Racial Mistrust Among Immigrant Minority Students

Velmarie L. Albertini

ABSTRACT: This paper examines perception of racial mistrust held by minority students towards white teachers during middle school years. The investigation determined relationships between levels of racial mistrust and the length of time English-speaking West Indian and Haitian students lived in the United States. Results indicate 35 to 50% of the students perceived moderate or high levels of racial mistrust. While no statistically significant relationships were indicated during the 6th and 7th, or 8th grades towards the ending of the 9th grade positive and statistically significant relationships were indicated for English-speaking West Indian as well as Haitian students. In addition to risks of unfavorable levels of racial mistrust low academic achievements remained a concern for both groups. Implications for social work research and practice with immigrant students are addressed.

KEY WORDS: Racial Mistrust; Minority Children; School Social Work.

Introduction

Racial mistrust refers to defensive cognitive and behavioral responses members of racial or ethnic groups deemed to be inferior develop in response to racism, biased attitudes and behaviors that originate from members of the dominant group (Taylor, Biafora & Warheit, 1994; Vega & Gil, 1998). Racism is characterized by stereotypes and generalizations that are negatively related to people’s racial background and is commonly the basis for discrimination against racial and ethnic minority groups (Baker, 1983). Social science researchers have established that racism, discrimination and race-related mistrust in schools and society are factors that place minority children at risk for high school failure and dropout rates (Bell, 1996; Walcott, 1997; Department of Social Ministry, Palm Beach Atlantic University, 901 South Flagler Drive, West Palm Beach, Florida 33416.
Bryce-Laporte, 1972; Delgado-Gaitan, 1988; Fine, 1986; Lambert & Taylor, 1990; Larkin & Sleeter, 1995; Lawrence, 1997; Lawrence, & Tatum; 1997; Lynch, 1987; Lynch & Hanson, 1998). Native-born blacks are particularly at risk for developing racial mistrust toward their white teachers on whom they rely for education. For instance, investigating the prevalence of racial mistrust among black children, Taylor et al. (1994) found that alarmingly, 30% of those studied expressed mistrust toward white teachers and Whites in general.

Although studies have identified racial mistrust as a sign of resilience among Blacks, they also emphasize risks of that cognitive response in the learning process (Biafora, Taylor, Warheit, Zimmerman & Vega, 1993; Grant, 1988; Taylor, et al., 1994; Terrell, 1981; Solomon, 1992; Vernay, 1990; Waters, 1994a, 1994b). Native-born and immigrant Blacks are known to encounter barriers in school and society that are national-origin, age, and race specific (Brown v. Board of Education; DuBois, 1961; Ogbu, 1991; Olsen, 1997; Ropers & Pence, 1995; Zhou, 1997). As a response to those conditions, racial mistrust is viewed as a protective mechanism necessary for combating racism. Looking beyond the protective or resiliency factor, racial mistrust is shown to interfere with and redirect minority students' natural curiosity and innate love of learning, and place them at risk for school failure and dropping out (Fernandez-Kelly, 1994; Rivera-Batiz, 1996; Rumbaut, 1994; Sanders, 2000; Solomon, 1992; Tatum, 1992; Vernay, 1990; Weissglass, 1997). Although mostly associated with native-borns, it has also been indirectly linked to other racial minority groups (Biafora, et al., 1993; Mitchell, 1990; Taylor, et al. 1994; Waters, 1994a). On a broader scope, Ropers and Pence (1995) and others argue, that disproportionate failure and dropout rates among minority students, compared to white students, are directly associated with institutional racism that can be seen in students' attendance and graduation rates across the nation. In fact, institutional discrimination is evidenced by, who attends school, who attends what school, what is taught, and even how teachers treat minority students in classrooms (Gollnick, 1995; Grant, 1988; Grant & Tate, 1995; Jaschik, 1986; Phillips, 1998; Racism prevails in state, minority believe, 2002).

**Addressing Diversity and Racism in Schools**

The arrival of record numbers of Black immigrants contributes greatly to current diversification in age, ethnic, racial and
socioeconomic background in the U.S. population (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1996). Assuming such trends persist, by the year 2010 about 30% of the U.S. population under the age of 18 years will be of African, Asian or Hispanic descent. In major cities where most immigrants settle, more than one-half of the children will be ethnic minorities (Patterson, 2000). The tendency of immigrant families with children to settle in an urban area such as Miami-Dade County is quite evident by the tremendous increase in the school's immigrant population (Tabares-Hantman, 2002). For decades U.S. educators and policy makers have anticipated the diversity, and in attempting to redress racism in schools have disseminated information on the psychological affects of bias and prejudice treatments on minority children’s education. The aim is to reduce racism among school personnel and racial mistrust among the minority student population (Bell, 1996; Lynch, 1987; Rong, 1998; Tatum, 1992; Vernay, 1990). Subsequently, many educational policy statements and multicultural educational programs reflect the goal of ameliorating the academic status of minority children by redressing underlying themes of bias, prejudice, and injustice in education (Gollnick, 1995; Grant & Tate, 1995; Kailin, 1999; Marsh, 1993, 1984; Marsh Craven, 1997; Ogbu, 1991; Olsen, 1997; Trueba, 1987). Those efforts, however, are reported with varying degrees of success (Banks, 1997; Kailin, 1999; Lawrence, 1997; Ropers & Pence, 1995; Rumbaut, 1994, 1990; Weissglass, 1997).

Efforts to redress race-related problem in Miami-Dade County Public Schools are superceded by what school officials present as more pressing problems, namely, school overcrowding and tremendous teacher shortages. According to reports, social adjustment issues that require individualized attention for students, including those related to race-relations, are considered less pressing despite high school failure and dropout rates among minorities (School Board Chair, Tabares-Hantman, 2002: Miami-Dade County Public School “State of the School Report”; “Miami-Dade County’s Public Schools Final Report of the Miami-Dade County Grand Jury, 1999 “An Education in Differences”). To a great extent the responsibility for addressing the social and adjustment concerns of immigrant students has fallen on the shoulders of teachers who already face tremendous challenges addressing diversity in learning styles, educational backgrounds, and meeting their educational objectives. School officials have identified the need for increased involvement of other personnel including school social workers. However, due to
budgetary restrictions, the ratio of social workers and other counselors in the middle and high schools in Miami remains at about 4190 students to one social worker (Miami-Dade County’s Public Schools Final Report of the Miami-Dade County Grand Jury, 1999 “An Education in Differences 2000”).

As co-existing phenomena, racism and racial mistrust have been sufficiently emphasized in cities heavily populated by native-born Blacks to suggest that the adjustment experiences of immigrant Blacks merit greater attention (Gollnick, 1995; Grant & Tate, 1995; Hains, Lynch, & Winton, 1997; Herr, 1999; Irvine, 1985; Portes & MacLeod, 1996; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Wellman, 1993). Indeed, work of Taylor et al. with native-born Blacks offers valuable insight. However, the experiences of others such as West Indians (people of the English-speaking Caribbean) and Haitians remain greatly understudied. Those groups share common African ancestry with native-born Blacks, yet each group is ethnically and culturally very distinct. Educated among native-born Blacks, the immigrants learn to interpret and cope with much of the same race-related barriers that historically have affected the native-born group. However, much information is missing about influences of crucial background factors such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and family history of the immigrants (Dentler & Hafner, 1997; Rumbaut, 1997; Sanders, 2000; Waters, 1994b). In two studies that looked extensively at West Indian and Haitian immigrants’ adaptation to race relations, Waters (1994a, 1999) indicates that at first glance those in the first and second-generation appear to be doing well; however this does not hold true overtime.

When West Indians first arrive, their knowledge of English, skills, and their optimistic assessment of American race relations facilitate their integration into American society. Overtime, however, the realities of race relations tend to overwhelm those positive cultural values. Contrary to long held beliefs of the benefits of assimilation, it is those who hold on to the positive cultural values that are more likely to succeed in terms of education (Gans, 1992; Waters 1999). Although Caribbean immigrants have been studied for more than half a century, the majority of the early studies focused primarily on adults. Studies that include Caribbean children tend to aggregate their information with native-born Blacks, resulting in a huge gap in the literature (Fix & Zimmermann, 1993; Frazier, 1957; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 1996; Portes & Stepick, 1993; Reid, 1939).
The aim of the current investigation was to examine levels of racial mistrust among West Indians and Haitians in urban middle schools in Miami Dade-County, Florida. The purpose was to determine whether those groups held levels of racial mistrust that could be associated with how long they lived in U.S. The study did not seek to establish whether racism exists in Miami-Dade County schools. Rather, it examined West Indian and Haitian students' perceptions and self-appraisal of their own levels of racial mistrust toward their white teachers. The study considered students' self-appraisal of race-related mistrust. The self-appraisal process integrates many aspects of student's life that, in turn, portrays their sense of personal identity and perception of their educational experience in the context of school and the larger society.

In selecting children of middle school ages and the two ethnic groups, the study relied on available information that indicates immigrant children of middle school age typically struggle with questions about their sense of academic competence and ethnic-identity (Rumbaut, 1997). Yet for West Indians and Haitians, the school environment may be the very place where their sense of competence, ethnic-identity and notions of themselves as members of a minority group is threatened or undermined (James, 1997; Maehr & Midgley, 1996; Waters, 1999). The rationale for using the school setting was based on scores of studies that identify schools as primary institutions that acculturate Black immigrant children toward the African–American culture and, to a lesser extent, toward the dominant culture (Dodoo, 1997; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 1996; Perlmann and Waldinger, 1997; Pryor, 1992; Rumbaut, 1990; Waters, 1999, 1994b).

**Methods**

**Sample**

Data for this study were extrapolated from a larger study involving \( N = 7386 \) students enrolled in the main school sample of middle schools and alternative schools in urban settings in Miami Florida. The first source of data collection derived from students in 1990 as they were entering 6th or 7th grades, depending on the entry grade for the respective schools. Two additional sets of data were collected in 8th grade, and then 9th grade, as the students prepared to transition to high School. A second source of data involved collateral
information obtained from parents of the students in the sample. Data were also collected from teachers at year one. School records were available during the three waves of data collection. This paper reports only the analyses involving the sample of West Indian \((n = 172)\) and Haitian \((n = 187)\) students, and excludes students with missing data. A breakdown of the larger study's sample is provided to capture the percentage of the sample by attrition rates across three waves of data collection, Time 1, Time 2, and Time 3 (T-1, T-2 and T-3). At T-1 the sample was \(N = 7386\). From T-1 to T-2 the sample was reduced by 10%, \(N = 6646\). At T-3 the sample was further reduced by 20% of the original sample, \(N = 5924\).

**Procedures**

Trained members of the project staff administered the three sets of questionnaires used to gather students' self-appraisals. The questionnaire used multiple variables, including racial mistrust, which was measured on a Likert-type scale. The questionnaires were administered in class under varying conditions, depending on students' reading comprehension levels. Some were self-administered using one session, and some used two sessions. Others were group-administered using two sessions. Parental consent forms were secured for each student. In designing the questionnaires, confidentiality was addressed by excluding all identifiers.

**Variables, Scales, and Reliability**

Racial mistrust is identified with theoretical perspectives of the same name (Biafora, et al., 1993; Taylor, et al., 1994). In developing the racial mistrust scale, McAdoo's (1983) Racial Awareness Scale and Terrell's (1981) Cultural Mistrust Scale were selected and adopted using the following seven indicators to measure the students' perceptions: (a) “White teachers ask Black students hard questions on purpose so that they can fail,” (b) “When a White teacher talks to a Black student, it is usually to get information that can be used against him or her,” (c) “Members of my family have talked to me about dealing with racism and prejudice,” (d) “Blacks should be suspicious of a White person who tries to be friendly,” (e) “I always defend the rights of Blacks,” (f) “Black parents should teach their children not to trust white teachers” and (g) “Members of
my family have told me about problems they have because they are Black.”

The responses for each of the above items indicating level of racial mistrust were scored using a four-point scale: (1) “Agree a lot,” (2) “Sort of agree,” (3) “Sort of disagree,” (4) “Disagree a lot.” Item (c) however was measured on a four-point scale: (1) “Very true for me,” (2) “Pretty true for me,” (3) “Not true for me” and (4) “Not at all true for me.” The index is an additive sum of the racial mistrust responses; thus, the scores were totaled and grouped, resulting in the scale of racial mistrust from low to moderate to high. In addressing reliability concerns, analyses were performed using Cronbach’s (1951) alpha coefficients to facilitate discovery of dimensions of the scales used to measure levels of racial mistrust. Cronbach’s (1951) alpha coefficients for racial mistrust of .6 and .8 were obtained respectively at T-1 and T-3. Additional questions were used at T-3, hence the change in the alpha coefficients.

The questionnaire was not originally designed to permit the respondent to specify an ethnic-identity. Therefore, for West Indians’ and Haitians’ self-appraisals of their ethnicity two questions, “where were you born?” and “where was your mother born?” were used in combination to operationalize each student’s ethnic background. In cases where the student was born in the United States and the mother was born in the Caribbean, the mother’s place of birth was used as an indicator for the student’s ethnicity. However, if both the mother and child were born in the Caribbean, then the respective country was used as the indicator for the student’s ethnicity. Finally, multiple factors including mother’s level of education, father’s level of education, socioeconomic status, student’s level of English proficiency and academic performance (indicated by cumulative grade point average, GPA) were used collectively to ascertain demographic profiles for the two groups. For Haitians level of English proficiency was also considered.

Data Analysis

Analyses of specific demographic variables in combination with indicators of racial mistrust and length of stay were expected to yield profiles important to the understanding of students’ perceptions of their educational experiences. In testing the hypothesis that students who lived in U.S. for longer period were expected to perceive
higher levels of racial mistrust than those living here for shorter periods. Consideration was given to the age and developmental stage of the respondents. Therefore, for correlation analyses, the focus was not placed only on linear correlations since those correlations alone may not be sufficient to detect non-linear relationships that may be present. In order to analyze relationships between perceptions of racial mistrust based on length of stay in U.S., frequency distributions were computed for each variable at T-1, T-2, and T-3. Chi-square tests were also performed using significant alpha levels set at less than .01 to compare the mean score differences for length of stay by nativity, and to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between the groups (including United States born versus non-United States born students). Consistent with the aim of the study, Pearson’s Correlation tests were performed to determine relationships between length of stay and perceptions of racial mistrust at T-1, T-2 and T-3. Multiple regression analysis was considered suitable for analyzing the collective or separate effect of the independent variable on a dependent variable while controlling for background factors. However, given the similarities in the parents’ educational levels, Socio economic status (SES) and even the students academic performances and lack of variability among those variables, it was expected that comparisons between these two ethnic groups were less likely to be influenced by such background factors differences.

Results

Demographic characteristics of the groups are also provided to offer salient findings about the sample population. Table 1 presents the Chi-square test results, included at this juncture to inform about students’ lengths of stay in the United States.

Demographic Profiles By Ethnicity

The proportion of West Indian to Haitian students was almost 50/50. However, the Chi-square test, indicated that a much higher percentage of the Haitians (45.7%) were born in the United States compared to West Indians (29.6%). The remainder of the population comprised of those born outside U.S., in Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, Antigua, Cayman Islands, Grenada, Guyana, St. Lucia,
St. Vincent, or the Bahamas. The students’ ages ranged from 10 to 17. Only one had already reached the age of 17 years at T-1. As expected, no statistically significant difference was found in the mean ages of the ethnic groups. For West Indians it was 11.51 years (SD .98) and for Haitians, 11.70 years (SD .93). In considering the parents’ level of education, again many similarities were found between the two groups. For instance, 28% of West Indian mothers and 27% of the fathers were high school graduates. Among Haitians, 26% of the mothers and 26% of the fathers were high school graduates. The percentage of parents with college degrees were also quite similar, 32% of the West Indian mothers and 35% of the fathers completed college. Among the Haitians 31% of the mothers and 36% of the Haitian fathers were college graduates.

The similarities in educational levels, were expected to make other comparisons between these two ethnic groups less likely to be influenced by SES differences. The SES in the sample was computed using a formula that calculated the mean of parents’ combined level of education and house size (measured by number of bedrooms and bathrooms as well as the number of occupants living in the house). During the initial phases of data collected “the overall SES of middle school students in Miami Dade County schools were relatively low judging from the percentage of students enrolled in the free and reduced lunch programs: 57% of those in the sixth; 48% of the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.03^a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 33.35.

^Haitians were significantly different at < .01 from West Indians.

### TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of years in U.S.</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>0–5</th>
<th>6–11</th>
<th>U.S. Born</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West Indians</td>
<td>33.90%</td>
<td>36.50%</td>
<td>29.60%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haitians*</td>
<td>24.10%</td>
<td>0.20%</td>
<td>45.70%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Haitians were significantly different at < .01 from West Indians.
seventh graders” (Vega & Gil, 1998, p. 26–27). A comparison of socio-demographic characteristics of these children and families with the findings of a study completed by the University of Florida indicated that 60 to 80 percent of the Hispanic and Black children entering the primary level grades in Miami Dade County lived in households with family incomes of $13,000 or less. Many lived below the poverty level (see Vega & Gil, 1998, p. 27; “Dade Kids Face Hardship”, 1993).

The students’ academic profile reflected by their grade point averages (GPA) is presented in Table 2. None of the students had attained a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of “A” during their middle school years. The cumulative GPA of “B” for West Indians was almost twice that of Haitians. Overall the mean GPA for the West Indians was 1.88 on the four-point scale indicating a low “C” average, and Haitians represented 1.81 on the four-point scale or a high “D” average.

As a background factor, English proficiency was deemed relevant only for Haitian students who were born in Haiti. English proficiency was not considered a relevant factor for West Indian students given their classification as native English speakers. Using a sub-sample of Haitian students (N = 144), English proficiency was deter-

### TABLE 2

Grade Point Average by Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>West Indians (N = 121)</th>
<th>Haitians (N = 121)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time 1</td>
<td>Time 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA*</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Cumulative grade point average on a 4.0 scale.
mined at T-1 and T-3 using frequency distributions to identify the number of students enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes or Functional Skill (FS) classes. Results indicated over 97% of students did not require ESL or FS classes. In addition to the data available in school records, each student was asked the following question: “How many items on the questionnaire were hard to understand?” The response to that question was also used to determine levels of English proficiency. Each student selected one of the following responses: “None”, “1 or 2 questions,” “A few questions,” and “A lot of the questions.” All the responses reflected the “None” category. As indicated in the Chi-square test, over 50% of the Haitian students were born in the U.S. Thus, they were considered English speakers. Thirty percent had lived in the U.S. for at least 6–11 years, and 24.1% lived here less than 1 to 5 years. Only 3 out of 144 Haitian students in the sample were enrolled in ESL classes.

Perceptions of Racial Mistrust

Descriptive statistics of the racial mistrust scores are presented on Table 3. It is important to note that with item responses ranging from 1–4 a total score of 14 or less indicated lower or more favorable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Racial Mistrust Descriptive Statistics by Ethnic Group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>West Indians Low (14 or &lt;)</th>
<th>West Indians Moderate (15–20)</th>
<th>West Indians High (21–28)</th>
<th>Haitians Low (14 or &lt;)</th>
<th>Haitians Moderate (15–20)</th>
<th>Haitians High (21–28)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T-1</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T-2</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>41.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-3</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VELMARIE L. ALBERTINI 321
levels of racial mistrust. Scores 15–20 indicated moderate levels of racial mistrust, and scores 21–28 indicated high levels of racial mistrust that were less favorable.

Racial Mistrust by Length of Stay

Figure 1a and b below show the frequency distributions for students’ lengths of stay and their perceptions of racial mistrust by ethnicity at T-1, T-2, and T-3. Most West Indians scored in the moderate to high ranges for racial mistrust across the middle school years, at T-1 (52%), T-2 (47%), and T-3 (63%). The Haitians’ scores revealed a very similar pattern of moderate to high ranges of racial mistrust, at T-1 (over 55%), T-2 (slightly over 57%), and T-3 (over 63%). Looking at the results for racial mistrust by length of stay for West Indian students, at T-1, who lived in the U.S. 5 years or less, they tended to score in the moderate range for racial mistrust. Those with 6–10 years in the U.S. scored just below the moderate range, those with 11 or more years (mostly U.S. born) also scored in the moderate range for racial mistrust. Measured at T-2, West Indians with 5 years or fewer years in U.S. scored mostly in the low range, for racial mistrust, as did those with 6–10 years. Those with 11 or more years, again mostly the ones born in U.S., scored in the moderate range. At T-3 West Indians with 5 years or less years scored mostly in the low range, while those with 6–10 years scored mostly in the moderate range. Those with 11 or more years (mostly U.S. born) also scored in the moderate range for racial mistrust. Among Haitians, the racial mistrust levels, regardless of the number of years in U.S., remained for the most part in moderate or high ranges. At T-1 most scored in the moderate to high ranges. Those with 5 years or less scored in the low range; however, those who lived here 6–10 years scored mostly in the moderate range. The pattern continued with those who lived 11 or more years here (U.S. born). Tested at T-3, Haitians with 5 years or fewer years scored mostly in the moderate range. Those here 6–10 years scored mostly in the low range, but the ones with 11 or more years (mostly U.S. born) scored in the moderate range for racial mistrust.

Correlation Matrix for Racial Mistrust and Length of Stay

Table 4 presents the correlation matrix by ethnicity at T-1, T-2, and T-3. Despite the fairly unfavorable levels of racial mistrust reported
by many West Indian and Haitian students, the correlation tests revealed only a few statistically significant relationships between the students’ lengths of stay and their levels of racial mistrust. For

FIGURE 1. (a) West Indian’s perception of racial mistrust; (b) Haitians’ perception of racial mistrust.
West Indians and Haitians no statistically significant relationships between length of stay and racial mistrust were indicated at T-1 or T-2. However, at T-3 a positive and statistically significant relationship was indicated between the lengths of stay and levels of mistrust ($r = .175$, $p < .05$). A positive and statistically significant relationship was also indicated between length of stay and racial mistrust levels for Haitians at T-3 ($r = .285$, $p < .01$). Given the similarities for parents’ educational levels, SES and students’ academic performances, the lack of variability in those variables was expected to make other comparisons between the ethnic groups less likely to be influenced by such background factors.

**Discussion**

Perhaps the most interesting observation within the findings is that between 35 and 50 percent of the students reported perceptions of moderate to high levels or unfavorable levels of racial mistrust towards their white teachers and Whites in general. These findings

**TABLE 4**

Correlation Matrix by Ethnicity at T-1, T-2, and T-3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>West Indians</th>
<th>Haitians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Racial mistrust</td>
<td>Racial mistrust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of stay (T-1)</td>
<td>$r = .063$</td>
<td>$r = -0.82$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of stay (T-2)</td>
<td>$r = .125$</td>
<td>$r = .084$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of stay (T-3)</td>
<td>$r = .175^{*}$</td>
<td>$r = .285^{**}$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^{**}p < .01$. $^{*}p < .05$. West Indians and Haitians no statistically significant relationships between length of stay and racial mistrust were indicated at T-1 or T-2. However, at T-3 a positive and statistically significant relationship was indicated between the lengths of stay and levels of mistrust ($r = .175$, $p < .05$). A positive and statistically significant relationship was also indicated between length of stay and racial mistrust levels for Haitians at T-3 ($r = .285$, $p < .01$). Given the similarities for parents’ educational levels, SES and students’ academic performances, the lack of variability in those variables was expected to make other comparisons between the ethnic groups less likely to be influenced by such background factors.
reflect slightly higher levels than previously reported among native-born Black children (Taylor, et al., 1994). While this article does not focus on the students' appraisal of their ethnic-identity, some consideration is given to Waters' (1994b) earlier findings, that indicated West Indian and Haitian children's acculturation process and self-identity development involves an African–Americanization process or the developments of a Black–American identity. As such, West Indian and Haitian children who are more African–Americanized tend to perceive more racism and discrimination for themselves, as well as for other Blacks (Woldemikael, 1989).

Conversely, those who perceive themselves as Caribbean tend to perceive less racism, and more opportunities and rewards for individual efforts. Most West Indians and Haitians in Miami settle in urban areas heavily populated by African Americans. Therefore it seems logical to reason that many, especially those who lived here 6–11 years or more, may be contending with similar levels of racism as the native-borns, and that their levels of racial mistrust would be associated with their length of stay or the amount of exposure to racism and new ideology about racism (Waters, 1994a, 1999).

The findings indicate that for the students in Miami, the unfavorable levels of racial mistrust that were associated with length of stay were evident towards the ending of the middle school years. One variable contributing to a possible explanation for the differences between the latter and the earlier years is the lack of variability in length of stay particularly among the Haitian students. Careful examination of the cohort samples reveals that the sample was not adequately distributed based on number of years students had lived in U.S.; therefore the relationships between length of stay and racial mistrust were confirmed only at the 9th grade level. Still, the findings of consistent patterns of moderate to high levels of racial mistrust towards white teachers raise some concerns over psychosocial supports that are in place for students and teachers in urban schools in Miami-Dade County. The future outlook for West Indians and Haitians in Miami-Dade County remains a major concern, given evidence of low academic achievement. Throughout middle school, the mean GPA for the students remained below 2.0, the level needed to attain at least a “C” GPA. This is of particular concern, given the links between educational qualifications and future occupational status.

Fernandez-Kelly (1994) suggests that interactions between minority students and teachers determined to a great extent the students'
level of curiosity and love of learning. When students perceive that their teachers are able to commit to providing fair and representative environments, the students experience a greater sense of school ownership, resulting in greater student involvement in the educational process and increases in academic success (Grant, 1988). The school performance in middle school years is inextricably linked to high school years and subsequently to higher education. The findings of this investigation suggest that the barriers that West Indian and Haitian students encounter may impose further barriers in terms of future academic development.

One background factor that was expected to relate to students’ academic performance was their parents’ level of education. It is therefore surprising to discover that despite relatively high educational achievements among the parents, there were not higher levels of academic performance among the students. This suggests the need to consider other variables as stronger contributors to students’ academic performance. Most of the students remained on a path to educational and social mobility that has already been set to spiral downward. Of course the path is not determined solely by ethnicity or race but by the level of academic preparedness the students attained. In addition, parents’ SES did not emerge as a salient factor. Bear in mind that the sample lacked variability in terms of the parents’ level of education and SES. Thus, it could not be statistically confirmed whether there are associations between SES and the students’ perceptions of racial mistrust. Also, the sample was not adequately distributed in terms of SES, given that the SES of the students is generally very low.

Implications Social Work in Urban Schools and Research

As Miami-Dade County school officials have pointed out, there is a great need to increase the role of school social workers in the school system (see Final Report of the Miami-Dade County Grand Jury, 1999: “Miami-Dade County’s Public School: An Education in Differences”). Social workers are trained to assess and address the social adjustment issues that often affect immigrant minority students’ education, including those related to racism and the development of racial mistrust. The Social work profession has a rich history of serving groups that traditionally have been affected by inequalities related to U.S. race relations. The Council on Social Work Education
has greatly emphasized the need for social workers to focus on the strengths that cultural and ethnic diversity affords our society. Yet insufficient focus has been placed on advocating for school social workers to play greater roles addressing needs of children of the new immigrant groups such as West Indians and Haitians. As long as race remains a means of categorizing and dividing people in U.S., social workers are needed in a variety of settings to develop culturally appropriate programs designed with early interventions that address the more vulnerable groups. For the West Indian and Haitian students in Miami, school social workers can play crucial roles in ameliorating their academic performance by addressing the costs and benefits of using racial mistrust as a cognitive and behavioral response to race-relations in U.S.

This article highlights racial mistrust as a much understudied area of school social work research and practice. While the involvement of more social workers may not address all the concerns of immigrant students in Miami, school officials have suggested that increasing students' access to trained social workers is expected to afford at-risk students culturally appropriate psychosocial supports that enhance the educational process. This would also alleviate the burden for teachers, who are compelled to focus more on psychosocial support and less on teaching. As Ropers and Pence (1995) established, there is a tremendous need to make available to students and teachers more psychosocial supports that address race-related barriers to education, especially in light of associations between the barriers and dropout rates among minority groups.

According to Miami-Dade County school officials, the ratio of social workers and other counselors in the middle and high schools remains at about 4190 students to one social worker (Miami-Dade County's Public Schools Final Report of the Miami-Dade County Grand Jury, 1999 "An Education in Differences 2000"). Efforts to redress racism or race-related mistrust remain secondary to school overcrowding and teacher shortages. Efforts to increase the number of social workers who are trained to do psychosocial assessments and provide psychosocial interventions are hampered by financial constraints (Tabares-Hantman, 2002: Miami-Dade County Public School "State of the School Report"; Final Report of the Miami-Dade County Grand Jury, 1999 "Miami-Dade County's Public School: An Education in Differences").

In considering future research concerns, there are some intrinsic factors that contribute to limitations in the field of social research
that also confronted this investigation. For instance, limitations exist in the utilization of survey questionnaires, which as a non-experimental research design, does not allow for the manipulation of independent variables and thus removes the potential for exploring causality of racial mistrust. Therefore, a determination could not be made as to whether perceptions of racial mistrust were antecedents or a consequence of other variables, including low academic performance. Another limitation lies in the study’s susceptibility to potential internal and external validity problems. It was limited by lack of manipulation of intervening variables, a procedure that is available in true experimental designs. Also, given that the sample was relatively small and drawn from a geographically distinct area, questions remain about generalization of the findings. Despite these limitations, the findings offer valuable information with implications for immigrant research and practice relevant to immigrant minority children’s education. The study could be replicated using a sample from various parts of the U.S. Future research could also expand the variables beyond the context of the classroom to incorporate more family factors relating to immigration history. Further usage of length of stay as an independent variable could explore greater variability than was available here.

References
Miami-Dade County’s Public Schools: An Education in Difference (Fall Term A.D. 1999) (Final Report of the Miami-Dade County Grand Jury, Filed July 6, 2000)


