to possible issues as well as to emphasize the fallacy of using a singular oral history to represent an entire group. Lofland (1984) suggested the “face-to-faceness” of an oral history interview facilitated genuine sharing between the interviewer and the interviewee. During the interview process, I perceived this observation to be true. Oftentimes, participants would initially share “safer” stories with me. As the comfort level increased between the participants and myself, stories were shared which they may not have been willing to share with an “unknown” interviewer. For instance, during one interview session, Sarah was cooking a fish dinner as part of a Gullah fund raiser. I purchased two dinners; one for myself and one for another participant. When Sarah gave me the dinner plates, she stated that she had fixed mine

like White people like it, whereas she had fixed the other plate “the way we eat it.”

When we sat down to eat, the major difference in the food was that my portion of fish had the head and tail removed while the “Gullah” dinner consisted of the entire fish - head, fins, and tail. The participant who was eating the “Gullah” dinner proceeded to eat the entire fish head, bones and all, while I ate my fillet sans head and tail. We laughed about the differences and I admitted I probably would not have eaten the fish head, even though the participant declared that the Gullah people consider the head to be the best part of the fish.

During another conversation about sweet grass baskets, Linda remarked how “my people” [White people] would not know how to pick grasses used for sweet grass baskets and probably wouldn’t even go into a wet land area to look for them. I replied that I couldn’t speak for all White people, but as for myself, I wouldn’t venture into a wet land or swamp unless I was with someone who knew what she/he was doing. This prompted good-natured laughter from both of us. I felt that the gap between us had narrowed and that I was perceived more as a friend than as an interviewer. My perceptions of the participants evolved from being primarily people who were gracious enough to let me interview them to a deep respect and admiration for them as individuals and also for the Gullah culture. Even though I may not physically see the participants often now that the study is finished, I will always consider them to be friends to whom I am eternally grateful.

### **Major Conclusions:**

Due to the exploratory nature of the study, the results cannot be generalized to the Gullah population. However, there were areas of commonality among several of the participants when investigating the research questions posed in this study. These findings or conclusions may serve to advance research in these areas and may contribute to a fuller understanding of the Gullah identity and biculturalism.

Among the findings discussed here, three findings emerge as unique to this study. The Gullah are a unique cultural group. Unlike many other minority groups, they did not have a great deal of knowledge about their ancestors until the last several decades. Separated from their ancestors in Sierra Leone by slavery, the Gullah did not really know that many of their traditions, such as weaving sea grass baskets and eating rice based cuisine were the same traditions that were practiced in Sierra Leone. The participants all spoke about how recent it had been that they knew, with some certainty, that they were descended from ancestors in the Sierra Leone area. Not only were they unable to have a continuous link to their ancestors because of the disruption caused by slavery, but the Gullah often had to rely on outsiders, such as researchers, like Turner (1949) and Opala (1987) to provide information about their language and cultural connections to Sierra Leone. Because of that “disconnect” between the Gullah and their Sierra Leone ancestors which was caused by slavery, their identity as a culture and as Gullah individuals may have been delayed.

Another significant finding was the presence of great conflict and tension within the Gullah culture and community. This tension seemed to be incorporated into the

identities of the participants as well. Numerous parallels were found between conflicts which are part of contemporary Gullah life. The tension between Christian and African beliefs may be expressed in the differences between the more European American type Christian churches that the participants attended on Sundays, and the praise houses, occasionally attended during the week. At the praise houses, more African type practices, such as clapping and shouting were found. Numerous other conflicts were found. There was conflict between speaking Gullah and standard English, between becoming bicultural and trying to isolate the Gullah from the mainland influences, and between “development” of the Islands and the traditional land use and ownership by the Gullah.

The third unique finding involved differences in the use of physical space between the Gullah participants and the non-Gullah newcomers. The Gullah use primarily oral language and have an interdependent, community orientation which seemed to clash violently with the non-Gullah newcomers’ more individualistic, technical, and legalistic orientation. These clashes and their unintended consequences frequently provoked changes in the traditional lifestyles that were not always welcomed by the Gullah participants. While this was not a primary area of focus for this study, the potential differences in physical space utilization and the underlying reasons for these differences may be very helpful in understanding the differences in different cultural groups and biculturalism.

The first research question explored the meaning of “being Gullah.” The results were very interesting. One of the participants thought that being Gullah was not

something you were born into; it was more of an ability to speak the Gullah language and an acceptance of Gullah culture. The remaining six participants all attributed a genetic or an ethnic basis to being Gullah. But to these participants, there was more to being Gullah than just being born Gullah. For these six participants, being Gullah was their primary identity. Being Black was secondary, and being “bicultural” was third. For the lone participant who did not think you had to “be born into Gullah” it appeared that her primary identity was Black, then bicultural and lastly, Gullah. As the interviews progressed, it became apparent that “being Gullah” was complex. Unlike myself, a White woman of primarily northern and eastern European descent, who thinks of herself as primarily a person, then as a White female, and lastly as an ethnic European American, the majority of the Gullah participants tended to consider Gullah (their ethnic identity) as their primary identity. This was evident in their stories and during observations of interactions between the participants and other people. Subtleties were used to identify other Gullahs, such as noting if there was any hesitation before greeting someone approaching you. Among Gullah-only interactions, the Gullah language tended to be used, both as a means of enhancing communication between Gullahs and also as a means of excluding non-Gullahs. Asking “who your people were” was another means of establishing your Gullah identity when encountering an unfamiliar Gullah person.

All of the participants thought that the ability to speak, or at least to understand, the Gullah language was crucial to “being Gullah.” Speaking or understanding Gullah did not appear to be solely a matter of language fluency, but involved much more. Familiarity with the Gullah language seemed to imply involvement with Gullah history,

heritage, and traditions. It also seemed to be a way of gaining power and control in a situation where Gullah people did not traditionally have much power or control due to their minority and unprivileged social status. An interesting twist on the use of the Gullah language involves the appropriateness of speaking Gullah in public. All of the older participants were severely cautioned by their parents to only speak “standard English” in public. Gullah was seen as slang; a dialect spoken by backward and uneducated people. As the Gullah language gained respect over the years, through the efforts of linguists, Gullah historians, the Gullah community and others, it became recognized as a language in its’ own right. The consensus among the participants was that “standard English” was still the language spoken in business and in school settings, but now it was acceptable to speak Gullah with family and friends. It was thought of as a type of “second language” by some of the participants.

In addition to familiarity and ability to comprehend or to speak the Gullah language, spirituality emerged as a major contributor to “being Gullah.” The participants were not unanimous in their expressions of spirituality. Some dealt with spirituality on a personal basis, while others expressed their spirituality in a religious manner. Among those who chose a religious expression, the majority involved a Christian religion, such as Baptist or African Methodist Episcopalian (AME). One person tended to have a more overtly African expression of spirituality; referring to the spirits of her ancestors and to the Creator. There appeared to be a heightened sensitivity among most of the participants to acknowledge that they were indeed Christian, and although they knew of people who practiced voodoo, they did not do so themselves. Spirituality for several of the



participants was synonymous with hope. Having hope was seen as being essential for the Gullah to survive, both during slavery and in contemporary times. Hence, to most of the participants, spirituality meant having hope which meant being able to survive.

Having a spirit of community and feeling close to nature were two additional attributes contributed by the participants to “being Gullah” The participants provided numerous examples of how the community pulled together to support families, and how individuals often worked to strengthen the community. Gullah individuals and families were often interdependent. Their interdependence with each other facilitated their independence from the dominant society. A feeling of being part of nature and of acting as a steward of nature’s bounty was expressed by most of the participants. Even though none of the participants farmed or supported themselves by working the land, there was an acute awareness of the relationship of the Gullah culture and community to the ownership of land and to the ability to exist harmoniously with nature.

The second research question explored the role of biculturalism in contemporary Gullah families. In order to accomplish this, a thorough review of the literature pertinent to biculturalism was completed. The family relationships of the participants were explored. The development of identities and of bicultural identifies were investigated. The advantages and disadvantages of biculturalism were assessed.

Among the participants of the current study, three were blood relatives, one was related by marriage, and two were long-time friends of the four participants who were related to each other. One participant was not related to any of the others and did not know the other participants. Having six of the seven participants involved in long term

relationships with each other facilitated the investigation of biculturalism within a family context. It also allowed observation of biculturalism across an age span of more than 50 years since the participants ranged in age from their early thirties to the late eighties. The six participants who knew each other all resided on St. Helena's Island, although some had left for extended periods of time before returning to St. Helena's Island to live. The remaining participant resided in a small city outside of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina where she has lived for over 20 years.

Perhaps the most interesting finding related to biculturalism was that all the participants had bicultural identities, regardless of age, residence, or amount of contact with the majority culture. It did appear that the younger participants may have had more well developed bicultural identities than the older participants. This appeared to be related to their employment situations. All of the four younger participants were employed in settings where they had substantial contact with non-Gullah people. Among the three older participants, two were retired, and one was self employed on a nearby island. The driving force behind the development of bicultural identities appeared to be that biculturalism contributed significantly to survival not only of the individual but also to survival of the community. In some instances, biculturalism facilitated the participants' ability to move beyond survival and to enjoy a high quality of life. Biculturalism did not appear to cause the participants to become less "Gullah." It actually seemed to heighten the participants' awareness of their Gullah identities as well as to heighten their abilities to participate in the majority culture comfortably and effectively. The results of the study strongly suggested that biculturalism was inexorably

linked to survival. Without biculturalism, the Gullah community would have to rely on isolation to preserve their identity. Since isolation is no longer possible, biculturalism has become the key to survival.

In the third research question, the role of generational transmission of Gullah traditions and knowledge in the development of identity was explored. The Gullah culture is primarily an oral culture. Recently, there has been an effort to develop a written Gullah language in an attempt to preserve the Gullah language. The efforts to preserve the Gullah language, in either oral or written form, contribute to the development of identity by ensuring that the method of transmitting knowledge, which is the Gullah language itself, is preserved. Metaphors and stories are primary means to transmittal of knowledge from the older generations to the younger ones. During their interviews, the participants all related incidents where they learned skills and developed ideas from interacting with older family and community members. It appeared, that like biculturalism, traditions and knowledge passed on to younger generations had survival as their chief concern. The younger generations may not actively practice some of the skills that they learned from the older generations, such as casting fishing nets, but the underlying lessons of these traditions, such as independence, interdependence, and self-reliance, were driven home and were a large part of the identities of each participant.

The last research question explored the relationship of Gullah child rearing practices to the development of identity. In this area, the impact of social context was clear. All of the participants noted dramatic changes in how Gullah children were raised. Most of these changes were not seen as desirable. Most of the participants expressed the

opinion that governmental interference, such as through child abuse legislation, had undermined parents' ability to raise their children. By undermining parents' ability to discipline children in a traditional manner, which usually involved physical punishment, several of the participants felt that they were unable to raise children to be as respectful and caring as they should be. Paradoxically, among the younger participants who expressed this view, none of them used spanking or other physical punishment as a major means of disciplining their own young children. Most of the participants expressed the view that this perceived "disempowerment" of parents by the government contributed to a less positive self concept in the participants' children as well as Gullah children in general.

The role of extended family was significant in Gullah child rearing practices. Mothers and grandmothers appeared to have the primary child rearing responsibilities. In some cases, the roles of grandmother and mother appeared to be interchangeable. All of the participants were adamant that their relationship with their mothers, fathers, and other family members who were thought of in a parental manner, contributed significantly to make them the people they are today and to their identities as an adult.

### **Limitations of the Study:**

There are several limitations in this study. As a qualitative study with an exploratory focus, the results are not generalizable to the entire Gullah population. Therefore, it was not necessary to have a large, randomly selected sample. Nevertheless, with a sample size of seven, selected using the snowball technique, the best that can be

said is that the results of the study are applicable only to the participants themselves. The results have other uses, such as fueling further research and suggesting practical applications, which are also of value. It is important to emphasize that the results cannot be generalized to the whole Gullah population.

In addition to limited generalization, the limited scope and sequence of the present study should be acknowledged. Each one of the research questions could have become the focus of a separate study by itself. The previous research and the theories discussed in the literature review could have been investigated in greater depth, and again, could have served as the impetus for a series of studies. These limitations were anticipated in the design of the study, which was intended to make a contribution to the understanding of biculturalism and identity in contemporary Gullah families, not to be a conclusive statement in itself.

The primary means used to gather data was the oral history method. This was supplemented by observations and by my limited participation in Gullah community activities. Other means of verification, such as the use of documents, independent observations, replication, and the use of a broader pool of participants would strengthen the conclusions of the study and would increase their ability to generalize to the Gullah population. It would also add to the knowledge base of biculturalism and identity as well as to what is known about contemporary Gullah families. Schvaneveldt, Pickett and Young (as cited in Bass, Doherty, LaRossa, Schumm & Steinmetz, 1993) discussed the drawbacks to using the oral history method. The use of retrospective data, with the potential problems of faulty memories or the respondents' desires to present themselves

in a better light, may be serious concerns affecting the quality of the information derived from using oral histories.

Symbolic interactionism theory was used to provide the theoretical underpinnings for this study. The purpose of the study was exploratory rather than theory testing; symbolic interactionism theory was used to provide a framework to help with formulating research questions and to aid in analyzing and interpreting data. Symbolic interactionism theory was well suited to verbal data, to a qualitative approach, and to the nature of the topic being studied. However, there are other theories and perspectives which could have been used and may have yielded different interpretations of the data. Future researchers may wish to employ other theoretical frameworks and perspectives before revisiting this topic.

Some of the literature that exists about the Gullah culture appears to romanticize it and is inaccurate. Likewise, it would be tempting to “romanticize” some of the findings from the present study perhaps due to my feelings of admiration and affection for the participants and their culture. A cautionary note is extended to the consumer of this research to avoid generalizing and romanticizing the results.

A significant limitation was imposed by my inability to speak Gullah. As a result, the interviews were conducted in standard English. While very comprehensive in nature, the interviews may not have been as “rich” as they could have been if we had been able to speak in Gullah with each other.

### **Implications for Theory, Research and Practice**

The results of the study did not support any one theory of biculturalism.

VanDenBurgh (1991, p. 72) noted the necessity for an individual to engage in a dual socialization process in order to become bicultural. The participants appeared to have engaged in a dual socialization process. These socialization processes were not necessarily simultaneous in nature, but rather appeared to be based upon the individual's social context at the time. Some of the bicultural theories and models encompass the assumption that an individual's primary identity is lost or changed in some way by becoming bicultural. Other bicultural theories and models contend that individuals can maintain a sense of belonging in two cultures without compromising her or his sense of identity. The results of this study seem to support this latter assumption.

Fishman (1989) and Malleas's (1988) observations about the difficulties of remaining culturally unique when interacting with other cultures appears to be especially salient. For so long the Gullah communities were isolated from the mainland. Now, not only are they no longer isolated, but they are experiencing an influx of non-Gullah people moving to the Sea Islands and in many cases, living in ways, such as in resorts and gated communities, which are foreign to the existing communities.

In terms of theories, the results of this research imply that no single theory is adequate to explain biculturalism and identity in contemporary Gullah families. Rather, bits and pieces of the varying theories seem to "fit" the data. It may be that LaFromboise, Coleman and Gerton (1993) are correct when they state that it is "the process by which people acquire a second culture that accounts for the major differences

between these [bicultural] models” (p. 402). The tenets of symbolic interactionism theory were useful in analyzing the data, facilitating analysis of processes within the individual, between individuals, and also between individuals and groups. Symbolic interactionism’s focus on “the importance of meaning for human behavior, on the development and importance of self concept, and on social process and the relations between [individual] freedom and [societal] constraint” (Maines, 1979, p. 524) permitted analysis to be done at varying levels and degrees of complexity.

In terms of research, the results of the study imply a need for multifaceted approaches using a variety of techniques and theories. Having a longitudinal approach would allow a developmental aspect to be explored. Researchers fluent in Gullah would be able to explore areas unavailable to those researchers who spoke only standard English. Both broader and narrower perspectives could be employed to investigate specific topics more comprehensively. The use of participant as well as observer methods would complement the research picture. The differences in utilization of physical space as it relates to Gullah identity is an area in need of further study.

Implications for practice yielded the most immediate contributions. The results of this study are available for use by groups or individuals to assist in preserving and promoting the Gullah culture. Despite the recent popularity of the Gullah culture in the media, very little information is available about the Gullah culture and language to our school children and to members of the Gullah community. It may be beneficial to advocate for “cultural teacher” positions in the public schools and “cultural specialist” positions within agencies as a means to provide structured, ongoing education about the



Gullah culture, its traditions and its language. The uniqueness of the Gullah culture and the contributions of its citizens to history demand recognition not only on a local level, but on a national and international level as well.

The Penn Institute Archives are housed several hundred miles away from Penn on a University of North Carolina campus. While this has been done to ensure preservation of these precious photos and documents, an unintended consequence has been to remove the archives from use by the Gullah community. Now that the Penn Center has entered into a partnership with the University of South Carolina, perhaps a facility could be constructed on the grounds of Penn where the archives could be housed and could be easily available to the Gullah community as well as to other interested people. Another possibility might be the use of technology to scan the photographs archived in North Carolina. That way, the Gullah community would have more immediate access to those photographs. If access to those archived materials is not readily available in the immediate future, the “unintended consequence” of archiving this material in a distant location may result in the loss of the ability to identify the people in the photographs by the elders living in the Gullah community.

The Gullah community should consider actively and deliberately fostering leadership among its’ members. In the rapidly changing world that the Gullah now encounter, they sometimes have been in a reactive position, where power and control are usurped by outsiders who are well organized and have bountiful financial and legal resources available to them.

The comments of the participants suggested that governmental processes are often seen as having a detrimental effect on Gullah families. It may be advantageous for the Gullah community to learn to use the political, judicial, and legislative processes to their advantage.

Gullah communities appear to be reaching a critical decision making juncture in regard to the future of the Gullah culture. Dialog among community members might encompass a wide range of possibilities such as exploring the merits of trying to remain relatively separate (like the Amish) from the mainland culture, development of a bicultural approach to facilitate survival of the Gullah culture within the larger, multicultural American community, or the evolution of a culture which incorporates features from the Gullah culture as well as from the dominant American culture.

Regardless of the shape the Gullah culture assumes in the future, the values underlying much of the present Gullah culture, such as the will to survive, self reliance, interdependence, spirituality, the importance of family, a sense of community, and the everlasting presence of hope in the face of great odds will continue to be an essential part of the Gullah culture.

### **Directions for Future Research**

There are many possible directions for future research. There is a need to pursue a longitudinal approach to studying biculturalism, identity, and other facets of Gullah life. Most research that has been done seems to focus primarily on adults. Research with

children and adolescents, done with appropriate safeguards, may yield unexpected results.

A cross cultural or multicultural perspective may be valuable in future research. As the population of the United States increases during the next century, the presence of multiple minority groups may foster an increasingly multicultural society, of which the Gullah culture would be part. Further research relative to biculturalism and identity would be welcome. It may be beneficial to continue exploring the interaction of biculturalism and identity with gender, as well as with factors such as racism, child rearing practices, and spirituality in order to be better informed to face the challenges of the future. Advances in technology may be utilized both to analyze data and to open avenues to more intensive data gathering. Research relevant to the use of physical space and also to the “uniqueness” of the Gullah as a cultural group is strongly suggested.

Coordinating research efforts with those of other researchers, such as those from the Penn Center and from the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition may result in a multidisciplinary approach, yielding a richer harvest of information. Further investigation of the relationship of the Gullah people to their ancestors in the Sierra Leone area of Africa may be fruitful. It may also be worthwhile to explore biculturalism and identity in Gullah families where there has been intermingling with Native Americans or other minorities. Research based in Gullah communities which are located at vast distances from the Sea Islands, for instance in Nova Scotia, Canada, or in Texas, may also be worthwhile.

A large scale, qualitative study, employing a variety of measures to investigate the Gullah culture, biculturalism, identity, and family life which involved Gullah people from a number of Sea Islands, from South Carolina to northern Florida, would be useful in determining if the results of the present study are unique to the participants of the study or if there are commonalties within the findings from both studies.

**Concluding Remarks:**

This study was undertaken in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Family Studies. Seven very courageous and compassionate Gullah people gave freely of their time and talent, sharing information relative to biculturalism, identity, and contemporary Gullah families. They provided unconditional acceptance, friendship and hospitality to a unknown graduate student at the same time they were contributing to preserving and promoting their culture and their community.

The results of the research yielded a wealth of information which will be far more valuable than solely fulfilling the requirement for an advanced degree. In addition to the tangible results of this study relative to biculturalism and identity in contemporary Gullah families, the research process also wrought profound changes in myself as a scholar and as a person. I developed a heightened sensitivity to the nuances of meanings, behavior and interactions. My awareness of subtle and not-so-subtle barriers, such as those posed by racism, economic disadvantage and prejudice increased. I developed a great respect for the participants and for the Gullah culture which has survived numerous challenges to its existence. After researching, observing and interacting with the participants, I am

confident that the Gullah culture will thrive in the future. I am thankful for the opportunity to contribute to the preservation of the Gullah culture and to the understanding of biculturalism and identity in contemporary Gullah families.

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## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX A

## IRB Exemption Approval




Office of Sponsored Programs

301 Burruss Hall  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061-0249  
(540) 231-5281 Fax: (540) 231-4384

### MEMORANDUM

TO: Janet K. Sawyers, Peggy M. Vogel  
Family and Child Development (0416)

FROM: H. T. Hurd   
Director

DATE: April 14, 1998

SUBJECT: IRB EXEMPTION APPROVAL- "Contemporary Gullah Families: A  
Multigenerational, Psychological and Sociocultural Perspective" - IRB  
#98-108

I have reviewed your request to the IRB for exemption for the above  
referenced project. I concur that the research falls within the exempt status.

Best wishes.

HTH/baj

cc: M.J. Sporakowski, Head  
Gloria Bird, Reviewer



## APPENDIX B

## **Sample of Informed Consent Form**

### **VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY**

#### **Informed Consent for Participants**

#### **of Investigative Projects**

Title of Project: Identity in Gullah Families

Investigators: Janet K. Sawyers, Ph.D. , advisor  
Peggy M. Vogel, Ph.D. candidate

#### **I. The Purpose of this Research/Project**

The purpose of this research project is to investigate how families maintain their Gullah identity while also belonging to the larger American society. Six people will take part in this study; three males and three females.

#### **II. Procedures**

As a study participant you will be expected to:

- a. meet with me at a mutually agreed upon place, such as in your home or at the public library.
- b. be interviewed two times within 30 days. Each interview will take 60 to 90 minutes to complete. At the first interview, I will ask you some basic background questions, like your age and education. Then I will ask you about things like your childhood, how your parents raised you, and about Gullah traditions. In the second

interview, I will ask you to tell me more about some of the things we talked about during the first interview.

### **III. Risks**

The questions I will ask are not intended to cause discomfort to risk to you. You do not have to discuss any topic that you do not want to discuss. You may stop participating at any time.

### **IV. Benefits of this Project**

No promise or guarantee of benefits are being made to encourage you to participate in this project. At the end of the study, you will receive a summary of the research results. A copy of the complete study will be given to the Penn Center and to the African Kultural Arts Network (AKAN) in order to contribute to the preservation and promotion of the Gullah culture.

### **V. Extent of Confidentiality**

Your identity will be kept confidential. Your name will only be known to me. I will assign you a false name and the information you provide will be identified only by that name.

All interviews will be audio taped. Two tape recorders will be used at the same time, in case one recorder breaks. Your name and the audio tapes will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home office. The tapes will be transcribed by me. Only I will have

access to the tapes. At the conclusion of the study, the list that has your name on it, as well as the tapes, will be destroyed so that your identity will continue to be confidential.

## **VI. Compensation**

Other than my sincere appreciation, please understand that you are volunteering to participate in this study and that you will not receive any compensation for your participation.

## **VII. Freedom to Withdraw**

Please understand that:

- a. you may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.
- b. you may choose not to answer any questions without penalty.

## **IX. Subject's Responsibilities**

I voluntarily agree to participate in two 60 to 90 minute interviews within a 30 day period.

## **X. Subject's Permission**

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project.

If I participate, I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I agree to abide by the rules of this project.

---

Signature

---

Date

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact:

Peggy M. Vogel  
Investigator

843-365-2315  
Phone

Janet K. Sawyers  
Faculty Advisor

540-231-3194  
Phone

H.T. Hurd  
Chair, IRB  
Research Division

540-231-4867  
Phone

## APPENDIX C

## **INDEPTH, SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE**

NAME:

DATE OF INTERVIEW:

ASSIGNED NAME:

DATE OF BIRTH:

ADDRESS:

INTERVIEW NUMBER:

TELEPHONE:

EMPLOYER:

MARITAL STATUS:

NUMBER OF CHILDREN:

1. Please tell me about yourself.
2. Please tell me what it was like when you were a child.
3. What special knowledge/wisdom do you think your parent/other important adults passed on to you?
4. How did they do that:
5. Please describe your educational experiences.
6. Please tell me about your adult life.  
Individual:  
Family:
7. Please describe parenting/child rearing practices that you are familiar with.
8. What child rearing practices did your parents/other adults use with you?
9. Who has been an important figure in your life:
10. (If the participant has children) How are you raising your children?
11. What would you like your children to know?
12. What are your religious/spiritual beliefs?

13. How have they influenced your life?
14. Please tell me about some of the Gullah traditions.
15. Have you had contact with anyone from Sierra Leone or from other areas of Africa?
16. How fluent in Gullah are you?
17. When would you speak Gullah?
18. When wouldn't you speak Gullah?
19. What do you see as being uniquely Gullah?
20. How do you think Gullah people are perceived by non-Gullah people?
21. What do you see as the role of government in your daily life?
22. Please describe how you see Gullah and non-Gullah interactions in situations such as during the work day, meeting tourists, interactions with people from other ethnic groups and in other situations.
23. What would you like non-Gullahs to know about Gullahs?
24. Is there any thing else you would like to share with me?
25. Can I answer any questions about any thing we have talked about?

Thank you for participating in this study. Your contributions have been important and are greatly appreciated. You will receive a summary of the results when the study is finished. I will be contacting you at a later date to see if you have any questions.



## APPENDIX D

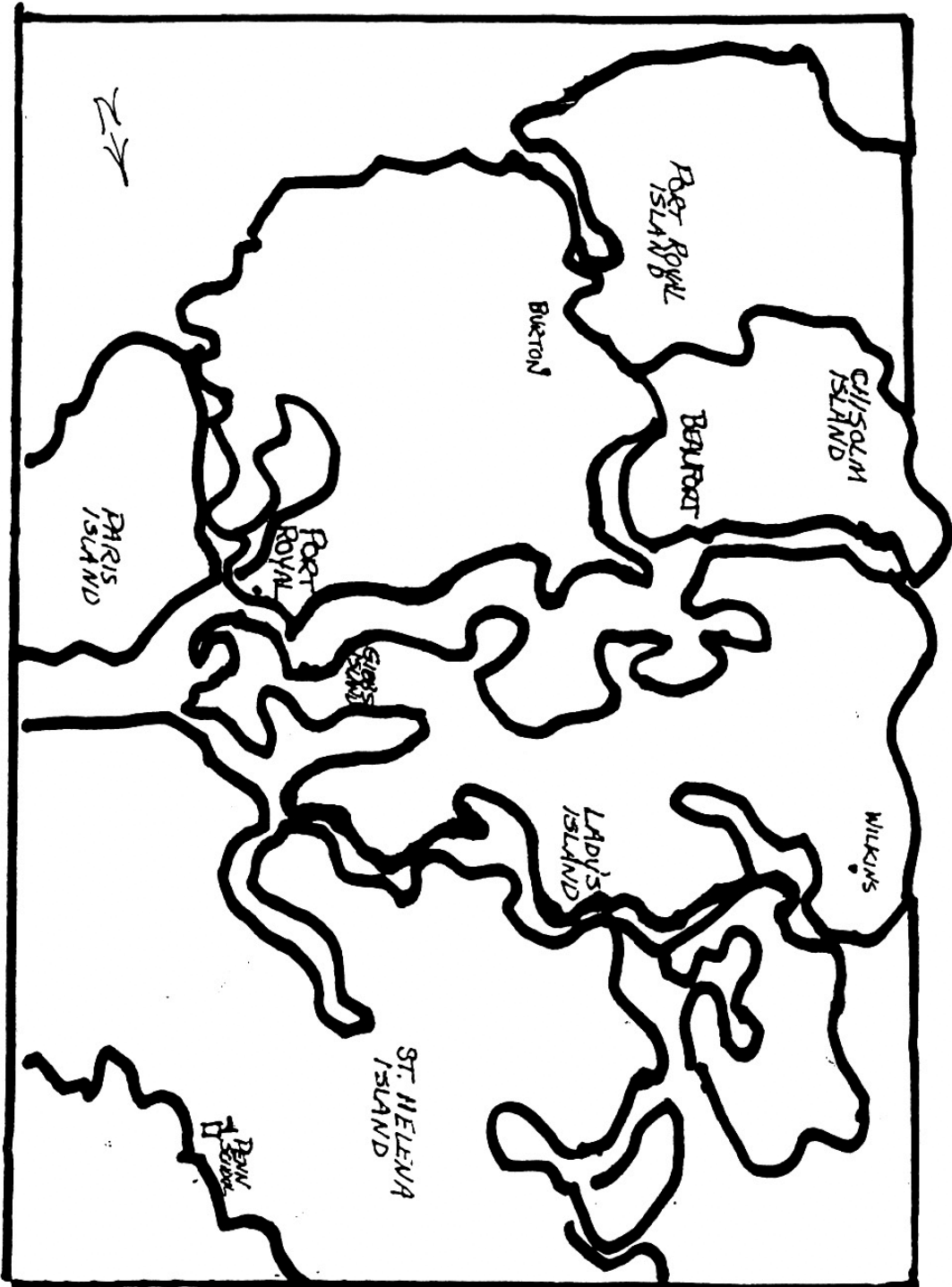
## **FINAL CODING SCHEME**

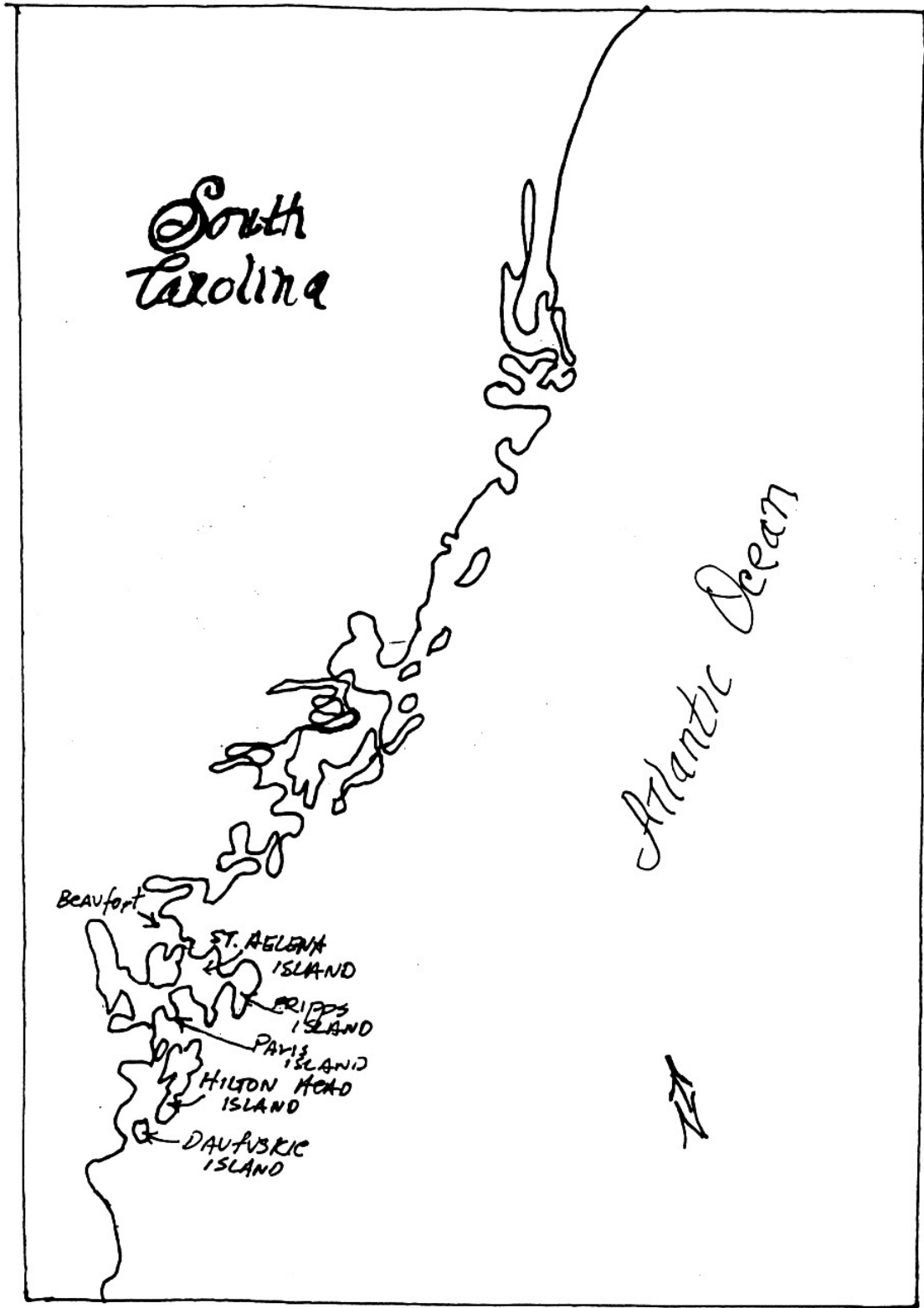
The coding scheme consisted of categories of responses. Categories included each research question, and five additional categories that developed as the interviews progressed. Symbolic interactionism theory was used to assist in categorizing and interpreting the data. Data from the transcribed interviews and from my field notes were coded according to these nine categories.

The final categories used in the coding scheme were: (a) the meaning of “being Gullah” to the participants, (b) bicultural identity, (c) generational transmission of traditions (d) Gullah child rearing practices, (e) Gullah language (f) racism (g) spirituality (h) physical space utilization (i) survival .

## **APPENDIX E**

Maps of St. Helena's Island area





## **APPENDIX F**

## **VITAE**

### **Peggy MacLeod Vogel**

I was born on October 26, 1953 in Montclair, New Jersey. The oldest of four children, I am married and have three children. As an undergraduate at the State University of New York at Buffalo, I studied psychology and was graduated in February, 1974 with a Bachelor of Arts degree cum laude. I worked as a Senior Social Welfare Examiner until I enter Alfred University in the fall of 1979. After graduating in May, 1981 with a Master of Arts degree in school psychology, I moved to Bedford, Virginia where I was employed as a school psychologist. I was active in professional organizations and served as the chairperson of the Ethics Committee of the Virginia Association of School Psychologists. I began my doctoral work in Family Studies at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in the fall of 1986. During this time, I completed the State of Virginia requirements for licensure as a professional counselor and as a school psychologist. In August, 1988 I left public school employment and began a private practice in Lynchburg, Virginia. My husband and I left Lynchburg and moved to the Myrtle Beach, South Carolina area in November, 1995. I continued to work on my dissertation while being employed as a school psychologist for the Horry County Public School System. In October, 1998, I became licensed as an psychoeducational specialist by the state of South Carolina. Professional memberships are maintained in the National Council on Family Relations and in the National Association of School Psychologists. I anticipate completing my dissertation and being graduated in May, 2000.