Black Male Identity and the Health Care System

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The Self and the Gender Self

- Having a Healthy Sense of Self (self esteem, identity) is a basic human need, necessary to health social and psychological functioning.

- The “Gender Self” is a sense of the self that is based on what it means to be male or female as viewed by the individual, one’s significant social groups, and one’s culture.
The African American Male Gender Self

- More than one African American Male Gender Self (Masculinities rather than one Masculinity).

- The dominant source of African American masculinities is not peculiar to African Americans, but is American, and cross-culturally spans human history.
Sources of the Masculine Gender Self

- Associated with issues of strength, skills, status and power.
  - **Physical** (Exhibition of physical strength)
  - **Social** (in the company of men).
  - **Sexual** (Attractiveness to Females, Control Over Female Sexuality).
  - **Economic** (Trumps the others as having money facilitates achieving the others).
Economic Masculinity & Health

- Became dominant with the rise of colonialism, plantation slavery, capitalism, and racism.
- These factors gave white males the power and the capital to define ideal masculinity for themselves, white females, and males and females of color.
- The role of economic provider as the ideal important construct for the masculine self among males.
John Henryism and the Fragmented Masculine Self

- John Henryism, the Struggle for the Ideal Masculine Self and Cardio-vascular disease among black men.

- The rise of the “fragmented masculine self, the struggle for masculine “balance”, and mental health issues among African American men.

[Share Model of Big Man Little Man Complex]
Slavery to Persistent Poverty to Prison Industrial Complex

- From Slavery to Persistent Poverty
- Jim Crow, the Great Migration, and the Creation of Racialized Ghettoes
- Economic Transitions and the Rise of Crack Cocaine
- From Land Lease Laws to Prison Industrial Complex
- Violence, Drugs, incarceration, and HIV Epidemics
Hustling and Other Hard Work

- “Hustling is American, as American as Apple Pie.”

- “A Man has to hustle in America, to make enough money to provide for one’s family, and to get respect.”

- No difference between the hustling found among street hustlers and American CEOs, just the size of the arena.

- Legal and illegal hustling.
Impact of Drugs, Violence and the War on Drugs

- 1980s---Drugs the faster growing sector of the global economy, and guns and munitions a second.
- Similar in the inner city during the late 1980s.
- The War on Drugs and its Devastation on these communities and families
- Removal of young males during most productive years.
- The impact of reducing the pool of husband and fathers in these communities
Distrust of the Formal Health Care System

- The Tuskegee Study, Eugenics and Other Experimentations
- Cultural Legends and Distrust of the Formal Health Care System
Community-Prison-Community-Prison Cycle

- Health and Social Deficits of those imprisoned.
- Health and Social Deficits among Reentrants
- High rates of recidivism of those who return to prison
- Cultural Continuity between community and prison.
Social Masculinity & Health

- Health Risks: Constructs of regarding respect and disrespect leading to violence and re-incarceration.
Sexual Masculinity & Health

- Sex needs of reentrants and vulnerability of school girls.
- Sexual needs, conquests, etc, leading to secondary transmission of HIV/AIDS
Physical Masculinity & Health

- Health Risk: Young males taken risks that can lead to illness and or death (being tough, defiant, etc).

- Intervention Approaches: (1) Teaching young males that taking such risks does not have to define what being a man is truly about; (2) Teaching young males that male physicality is associated with developing a strong and health body; (3) Religious themes, such as the body is God’s Temple, and thus must be maintained.