

Project: REACH

RACISM ENVIRONMENT AND ALCOHOL CENTRAL HARLEM

Study Newsletter

Please share this newsletter (also online at <http://www.columbia.edu/~nak2106/reach.html>) with others who may be interested!

March 2008



WHAT WAS PROJECT REACH ABOUT?

The study investigated some of the factors related to alcohol drinking among Black women in Harlem. Alcohol intake is a known risk factor for breast cancer, and Black women have high mortality from this disease.

Since most risk factors for breast cancer are out of your control (e.g., family history, age), it is very important to learn as much as we can about what affects the *behaviors* that are risk factors for breast cancer. This is why we wanted to learn about what affects alcohol intake. We were interested in two main areas: the effects of dealing with racism, and the effects of lots of alcohol in the neighborhood (in the form of outdoor ads and liquor stores). These are experiences that Black women throughout the United States,

not just Harlem, face in their everyday lives.

Project REACH is led by Dr. Naa Oyo A. Kwate, an Assistant Professor at Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health. Some of the project staff included Shekinah Elmore, Folake Eniola, Meghan Jernigan, Tammy Lee, Dorothy Louis, and Sydney McKinney. In this newsletter we will describe how we completed the study, how we used the information you shared with us, and some of the findings we have discovered so far.



What is alcohol advertising like in Central Harlem?

We saw a number of different types of alcohol being advertised, such as beer, vodka, malt liquor, gin, and cognac. Many different brands were featured, such as Budweiser, Coors, Remy, Courvoisier, Tanqueray, Smirnoff and Colt 45. On this page are photos of some of the ads we saw, and the next page has maps showing how heavy alcohol advertising is throughout the area. About 25% of all the outdoor advertising spaces in Central Harlem contained alcohol ads, similar to the percentages seen in research studies in other cities.

Alcohol ads were displayed in many different formats, such as on public phones, smaller billboards (such as the one below), subway entrances, bus shelters, and also very

large billboards (wallscapes), which can be several stories high.

As we mention in the sidebar, many of these ads suggest that alcohol helps you to “move up” socially. Some of the products are inexpensive (e.g., beer), but others are very expensive. In the ad below, the Courvoisier XO retails for about \$144. Most people in Harlem do not have incomes that would allow them to spend that much on a bottle of liquor. The advertisement says that if you don’t have a lot of money, you can act like you do by drinking this product. This is a very dangerous message, and it encourages people to engage in a behavior that can damage their health.

Also, as you can see in the photos, many ads are at a level that children can see easily.

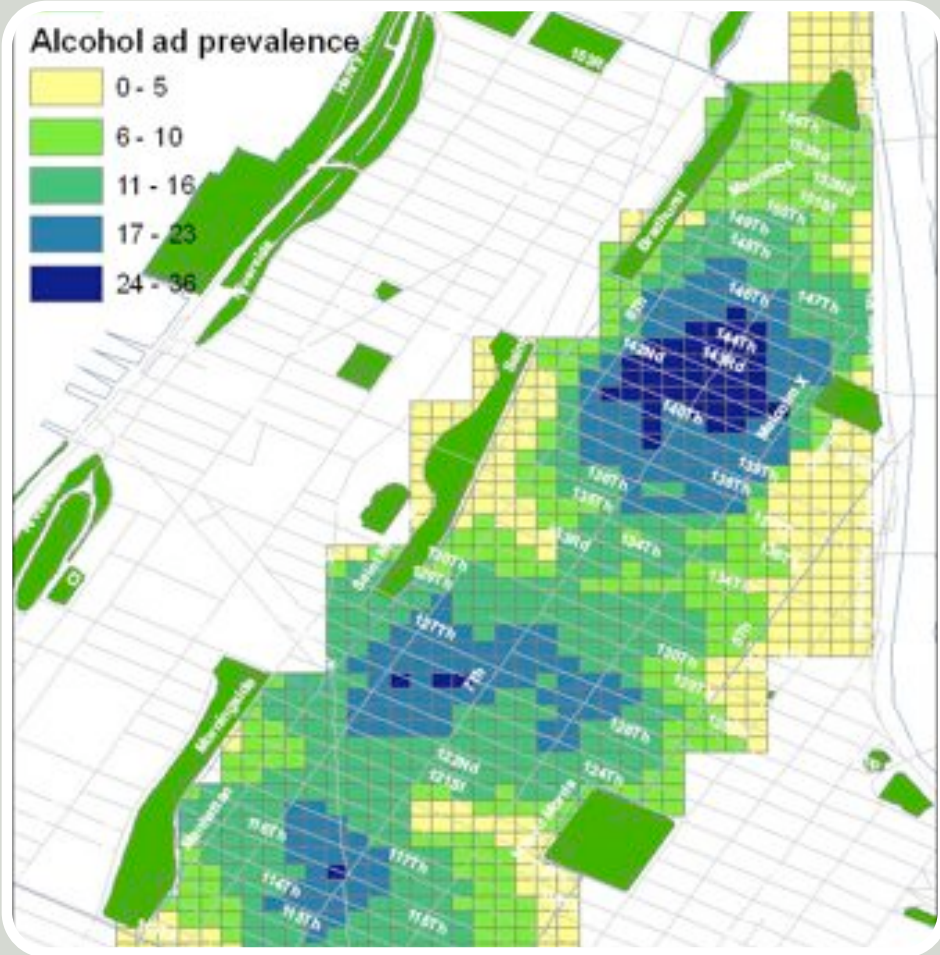


ALCOHOL ADS



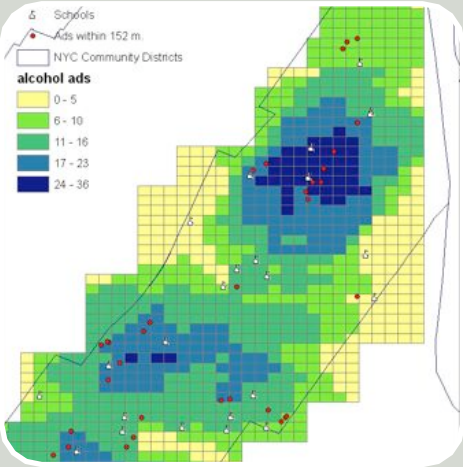
Dangerous messages

Alcohol ads in Harlem try to convince viewers that 1) drinking alcohol will make you look or feel rich; 2) drinking alcohol will make you more sexually attractive or successful; and 3) drinking alcohol is necessary to have a good time.



Exposure to alcohol ads

At left is a map of showing how much alcohol advertising there is. The darker the shading, the more the ads. Below is a map showing that about 44% of ads were within 500 ft. of a school.




Does alcohol in the environment affect alcohol intake among Black women?

You probably remember that participating in Project REACH meant answering a lot of questions. These questionnaires are used to get an average for everyone who participates, and we can use those numbers to see how some behaviors or feelings relate to others. Most of the questionnaires are used by clinicians and researchers. For example, one questionnaire asked about behaviors like needing a drink first thing in the morning or having loved ones criticizing drinking.

The answer seems to be yes

These are things that could mean that someone has a drinking problem. Since we asked for everyone's cross-streets, we were able to learn where everyone lives on the map above. We determined how much alcohol advertising was present close to each woman's home, and we looked at how much that amount affected drinking. We found that the more alcohol ads women were exposed to, the greater chance they had of showing drinking patterns that could indicate a problem.

BASIC FACTS & FIGURES	TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	AGE	FAMILY	HEALTH
	<p>139 women participated in the study from all across Central Harlem (5th Ave and St. Nicholas East to West, and 110th to 155th St.)</p>	<p>The mean age was 34, and the range was from 21 years old to 49 years old.</p>	<p>67% of women had children, and 24% were married or in a lifetime partnership.</p>	<p>Most women said their health was "very good" or better. 44% of women were smokers.</p>

RACISM AND HEALTH

Does the amount of racism Black women experience affect drinking?

More and more research studies are showing that racism harms health.

Studies have shown that the racism African Americans experience is related to many different health outcomes, such as high blood pressure, psychological distress, substance abuse and more. In Project REACH we wanted to learn more about whether racism affects Black women's drinking patterns, and if women's identity about being Black affected that relationship.

The questionnaires in Project REACH asked about how often women experienced different forms of racism in their everyday life, and how much they think racism affects different aspects of Black life (even if it doesn't happen to the individual woman). First, let's take a look at some forms of racism that most women said never happened to them.

You can see in Table 1 that about 33% of women said it never happened that others acted like they were afraid or intimidated by them, and 52-53% said it never happened that someone avoided them physically or mistook them for a servant. The other bars show experiences of being insulted/harassed or being told your work is inferior.

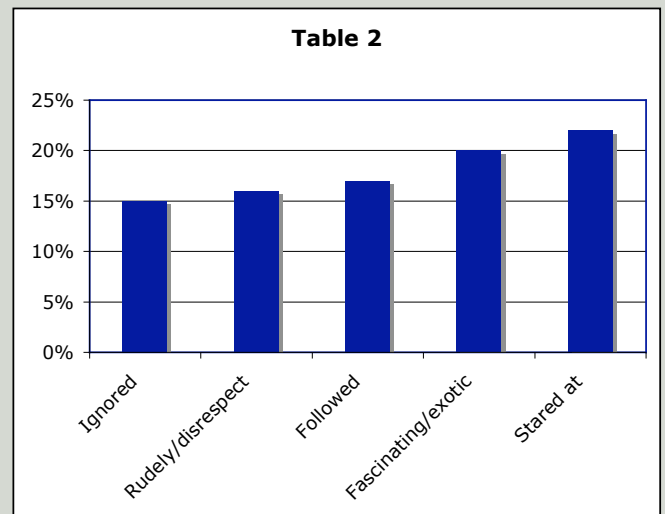
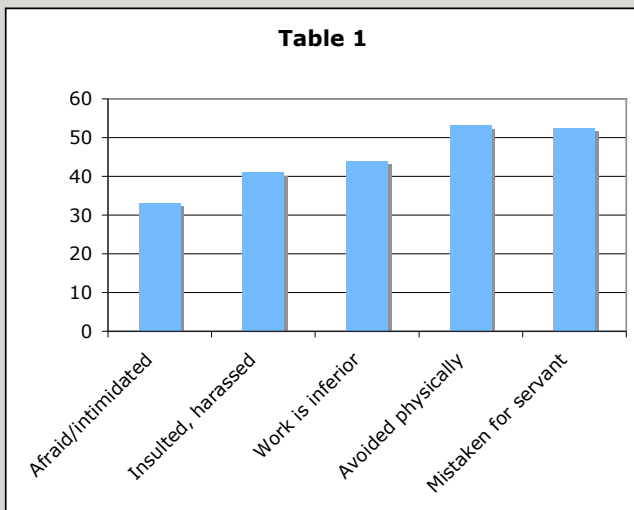
On the other hand, we found that other forms of racism happened quite often. In Table 2, you can see the percentages of women who said certain events happened a few times per month or more. These include being ignored, treated rudely or disrespectfully, or as fascinating/exotic. The most commonly mentioned event was being stared at--22% of women said this happened a few times per month or more.

But it is important to realize that

overall, the women in the study did not report that they experienced racism very frequently.

Even so, when we looked at the relationship between experiences with racism and problem drinking, we found a positive relationship. That is, the more racism women experienced, the more likely they were to have drinking patterns that could mean they have a problem with alcohol. This supports our prediction that racism is a serious stressor in many Black women's lives.

Right now we are analyzing the data to find out whether identity about being Black affects this relationship. It could be that women who have strong identity might drink less even if they experience racism, but it is also possible that they might drink *more*, because racism might affect them very strongly.



MOVING FORWARD

Project REACH did not end when the last survey was completed...

Scientific publications

We have begun analyzing the data we obtained in the study, and we have published a few articles in academic

journals. If you are interested in learning more about the scientific publications, please contact Dr. Kwate at nak2106@columbia.edu. As we described on the previous page, other publications are in the works.



Dr. Kwate & Folake on graduation day!



Tammy

Creating change

The relationships we found between alcohol ads and drinking behavior are very important. We believe the data show that New York City must develop new policies on how outdoor advertising takes place. If you would like to receive updates on this work, or would like to help, please write us at the project email address, listed below.



Sydney

Future studies

Dr. Kwate is also conducting other research on African American health. If you would like to be contacted for these studies, please send an email to the project email address, below.



Meghan & Dr. Kwate



Dorothy

Thank you!

We would like to thank all the participants and community members who helped make this project possible. Please contact us if you have questions or comments!

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STAY IN TOUCH

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