

# **What Do We Know and What Do We Need To Know About Health and Marriage in the African American Community**

Presenter:

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# Learning Objectives

- ❖ Define Health, Marriage and their Components
- ❖ Outline marriage advantages and its associated health impacts
- ❖ Discuss current research findings on positive impacts of healthy marriage on health status
- ❖ Describe what we still need to know in order to use healthy marriage as appropriate intervention to promote specific health outcomes and parity for African Americans
- ❖ Outline core criteria for future efforts and action steps.

# Workshop Goal

To engage participants in discussion of what we should know about Health and Marriage in the African American Community based on research;

and

What we do need to know to promote healthy marriage as appropriate intervention for healthy outcomes.



# Quote of the Day

*Progress lies not in enhancing what is, but in advancing toward what will be.”*

*Kahlil Gibran, “A Handful of Sand on the Shore”*



# Context of Marriage and Health

Two sides of the same coin....



Life experience  
Relationships  
Marriage

Behaviors  
Health  
Well-being

# Definition of Health



**Health is a “state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”**

*Source: World Health Organization [WHO]*

# Components of Health

- ❖ A state of being sound in mind and body
- ❖ A state of physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity
- ❖ Healthy and safe environment and balanced diets
- ❖ When the physical and mental potentials satisfy the demands of life commensurate with age, culture, and personal responsibility
- ❖ A basic and universal human right
- ❖ A state of social, emotional, spiritual and cultural well-being of the whole community, including the concept of life and earth.

# Definition of Marriage

Marriage is defined in many ways but for the purpose of this Paper,  
Marriage is defined as:

- ❖ The legal union of a man and woman as husband and wife
- ❖ The state of being married; wedlock; a wedding
- ❖ A common-law marriage
- ❖ A customary or [traditional] marriage.

Source: [American Heritage Dictionary](#)

# Components of Marriage

- ❖ Contractual agreement and covenant between the people in the marriage, their families, society and deity
- ❖ Provision of a permanent lifelong familial relationship that is stable, loving and peaceful for the partners
- ❖ Inclusive of sexual, physical, economic, emotional, charitable, and spiritual bonds.
- ❖ Protection of one another to avoid choices and actions that are harmful to the union.
- ❖ Fostering relationship of mutual respect, responsibility, trust and freedom within the marriage limitations.

# Who are African Americans?

- ❖ A group of people in the United States whose ancestors are from Africa, and predominantly from sub-Saharan Africa:
  - Some of them have mixed ancestors from Europe, Native American or Asia
  - Some of them are first generation migrants from Africa to the United States
  - All of them have some African cultural heritage

# Marriage Advantages and its associated Health Impacts

- ❖ Marriage has protective effect that results in married people living longer than their unmarried counterparts
- ❖ Married people experience better health status in conditions associated with risks of divorce
- ❖ Adults who live in co-habiting relationships have similar poorer health problems and status as divorced and separated adults

*Source: CDC - Marital Status and Health Report 2002*

# What Do We Know?

- ❖ Efficacy
- ❖ Etiology
- ❖ Prevalence
- ❖ Correlates and Co-morbidity
- ❖ Gender, Race and Age Differences
- ❖ Long-term Outcomes Trends

# Efficacy

Evidence shows that compared to divorce, widowed or never married adult; married adults are **less** likely to:

- ❖ Be in fair or poor health
- ❖ Suffer from serious psychological distress and headaches
- ❖ Be limited in various activities of daily living
- ❖ Be externally influenced by unhealthy behaviors, e.g. smoke, drink heavily...
- ❖ Have mental health and heart disease at the rate reported by unmarried adults, divorced or widowed [Gallo, et al. 2003; Goldman 2001; Baker, et al. 2001]

*Source: Center of Disease Control and Prevention*

# Etiology

Marriage offers social integration and supports linked with many health benefits, such as:

- ❖ Protection against cardiovascular diseases [Seeman 1996]
- ❖ Protection against depression when there is reported satisfaction and happiness [Mastekaasa 1994; Robins 91]
- ❖ When household income was controlled, married people have lower rate of mortality [U.S. Census 98; Johnson 2000]
- ❖ Positive spousal influence on healthy behaviors and discouragement of unhealthy behaviors [Umberson, 1992]
- ❖ Protection against well-documented health risks associated with social isolation [Berkman & Glass 2000; Brummet 2001]
- ❖ Less contraceptive failure rates when compared to unmarried couples or cohabiting couples [Fu, et al. 1999]

# Prevalence

The Center of Disease Control and Prevention/NCHS 2004 report shows that:

- ❖ Nearly 60% of adults are married, 10.4% are separated or divorced, 6.6% are widowed, 19% are never married, and 5.7% are living with a partner
- ❖ Marital status varies greatly among race/ethnic groups. Approximately 61% of White adults, 58% of Hispanic adults, and 38 % of Black adults are married
- ❖ Within 10 years of marrying, nearly half (47%) of African Americans are divorced or separated (compared to one-third of Whites and Hispanics)
- ❖ Within 20 years, nearly two-thirds (63%) of African Americans are divorced or separated (compared to about 50% of Whites and Hispanics)

The Center of Disease Control and Prevention/NCHS 1996 report shows that:

- ❖ In 1940, more than 95% of African American children lived with both parents [compared to now where (35%) of African American children live with both parents, and (76%) of White children live with both parents]

# Correlates and Co-morbidity

## Evidence shows that Marriage:

- ❖ Mitigates health risks associated with social isolation, such as depression, mental illness, etc. [Berkman & Glass, 2000; Brummett, et al, 2001].
- ❖ Offers social integration associated with benefits, e.g. cardiovascular health and sense of protection [Seeman, T. E., 1996; Hazadu, H. P., 1995; Orth-Gomer, K., 1994].
- ❖ Improves mental health and soundness of mind and body when the couples report having healthy, happy and satisfied life [Mastekaasa, A., 1994; Robins, L. R., 1991].
- ❖ Increases longevity – Never married, divorced, separated and widowed adults have elevated rates of death compared to married individuals. Also, married men have 250% higher longevity versus the women 50% [Ross et al., 1990; Litwak, 1989].

# Gender Race and Age

Comparisons of currently Married and never-married men show that Married men:

- ❖ Are generally healthier than never-married men
- ❖ Strong evidence of healthier behaviors and lower mortality among the youngest age group, although it persists throughout the age groups studied [CDC, 2002; Lillard and Panis, 1996].
- ❖ African American men have more health benefits from marriage than African American women; The men also have less negative health impacts than the women in unhealthy and stressful marriages [RAND Center for the Study of Aging, 2003].
- ❖ Married persons (particularly women), despite the socio-economic benefits, are more sensitive to and have health conditions associated with negative/unhealthy relationships [Notarius, C.I., et al., 1989; Johnson, et al., 2000].

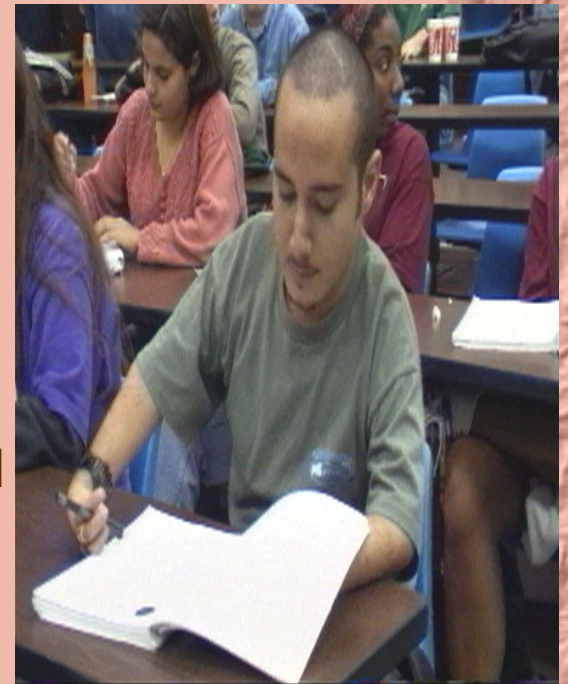
# Long-term Outcome Trends

- ❖ Social integration, Supports and Health Protection, particularly cardiovascular health [Seeman, T. E., 1996; Hazadu, H. P., 1995; Orth-Gomer, K., 1994].
- ❖ Protection against depression and Promotion of mental health when there is healthy marriage and satisfaction [Mastekaasa, A., 1994; Robins, L. R., 1991].
- ❖ Higher socio-economic benefits from higher household income [Money income in the United States: 1998; Johnson NJ, et al. 2000].
- ❖ Increase longevity and reduce mortality rate [US Census Bureau Report 2000 and CDC Report 2000]].
- ❖ Healthier behaviors from positive spousal influence that discourage unhealthy behaviors [Umberson, D., 1992].

# We Still Have More to Learn...

For African Americans, we need to know:

- ❖ What protective factors of marriage are reducing risk of mortality?
- ❖ What factors of healthy marriage correlate to specific health conditions and why?
- ❖ To what extent does the absence of these factors cause unhealthy conditions, when and how?
- ❖ Who shares what factors with who and to what extent, and why?; And how do these factors impact the well-being of African American children and community?
- ❖ What is the relationship between marriage and health disparity for African Americans?



# Context of Healthy Marriage for African Americans

*We need to understand:*

- ❖ *Why do African Americans decide (or not decide) to get married;*
- ❖ *What happens during the marriage that couples perceive as good (healthy/success) or bad (unhealthy/failure);*
- ❖ *How other significant folk around them (family, friends, neighbors, etc.) perceive marriage (healthy & unhealthy);*
- ❖ *What internal & external factors interfere with marriage and how do they impact state of health and/or adverse health for African Americans;*
- ❖ *Use epidemiological and ethnographic based approach to study targeted groups of this population to provide precise data on specific health conditions that correlate with healthy marriage factors by gender, age, financial support, race/culture of spouse and other ecological factors; and*
- ❖ *What role does Culture play in all of the above in relation to healthy marriage.*

# Factors of healthy marriage that correlate to specific health conditions

## *We need to:*

- ❖ *Use an epidemiological approach to determine the prevailing diagnostic conditions relating to high level stress & isolation due to unhealthy marriage.*
- ❖ *Use an ethnographic approach to determine how healthy marriage looks from the perspectives of African Americans;*
- ❖ *Distill the key features of healthy versus unhealthy marriage among African Americans compared with other cultural and racial groups to determine the nature of interventions that are appropriate to explore;*
- ❖ *Identify factors of healthy marriage that can be used as effective interventions to mitigate or/and ameliorate specific health conditions among African Americans.*

# Formation and dissolution on marriage among African Americans

*We need to:*

- ❖ *Combine both epidemiological and ethnographic approaches to determine if the timing of marriage formation and dissolution impacts specific health outcomes that correlate with healthy marriage factors among African Americans;*
- ❖ *Understand how and what makes some marriages formed at the same time to be healthy while others are not and why;*
- ❖ *Know if the timing of marriage impacts the duration and health of the marriage, as well as how such timing impacts the dissolution of marriage;*
- ❖ *Determine & promote the right timing for marriage formation and dissolution based on factors that create the environment that improves healthy marriage as part of interventions for addressing related health conditions.*

# Protective factors of marriage that may reduce risk of mortality

- ❖ ***What are the triggers to African Americans getting married, staying married or/and separating or dissolving marriage:***
  - ***Personal meaning and perception of marriage & its success***
  - ***Definition of interpersonal crisis, stress and distress***
  - ***Level of self awareness (or lack of it) of the relationship and interfering context;***
  - ***Perception and interpretation of the problems and solutions***
  - ***Communication ability and Sanctioning ability, i.e. 'to seek help'***
  - ***Compatibility of 'sought help' and 'received help' to the problem***
  - ***External influence and self imposed time for normalcy or else...***
  
- ❖ ***How can we use epidemiological findings on factors ameliorating specific health conditions among African Americans to determine what triggers share the same factors; to what extent can these same factors improve healthy marriage and life expectancy; or vice-versa.***

# Disparity in Marriage and Health for African Americans

***We need to:***

- ❖ ***Determine if the absence of healthy marriage exacerbates specific health conditions where African Americans experience significant disparity;***
- ❖ ***Better understand and identify common underpinning factors, who shares these factors among different African American groups, and what are the impacts on them and their children;***
- ❖ ***Accurately identify true cases, have better documentation of incidence, prevalence, and increased knowledge of how and what factors of unhealthy marriage causes what disease or adverse health conditions in who and why in order to more precisely target effective prevention and treatment efforts; and***
- ❖ ***Promote the use of healthy marriage interventions where appropriate to improve parity in well being and health.***

## *What role does Culture play?*

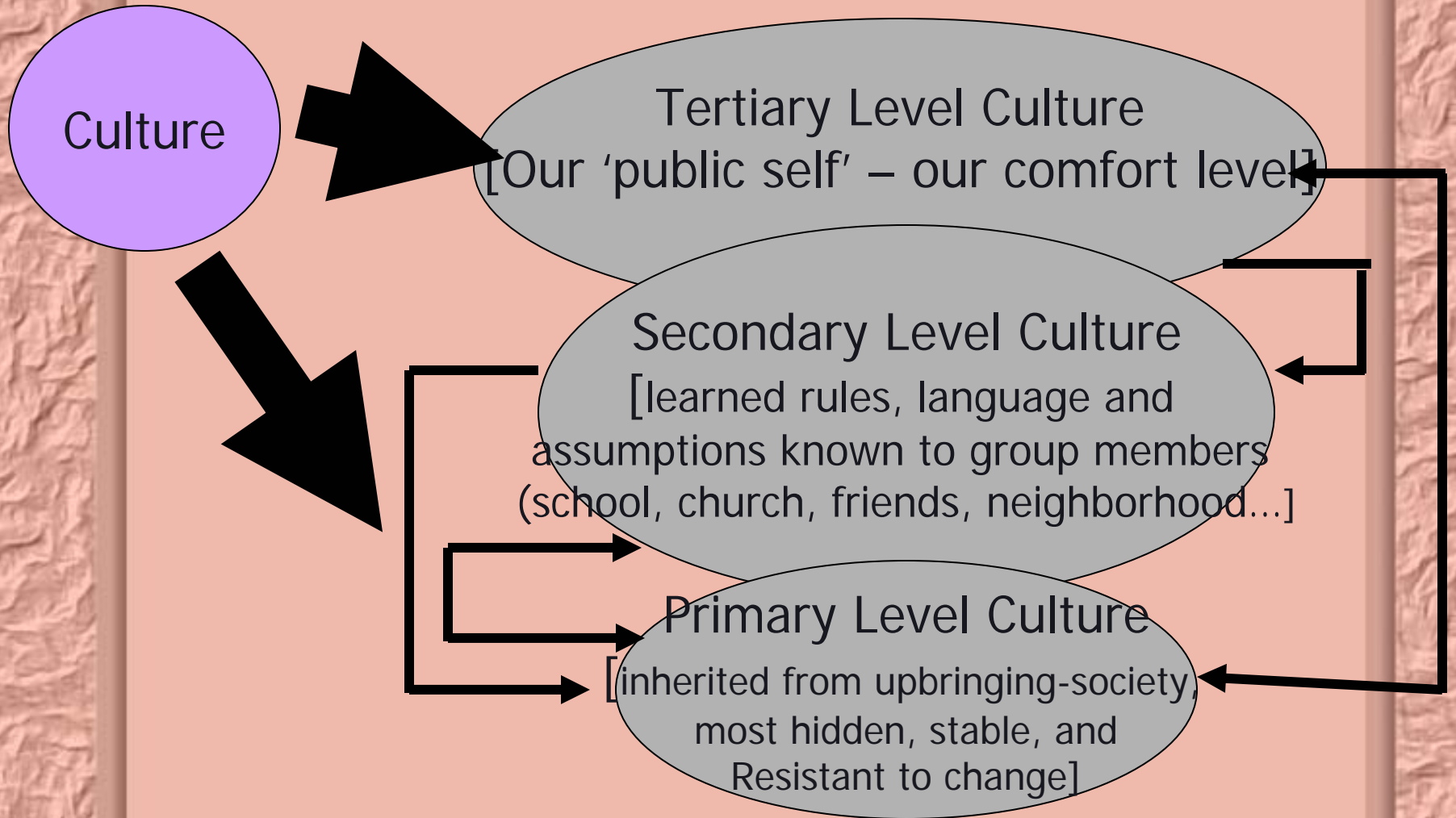
*Culture Is...*

*Not Genetic or Racial – It is socially constructed knowledge, beliefs, values, rules and guidelines individuals learn, share and use for thinking and behaviors*

**It tells us how to see, understand and interpret life experiences emotionally; and how to behave in relation to other people, place and thing [spouse, children, friends, elders, Church, Doctor's Office, Marriage...]**

***We are Culturogenic!!!***

# Three Levels of Culture



# Future Efforts Focus

**Evidence Based Approach still Needed:**

- ❖ **Focus on conducting comprehensive research to study and better understand how to use healthy marriage within African American cultural context to improve their health status & outcomes.**
- ❖ **Ability to at least generalize study findings among different groups of African Americans.**
- ❖ **Test the efficacy of proposed interventions on targeted disease prevention or/and treatment for replication.**

# **Future Efforts - As Leaders You...**

- 1. Challenge the marriage and related health status among African Americans**
- 2. Inspire a shared vision and expectations**
- 3. Enable others to act & support the vision**
- 4. Model the way through culture & actions**
- 5. Encourage the heart with our passion**

*Adapted from Kouzes &  
Posner, 1997*

# Who Should Work with Us?

❖ **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:**

❖ **ACF, HRSA, CDC, NIH...**

❖ **U.S. Departments of Education and Agriculture**

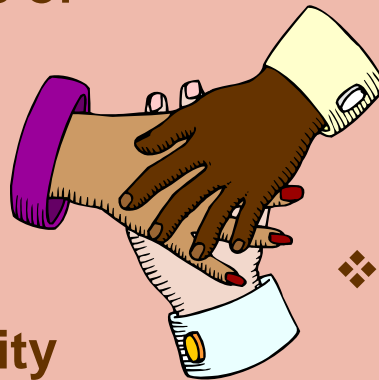
❖ **Natural Community Partners in Action**  
e.g. local food pantry, grocery store, Laundromats, Neighborhood watch

❖ **Faith Based Organizations...**

❖ **Universities**

❖ **Colleges, including community colleges**

❖ **High Schools**



❖ **County agencies for health and human services**

❖ **State agencies for health and human services**

❖ **Community Foundations and Non Profit organizations...**

## WAYS TO MAKE NEXT STEPS HAPPEN?

- **Development of effective Partnerships**
- **Replication of evidence based interventions**
- **Implementing Community-Based Systems of Care**
  - **Optimizing community-level responses to promote and protect healthy marriage**
  - **Ensuring families are supported**
- ★ **Measuring Progress**
  - **Using consistent and appropriate techniques and measures to monitor, community health status & wellbeing**
  - **Identifying existing data sources and developing tool for measuring marriage factors that correlates to specific health outcomes**

# *Final Thought*

The most pathetic person in the world is someone who has sight but has no vision.

-- *Helen Keller*



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**THANK  
YOU!**