

Emulation to Environment:  
The Road to Long Term Substance  
Abuse in a Cohort of Older African  
Americans

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# Purpose/Aim

The purpose of today's presentation is to

- Present the findings of my dissertation study which explored the underlying social factors associated with substance abuse among older African Americans.



# Challenge

## Operationalization of the Population of Interest *African American*

- The predominant African American group.
- Roots are embedded in slavery in America.
- They have been and continue to be subjected to disparities.
- All references to African Americans or Blacks, in this study, pertain to this group.





# Challenge



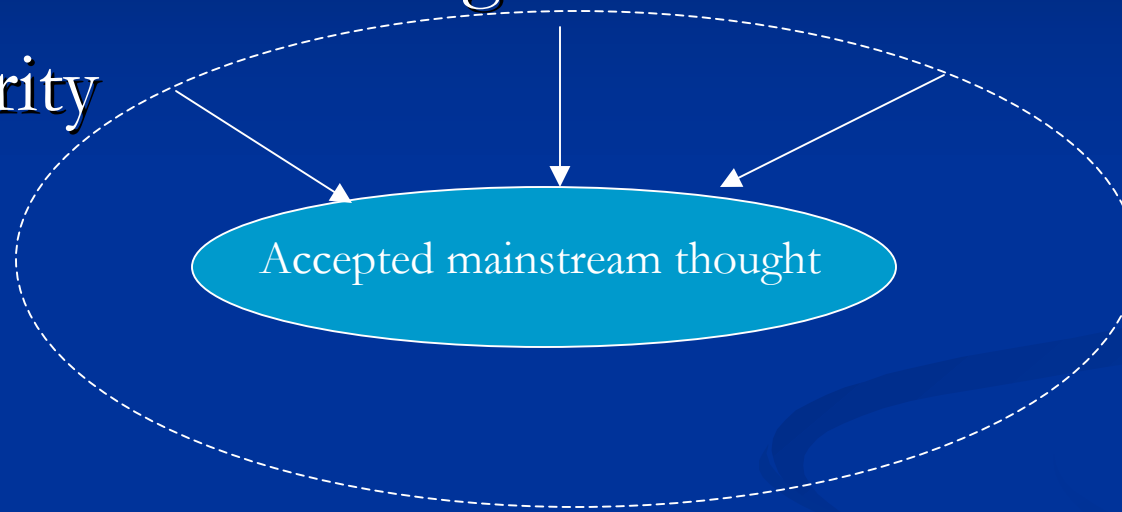
## Operationalization of the Population of Interest *Older*

- Why 55 or older? Why not older?
- When compared to the general population there is a premature mortality or truncation of the lives of African Americans (Hayward & Heron, 1999).

# Challenge and an Opportunity

Liminal Positioning

Alterity



# What We Know Historically

- Slavery
- Racial Residential Segregation
- Commercial Activity
- As early as 1910



# What We Know

## Adolescent African Americans (AAA) And Young Adult African Americans (YAAA) and Illicit Drugs

- Linking Literature with Research
  - Quantitative Studies (AAA)
    - Townsend and Belgrade, 2000
      - Racial identity
    - Sickles and Taubman, 1991
      - AAA at higher risk to go from non use to illicit use
  - Quantitative Studies (YAAA)
    - Burton et al, 1996
      - marital role
      - employment role



# What We Know

## Older Adults/Older African American Adults who use Illicit Drugs

- Linking Literature with Research
  - **Quantitative Studies**
    - SAMHSA, 2005  
(AA have Higher trends of illicit use)
    - Winick, 1960 (Maturing Out)
    - Rivers, 2004 (Cocaine Use)
  - **Qualitative Studies**
    - Schensul, 2003 (Senior Housing)
  - **Case Studies (Late onset/Cocaine)**
    - Kausch, 2002
    - Kouimtsidis & Padhi, 2007
    - Nambudiri & Young, 1991



# What We Don't Know

## Older African American Adults who use Illicit Drugs

The central questions related to African Americans are:

- Why might one begin illicit drug use at a young age and continue this use into old age?
- Why might a person 55 or older begin illicit drug use late in life?



## Theoretical Perspectives

These two work really well but fail to address race

- Wallhagen's Perceived Control/Person  
–Environment Fit
- Winick's Genesis for Substance Abuse/A  
Three Pronged Theory  
Based on Role



## Theoretical Perspectives

### Wallhagen's Perceived Control/Person –Environment Fit

- Derived from Lawton's Sense of Control
  - Press-Demands vs. Competence-Resource

**Strengths**-Sensitivity to Older AA Adults

(Wallhagen & Lacson, 1999)

**Weaknesses**-No studies associated with  
drug use in elders



## Theoretical Perspectives

These two work really well but fail to address race

### ■ Winick's Genesis for Substance Abuse/A Three Pronged Theory Based on Role

- n Access
- n Low Proscription Against drug use
- n Role Strain/Deprivation

Viet Nam as an example of utility

Strengths-1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Prongs

Weaknesses- 2<sup>nd</sup> Prong



# Racial Formation Theory

- The meaning of race:
  - Is socially unpredictable and politically unstable
  - Addresses the intersection of discourse with institutional practices
  - Expresses those findings in macro and micro social interpretations



# Older African Americans and Illicit Drug Use



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# Purpose/Aim

The purpose of the study was to explore the underlying social factors associated with substance abuse among older African Americans as an underpinning to the development of approaches to nursing care and treatment.



# Method

The study used a grounded theory design to answer the research questions. A purposive sampling of 24 patients from Recovery Programs were interviewed with a common interview guide.



# Entrée, length of field work, nature of data collected.

- Entrée
  - Sites
  - Privacy Concerns
- Length of Fieldwork
  - 5 months
- Nature of Data Collected
  - Psycho-social
  - Environmental
  - Political



# Emerging Themes

- Family member with history of substance abuse: Emulation
  - 60% had a history of substance abuse in a close family relative
- Environment: Targeted marketing of commodities
  - 66% believe drugs purposely introduced to Black communities
- Media Images: Emulation  
The effect of media on Substance Abuse in older African Americans



*Family member with history of  
substance abuse*



In their own words  
*Family member with history of  
substance abuse*

I: “Are you the only sibling, that used drugs?”

R: No, everyone except my baby brother.

I: And who was the first to use?

R: On a continuous basis, I believe I was.

I: Did you introduce them to drugs?

R: No, but by example probably.”



# Targeted marketing of commodities



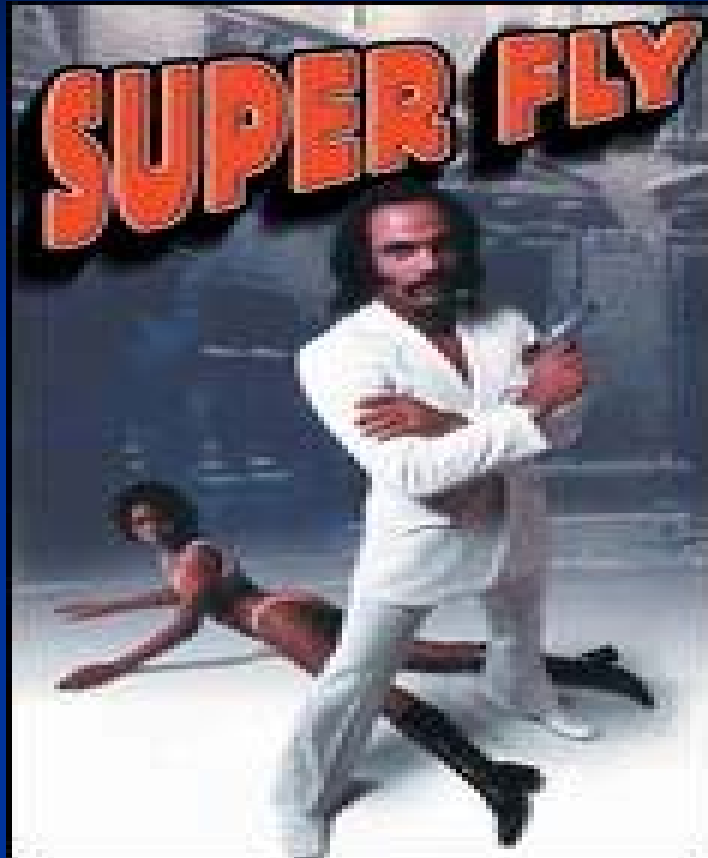
## In their own words:

### *Targeted marketing of commodities*

- R: “You had a 24/7 drug house right there on the corner. You could buy any kind of drug that you wanted.
- R: “Well, from MacAlister to Fulton, from Fulton to Grove, from Grove to Hayes, from Hayes to Oak, and to Oak and Fillmore, from Oak and Fillmore, down to Page and Fillmore, from Page and Fillmore down to Hanks 500 it was saturated with liquor stores.”



# Media Images



“Freddie’s Dead” Curtis Mayfield

# In Their Own Words

## *Media Images*

**Respondent 4** expressed media influence;

“Superfly, the movie, was, well what they did was popularize drugs.”

“Any time you look up with a black movie, it’s always in drugs. You know?”



# Conclusion

- The need for a concerted effort from an interdisciplinary approach is clear, because there are multiple forces involved in the construction of older African American substance abusers. The core issues of substance abuse, such as the environment and larger societal forces, cannot be addressed by one discipline and mandate that clinicians move to an interdisciplinary approach.

