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Soul Food: [Re]framing the African-American Farming Crisis Using the Culture-Centered Approach

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Historically, African-American farmers faced a long and challenging struggle to own land and operate independently. In recent years, several factors, including unfair policy legislation, institutionalized racism, the mechanization of agriculture, and increases in agricultural technology have exacerbated land loss and decreases in farm ownership. Currently, African-American farmers are vastly underrepresented, comprising just 2% of the nation's farmers, 0.5% of farmland and 0.2% of total agricultural sales. As a site for inquiry, this topic has been examined across many academic sub-disciplines, however, the literature has not yet explored how the erasure of the African-American farmer influences the conversation about broader diet-related health disparities in the U.S. This overlooked perspective represents a novel approach to rethinking public health interventions and may improve methods for communicating messages about healthy eating to the African American community. In this essay, we extend (Dutta, 2008) the Culture-Centered Approach (CCA) to foreground the lived experiences and perspectives of a small cohort of African-American farmers ($n = 12$) living in the U.S. Mid-South as an entry point to address this underexamined area of research and inform future methodological directions of study. Two key themes emerged from the thematic analysis: (1) erasure of the African-American farming tradition and land loss; and (2) solutions to change. Drawing on the understanding that systematic land loss in the African-American community has contributed to wealth disparities between African-Americans and Whites, we argue that the erasure of the African-American farming tradition within mainstream discourses has created communication inequities that disenfranchise the African-American community and may contribute to broader health inequities in food system. Our findings may offer important insights into the methodological development of more effective health campaigns within these communities.

Keywords: African-American farming, usda, culture-centered approach, agriculture, thematic analysis

INTRODUCTION

Historically, African-American farmers faced a long and challenging struggle to own land and operate independently. Since the beginning of the twenty century, land ownership by African-American farmers declined nearly 50% every 10 years (USDA NASS., 2014), which nearly tripled the loss of land of White farmers during the same period (Wood and Gilbert, 2000; Grant et al., 2012). Several factors contributed to this decline, including unfair policy legislation, institutionalized racism, the mechanization of agriculture and increases in agricultural technology (Reynolds, 2002; Hinson and Robinson, 2008; Wood and Ragar, 2012). These factors changed the landscape of contemporary agriculture and erased the narratives of structural discrimination and material inequities that historically burdened the African-American farming community.

Currently, African-American farmers are vastly underrepresented concerning both individual laborers and land ownership. According to a report from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), African-American farmers represent <2% of the nation's farmers, operate <0.5% of the country's farms and account for 0.2% of total agricultural sales (USDA NASS., 2014). Regarding land ownership, African-American farmers represent just 2% (68,056) of landowners (in comparison to 96.2% of Whites, or 3,412,080) and 0.9% (7,754) of total acreage owned (in comparison to 98.1% of Whites, or 856,051; USDA NASS., 2014). Overall, African-American farmers have been devastated economically, politically, and socially, and as such, are more likely to commit suicide, become depressed, and live in poverty compared to White farmers (Horst and Marion, 2019) these dire circumstances have all but eliminated African-Americans from the contemporary agricultural landscape.

Coinciding with this exigency, disparities in health and disease between various segments of the population (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation) have emerged as a pressing public health concern in the United States and become a major focus of public health research in recent decades (Centers for Disease Control Prevention., 2008). Studies have shown that diet is a primary contributor to disparities in many chronic conditions and diseases and represents an important area for examination (Satia, 2009). Yet, many dominant approaches that address diet-related health disparities employ top-down programs that locate meaning in dominant articulations of health communication (e.g., expert-driven policies and measurement criteria)—often assuming universality (e.g., Western-centric theoretical models), effectiveness (e.g., cause-effect rationales) and innovation (e.g., taken-for-granted need for intervention) in their methodology (Dutta, 2010). Often missing from these efforts is a focus on cultural communicative barriers which may limit or reinforce such disparities (e.g., lack of representation, cultural norms). Recent health communication scholarship has called for the restructuring of health agendas from traditional top-down approaches to more emancipatory models that incorporate nuanced cultural, structural and other barriers to commitment often obscured or overlooked in dominant paradigms.

One emerging model is the Culture-Centered Approach (CCA). This framework suggests that the exclusion of marginalized communities from dominant communication platforms is connected to their disenfranchisement and lack of access to vital resources (e.g., healthy food) and aims to address health disparities by opening spaces for dialogue to generate locally-driven agendas and policies. In this essay, we employ the methodological underpinnings of CCA to foreground the lived experiences and perspectives of a small cohort of African-American farmers living in the U.S. Mid-South using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Silverman, 2006). Similar qualitative studies have used the CCA to examine diet-related health disparities among marginalized populations (Koenig et al., 2012; Dutta and Jamil, 2013; Dutta et al., 2016), however this is the first to take an inductive approach to map emergent themes onto the core constructs of CCA (culture, structure, agency).

Drawing on the understanding that systematic land loss in the African-American community has contributed to wealth disparities between African-Americans and Whites (Doron and Fisher, 2002; Gilbert et al., 2002), we argue that the erasure of the African-American farming tradition within mainstream discourses has created communication inequities that disenfranchise the African-American community and may contribute to broader health inequities in food system. This paper contributes new knowledge to scholarship on the African-American farming crisis and informs future methodological directions of study. The following research questions guided our analysis: (1) How do African-American farmers in the Mid-South describe cultural and structural barriers and opportunities for African-Americans in the U.S. agricultural industry? (2) How do African-American farmers in the Mid-South describe legacies of racism, discrimination and other forms of inequities? The paper will unfold as follows: first, a review of literature examining contributions to the decline of the African-American farmer, health disparities and the modern food landscape. Then, we discuss our theoretical framework and method, and next, provide the results from the thematic analysis. The paper concludes with a discussion section at the end.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DECLINE OF THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN FARMER

Since the end of slavery, African-American farmers have struggled to gain economic capital and self-sustainability (Smith, 2004). The rapid and continual decline of African-American farmland can be somewhat attributed to advancements in agricultural technology and the mechanization of equipment, which increased the productive capacity of farms exponentially (Brown and Larson, 1979; Brown et al., 1994). Compared to White farmers, African-American farmers had far more difficulty accessing these transformative technologies (Wood and Gilbert, 2000; Green et al., 2011). Further, during this period of rapid innovation, structural changes in agricultural policy, such as “New Deal” era farm subsidy programs, favored large-scale farms, which were mostly owned by Whites, and African-American farmers were systematically targeted by

discriminatory banking policies (e.g., mortgage foreclosures) and forced acquisition of their farmland through “heir property” (Reynolds, 2002; Hinson and Robinson, 2008; Schell, 2015; i.e., fractioned land ownership and partition sales). Together, these events marginalized the African-American farming population and erased much of their contributions from the modern agricultural landscape. Scholars have not yet considered how the erasure of African-American farming in the modern food landscape contributes to significant health inequities in the food system.

HEALTH DISPARITIES, ERASURE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN FARMING, AND THE MODERN FOOD LANDSCAPE

Research indicates that African-Americans suffer disproportionately in comparison to Whites in terms of disease incidence and mineral deficiencies related to nutrition (Wang and Chen, 2011; Kirkpatrick et al., 2012). For example, data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) III (1999–2002) found that African Americans were 43% less likely than Whites to meet USDA fruit and vegetable guidelines (Casagrande et al., 2007). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Centers for Disease Control Prevention. (2017), African-Americans are nearly twice as likely to be diagnosed with diabetes than their White counterparts, with prevalence rates of 13.4 and 7.3%, respectively. Although several factors have been identified as possible culprits, such as socioeconomic status (Eyler et al., 2004; Bahr, 2007), psychosocial factors (Watters et al., 2007, 2008) and cultural factors (Kumanyika et al., 2005; Boyington et al., 2008), one potentially overlooked contributor is the erasure of the African-American farming tradition within mainstream discourses and subsequent communication inequities that emerge as a result.

The erasure of the African-American farming tradition detached much of the African-American community from their connection to the land and prevented African-American farmers from competing in the modern agricultural landscape (Balvanz et al., 2011; Daniel, 2013). Moreover, dominant tropes of health and healthy eating practices universalized values specific to Whites and White culture (e.g., eating organic food, tropes of “getting back to the land” and “putting your hands in the soil”) and largely ignored contributions and cultural histories from other groups. For instance, the Alternative Food Movement (AFM), which is a social movement based on developing alternatives to the corporate agribusiness domination of the global food system, emerged as a potential model to improve food access and alleviate food system-generated issues, such as food insecurity (Burdick, 2014; Grauerholz and Owens, 2015), but there have been no significant initiatives by leaders of the AFM to involve African-American farmers or an acknowledgment of their farming tradition in health-promoting initiatives.

Further, AFMs seek to build community and promote inclusivity, participatory democracy, and serve as spaces of contestation against the globalized food system (Kloppenborg et al., 1996; Goodman et al., 2012), but despite these purported

benefits, most AFMs see people of color as marginalized and disenfranchised populations, and these narratives have profound influences on who participates and leads the movement, what is considered “healthy” food, and how resources are allocated (Myers and Sbicca, 2015; Broad, 2016).

Scholars such as Guthman (2003, 2008) and Alkon (2012) argued that the valorization of dominant tropes in alternative agriculture such as “community” and “democratic values” embodied Whiteness and reproduced privilege by emphasizing rhetorics of individual-level accountability and personal responsibility, and obscured or ignored altogether many of the structural constraints which contributed to the creation of such realities. Similarly, Slocum (2006, 2007) characterized AFM institutions as “White spaces” with regards to market vendors, patrons, and management. The spatial coding of AFM institutions as “White spaces,” along with rhetorics of individual-level accountability and personal responsibility, may function as a barrier toward the participation of African-American farmers because it perpetuates the same system that historically disenfranchised their land rights and displaced them economically (Allen and Guthman, 2006; Holt-Giménez et al., 2011; Alkon and Mares, 2012; McClintock, 2014).

Another way that the African-American farming tradition gets marginalized within contemporary discourses is through the appropriation of indigenous African farming techniques, particularly in the organic farming sector. Racism is embedded within the roots of the organic farming sector and can be traced back to Nazi Germany and the nationalistic British Soil Association, whose teachings were adopted by organic farmers in the 1970s by the political leanings of the New Left with the rise in back-to-the-land and counter-culture social activism as a way to promote social equality (Guthman, 2008; Alkon, 2012). Several scholars have drawn attention to how revisionist interpretations of organic agriculture in mainstream U.S. culture worked not only to mask the historical contributions and challenges of people of color in food production but also re-centered the small-scale White farmer as the American agricultural icon and face of organic farming (Allen, 2004; Alkon and McCullen, 2010). In *Farming While Black: Soul Fire Farm’s Practical Guide to Liberation on the Land*, Penniman (2018) described how modern forms of polyculture (i.e., the process of growing plants of different species as a way to increase plant biodiversity and make crops more resilient to climate variability and extreme weather conditions—a staple in modern organic farming) can be traced back several 100 years to indigenous farmers from countries in the West African region such as Ghana and Nigeria, yet often West Africans were not acknowledged for their historical contributions to the movement. Similarly, Guthman (2011) highlighted that many contemporary organic agriculture spaces were often burdened by their implicit attachment to Whiteness, which prevented such arenas from adequately engaging with concerns of attribution and ownership.

A combination of the legacies of sharecropping and tenant farming, issues of “heir property” and the discriminatory federal policies has severely impacted the ability of African-Americans to own and operate land. In the context of health disparities, public health scholarship has identified both land ownership and

maintaining a cultural connection to the land as important social determinants of health (Olson and Anderson, 2013; Breitreuz et al., 2014). However, to date, studies have not explored how the erasure of the African-American farmer influences the conversation about broader health disparities in the U.S. In this article, we draw on the CCA to foreground the lived experiences and perspectives of a small cohort of African-American farmers living in the U.S. Mid-South as an entry point to address this underexamined area of research. Below is a description of the central tenets of the CCA.

THE CULTURE-CENTERED APPROACH TO COMMUNICATION

The CCA is a methodological and theoretical framework for examining and interpreting the lived experiences of marginalized communities (Airhihenbuwa, 1995; Dutta, 2008). Drawing from subaltern and postcolonial studies theory (Fanon, 1963; Freire, 1972; Spivak, 1988), the CCA suggests that understandings for interpreting health are generated through mutual dialogue between community members and interventionist. Opposite of dominant approaches of health communication, whose agendas are controlled by outside experts, the CCA foregrounds the importance of listening to local communities to better understand how health issues become interpreted and communicated. For researchers, the CCA marks a shift from their traditional role as an interventionist, who directs and implements campaigns, to that of a listener who participates in dialogue with community members (Dillon and Basu, 2013).

Fundamentally, the CCA links listening with social change, in that it centers on engaging with the broader structures of erasure and domination, with the ultimate purpose of disrupting oppressive methods of organizing through grassroots efforts (Desmarais, 2007). Through this process, the emphasis on listening in the CCA becomes grounded within a transformative agenda of social change and justice (Dutta, 2014). The CCA is situated at the intersection of culture, structure, and agency.

Culture refers to the localized values, beliefs, and philosophies of a group or community. Structures refer to how resources are organized in society (Airhihenbuwa, 1995). In the context of health, structures exist at the micro-level (e.g., community-level medical services, means of transportation, channels of communication and health-promoting resources such as food access), meso level (e.g., media platforms) and macro-level (e.g., national and international political coalitions and health organizations; Basu and Dutta, 2008). Structures across these different levels work symbiotically and can either hinder or improve an individual's ability to engage in health-promoting behaviors. Agency refers to the ability of individuals to enact choices and negotiate structures that incorporate their lives.

As a guiding framework, the CCA is well-aligned to critically examine dominant discourses of African-American farming. It adds to the understandings of how African-American farmers describe barriers and opportunities for farming in the agricultural industry in three primary ways:

(1) it de-normalizes dominant narratives (e.g., economic and sociological/demographical data) of African-American farming in the U.S. by highlighting alternative paradigms; (2) it privileges non-traditional forms of resistance as an entry point for upsetting the status quo, by challenging hegemonic norms and taken-for-granted assumptions; and (3) it centers on engaging with the broader structures of erasure and oppression, with the ultimate goal of disrupting dominant modes of organizing through grassroots activism.

METHODS

Overview

The research sites for this study were the Black Farmers Agriculturalists Association (BFAA) and the Mississippi Minority Farmers Alliance (MMFA) located in Memphis, TN and Okolona, MS, respectively. Access to the study population was gained using snowball sampling. The primary method of data collection was in-depth, semi-structured interviews. A total of 12 individuals participated in the study. Data analysis incorporated two primary steps: (1) an inductive thematic analysis using the constant comparison method (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Silverman, 2006); and (2) mapping the emergent themes onto the core constructs of the CCA.

Context: U.S. Mid-South

The Mid-South is a region in the U.S. consisting of states North Mississippi, Southern Missouri, Western Kentucky, Central, Northeast and Northwest Arkansas, and West Tennessee—anchored by the Memphis metropolitan area. As a site for inquiry, the region presented a rich area for insights into understanding the perspectives of African-American farmers. Historically, land ownership has been a key cultural and political asset in the region for African-Americans. Despite the national statistics regarding land loss among African-American farmers, there remain a concentration of African-American farm owners who are supported by a network of regional institutions which aim to advance the “local food and culture economy” (Beaulieu and Littles, 2008, p. 2). This context offered a unique entry point for uncovering the locally constituted meanings and lived realities of the African-American farmer today.

Research Site

Black Farmers and Agriculturalists Association

The Black Farmers and Agriculturalists Association (BFAA) is a national, non-profit member-based organization that provides guidance and support to African-American farmers in the U.S. and abroad. Formed in 1997, the organization has a membership of over 1,500 farmers nationwide and 21 state chapters. In addition to providing support for African-American farmers, BFAA was one of the lead organizers of the 1999 USDA Class Action Lawsuit Settlement *Pigford v. Glickman*—a civil action which claimed that the USDA had discriminated against African-American farmers on the basis of race and did not properly investigate grievances from 1983 to 1997, resulting in the USDA forced to pay approximately \$1.06 billion in cash, tax and debt relief (Cowan and Feder, 2013)—providing resources and

educational materials to affected farmers. The organization is headquartered in Tillery, North Carolina.

Mississippi Minority Farmers Alliance

The Mississippi Minority Farmers Alliance (MMFA) is a community-based agency that provides outreach assistance to socially disadvantaged, limited resource, and veteran farmers and ranchers in Northeast Mississippi. As a non-profit entity, some of their services include conducting on-farm assessments, sponsoring on-site farm training and youth workshops as well as promoting sustainability. Additionally, the MMFA maintains partnerships with various corporate entities, including the USDA, Alcorn State University Small Farm Development Corporation, and the American Red Cross.

Recruitment

Access to the participant population was gained using snowball sampling. Recruitment outreach efforts were facilitated by the executive director at each research site in addition to email and phone calls. A total of 12 participants took part in the study (11 males and 1 female; also see **Table 1**). Pseudonyms were used throughout the document to protect the privacy of participants. Individuals were considered eligible to take part in the study if they self-reported as Black or African-American, owned or worked on a farm for over 1 year in the Mid-South (e.g., Arkansas, Mississippi, or Tennessee area), and were over 18 years of age. Before participating in the study, a short demographic pre-survey screener was administered to determine eligibility. During recruitment, participants first signed up with the lead author (AC) during his on-site visits at both locations, where he contacted them later to establish a time and location that worked best for them to meet. Once a time and location were established, he met with participants to conduct the interviews. Before each interview, he explained all the procedures and let each participant know that their participation was voluntary and that they could choose to opt-out at any point during our conversation.

TABLE 1 | Participant Characteristics (N = 11).

	Age	Sex	Production	Education
Gregory	56	Male	soybean/ corn/ produce	BS
Delvin	62	Male	soybean/ corn/cotton	HS
Lawrence	70	Male	produce	BS
Keith	60	Male	soybean	PhD
Jesse	52	Male	produce	PhD
William	62	Male	soybean	BS
Jackson	65	Male	soybean/ corn	BA
Charles	59	Male	soybean/livestock	HS
John	69	Male	Soybean	HS
Levi	71	Male	Livestock	BS
Jeffrey*	64	Male	soybean/corn/produce	HS
Mary*	59	Female	soybean/ corn/produce	HS

BS, Bachelor of Science; HS, Highschool Degree; PhD, Doctor of Philosophy, PhD, and BA, Bachelor of Arts.
 *participants are married.

Once all procedures had been clarified, each participant signed the informed consent form and was given a copy for their records. All interviews were held both at the physical site of each organization’s site as well as the homes of participants, which allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of emic views/perspectives (Creswell, 1998). Accommodations were made to use on-site office spaces and meeting rooms to conduct interviews when possible. Interviews averaged from 20 to 65 min in length and resulted in 60 single-spaced pages of transcriptions. Recordings were stored and secured on a password-protected smartphone. Audio data was destroyed 18 months after the completion date. Approval and review of the study were facilitated by the University of Memphis Institutional Review Board in February 2017.

**Data Collection
 In-depth Interviews**

The primary method of data collection was in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The interview protocol consisted of a 10-question semi-structured guide (see **Table 2**). Each interview began by focusing on general meaning and understanding. The second part of the interviews focused on uncovering lived experiences and circumstances. Finally, the interviews concluded with the participants own suggestions for interpretations and solutions.

Fieldnotes

Field notes were recorded continuously throughout the project by AC (including during interviews), emphasizing a reflexive approach (Madison, 2005). He did not keep a schedule or format for field notes; writing consisted of jotting down ideas or

TABLE 2 | Questions from in-depth interview guide.

1. How did you get into farming? (e.g., family business, etc.)
2. How/where do you sell your goods (e.g., farmers markets, etc.)?
3. Tell me about your personal experience as an African-American farmer living in the U.S. South.
4. How would you describe the types of support available for African-American farmers (e.g., support groups, community coalitions)?
5. I am interested in how you perceive the plight of African-American farmers in the contemporary agricultural landscape. Can you tell me about that in your own experience? Are there unique circumstances facing African-American farmers today?
6. Do you feel that racism is still an issue?
 - (If yes): In what ways do you still see racism as a problem?
 - (If no): Why do you feel that racism is no longer an issue?
7. Tell me about the role of land ownership as it pertains to African-American farmers
8. Tell me about the process of receiving government funding for your farms. Is the process different for White farmers? Have you been affected by the recent *Pigford* settlement?
9. I am exploring the role of farming within the African-American community. Do you have any thoughts about the emphasis (or lack thereof) on farming in the African-American community?
10. Is there anything I didn’t ask that you would like to tell me?

observations that he found insightful or noteworthy. Throughout data collection, he compiled a total of six hand-written pages.

Coding and Analysis

Data analysis comprised two main steps: first, an inductive thematic analysis using the constant comparison method (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Silverman, 2006); and then, mapping emergent themes onto the core constructs of the CCA. Thematic analysis involves a 6-phase coding process: Phase 1—familiarization with data; Phase 2—generating initial codes; Phase 3—searching for themes; Phase 4—reviewing themes; Phase 5—defining and naming themes; Phase 6—final analysis and write-up of the report (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The primary author (AC) conducted the inductive thematic analysis, ensuring that the emergent themes were determined by the data. The secondary author (AA) reviewed the emergent themes and coded independently to ensure reliability, taking notes of intersections between the emergent themes and CCA. The final result was the identification of two main themes and four sub-themes.

Phases 1 and 2 were used to identify distinct concepts which could be labeled and sorted. Here, we informally grouped concepts that we considered related to the same phenomenon under broad categories (e.g., policy, farmer experiences). During the 3rd and 4th phases, we refined the conceptual categories to include clearly defined properties and definitions. Emergent themes during this stage included infrastructural barriers, inequality, feelings of pessimism, challenges of capital-intensive farming and solutions for change, and emergent sub-themes included education and awareness, buy-in from outside institutions and focus on family. In phases 5 and 6, we continued the process of stratifying related associations which led us to two distinct themes: erasure of the African-American farming tradition/land loss and solutions for change, and four distinct sub-themes: discriminatory practices of the USDA, shifts in community attitudes toward farming, education and awareness and community and family involvement. During this stage, unique sub-themes which were not cross-referenced in the data by other participants were combined into broader themes and categories or removed altogether (e.g., challenges of capital-intensive farming, buy-in from outside institutions).

After the completion of the thematic analysis, we began the process of mapping the emergent themes onto the CCA conceptual framework. We started by creating operative descriptions of CCA constructs that mirrored our context-specific research setting, using an iterative approach throughout the mapping process (Silverman, 2006). This is important to note because while the CCA offers a uniformed set of constructs, the research-specific meaning of CCA constructs is not fixed, and can only be decided by the unique context of each study setting (MacFarlane and O'Reilly-de Brún, 2012). Thus, we had to merge our data from the thematic analysis and the intended meaning of the CCA constructs to determine related associations, which included a process of breaking down the constructs of the CCA and re-conceptualizing them with reference to our particular study setting (MacFarlane and O'Reilly-de Brún, 2012).

These steps allowed us to take an inductive approach to data analysis as opposed to deductively merging data into a priori categories. Using a heuristic approach, we made the following theoretical associations using our sub-themes: (1) discriminatory practices of the USDA—structure; (2) shifts in community attitudes toward farming—culture; (3) education/awareness and (4) community/family involvement—agency.

RESULTS

Two major themes emerged from the thematic analysis: (1) erasure of the African-American farming tradition and land loss; and (2) solutions for change. Based on the core principles of the CCA, below is a presentation of findings that emerged from the interview data.

Erasure of the African-American Farming Tradition and Land Loss

Participants at both research sites described multifarious ways that the African-American farming tradition and land stewardship has been lost over the past several decades, which they described at various levels (e.g., interpersonal, community, structural). Specifically, farmers identified two main examples: (1) discriminatory practices of the USDA; and (2) shifts in community attitudes toward farming.

Discriminatory Practices of the USDA: Structure

The CCA highlights the role of structure in reinforcing disparities, noting that “differentials in outcomes ultimately reside in inequalities in the organization of societies, institutions, and organizations” (Dutta et al., 2013, p. 161). Historically, dominant social and institutional structures have marginalized the African-American farming community while simultaneously appropriating their influence and cultural traditions within the modern agricultural landscape (Hinson and Robinson, 2008). In recent years, the most significant contributor to the decline of African-American farming has been the bureaucratic and discriminatory practices of the USDA (Wood and Ragar, 2012). This was reflected in our interviews, as many of the participants possessed a keen sense of distrust and skepticism toward the USDA and its related policies and practices, referencing several examples of ways that they faced and witnessed discrimination at the structural level. As William (male, 62) asserted, “it wasn't mother nature that discriminated over the Black farmer, it wasn't the insects, it wasn't drought, it wasn't famine, it's discrimination now of the pen.” Jackson (male, 65) described in detail the discriminatory tactics used by Department of Agriculture officials:

Discrimination is a legal term. If you have Black farmer A with 100 acres, and White farmer B with 100 acres, all other things remaining the same, the insects will not discriminate against A or B, the sun will not shine more, the rain will not, so if the Black man is not capable of producing, when at one time we brought him here for no other reason but to produce, now all of a sudden he is not a good producer, now all of a sudden he cannot afford to pay for the tractor, he cannot pay for the chemicals.

Jackson's narrative draws attention to the unequal and racist lending practices of loan allocation from the USDA offices, mainly as it related to the purposeful delaying of loans to prevent optimal crop yields. As many African-American farmers did not possess the proper amount of invested capital to farm on their own, they were solely reliant on the assistance of the USDA to provide them with the necessary equipment and resources to farm. By denying or delaying African-American farmers loans, many farmers could not pay back the adequate monies in time, allowing USDA to seize operations that went into default and control the economic structuring and racial hegemony of the industry. As Jackson put it, "Black farmers were discriminated against, not in the field, but in the banking and the boardroom!" Conversely, USDA awarded White farmers in the same situation larger sums of money. Charles (male, 59) experienced this firsthand while waiting at the USDA office:

If you miss your opportunity to plant, see it's like with corn, after April 15th, it goes down a bushel a day. And I planted corn in May, you know, waiting to try to get my loan, soybeans the same way. In other words, it takes money. And White folks which were all in the FSA (USDA) office, didn't believe that a Black man should have no more than \$10,000 to farm with. But at the same time, when a White farmer come in there he was given 50 or 60 or \$100,000!

Other farmers shared stories of being confronted by similar circumstances throughout their career. Though none reported facing drastic consequences (e.g., loan default, land foreclosure), many participants knew of others who experienced such challenges and offered detailed criticisms and reported feelings of anger and resentment toward the USDA. In our field notes, we noted deep tension reflected in the farmer's narratives when discussing experiences with the USDA. Participants felt overtly discriminated against and perceived current USDA policies as purposefully constructed to reinforce social control, maintain status quo relationships, and eradicate the African-American farming tradition while separating African-American farmers from their connection to the land.

William saw USDA discriminatory practices as the main culprit in the historical land loss of the African-American community: "The accumulative effect of discrimination now has allowed us to lose most of the land that we acquired in 1910—we are for all intents and purposes, extinct!" For Levi (male, 71), the implications of USDA discriminatory practices spanned further than the farming community, as he suggested that the USDA was responsible for reinforcing broader disparities among the African-American population. During our conversation, he described what he perceived as hypocrisy in USDA funding policies in that they market USDA-approved products to African-Americans on food stamps, while at the same time denying their ability to grow food and contribute to the agricultural landscape:

Interestingly enough, the Department of Agriculture provides food stamps to the African-American community, but they won't give the Black farmer a loan to grow the food... so it's not about food. We can buy all of the food, they'll give us all the where-with-all to buy, we just don't want you to grow. Because its competitive, it involves a source of financial independence, a source of wealth.

All of the other minority groups come to this country for one reason and one reason only, they can use their skills, their skillsets that they acquired and they perfected for thousands of years. We were brought here for our skillsets, to produce, to grow food... But unfortunately, we were never rewarded for those benefits, not even then and not today.

Levi's narrative addresses the larger thesis in this article by connecting the erasure of African-American farmers directly to wealth disparities within the broader African-American community. By marketing USDA-approved products to African-Americans on food stamps while simultaneously preventing African-American farmers from securing loans, the USDA exacerbated land loss within the African-American community, which has created large disparities in wealth between African-Americans and Whites. Subsequently, these disparities may have contributed to disproportionately poorer diet-related health outcomes among African-Americans, including rates of food insecurity and weight-related comorbidities. The decline of the African-American farming tradition has forced many African-Americans on food stamps to rely on food items produced and distributed by corporate agribusiness supply chains (e.g., commodity crops). Corporate agribusiness is largely dominated by Whites (91%; United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019).

Shifts in Community Attitudes Toward Farming: Culture

Participants suggested that in-group attitudes toward farming among the African-American community have also contributed to the erasure of the African-American farming tradition. In the context of the CCA, culture refers to the local interpretation of values, beliefs, and practices of a group or community (Dutta, 2008). Participants stated that many African-Americans did not see the cultural value of farming and were unwilling to get involved in any capacity. During our interviews, they propositioned several reasons for this paradox, including problematic associations with slavery and sharecropping as well as the general difficulties that come with intensive farm labor. In the excerpt below, Jeffrey (male, 64) shared his thoughts about how African-Americans' troubled agricultural past has influenced attitudes toward farming, particularly among the elderly generation:

It will probably be the next generation or the next two generations of Blacks, those that have absolutely no history of say, the grievances... We are still hung up over the grievances in agriculture, and so we have not been able to assess the opportunities. So when you say farming in the Black community, those of us who remember what it was like picking cotton, slopping hogs, feeding chickens, there is a little Black box, in our psychic [sic] somewhere, that causes us to shake our head involuntarily.

Located in Jeffrey's narrative is an articulation of the communicative stigma that is connected with slavery and its implications on the African-American farming tradition. By being disconnected from the cultural value of land and the farming process, the African-American community has

missed opportunities to gain economic empowerment and preserve their agricultural roots. Gregory (male, 56) shared a similar observation when describing the apprehension of older generations to embrace farming: “We’re victims of too narrow of perspective. You can’t get beyond the first level of farming, when you think about the drudgery, the pain, the history of it.” For Jeffrey and Gregory, the negative portrayals of agriculture among elderly African-Americans has complicated efforts to rethink dominant narratives and reclaim farming traditions.

Participants also shared concerns that young African-Americans were not entering the field to replace the increasingly elderly population of existing farmers, which threatened to disenfranchise the African-American farming community further. Participants levied several possible explanations for this exigency, including a lack of passion or work ethic toward farming, dearth of opportunities and access to resources and lack of family support. The excerpts below highlight some of the responses from participants describing associated challenges of getting the younger generation involved with farming:

We don’t have a chance! I know you got young boys, if you was to say, “well, we got 200 acres right over here, we want you to farm. We gonna give you the money to farm it with,” and write him up, some of these young Black fellas would take it. But trying to go start on your own? You’d be better off going to get you a job cause know you ain’t gonna do no good on it!

Delvin (male, 62)

I don’t blame them young Black men from trying to farm, cause there ain’t no way for him to make a go at it if you can’t get the loans to farm it with. And you’ve got to have ‘time loans,’ you can’t just borrow \$50,000 and owe it back right away, you’re going to have some time to where you can set up a plan and wait on them to get right. So, you ain’t never gonna get no Black farmers here, not in Mississippi!

Delvin (male, 62)

Young people nowadays, they don’t want no part of it. I might as well just be honest. And that comes from the work ethics that you learn when you were young. When I was young, I couldn’t wait to get out there to plow a mule, and then I couldn’t wait to drive the tractor when daddy bought a tractor. And the families, you had a certain position in that family. In other words, “junior, you do this.” If it’s nothing but pump the water for the cows. It was a close-knit type thing, you know. But nowadays nobody cares.

Lawrence (male, 70).

The above excerpts capture the multitude of complexities and challenges of passing the farming tradition down to younger African-American farmers. Delvin’s narratives, while accounting for the lack of interest on the part of the younger generation, suggest that there are larger structural constraints at play, which may prevent the youth from participating in the industry. For Lawrence, a deep tension was reflected in the overall laissez-faire attitude that he felt many young African-Americans exhibited. Opposite of Delvin’s narrative, which attributed root causes of the problem mostly outside of the hands of those affected, he centered his critique at the family structure and the youths themselves for not cultivating the proper work ethic his own family prioritized with him. Both perspectives illustrate the multi-level nature of the exigency.

Participants attributed the main reason for the shift in community attitudes on farming to the lack of family support and passing down of generational knowledge and education, particularly with regards to land ownership. William suggested that this phenomenon first started in the late 1930s, when new industries and job opportunities became available for the first time for African-Americans. “When the alternatives in the Midwest, the North, and the Northeast became available—the war machinery, the automobile industry, the textile industry—Black folks started to move.” As more opportunities became available, many African-Americans chose industrial jobs over farming, often selling off their owned land in the process. However, as many of those industries folded or transformed in subsequent decades, many of those same individuals were not able to recover financially. He continued:

Unfortunately, now that industrialization is waning, we are looking for other opportunities, to plant our feet economically speaking, and the land that we had acquired in 1910, the 15 million acres, is now all of a sudden gone. So there has been this bittersweet push and pull effect. Discrimination was pushing us, but the call to want to go to the bright lights was pulling. So between the pushing and the pulling, we see now that like the polar bear, the ice is melting all around us.

In addition to the “push-pull” effect of economic migration that William described, participants identified overall neglect and a lack of understanding about the value of land as other contributors to the erasure of the African-American farming tradition and intensifying land loss. As asserted by Gregory:

We have to know what to do with land, we have to own land, we can’t lose any more land. We have lost millions of acres by neglect, by being ripped off, by not understanding what the land has to value in our minds.

A primary cause for this as described by participants were the bureaucratic complexities of “heir property.” As described above, heir property is fractioned land ownership or partition sales. In most cases, when a landowner died, the property was passed down to the landowner’s children through the formal process of creating a will. However, with heir property, the land was handed down informally where it was held in common, making it difficult to determine who the legal owners were after several generations. As many African-American families migrated to different parts of the U.S. to seek better opportunities, many lost interest in owning their share of partitioned land and would sell their share back to the government. The millions of acres lost by neglect that Gregory refers to draws attention to the disparities in wealth that heir property has created for the African-American community. He provided an analogy in the excerpt below:

People look at “big daddy” and “big momma” sweated for 40 years to pay for 200 acres, and they cultivated 75 of it. And the kids are now living in LA, Houston and Dallas, Atlanta, go back home and say “all they got on there is that ground where they used to grow cotton, I don’t want no more of that!” And then they got about 150 acres of woods, all of them trees and grass,

what do I need with that? They don't understand! They may be going home and looking at that home site... and they could be standing on three million dollars... If they just understood what they had. Ownership is essential to our forward progress. We've got to educate, and teach ourselves not to marginalize what we have and what our possibilities are, and it starts with that farm!

Solutions for Change

In addition to discussing the multitude of cultural barriers which contributed to the erasure of the African-American farming tradition over the past several decades, participants also noted various solutions to address the crisis. Farmers described two main solutions: (1) education and awareness; and (2) community and family involvement.

Education and Awareness: Agency

One of the central tenets of the CCA is agency. Here, agency is defined as "the capacity of cultural members to enact their choices and to participate actively in negotiating the structures within which they find themselves" (Dutta, 2008, p. 7). Within the CCA, the concept of agency becomes significant as it manifests "in a particular cultural context where community-centered meanings are exchanged, constructed and reconstructed." (Dillon and Basu, 2013, p. 127). By privileging the subaltern voice in both the identification of problems and in the articulation of relevant solutions, the CCA allowed participants to communicate their needs better and provide a more authentic representation of their lived realities. Participants described education and awareness as a main solution to address the African-American farming crisis, positing the inherent lack of understanding of the opportunities that farming offered as the main barrier to generating interest in farming in African-American communities. Participants highlighted concerns such as mismanaged land ownership, unfamiliarity with technology, and close-mindedness as root causes for the problem. Referencing the strategies of previous generations, Keith (male, 60) pointed to the various social and political benefits that land ownership affords individuals and communities:

One thing that our ancestors did was they went and they got land! If it was the worst piece of land in the world, they went and they got land. You have to have land, and that land presented them with a set of opportunities, the ability to own, to produce, to sell the legitimacy of getting into the system, that's what is so important about land... The land says you have a place where you have your established source of opportunity, security, this is yours, you know? Nobody can violate it, if they do, they do it at their own risk. Having land is really important.

Keith's narrative draws attention to the generational disconnect when it comes to valuing land. Previous generations saw land ownership not only as a way to provide a sense of security, but also as a source of financial freedom, which he suggests may offer similar opportunities to generate wealth and break cycles of poverty and disenfranchisement among current generations. When addressing potential solutions to mitigate land loss and increase interest in farming, Gregory discussed the importance of being educated on potential business opportunities:

Well, I think one thing, if you are going to have a thriving society, the key to it is education. And I think that right now, where Black people are positioned, is that they need to be educated about the opportunity and benefits of broadening their perspective. You never know, that from that farm, from that one soybean, comes 1,000 variations. And each one of those variations is another market, another economic opportunity for someone. And jobs, and everything else. We have to be educated... Once we become educated, possibilities become tremendous!

As described above, as farming has shifted toward more capital-intensive forms of mechanization and equipment, African-American participation in the agricultural landscape has waned. To become reintegrated into the industry, participants discussed the importance of understanding the role of technology in agriculture to have a better chance of succeeding in the mechanized farming world of today. Though this sample of participants had enough economic capital to stay up to date with current farming practices, they shared strong opinions about how contemporary agribusiness had affected the state of African-American farming and what solutions could be levied. During a conversation with William, he elucidated how the landscape of farming had changed in recent years, and how the overall lack of education and entrepreneurial know-how was negatively affecting the African-American community:

When we start talking about farming, most Black folk don't know that we use tractors now with the GPS satellite system. You see how straight those rows are? (points to the screen) That deal right there is in tune with 24 satellites, that guy (the driver) doesn't even have his hand on the wheel. But now, the Black community doesn't know that... So, we have not developed an appreciation for the new or the advent of agriculture and the technological advantages, to where we are willing to say "let's go back and look at this new industry."

Community and Family Involvement: Agency

Moreover, in addition to education and awareness, other participants articulated the fundamental importance of getting excited about farming and getting the community more involved and interested. With the growing popularity of direct-to-consumer networks and increased consumer consciousness supporting local farmers, many farmers felt that there were still many opportunities available for African-American farmers to have success. Jesse (male, 52) mentioned the importance of creating bottom-up solutions to get community buy-in to change the existing paradigm:

We need a groundswell, I think. You need to create an interest for going into farming, and then putting some support measures in place, where mentoring or land access or favorable turns for loans to get some of these young people to see farming as an opportunity. And I think in the future, a lot of new converts into farming, it's not a problem getting African-Americans and other minority groups into agriculture, but the cost of farming, when we look at that sector alone, that is what the problem is.

Expanding on his solution of creating bottom-up solutions, Jesse highlighted the importance of reintegrating the African-American family in the structuring of farm enterprises and getting young families involved early in the process of farming. As described by previous participants, as older African-American farmers continue to exit the business, new generations are not replacing the farmers at an adequate rate. In the excerpt below, he mentions the integral role that young adult African-Americans can play in helping to maintain and revive the African-American farming tradition.

There are a lot of different approaches, but I think what is similar in all of the approaches is to keep the family engaged in farming. Right? And so, to overcome the Black farming population, the people in their 30s that are interested in doing it have to keep their kids engaged in doing it. And build another generation of people that farm. I don't see any other way short of that to do it.

Further, to address potential structural and cultural barriers that come with generating start-up farming businesses among African-American youth, Jesse again referenced the integral role of family in supporting such ventures. Below he highlights alternative solutions such as creating small-scale, direct market outlets that center on selling directly to family networks:

By showing young Black kids how to make money from farming, from producing vegetables—like if you have a market garden in the city, I think that young people should be able to market. Maybe—and it doesn't have to be coming to a farmers market, but that's one of the ways that they can do it. I think that a young Black child could sell vegetables, get a commitment from their families, if they have a good family structure, not a nuclear family, but the aunts and the uncles and the grandmas and all of that to buy from them. I think that can be done.

DISCUSSION

In this qualitative study, we applied a culture-centered framework to reveal some of the unique lived experiences and perspectives of a small cohort of African-American farmers in the U.S. Mid-South and drew attention to the role of critical methods as an innovative approach to addressing the African-American farming crisis. The experiences of participants were encompassed by two themes, which were the following (1) erasure of the African-American farming tradition and land loss; and (2) solutions to change.

Gilbert et al. (2002) attributed African-American farm and land loss to the forced sales due to “heir property,” lack of access to government programs, and continuing racial discrimination by lenders and government agencies. Similarly, Green et al. (2011) stated that the plantation political economy, sharecropping systems, limits on civil rights and discrimination by the USDA were responsible for the decline. The congruence of grievances between farmers across studies and from many different regions of the United States suggest that discriminatory policies and a social and economic climate may have prevented African American farmers from thriving in America, which

implies that solutions to address this crisis should involve system-level changes.

However, despite the structural challenges African-American farmers face, farmers cited education, and awareness as an entry point to address the crisis. While farmers drew attention to larger-scale barriers such as the unequal and racist lending practices of loan allocation from the USDA, the solutions that they proposed centered on rhetorics of empowerment and self-sustainability and were located exclusively at the community and individual levels. This highlights a level of dissonance between how farmers perceived the crisis and how they felt compelled to act on it. Research highlighting material and symbolic forms of empowerment and individual-level solutions for change among the African-American farming community has been well documented (Balvanz et al., 2011; Fiskio et al., 2016; Touzeau, 2019). While these previous studies highlighted the crucial role of community and individual-level solutions in addressing the crisis, for widespread social change it is imperative to shift the broader conversation to more structural level interventions (e.g., federal loan reform, farm subsidy programs). More importantly, it is critical to gain the confidence of African-American farmers, who have traditionally been self-reliant—perhaps based on their justified distrust and disillusionment of the system—to participate in such reform efforts. Approaches such as the CCA, with its focus on grassroots organizing and collective agency, can serve an integral role in facilitating such endeavors.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH SCHOLARS AND PRACTITIONERS

We asserted in this paper that the erasure of the African-American farming tradition within mainstream discourses created communication inequities that disenfranchise the African-American community and may reinforce health disparities among this population. Previous critical health communication scholarship similarly drew attention to the role of communication as an enabler of exploitation (Acharya and Dutta, 2012), stigmatization (Newman et al., 2014) and marginalization (de Souza, 2009) in health contexts. However, because our research questions targeted broader cultural and structural barriers and legacies of racism and discrimination, we were unable to make explicit associations between the erasure of African-American farming and population-level health disparities. Nonetheless, our findings (e.g., participant responses regarding land loss and wealth disparities) do present unique entry points for public health professionals to conceptualize these disparities in a broader context. Below we provide several examples of how practitioners might expand their scope of assessment when addressing diet-related health issues, particularly within low-income communities and communities of color.

One way that practitioners can think about addressing diet-related health disparities in is by highlighting the importance of including farmers of color in health-promoting initiatives such as the AFM. Previous scholarship has highlighted the multitude of benefits of AFM, particularly in the context of community-level food access, an issue that disproportionately

affects low-income communities and communities of color (Goodman et al., 2012). Despite these benefits, ample evidence has documented that many of these communities are not participating in the movement (Slocum, 2007; Agyeman and Alkon, 2011). For public health professionals, exploring aspects such as spatial geography and the role of institutional cultures in encouraging African-American farmers to participate in the movement may improve diet-related health outcomes in these communities. Examples might include culture-centered outreach efforts to African-American farmers, provision and subsidy programs to help alleviate financial barriers to participation and calls for more diverse management and leadership positions within these spaces.

Another way that practitioners might expand their scope of assessment in addressing diet-related disparities is by incorporating ways to address the cultural erasure and re-appropriation of the African-American farming tradition and related practices, particularly in the organic farming movement. Past studies have drawn attention to the implicit Whiteness in the production, distribution, and consumption of organic food (Guthman, 2014). As the philosophies and values of the movement have shifted away from the influences of traditional African practices in recent decades, much of the African-American community may not be able to identify with the movement's revisionist roots and feel excluded from participation. By working to complicate this narrative and de-center the movement's implicit attachment to Whiteness may provide public health professionals an entry point to better address diet-related disparities within communities of color. Examples might include more inclusive imagery and representation in marketing and promotional materials (e.g., food conferences, farm tourism, community-supported agriculture stores), efforts to promote preservation and acknowledgment of African-American contributions to the movement (e.g., key individuals, moments) and rethinking dominant narratives about organic farming in the U.S.

Lastly, public health professionals can expand their scope by addressing the important role of maintaining and preserving land ownership among communities of color. A primary grievance in the narratives was the lack of education on the part of the African-American community when it came to owning and preserving land, which has resulted in them losing nearly 15 million acres since 1910—and subsequently, much of their political, social and economic power. From an ecological perspective, land ownership has been shown to posit several benefits, including generational wealth, food security, and political autonomy (Chowa, 2007; Binder and Binder, 2016; Pfeffer and Killewald, 2017). Over time, encouraging land ownership may contribute to a reduction in wealth disparities among these communities.

METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE CCA

The CCA is uniquely situated to address components of the African-American farming crisis. Dominant discourses observing this phenomena are centered on exploring historical

timelines using top-down, evidence-based data such as census tracts, policy documents and government reports, and therefore do not reveal the perspectives of African-American farmers themselves (Reynolds, 2002; USDA NASS, 2017). By de-normalizing dominant narratives and highlighting alternative paradigms, privileging non-traditional forms of resistance by challenging norms and taken-for-granted assumptions and engaging broader structures of erasure and oppression, the CCA adds to understandings of how African-American farmers describe barriers (e.g., legacies of racism and discrimination) and opportunities for farming in the modern landscape.

The CCA has been used by other scholars to address diet-related health disparities among marginalized populations (see Koenig et al., 2012; Dutta and Jamil, 2013; Dutta et al., 2016), however this study is the first to take an inductive approach to map emergent themes onto the core constructs of CCA. Employing this two-step strategy to our data analysis was beneficial in several ways. To begin, because our study was not focused on making explicit connections to health (e.g., studying the effects of discrimination on farmer's health), we had apprehensions about applying the CCA as an a priori conceptual model. Having the freedom to create operative descriptions of CCA constructs that mirrored our context-specific research setting and apply them as they emerged across the data allowed us to resolve some of the ambiguity we felt selecting categories during the thematic analysis. This freedom also allowed us to make clearer and more accurate connections between the participant's narratives and broader health disparities.

LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This study has several limitations. First, the sample size was small and regionally homogenous. A larger and geographically diverse sample of African-American farmers would allow for broader and more nuanced analysis. Additional studies that include farmers from these locations would provide stronger evidence and more nuanced findings. Second, the study comprised mainly of older farmers. Due to the array of documented challenges that younger African-American farmers face, including these perspectives would provide a deeper and more accurate contextual narrative. Also, there remain unexplored dynamics of African-American farming, such as how the recent trend of immigrant farm labor has affected current African-American farmers. Future research in this area should seek to incorporate these concepts.

In conclusion, this study is significant because it contributes new knowledge to scholarship on the African-American farming crisis. Historically, the foundations of agriculture in the U.S. have been built on the skill and expertise of African-American farmers. Initially brought over in the slave trade in the early 1600s, African-American farmers supplied not only the manpower, but a unique skill set to farming that White landowners did not possess (Littlefield, 1981). Unfortunately, as time has gone on, African-Americans have not been properly recognized for their contributions to the agricultural landscape, which has had several deleterious effects for the African-American

community, including disparities in wealth, rates of poverty and food insecurity.

Over time, this combination of effects have led many public health programs to target African-American communities for healthy food campaigns aimed at alleviating the associated economic and health-related costs of diet-related health disparities. However, many of these programs do not go far enough in their intervention efforts, often addressing surface-level symptoms instead of systemic root causes. If public health professionals and policymakers are to be committed to establishing health equity among marginalized sectors of society, it is essential that they listen to these narratives of discrimination, struggle and meaning-making and work collaboratively with African-American farmers and communities in seeking spaces for structural transformation toward addressing land loss and health inequality. In this paper, using the CCA allowed us to critique dominant narratives about the legacy of African-American farming, connecting the erasure of African-American farming to the broader context of wealth disparities.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The datasets for this article are not publicly available because of participant privacy. Access to data can be made available upon request. Inquiries should be directed to Andrew Carter, andrew.carter@sjsu.edu.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Jessica McMorris, Beverly Jacobik—University of Memphis IRB board. To participate in the study, individuals had to self-report as Black or African-American, own or work on a farm for over 1 year in the Mid-South (e.g., Arkansas, Mississippi, or Tennessee area), and be over 18 years of age.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

AC drafted all major sections of the manuscript. AA assisted with revisions and structuring of the manuscript.

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The reviewer JO declared a shared affiliation, with no collaboration, with one of the authors AA to the handling Editor.

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