Suffering, Surviving, Succeeding: Understanding and Working with Haitian Women

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Encouraging their sisters in the homeland, Haitian women in the U.S. also have formed women's groups to act for local and transnational change. Fann Ayisyen Nan Miyami (Haitian Women of Miami) holds fundraisers and awards banquets to assist and to honor Haitian women (Casimir, 1997). This group helps women to start businesses through the granting of small loans that are not available through the normal banking channels. They support Haitian women in dealing with domestic violence situations and other social service needs through their advocacy for government grants and through maintaining leadership roles in community social services agencies (Colon, 1999). Many of these professional Haitian women initiate radio programs or travel to local community meetings to teach Haitian women about community resources for health services and about their options to resist domestic battering (Colon, 1997; Stevens, 2000a, Stevens, 2000b). Recently several members from this organization developed the Haitian-American Community Census Committee to ensure that Haitian households in Miami were counted in the 2000 census (Stevens, 2000c).

It is important that social workers connect Haitian women with the organizations that exist and help them in the development of others that can increase the positive efforts on-going within their communities. Examples of Haitian women abound, who work within their community to bring about change, particularly aimed at other Haitian women. One woman has become a community crusader for teaching about breast cancer, after surviving the cancer herself(Stevens, 2000a). She lectures and connects Haitian women to health serving organizations throughout the community. She has become a culture translator assisting mainstream service providers to bridge the cultural and language gap to serve the Haitian community. Other women have become mentors for young Haitian girls. Understanding that these adolescents are often caught between cultures, Haitian women can help to serve as role models and to be "big sister" counselors in times of stress.

Full text: SUFFERING, SURVIVING, SUCCEEDING: UNDERSTANDING AND WORKING WITH HAITIAN WOMEN

Abstract: The oppressions of race gender and class intersect quite clearly in the lives of Haitian immigrant women. Coming from a society where color and class indicate privilege and access to resources, Haitian immigrant women who are black and poor find opportunities here. Social workers must learn to use empowerment models to overcome the effects of race, gender and class in services to this population.

Keywords: Haitian, ethnic-sensitive, race, class gender, immigrant, social work practice

Race, gender and class constitute systems of oppression that social workers encounter in practice with many clients. For some individuals these systems are intertwined resulting in physical, psychological and social dysfunction. Haitian immigrant women are a group so affected by the vinculum of race, gender and class. Coming from a society in Haiti where color tends to provide privilege, and where patriarchy and oligarchy
constitute the norm, Haitian women need help in breaking through the barriers formed by these oppressive systems. As Black women saddled with the economic difficulties of immigrant life, Haitian immigrant women face continuation of the race, gender and class nexus upon their arrival in this country. Over the past three decades, Haitian immigrants have emerged as a distinct ethnic group in the United States. Prior to the 1970s Haitians, for the most part, assimilated into the Black American population (Laguerre, 1998). Since that time, three distinct waves of entrants have migrated from this Caribbean country (Mitchell, 1994). Women have migrated in larger numbers than men and currently constitute a bit over half of the Haitian population in the U.S. (Cataneese, 1998). Laguerre (1998) reports that 56% of those Haitians admitted into the United States in 1993 were women. Social workers frequently encounter Haitian women as clients, but little attention has been made to the diversity within this group.

Haitian women are a varied population. They are European and African and mixed in complexion and physical characteristics. Some have endured economic and marital hardships. Others have enjoyed the favors of privilege including education, travel and luxury. This paper will examine the relationship of race, gender and class among Haitian women in three distinct periods, first, the period of "suffering," the home-country experience; secondly, the period of "surviving," the immigration experience; and, thirdly, the period of "succeeding," the diasporic experience. We will also suggest important points for social workers in work with this population.

**SUFFERING: HAITIAN WOMEN IN THE HOME COUNTRY**

**Historical background**

Society in Haiti developed out of the unique colonial, revolutionary and subsequent periods of the Haitian republic, in particular the recent father-son, Duvalier regime. Most French colonialists left their wives and daughters in France upon immigrating to Saint Domingue, the colonial name of Haiti. With the introduction of African slaves into Saint Domingue, the colony grew to become the most productive and significant European possession in the Caribbean (Dupuy, 1989). These Frenchmen established temporary households with colonial women, who, by the early 18(th) century, were mostly Caribbean-born women of mixed European and African heritage. Garrigus (1996) points out that these women were both respected and feared. White elites felt that mixed-race persons were physically and morally inferior to persons of either wholly French or African ancestry. As these women lived with white men, their identity was significantly confused; and, when they owned property, could read and write French, and were faithful to the French church, [they] were counted in the population census as white (Garrigus, 1996, p.30).

Women of color in the colonial period were thought to have particular sexual power over white men since the whites lived openly with these women and acknowledged paternity of their children. During the 18(th) century, free women of color were more likely to own property, and to amass wealth, than even white women in the colony (Garrigus, 1996). By the end of that century, the sons of these free women of color married the daughters of other free women of color creating a new generation of wealthy free families of color. Garrigus indicates that this second and third generation of mixed ancestry was increasingly led by men, not women, as the quadroon and mulatto sons took over the holdings of their mulatto and black mothers (p.40). It was these quadroon and mulatto sons who joined with the African slave population to overthrow the French and establish the nation of Haiti in 1804. It was also these male forces that created a society in which women in general were subjugated and where poor, black women were at the bottom of the economic and social ladder.

From the inception of the Haitian republic, women were systematically discriminated against as members of the society. In the transition from slavery to nationhood, former slaves participated in a semi-wage, semi-sharecropping system in which women received 2/3 the wages of men. Female protests of the system were put down after direct appeals to the maleness of the former male slaves. Later in the nation's history, each of the many constitutions written and published between 1801 and 1950 kept women in subordinate positions. For example,
until 1979 married women, under Haitian law, were legally minors and were subject to and accountable to their husbands (Charles, 1995).

Race and color
Skin color affects the status of women in Haiti. Black is normative in Haitian society (Dupuy, 1989) so that to be Haitian is to be Black (Zephir, 1996). Being in the majority, Blacks have always had positions of authority and prestige, but Haitian history is also replete with tensions between the mulatto elite and the Black masses. A caste-like system developed over the years, in which skin color, education, the use of French, and intermarriage between families served to create the society's upper elite group. In Haiti, caste and class systems interact with race and skin color to create a stratified society in which lighter skin color tends to correlate to a somewhat permanent upper-socioeconomic status. While it is possible to be of darker complexion and to attain higher status, light skin is highly valued among Haitians of the upper classes. Persons in the impoverished masses are more commonly darker, uneducated and underprivileged. As with many Caribbean nations, money and education "whiten." Individuals are accepted into the privileged group when they attain high levels of economic or educational achievement. For women this interplay between racial complexion and class is more significant. Light skin color is important as a valuable gender resource and a fair-complexioned Haitian woman is considered more attractive than a darker one allowing for increase social privilege. In his autobiographical saga, Restavèc: From Haitian Slave Child to Middle-Class American, Cadet (1998) describes the attitudes of Florence, his dark-skinned maman:

She always said that a poor light-skinned woman was the equivalent of a rich, dark-skinned woman, and a rich light-skinned woman was above everyone else. Florence also believed that light-skinned women in Port-au-Prince were more sought after. As mistresses they were handsomely rewarded, and as wives they seemed to have the richest husbands (p.10).

The oligarchy that has ruled Haiti for much of its history is comprised of Creole whites, mulattos and middle-class Blacks. Traditionally the majority of the women in this elite oligarchy hold their status through marriage (Charles, 1995). Mulatto and fair-skinned women are highly valued in the exchange of political privilege through marriage. Haitians, both male and female, of darker-complexion have gained power and access to the privilege accorded within this caste system through educational attainment by study abroad, economic enterprise in the vast Haitian countryside, and through appointment to high government positions in the cities.

Haitian family structure
Even among progressive elements of society, the woman's place in Haiti is defined by the home and the family (Charles, 1995). While the woman has preeminence in caring for the household and the children, economic responsibilities, decision-making and power over the family continues to reside with the male (Bastien, 1995). Families and relationships in Haiti range from traditional church and government-sanctioned marriage to what is called plasaj, or a kind of common-law marriage. Marriage is highly valued and family life is of great importance. Although poor women seek to have the more valued status of a traditional marriage, plasaj is more common among the poorer people of Haitian society (Civan, 1994). Both men and women may have a series of such relationships during a lifetime, and men will commonly have several such relationships during the same period. Civan indicates that children born from one plasaj regard offspring from another plasaj as brothers and sisters and often live in the same household with out conflict (p.21).

Women do not necessarily enter these relationships freely. Poverty, illiteracy, as well as, undeveloped educational and environmental conditions drive poor Haitian women into plasaj relationships. Farmer (1996) shares the story of Acephe, who as a poor Haitian countryside girl, was still in primary school at the age of 19. She began to assist her mother in carrying family produce to a market that was located near a military barracks. An army officer found her to be attractive, and though he had a wife and children, approached her family about allowing them to establish a plasaj relationship. Because of the family's poor condition, Acephe entered into a sexual union with the soldier. He subsequently infected her with the HIV virus, which, in a country where AIDS
treatment is inadequate, was essentially a death sentence. In most families it is the responsibility of the man to provide for the family. If the man has several families, he is to provide for each. Women in Haiti, however, are much more involved in the labor force comprising 48% of those who work (Charles, 1995). While men in the rural areas are responsible for tilling the fields, women are responsible for harvesting and marketing the products. In the cities, women may work as domestics. Though such work is financially somewhat beneficial to the uneducated country girl and her family, rural families are often disappointed when daughters migrate to work in rich urban households (Farmer, 1996).

Domestic and State Violence

Violence against women occurs across all classes in Haiti (Bastien, 1995). Traditionally the state does not intervene in domestic affairs in Haiti and men are free to treat their wives and mistresses as they wish. The woman is expected to do as the husband asks her to do, and behavior not in keeping with this tradition, grants the husband leave to discipline her physically, psychologically or emotionally. Even when women return to their parents or other relatives to escape the battering from the male, she is encouraged to return and to endure the relationship. Women are seen by men as lazy since all they do is cook, wash and care for children (Vieux, 1989). Even those who may help the man with economic responsibilities in the fields or in small businesses are not valued and can be "corrected" by the man (Vieux, 1989). A woman may leave the household if the domestic violence continues, but will go to live with the husband's parents so as to indicate that she is not abandoning the relationship.

Under the Duvalier regime, women found themselves threatened with state sanctioned violence. Those who were mistreated were most likely to be the wives or common-law wives of men Duvalier persecuted. Early in the Duvalier era, Yvonne Hakime Rimpel, an anti-Duvalierist and a feminist newspaper editor was kidnapped, beaten and raped by paramilitary terrorists known as the Tonton Macoutes (Charles, 1995). This state violence contradicted the patriarchal tradition of treating women as apolitical innocents. Women who supported the Duvalier regime were known as "Marie Jeannes" (an historical slave-woman patriot) and were often those in administrative positions within the government.

SURVIVING: HAITIAN WOMEN AND THE MIGRATION

Coming to America

It is popularly thought that the migration of Haitians to the United States began with the arrival of the boat-people in the 1970s and 1980s. In reality, Haitians have long migrated throughout the region in search of work or haven from political and military oppression (Stepick, 1998). Women comprise in excess of 50% of Haitians who immigrate to the U.S. Cantanese (1998) indicates that women were in the majority among Haitian migrants during the decades from 1970 to 1980. Stepick and Portes (1986) revealed that 59% of their random sample of Haitian arrivals in three South Florida locations were women, and that this statistic was consistent with both census data and earlier studies. Laguerre (1984) found that females outnumbered males 53% to 47% among the New York population in his classic study. He later concludes that the gender ratio among undocumented Haitians is similar. Of the 10,094 Haitians admitted into the United States in 1993, 56% were women (Laguerre, 1998).

Race and Haitian Immigrant Identity

While skin color has significance for status in Haiti, Haitians of all complexities find life in the U.S. to be difficult (Zephir, 1996). American definitions of race are based upon a bi-furcated model of black-white with any person having known African heritage being classified as black (Davis, 1991). Upon migration to the U.S., most Haitians tend to identify themselves as Black. Zephir (1996) found that first generation adult Haitians overwhelmingly listed themselves as Black on official forms and documents in which race was requested. Only one respondent in her study listed herself as white.

For the mulatto Haitian woman, light skin does not lend the same value here as it does in Haiti. Cadet (1998) shares that Lise, the light-skinned wife of Denis his mamman's son, worked in a upper New York state rubber-
stamp factory to augment her husband's income, whereas in Haiti she did not work outside the home and had had several servants to assist. Oswald (1999) found that middle-class, light-skinned Haitians are proud of their last names which refer back to their French ancestors and that they differentiate themselves from Black Haitians who may have surnames names based upon place-names, sobriquets, and baptismal names and who work in menial positions in Haiti.

White Americans view all Haitians as Black and Haitians of all backgrounds find discrimination in the U.S. to be a problem. Official American policy treated Haitian "boat people" as economic migrants were contrasted with policy toward the whiter Cubans. Haitians develop an ethnic identity in this country that includes national and racial pride, immigrant status and language. Middle-class Haitians particularly those with fair skin are careful to use speaking of French to differentiate themselves from African-Americans (Oswald, 1999).

Some Haitian women find the behavior of lower socio-economic native-born Blacks as distasteful. One respondent reported to Zephir (1996) that several African-American called her a "Haitian bitch" after she reported these women who had stolen products from a guest speaker at their cosmetology school. Haitian adolescent females who attend school in the United States report incidents with African Americans in which Haitians are ridiculed, called names and are derided as "smelling bad" by native-born black students (Stepick, 1998).

Not all Haitians wish to distance themselves from African-Americans. Occurrences such as the abuses by New York City of Haitian and other young black males resulted in protests by Haitians and African-Americans. Other incidents such as the Miami protest over the arrest of a Haitian customer in Miami who got into a fight with a Cuban store clerk are indicative of instances in which the Haitian and the African-American communities work together and show racial solidarity in the face of perceived racism (Stepick, 1998).

Gender roles and family life
The family life of Haitians in the U.S. is quite different from the norm of family life in the home country. While the man is still considered the decision-maker in the family, the economic freedom of the woman allows her much more input into the family's daily activities and use of the income. Pié (quoted in Laguerre, 1984) shares the testimony of a Haitian woman in New York:

In our country, the wife has her head down, because she does not work. She sits, wastes time and gossips. She is forced to live with a man because it is he who gives her food, money, clothes and shoes. Here things have changed. We have the means to help financially with expenses incurred in the household and with the education of our children. Slavery is over. We bring money to the household, and this gives us the freedom to voice our opinions. Those who are unhappy with our new way of life: Take it or leave it. (p.76)

The economic freedom of Haitian women in this country restructures the marriage relationships. Laguerre (1984) identifies four types of male-female relationships. These include "mariaj de goudin," where the Haitian marries a person who is either a citizen or has a resident visa in order to become eligible for U.S. residency status; "mariaj bay bous," where a Haitian who has resident status returns to Haiti and marries a woman who is interested in migrating and brings her back to the U.S.; "mariaj rézidans," where a Haitian who has resident status marries one who does not; and, "bon mariag," both parties contract the marriage in Haiti and then migrate or the parties meet here and both have resident status. While the plasaj is common among South Florida Haitian families, it is difficult for men to maintain the multiple families they are accustomed to in Haiti because of financial requirements (Stepick, 1998).

Middle-class Haitian families may be extended in nature with several generations living together. Educated and professional Haitians were able to bring their relatives to the U.S. through chain migration. Oswald (1999) describes in her ethnographic study the household of Odette Girard, a middle-class Haitian immigrant in a Midwestern city who lives with her husband, three small children, and father- and mother-in-law. The family has relatives in New York and Miami. Odette's aunt and older sister were the first in the family to migrate and used networks of other relatives to become resettled. Examples of households with various relatives and non-
relatives are numerous in the literature (Laguerre, 1998; Stepick, 1998; Wingerd, 1992).
Households may be defined by the children of the mother of the household (Stepick, 1998). Class status
sometimes affects the nature of the migration patterns. Poorer women migrate earlier and obtain employment
sending later for their children and perhaps spouses. Sometimes they may enter into relationships and bear
children born in this country. Middle-class women are more likely to migrate with their spouses, or to join them
after the man is established in employment. Children may include those who were born in this country, those
born in Haiti and who immigrated with their parents, those who were born and remained in Haiti and were sent
for once the parents were established here, or lastly, combinations of each. Since both parents usually have to
work the oldest female child may have significant responsibility for household duties (Stepick, 1998).
Parent-child relationships
One major problem for Haitian women who have children is the potential for conflict between parent and
children. In Haiti, children are not allowed to question the authority of parents. Any disrespect of parents is
responded to swiftly and firmly. DeSantis & Ugarriza (1995) report that Haitian mothers worry about the ability to
control their children's behavior. Socialized in a society where corporal punishment is accepted as the means of
training children to conform, Haitian parents find that American laws targeting child abuse affect their ability to
discipline children. Concern expressed by Haitian mothers suggested that they must have ways to prevent their
children from acquiring some of the habits and behaviors of native-born children which they see as negative
(DeSantis & Ugarriza, 1995).
Children tend to assimilate before their parents do (Stepick, 1998), although this phenomenon is affected by
race, class and gender. Children may seek to hide their ethnic and national identity and to seek to be identified
as African-American rather than Haitian. Middle class children assimilate much quicker than do poor children.
Access to economic means allows for increased contact beyond the ethnic enclave and therefore more
understanding of the mainstream community. Girls assimilate much slower than do boys. In the case of poor
girls, they may have home responsibilities that limit their ability to explore the host community.
Children who are born in Haiti and brought to this country may have never been without adult supervision since,
in the home country, a parent or extended family member would be available to oversee the child. They learn
English before the parent does and parental relations are affected by the role reversals of the child's capacity to
understand and negotiate the systems and institutions of the community while the parent remains incapable of
doing so. Furthermore, as children become more proficient in English, they sometimes speak less Creole.
Parents who do not know English then find it hard to communicate in either language with their children.
Children born of Haitian mothers and fathers in this country grow up in communities where they are socialized
by the same culture, as are the children of American parents. They expect their parents to treat them as
"Americans" and they resent the association with Haitian culture that comes with the parental expectations of
strict discipline (Stepick, 1998). Overall, Haitian mothers want their children to be obedient, courteous, and
unquestioning (DeSantis & Thomas, 1994). They feel that this will result in self-reliance, self-sufficiency and self-
competence that will make for a more successful life for the child and the family. These different perspectives of
child and parent can result in intergenerational conflicts that can affect the immigrant Haitian family.
Employment and economic activities
Haitian immigrant women work outside the home to support themselves and their families. DeSantis and
Thomas found that 80% of their respondents indicated that they were employed in jobs that took them away
from home. Haitian women in South Florida tend to be employed in service industries such as restaurants and
hotels (Stepick, 1998). Additionally many Haitian women worked in the agricultural fields of rural South Florida.
Employment in northern cities such as New York is also concentrated in the services sector and secondarily in
administrative support (Laguerre, 1998).
Haitian women are active in the informal economic sector (Stepick, 1998). They are regular vendors in local
"flea markets" and in sidewalk sales. They also will operate unregulated businesses from their homes. Many
begin to make clothes or other apparel on sewing machines purchased through loans gained from local organizations (Santiago, 1997). Some Haitian women continue a tradition of serving “take out” meals from their kitchens (Laguerre, 1998). Immigrant Haitian men whose families are still in Haiti may live alone in rooming houses throughout the community and have no way to prepare their own meals. Haitian women prepare traditional dishes that can be quickly served to customers who come to their doors. These women are proud of their entrepreneurial spirit and indicate that it is better that they operate illegal businesses than to depend upon the social welfare system (Casimir, 1997).

Middle-class Haitian women are well represented in the professional and business sectors of their communities. Forty (40) percent of Haitian and Haitian Americans have some college training (Stepick, 1998). Laguerre (1998) reports that 13.2% of Haitian females in his study of the New York Haitian community were professionals, which exceeded the percentage of Haitian men in such occupations (12.5%). Many of these professionals are community oriented. For example, a Haitian female social worker is among the foremost community activists in South Florida and, a former educator turned political aide has been successful in getting government grants for the community (Colon, 1999). Furthermore, a Haitian female law firm in Miami were praised for their lobbying efforts on behalf of Haitian immigrants in getting the Congress to pass the Haitian Refugee Immigration Fairness Act of 1998 (Yee, 1999).

Spiritual and Religious Expression

Religious belief systems are central aspects of Haitian culture. Haitians are very devout believers (Stepick, 1998). For Haitian women religion, whether western style, indigenous, or a combination of the two, serves to soothe mind, soul and body. In this syncretic relationship, the use of the European religious values are mixed with the African Voudou beliefs. In Haiti, the official religion has always been Catholicism, just as the official language has always been, until recently, French, but as all Haitians understand Kreole, all Haitians have an understanding and of the cultural aspects of Voudou (Stepick, 1998).

Voudou rituals and services are also held in most large Haitian communities in this country, and while Americans misunderstand this religion and associate it with negative stereotypes popularized by the media in the United States, it simply serves, as do other religions, to explain and to regulate life and behavior. Because of the negativity associated with Voudou many Haitians openly disavow any association with even its cultural aspects. Increasingly there is competition among the three main religious practices: Catholicism, Protestantism and Voudou.

Increasing numbers of Haitians are Protestants. In Haiti they number perhaps 15-20% of the population while in the South Florida Haitian community, 40% of respondents indicated membership in Protestant denominations (Stepick, 1998). Haitian congregations purchase time on numerous radio stations and television stations to bring religious services to the community (Laguerre, 1998). Most ministers are men, but women play major roles as singers, prayer group leaders and members of the women’s ministries. Notwithstanding class, women may express more openly both traditional and alternative systems of belief than men. Women attend church in higher numbers than men do and they openly acknowledge both formal religion and spiritual.

SUCCEEDING: HAITIAN WOMEN IN THE DIASPORA

Laguerre (1998) defines Diaspora as “individual immigrants or communities who live outside the legal or recognized boundaries of the state or the homeland, but inside the reterritorialized space of the dispersed nation” (p.8). He argues that there is both “displacement” from the homeland, but also, “reattachment” with the homeland. For Haitian women this description appears quite accurate as they exemplify Laguerre’s concept of “diasporic citizenship.” These women’s practice of civic and political involvement indicates their citizenship in both the homeland and the country of residence.

As we have pointed out, women in the Haitian homeland have traditionally been outside of the mainstream. Although the political situation in Haiti has changed significantly since the return of some democracy following the military intervention of 1993, women are still marginal in Haitian politics. There are only three (3) women in
the eighty (80) seat Haitian parliament and of the 127 mayors of Haitian cities and towns only six (6) are women (Mardy, 1999). In the Diaspora women are taking a leadership role in both activities to improve the community here, as well as, increasingly getting involved in politics in the homeland.

Women are organizing themselves as a strategy for change. Feminism has never been strong in Haiti, but women's organizations are being formed to assist in the empowerment of women for economic, political and social change. In the homeland, traditional women's groups have concentrated on healthcare and education for poor children, while newer groups such as Fann d'Ayi (Women of Haiti) and Ligue des Femmes Rurales (League of Rural Women) (Charles, 1995). Recently following a National Women's Conference held in Haiti, another organization, Fanm Yo La (Women Are Here) was developed to motivate women to engage in action in government.

Encouraging their sisters in the homeland, Haitian women in the U.S. also have formed women's groups to act for local and transnational change. Fanm Ayisyen Nan Miyami (Haitian Women of Miami) holds fundraisers and awards banquets to assist and to honor Haitian women (Casimir, 1997). This group helps women to start businesses through the granting of small loans that are not available through the normal banking channels. They support Haitian women in dealing with domestic violence situations and other social service needs through their advocacy for government grants and through maintaining leadership roles in community social services agencies (Colon, 1999). Many of these professional Haitian women initiate radio programs or travel to local community meetings to teach Haitian women about community resources for health services and about their options to resist domestic battering (Colon, 1997; Stevens, 2000a, Stevens, 2000b). Recently several members from this organization developed the Haitian-American Community Census Committee to ensure that Haitian households in Miami were counted in the 2000 census (Stevens, 2000c).

SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE WITH HAITIAN WOMEN

The literature on practice with Haitian women is at best scant to non-existent. Some work has been done on practice with Haitian families and immigrants (Bibb &Casimir, 1996; Pierce &Elisme, 1997). Otherwise, Charles (1986) shares important material for understanding mental health issues with Haitian clients. Our purpose here is to suggest specifically important ideas for work with Haitian women.

We have identified that Haitian women have found life in both the homeland and in the Diaspora to be difficult. Being oppressed by race, gender and often-times, class, Haitian women have had to develop their own devices for adapting. Traditions of social work and psychotherapy services are do not exist among Haitian women. In Haiti, social services are rare and mental health services suggest one to be "crazy" (Charles, 1986). As a result, upon migrating to the United States, Haitian women tend to resort to their familiar coping mechanisms such as religious intervention and their native wit.

Treatment for Haitian women should incorporate elements of feminist (Afrocentric womanist) therapy, psychosocial practice concepts and empowerment principles. These are incorporated into a three stage developmental process for personal, family and community change. The stages include motivation, competence and influence.

Motivation

Motivation for change comes from internal and external sources. While psychological strengths allow some women to endure, others are motivated by positive or negative factors in their environment. Haitian women are motivated to flee Haiti due to the political and economic oppression of the homeland, but many of their behaviors require internal motivation for change. Women from racially oppressed communities benefit from treatment that does not separate the oppression of race from that of gender (Greene, 1997). Identifying that the "spheres" of male dominance and white supremacy oppression overlaps, Greene suggests that the point where these converge is the point at which the presenting problem of the client can best be seen. This is also true for Haitian women. The societal inequities interact with intrapsychic obstacles to inhibit proper social functioning. It is not surprising to note that the women who are victims of domestic abuse be not are also affected by high
unemployment in some Haitian communities. Additionally the fact that Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) treats Haitian immigrants differently than other persons migrating to this country creates great stress to Haitian women resulting in the acceptance of male dominance as a means of survival.

Using African-American women as an exemplar, Greene (1997) also points to the psychological impact of the dominant society's perception of these women and how this affects their self-concept. Since Haitian women are women of African origin, we posit that they may also be affected by the dominant idea that European skin color and hair texture is more highly valued. Since color often dictates class in Haitian society, the majority of Haitian women may internalization of a sense of personal unworthiness can result. Afrocentric feminist or womanist theory posits self-reliance, self-definition and activism as elements of creating a positive self-image that seeks to strive for personal and collective advancement consistent with traditional African principles (Collins, 1991; Dove, 1998).

Motivation occurs best in group settings. Association with others who are struggling with similar oppression allows the individual to raise her consciousness about the nature of the oppression, but even more, to appreciate that she is not alone in her struggle. Haitian women gather in churches, schools and other organizational settings. This association serves to increase personal pride in culture and history and enhance personal motivation for growth and development. Furthermore the group venue allows for opportunities to enhance the capacities and knowledge of Haitian women to take greater charge of their lives and the lives of their family members.

Competence

Haitian women have come from an environment that is poor in resources and where traditions of female assertiveness do not exist. Social workers can help by providing information, knowledge about resources, and identification of rights and responsibilities in securing social service needs. Additionally Haitian women may require tutoring in social skills and inter-personal skills. This is particularly important in dealing with figures of authority such as school administrators and teachers, INS and other governmental officials; as well as, in responding to intervention by social service agencies in follow up to child protective services and domestic violence. Authority is not questioned in the homeland and when immigration status is not secure in the Diaspora, passive behaviors are the normal response to repel the possible threat of deportation (Pierce & Ellis, 1997).

As Haitian women develop these competencies, it then becomes important that they have opportunities to development of personal advocacy. Organizations of professional Haitian women have already shown that personal advocacy can lead to greater community and group advocacy. Continued interaction of these women with their poor sisters also aids in the amelioration of the class inequities that are prevalent in Haitian society in the homeland and that continue to an extent in the Diaspora.

Influence

It is important that social workers connect Haitian women with the organizations that exist and help them in the development of others that can increase the positive efforts on-going within their communities. Examples of Haitian women abound, who work within their community to bring about change, particularly aimed at other Haitian women. One woman has become a community crusader for teaching about breast cancer, after surviving the cancer herself (Stevens, 2000a). She lectures and connects Haitian women to health serving organizations throughout the community. She has become a culture translator assisting mainstream service providers to bridge the cultural and language gap to serve the Haitian community. Other women have become mentors for young Haitian girls. Understanding that these adolescents are often caught between cultures, Haitian women can help to serve as role models and to be "big sister" counselors in times of stress.

Case Vignette

The following is a case example that shows the way that the motivation, competence and influence phases influence practice in a typical situation encountered by social workers in work with Haitian families:
A woman, Marie "Ju", came to register her children for school. She had been quite hesitant to do so since she spoke little English and feared that she would not be able to communicate with the school officials. At least one of the children was also not proficient in English having recently come from Haiti. At her church service on the week-end prior to the beginning of the new semester, she learned that the school in her community had sought to insure that all children in the neighborhood were registered. Additionally she understood that the school had special resources to help children who were immigrants.

Upon arriving at the school office, she was directed to speak with the bilingual school social worker, because of her difficulty with the English language and because she did not have all of the necessary paper work. One of the children she wanted to register is the son of her deceased cousin. Both of his parents died in Haiti and there was no one else to care for him. He had come to the United States with Marie two months after the funeral. Although he is 11 years old, the boy had never attended school in Haiti.

Marie does not have legal custody, as is the custom in Haitian families, when the parents die, the nearest relative usually assumes care for the children. This situation is understood in Haiti and no official would require custody papers for any social or educational services.

The school social worker realized the need to increase Marie's competence in understanding and negotiating American systems. She educated the mother about the school's requirements for registration. She explained to school personnel the problem of attaining custody as seen in the Haitian culture and the difficulties that exist in getting any records from Haiti. She helped the school understand the reason that the boy had never attended school in Haiti and suggested ways that they could help with remedial skills once he was enrolled in school.

The social worker helped the mother with obtaining necessary records while modeling for her ways she can advocate for herself and for her children. The social worker made referrals to health centers to help Marie access medical services at low cost. After working with the mother for several months, the social worker invited her to attend a parent-teacher organization (PTO) meeting at the school. Marie learned that in this country, parents are encouraged to take an active role in their children's education, whereas in Haiti, parents defer all education matters to the school's teachers and administrators. She became active in the PTO and helped other Haitian mothers to comprehend educational parental roles. This mother understood, learned, and was willing to claim her children's right to a free education under the US laws.

CONCLUSION

Haitian women are an example of a group that is oppressed by the intersection of the social injustices of race, gender and class. Their pain begins in the homeland and continues through the migration period and into their immigrant communities in this country. It is clear, however, that Haitian women are taking a leadership role in the development of their communities. They are learning new capabilities and are succeeding in business, media, and community, as well as, in the development of functional family lies. Social workers can assist Haitian women in this endeavor. They can work with Haitian women through the use of a practice model that stresses the integration of a motivational positive self-image, greater skills, knowledge and competence, and finally to community activism to change many of the problems Haitian women and girls encounter in their journey in the Diaspora.

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