

Exploring the relationship between psychological symptoms and ethnic  
connectedness among the New York Metropolitan Area Haitian community to the 2010  
earthquake in Haiti

By

Samuel Jeannite, M.A., M.S.Ed.

PREVIEW

A Doctoral Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Psychology  
in the Department of Psychology at Pace University

New York

2015

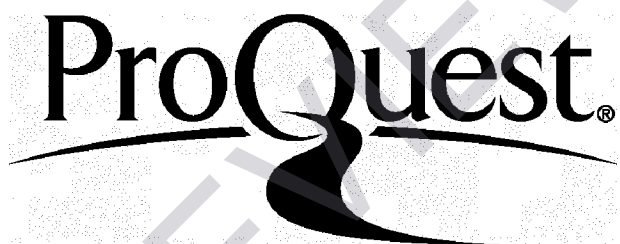
ProQuest Number: 3664500

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 3664500

Published by ProQuest LLC(2015). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.  
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

# PSY.D PROJECT FINAL APPROVAL FORM

NAME: Samuel Jeannite M.A., M.S.Ed.

TITLE OF PROJECT: Exploring the relationship between psychological symptoms and ethnic connectedness among the New York Metropolitan Area Haitian community to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti

## DOCTORAL PROJECT COMMITTEE:

PROJECT ADVISOR: Dr. June Chisholm  
Name

Professor Pace University  
Title Affiliation

PROJECT CONSULTANT: Dr. Lisa Rosenthal  
Name

Assistant Professor Pace University  
Title Affiliation

PROJECT CONSULTANT: Dr. Florence Denmark  
Name

Professor Emeritus Pace University  
Title Affiliation

## FINAL APPROVAL OF COMPLETED PROJECT:

I have read the final version of the doctoral project and certify that it meets the relevant requirements for the Psy.D degree in School-Clinical Child Psychology.

June L Chisholm  
Project Advisor's Signature

10/11/15  
Date

[Signature]  
Project Consultant's Signature

11/11/15  
Date

Florence L Denmark  
Project Consultant's Signature

11/11/15  
Date

PREVIEW

©2015  
Samuel Jeannite  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank GOD for blessing me in abundance through my years as a student. My faith in God allowed me the strength to power through this program. When there were times of immense stress, God has always placed a person or situation in my life as a reminder of his grace. I began as an undergraduate student at Pace University and I believe that it is fitting that I am completing my doctorate in a school that has provided me with so many opportunities. These years have been a test of stamina and patience and I am better for it now.

I would like to thank my family for encouraging me throughout this process. Their faith in my abilities never wavered and for them it was not a matter of “if” I can finish but “when” I will finish. My siblings have always kept me grounded and focused on the task at hand. They have consistently expressed to me that my success is their success. My parents, Guirlande and Felix, have been a steady source of support and inspiration in my life. They have taught me the definition of perseverance, not just in words but in action. Being immigrants from Haiti, they ingrained in me the idea that nothing I have can be taken for granted. For them, hard work is a requirement, not a choice. I would like to tell my parents that I am listening even if sometimes it does not seem like I am. This achievement is for you as well as for myself. Thank you!

To Dr. Chisholm, you have been my professor since my freshman year at Pace. I am fairly certain that I managed to take every class you offered. Those undergrad years were very formative. Your instruction and passion solidified my desire towards becoming a psychologist. I am grateful that you agreed to be my project advisor.

Thank you, Dr. Rosenthal, for your advisement especially regarding the statistics portion of my project. I did not believe that I would find bootstrap mediation interesting

but you were able to help me understand its intricacies. Your interest and support in this project proved invaluable. To Dr. Denmark, thank you for your feedback and positivity throughout this project and my time in this program. You always appear to be smiling and you make time for everyone. Thank you!

To the Pace faculty, as a whole, you have been supportive and have demonstrated an interest in my professional growth and for this I am thankful. I would like to give a special thanks to Dr. Mowder and Dr. Sossin. I have been able to gain valuable experience regarding working with parents and children. Dr. Mowder and the PCI afforded me the opportunity to present on multicultural parenting issues at various conferences. Thank for allowing me a platform to grow in terms of understanding the research process.

I would like to thank my cohort for being, for lack of a better word, awesome! My classmates and friends, especially Keisha, Shauna, and Linda have been supportive and made the program manageable. I would also like to thank my friend Monique whose support was irreplaceable during the last leg of this project.

To my church family who I consider my extended family, I thank you for your continued prayer and support and genuine happiness regarding this accomplishment. Special thanks to Pastor Franck Souffrant and his congregation. Without your aid this project would not have been what it is now!

**I AM FINISHED WITH THIS PROJECT!!! I look forward to the many projects ahead!**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	viii
ABSTRACT .....	ix
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION .....	1
II LITERATURE REVIEW .....	4
Transnationalism .....	4
Ethnicity .....	6
Acculturation .....	9
Vicarious Traumatic Stress .....	10
Depression and Anxiety: A Haitian Perspective .....	12
Research Questions .....	14
III METHOD .....	16
Participants Procedures .....	16
Procedures .....	16
Descriptive Characteristics of the Sample .....	16
Measures .....	17
Participant Characteristics Items .....	17
Stephenson Multigroup Acculturation Scale (SMAS) .....	18
Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) .....	18
Secondary Trauma Scale (STS) .....	19
Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7) .....	19
Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) .....	19
IV RESULTS .....	21

	Bivariate Correlations.....	21
	Multiple Linear Regression Analyses .....	25
	Unplanned Exploratory mediation Analyses .....	28
V	DISCUSSION .....	29
	Discussion .....	29
	Clinical Implications.....	32
	Limitations of the Present Study and Areas of Future Research .....	35
	Conclusion .....	38
	REFERENCES .....	39
	APPENDICES	
	A. English Questionnaire (Including Consent Form) .....	48
	B. French Translated Questionnaire (Including Consent Form).....	57
	C. Haitian Créole Translated Questionnaire (Including Consent Form) .....	66



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Participant Characteristics .....	23
Table 2. Bivariate Correlations.....	24
Table 3. Regression Analysis: Age.....	26
Table 4. Regression Analysis: Age of Immigration.....	27

PREVIEW

## ABSTRACT

The 2010 Haitian earthquake resulted in many casualties, mass relocation, and worsened the quality of life for many Haitians already dealing with poverty. Haitians who were living abroad experienced the tragedy through the media and rallied to send aid to friends and family. The goal of this research study was to determine whether Haitian connectedness among Haitians living in the United States was associated with increased symptoms of secondary traumatic stress, anxiety, and depression as a result of the earthquake. Haitian connectedness was measured through questionnaires designed to capture aspects of transnational relationships along with levels of ethnic identity and acculturation. Participants for this study were Haitians recruited through various churches and community organizations within the New York Metropolitan Area. There were 105 participants (women = 57.1%; men= 42.9%) aged 19 to 83 in the final analytic sample. While the overall analyses mostly did not support hypotheses, the results indicated that first generation immigrants from Haiti reported more secondary traumatic stress but not more symptoms of anxiety and depression than Haitian Americans who were born in the United States. It also became apparent that the participant's age of immigration to the United States was positively associated with symptoms of secondary traumatic stress. An unplanned exploratory analysis indicated an indirect relationship between age of immigration to the United States and symptoms of depression and anxiety through the mechanism of secondary traumatic stress. The results demonstrate that many Haitians living in the United States continue to have important connections and familial obligations to those back in Haiti. These connections can be a source of empowerment but can also be a source of psychological stress, especially when unexpected tragedies occur. Clinical implications for these findings are discussed.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

On January 12, 2010 a 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck Haiti. The earthquake's epicenter was near the town Leogane and resulted in damage to the nearby capital of Haiti, Port-au-Prince. The estimated number of deaths are unreliable but have been projected to be anywhere between 100,000- 200,000 people, with over 300,000 reported injuries (U.S. Geological Survey, 2011). More than 500,000 residents of Port-au-Prince have since been relocated. The Haitian Prime minister at that time, Jean Max- Bellerive, reported that 250,000 residences and 30,000 commercial buildings were severely damaged and in need of being demolished (Renois, 2010). A picture showing the collapse of a large portion of the Haitian National palace depicts the severity of this earthquake and its catastrophic aftermath on the country and the Haitian people.

Haitians from the United States and the rest of the world gathered resources to come to the aid of family and friends back home. Many Haitians living outside of Haiti experienced distress as a result of the damage and the inability to establish communications with relatives and friends in Haiti. The collective response of the Haitian diaspora illustrates the multi-strained social relations involving political ties, economics, socialization, and relations between the dispersed group and the homeland. These links not only affect those who are first generation immigrants (i.e. those born in Haiti, and later immigrated elsewhere), but also their descendants (e.g. 2nd, 3rd generation immigrants) who may have less direct contact and/or interaction with the homeland (Lundy, 2011).

The psychological experiences of immigrant groups in the United States and globally have been studied over the years. The literature indicates that many immigrants face stressors associated with migrating to a new land in the pursuit of a better life, or fleeing persecution and/or other dangers back home (Yakusho, Watson, & Thompson, 2008); recurring themes such as economic disadvantages, employment difficulties, discrimination, acculturation difficulties due to cultural and language differences, enculturation, and parenting differences were noted (Saechao et al., 2012). Other research studies found stressors related to barriers against immigrant groups receiving and benefitting from mental health services (Scheppers et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2011). Recent research has explored what Schiller et al. (1992; 1995) describe as transnationalism, which is a process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-strained social relations that link together their societies of origin and the settlement.

Thus, transnationalism refers to those psychosocial processes that blur boundaries, allowing an immigrant to maintain a dual immersion in both societies. Transnational engagement varies from frequent and regular traveling between countries to developing organizations (e.g., churches) for aid with gathering and dispensing goods and information to sending support to that country without ever having to visit the country they are helping (Lundy, 2011). The stress associated with a “trans-nationalistic,” identity has just recently begun to be studied. A study of refugees from Sri Lanka and Indonesia living in Norway prior to the South East Asia tsunami in 2004, found that psychological symptom levels were associated with the degree of indirect exposure to the tsunami and chronic stressors of refugee life (Stige & Sveaass, 2010).

The concept of transnationalism framed the basis of this doctoral thesis to better understand the impact of the earthquake and aftermath on the New York Metropolitan

Area (tristate) Haitian community. Specifically, this study attempted to understand how one's sense of connectedness to Haiti, ethnic identity and degree of acculturation within the tristate Haitian community influenced reactions to the Haitian Earthquake of 2010. News media accounts reported that reactions to the earthquake included but were not limited to symptoms of vicarious traumatic stress, which is what the literature refers to as secondary traumatic stress, depression, and anxiety about the wellbeing of family and friends there in great danger (Shultz, Marcelin, Madanes, Espinel, & Neria, 2011). This research questioned how first generation immigrant Haitians, many struggling with adapting to living in the United States and having to provide for family in the United States and back home experienced stress by this event. The second question explored how second and third generation Haitian Americans, some who may have no direct involvement with Haiti, may also have experienced stress as a result of a sense of connectedness, and shared ethnic identity developed and nurtured within the New York Metropolitan Area Haitian community.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Connectedness to the Haitian Culture

##### Transnationalism

Haitian immigrants have immigrated to the United States for various reasons, ranging from fleeing political persecution to seeking a better financial situation for their families back home (Pierre-Louis, 2013). Haitian immigration to the United States increased in volume in the 1960's after a series of political and economic events led to the installation of Francois Duvalier, also known as "Papa Doc" (Menos, 2005; Pierre-Louis, 2013; Ball, 2015). Duvalier was elected through corruption, intimidation, and influence over the army and proceeded to oppress opponents by torturing, killing, and exiling people with the help of his secret police. The result of this oppression resulted in an economic repression and forced many Haitian political refugees, scholars, and professionals (i.e., doctors, lawyers, teachers, and engineers) to leave Haiti (Pierre-Louis, 2013; Ball, 2015). Between the 1970's and 1980's, nearly 100,000 documented Haitians lived in the United States (Menos, 2005; Terrazas, 2010; Pierre-Louis, 2013). Between the 1980's and 1990's, the number of legal and illegal immigrants increased dramatically. Many Haitian refugees attempted to come into the United States illegally as a result of Haiti's continued economic difficulties as well as the restrictions placed on potential immigrants by the United States (Terrazas 2010; Ball 2015). Haitian refugees were dubbed "boat people," and were detained and returned to Haiti. There was also stigmatization of Haitians caused by the Centers for Diseases Control (CDC) indicating

that Haitians were one of the carriers of HIV (Menos, 2005; Terrazas, 2010; Pierre-Louis, 2013). These occurrences greatly affected Haitians living in the United States as well as in Haiti.

According to the 2010 census bureau, there were 535,000 documented Haitian immigrants in the United States, making Haitians the second largest population of Black immigrants after Jamaicans (U.S. Census, 2010; Terrazas, 2010). Haiti's tumultuous history and economic difficulties have made remittances by immigrants almost necessary (Buss & Gardner, 2005; Orzco, 2006; Lundy 2011). An example of the trans-national Haitian identity highlighting one's sense of a transnational citizenship occurred when past Haitian president, Jean -Claude Aristide, referred to Haitians living outside of Haiti as the "tenth department" of the government because of the country's heavy reliance on their remittances (Schiller et al., 1995). More than a third of Haiti's gross national income is said to come from remittances (money sent back to friends and family from Haitians who have immigrated) (The World Bank, 2010). In addition, many Haitians use visits between Haiti and the United States to help restock small stores and family businesses with items brought into Haiti in personal luggage (Schiller et al., 1995).

Haitian immigrants in addition to grappling with the psychosocial stressors connected with the immigrant experience in general, face challenges as racial and ethnic minorities of color who experience poverty at disproportionate levels that greatly adversely affect their overall quality-of-life (Belizaire & Fuertes, 2011). For example, many Haitian youths come to the United States without their parents and live with relatives, sometimes for many years before reunification with parents can occur. Thus, these relatives often assume the role of guardian/care-taker for these youths; this change in status as well as economic and legal responsibility can pose significant disruption and

stress in their support system. Issues related to varying degrees of acculturation among family members already living in the United States and the youth dependent upon them can cause further difficulties within the family structure and support system (Nicolas, Arntz, Schmiedigen 2009; Menos, 2005; Zephir, 2001).

### **Ethnicity**

Ethnicity can be understood as a dynamic set of practices that allow for people to identify or to be identified with groups of people on the basis of acknowledged commonalities including language, history, nation of region of origin, customs, ways of being, religion, names, physical appearance, and/or genealogy or ancestry (Phinney, 1996; Phinney, Horenczyk, Leibkind, Vedder, 2001). Ethnicity can be a source of meaning, action, and identity. Ethnicity can also confer a sense of belonging, pride, and motivation, as well as negative feelings about oneself (Phinney, 1996; Markus, 2008).

When discussing ethnicity in the United States among people of color in general and Haitian immigrants in particular, it is important to recognize the negative effects of stereotypes and discrimination. Haitians have been subject to stereotypes and perceived lower status within the United States as well as the international community (Charles, 1986; Desrosiers & St. Fleurose, 2002). In 1982, the CDC classified Haitians as a high-risk group for contracting and spreading HIV (Singer, 2006). Later studies had incorrectly pointed to the disease as originating in Haiti. Although a retraction was issued in 1985, the stigma still remained well into the 1990's, and the retraction did not receive nearly the same publicity as the initial classification (Santana & Dancy, 2000; Singer, 2006). This resulted in further bias against Haitians in schools, hospitals, and businesses. To avoid stigma and rejection, many Haitians neglected to mention their background for fear of rejection (Santana & Dancy, 2000).



Santana and Dancy (2000) qualitatively studied the effects of stigma on Haitian American women. This stigma has resulted in the rejection of the values of the dominant society, while simultaneously increasing self-doubt, negatively affecting self-esteem, intimate relationships, and general difficulties within their own Haitian community. Although this study was qualitative in nature, it gave a glimpse of the difficulties a Haitian individual may face. One of the women in the study reported this about her daughter:

“I have a daughter that’s 16; she goes to an all- girl Catholic School on the north side. And she comes home with two things all the time. Mommy, they say that I’m from Haiti and a lot of Haitian people have AIDS. Is that true?” (Santana & Dancy, 2000, pg. 168)

Stigmatization leads to misperceptions and labels that Haitian adolescents have to defend against. Once a group has been stigmatized, it becomes very difficult to erase the stigma (Santana & Dancy, 2000). These stigmas can become internalized and create thought processes that are dysfunctional, further placing strain on family and social relationships. As a result of this, many members of the second generation were reported to engage in a phenomenon known as “cover-up.” This is an active process of distancing oneself from one’s Haitian heritage. Haitians were said to have anglicized their name or to have identified themselves as Jamaican, French, or African American, anything but Haitian (Zéphir, 2001).

Unlike ethnicity, which in some contexts may be perceived by others, ethnic identity is the subjective experience of an individual and is subject to change over time (Phinney et al., 2001). Oetting, Swaim, and Chiarella, (1998) describe ethnic identification as "... the extent to which individuals view themselves as involved with an