



HHS Public Access

Author manuscript

J Aging Health. Author manuscript; available in PMC 2023 June 01.

Published in final edited form as:

J Aging Health. 2022 June ; 34(3): 301–306. doi:10.1177/08982643221086334.

Contemporary Research on Older Black Americans, a Special Issue of *Journal of Aging and Health* in Honor of the Life and Legacy of James S. Jackson

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Abstract

This special issue of the *Journal of Aging and Health* honors the memory of James Jackson by elevating his many research contributions to the physical and mental health of older Black Americans. The articles focus on the central problems and questions that James Jackson addressed throughout his illustrious career. All articles in the special issue focus on older Black Americans and include at least one of the following elements. (1) Articles based on the National Survey of American Life, the data set for which James Jackson was the Principal Investigator. (2) Articles that utilize the Environmental Affordances Model which was developed by James Jackson. (3) Articles that include the Everyday Discrimination scale which was originally published by David Williams, James Jackson and colleagues. (4) Articles based on the Health and Retirement Study (HRS), the data set for which James Jackson served as Editor for a special issue of *The Gerontologist*.

This special issue of the *Journal of Aging and Health* commemorates the work and contributions of Dr. James S. Jackson. James S. Jackson (1944-2020) made many unique and ground-breaking contributions to the field of Gerontology, as well as other social science disciplines and professional fields. Although his primary training was in social psychology, he also contributed to areas as diverse as aging and gerontology, Black families and generational analyses, Black psychiatric epidemiology and health behaviors, Black political behavior, Black ethnicity and immigration, and survey methodology among Black populations.

James Jackson was the Founding Director and Leader of the Program for Research on Black Americans at the Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan. As Director of the Program for Research on Black Americans, James Jackson: 1) was the Principal Investigator of the first national surveys of Black Americans based on probability sampling (e.g., the National Survey of Black Americans, the National Black Election Survey, the National Survey of American Life), 2) developed novel sampling methods to improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of sampling Black Americans, 3) challenged the scientific validity of using a white comparison group in the National Survey of Black Americans and the National Black Election Survey, instead championing the study of within group differences among Black Americans, 4) conducted the first national survey of Black Caribbeans (as part of the

National Survey of American Life), 5) along with David Williams, created the Major and Everyday Discrimination scales in the 1995 Detroit Area Study (this scale has been utilized in 100's of papers and is one of the strongest predictors of poor mental and physical health), and 6) developed what has commonly been termed the Affordance Model which explores the seemingly contradictory facts that despite high levels of poverty, poor housing, and high crime neighborhoods African Americans have lower rates of psychiatric disorders.

As previously noted, James Jackson was the Principal Investigator of the National Survey of Black Americans and the National Survey of American Life. These studies have had a tremendous impact. For instance, numerous first-of-their-kind Black mental health studies were published using these data. This includes analyses on help-seeking, religion, and mental health, extended family relations as both risk and protective of Black mental health, group identity and mental health, DSM IV depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, PTSD, suicidal behaviors, social phobia, discrimination and mental health, depressive symptoms, and symptoms of anxiety. Unlike many studies that investigate mental health from a deficit perspective, the James Jackson surveys embody a strengths perspective. These analyses incorporated a consideration of context and investigated various protective factors for mental functioning including religious participation, church support, family support, friend support, group identity, and racial socialization.

Jackson's work and studies based on these data collections have made a tremendous impact on several sub-fields in psychology, gerontology and numerous other social science areas. Indicators of his influence in academia include memorials and commemorations of his work including : 1) the Gerontological Society of America, Society for Research in Child Development and the Association of Black Sociologists held memorial services, 2) the National Institute of Mental Health launched a James Jackson Memorial Award, 3) the Gerontological Society of America established the James Jackson Mentoring Award, 4) the Alzheimer's Association launched a James Jackson Memorial Lecture and 5) the University of Michigan commemorated his legacy by establishing the James S. Jackson Distinguished Career Award for Diversity.

One of James Jackson's major and enduring legacies is his mentoring of a generation of Black academics who have assumed leadership positions in their fields. For examples, James Jackson was the PI of the NIH funded Michigan Center for Urban African American Aging Research (MCUAAAR). The MCUAAAR has been in existence for more than 20 years and has been extremely successful in mentoring minority (mostly African American) junior faculty. Former junior faculty who were mentored at the MCUAAAR have gone on to become widely recognized experts in their fields.

Under Dr. Jackson's leadership, the Program for Research on Black Americans (PRBA) emerged as the premier transdisciplinary research organization focused on the lives and well-being of Black Americans. The PRBA also served a critical role in the training of emerging scholars including doctoral students, postdoctoral fellows, and early career faculty. PRBA continues to be an important center for research and training of emerging scholars and has contributed to the development of an outstanding group of scholars that have gone on to important roles in the academy. James's proteges include Provosts, Associate Provosts,

Deans, Department Chairs, Endowed Professors, and leaders in their fields of study. The information in Table 1 provides a list of select Gerontologists who were mentored by James Jackson, PRBA and the MCUAAAR (because of space limitations the complete list of PRBA and MCUAAAR alumni could not be presented). Another indicator of James Jackson's success in mentoring is that several of his former students have, like him, achieved the status of being in the Top 2% of cited scientists across all disciplines/areas in the world (Baas et al., 2021). This includes Linda M. Chatters, Harold Neighbors, Vickie Mays, Robert Sellers, Robert Joseph Taylor, and David R. Williams who are in the category of the Top 2% in citations over their careers and Lisa Barnes and Karen Lincoln for the Top 2% citations for the year 2020.

During his illustrious career, James received many honors and held major leadership positions in academia, as well as in national professional organizations. James Jackson's professional leadership started early with his role as president of Association of Black Psychologists during which he confronted the leadership of the American Psychological Association on structural racism at the annual APA convention. Other leadership positions include Director of the Institute for Social Research, Director of the Center for African and African American Studies (University of Michigan), and past president of both the Association of Black Psychologists and the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues. He served on the National Advisory Mental Health Council of the National Institute of Mental Health and the National Institute on Aging Advisory Council and the Board of Scientific Counselors. He served as a member of the Advisory Council to the Director of NIH. In 2002, he was elected to the Institute of Medicine. He was a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the W.E.B. Du Bois Fellow, the American Academy of Political and Social Science. He was a Member of the Board on Behavioral, Cognitive, and Sensory Sciences, National Research Council. He was also a member of the National Science Board on the request of then President Obama. Readers of this journal may be familiar to Jackson's contribution in the area of Gerontology. However, his research and mentoring has had a major and enduring impact on the fields of Psychology, Public Health, Social Work, Sociology, Psychiatry and Political Science. Many consider James Jackson and Kenneth Clark as the two most influential African American psychologists in history.

The goal of this special issue of the *Journal of Aging and Health* is to honor the memory of James Jackson by elevating his many research contributions of the physical and mental health of older Black Americans. The articles in this special issue focus on the central problems and questions that James Jackson addressed throughout his long and illustrious career. To that end, all articles in the special issue focus on older Black Americans and include at least one of the following elements for which James played a major role. (1) Articles that are based on the National Survey of American Life, the data set for which James Jackson was the Principal Investigator. The NSAL is notable as it provides information on both African Americans and Black Caribbeans, as well as non-Latino whites. (2) Articles that utilize the Environmental Affordances Model which was developed by James Jackson (Jackson et al., 2010; Mezuk et al., 2010; Mezuk et al., 2013). (3) Articles that include the Everyday and Major Discrimination measures originally used in the 1995 Detroit Area Study (PIs James Jackson and David Williams) which was originally published by David Williams, James Jackson and colleagues (Williams et al., 1997). (4)

Articles that utilize the Health and Retirement Study (HRS), the data set for which James Jackson sponsored a specialized conference and served as Editor for a special issue of *The Gerontologist* on Minority Perspectives from the Health and Retirement Study (Jackson, Lockery & Juster, 1996).

The majority of the articles examine within group differences among older African Americans. This was a hallmark of James's research contributions in increasing our understanding of diversity *within* Black populations to halt monolithic depictions of Black life. Consistent with James Jackson's belief in mentoring and training, this issue includes articles that include doctoral students and Assistant Professors as co-authors. In fact, of the 14 articles in this special issue, 11 are first-authored by a doctoral student, post-doctoral scholar, or an Assistant Professor.

The articles in this special issue span several research questions and content areas. Three of the articles examine the prevalence and correlates of psychiatric disorders among older adults using the NSAL. This research fills an important gap in the literature as research on psychiatric disorders within this population is extremely limited. Further, because this work mainly appears psychiatric journals, readers of JAH may be unfamiliar with this research literature.

Work by Brooks et al.,(in press) provides one of the first examinations of traumatic events among the older Black American population. They found that 8 out of 10 older African Americans and Black Caribbeans have had at least one traumatic event in their lifetime. Frequent types of trauma experienced include war-related trauma for African American men, assaultive violence (e.g., rape, sexually assaulted, badly beaten by spouse) for both African American and Black Caribbean women, and sudden, unexpected death of a close associates across all groups. Among African Americans, assaultive violence was associated with increased depressive symptoms and lower levels of life satisfaction and happiness. This was not the case among Black Caribbeans, however. The strengths of this manuscript include the examination the impact of trauma exposure on both positive (i.e., happiness, life satisfaction), as well as negative (i.e., psychological distress, depressive symptoms and 12-month antidepressant use) valence mental health domains.

Jones et al., (in press) provide one of the most extensive analyses of anxiety disorders among older Black adults ever conducted, investigating lifetime and 12-month prevalence rates for Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Agoraphobia and Panic Disorder. Persistence and severity of these disorders was also examined, as well as the degree to which these disorders contributed to functional disabilities. They argue that despite older African Americans' low prevalence rates for disorders, those who specifically have anxiety disorders experience substantial mental health burden. A second article by Jones et al. (in press) involves an in-depth examination of age differences in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In addition to examining lifetime and 12-month prevalence rates of PTSD, they also examined PTSD persistence, severity, and functional impairment. Findings indicate that for middle aged Black adults (both African Americans and Black Caribbeans), PTSD is associated with higher unemployment, lower education, poverty, and stress for Black men, and unemployment, divorce, poverty, stress, and discrimination for Black women.

Two of the articles in this issue test James Jackson's Environmental Affordance model using data sets that were created to explicitly test this model. Mezuk et al., (in press) used data from the Richmond Stress and Sugar Study to examine the relationship between self-regulatory coping behaviors (i.e., health-harming and health-promoting) and hypothalamic pituitary adrenal (HPA) stress reactivity. They find that health-harming (e.g., smoking) and health-promoting (e.g., exercising) behaviors were positively correlated. Further, although several individual behaviors were related to stress reactivity, (e.g., smoking and meditation), summary measures of behaviors were unrelated to stress reactivity. Allen et al., (in press) investigated Black-White disparities in HPA axis regulation using two data sets for which James Jackson was the principal investigator (Create and Triad). Their work indicates that Blacks demonstrate more evidence of HPA axis dysregulation than Whites and generally report more types of chronic stressors. Controlling for racial differences in chronic stressors reduced, but did not eliminate the Black-White disparity in HPA axis regulation.

Sylvers et al. (in press) investigate differences in major and everyday discrimination between African Americans, Black Caribbeans, and Non-Latino White older adults. A strength of their analysis is that because they examine individual indicators of discrimination as opposed to summary measures, they identify types of discrimination that could be obscured by using summary measures. Overall, the find that both African Americans and Black Caribbeans reported more major and everyday discrimination than non-Latino Whites. However, there were no significant differences between African Americans and non-Latino Whites with regards to being fired, neighbors making life difficult, and receiving poor service from repairmen. Older African Americans and Black Caribbeans were more likely than non-Latino Whites to report that they had experienced any everyday discrimination and any everyday discrimination specifically due to race. Non-Latino Whites, however, were more likely to report that they had experienced discrimination due other factors (e.g., gender).

Several of the articles in this special issue address the impact of stress on various mental and physical health outcomes. For example, Erving (in press) investigated the impact of stress on several indicators of physical health among older African American and Black Caribbean women. She finds that African American women have significantly worse physical health than Black Caribbean women. In particular, African American women have more chronic conditions, functional limitations, and poorer self-rated health. Older African American women also, had more stressful life events. The higher levels of stress among older African American women did not explain ethnic (African American and Black Caribbean) differences in physical health.

Mouzon (in press) investigated the impact of stress exposure and coping on the mental health of older African Americans. She investigated 4 different types of coping strategies including: emotion-focused coping, problem-focused, religious coping, and maladaptive coping. She found that stress was consistently associated with poorer mental health. She further found that five of the 11 coping strategies had significant buffering effects for the relationships between stress and mental health. For example, for older African Americans, religious coping serves as an important buffer against the mental health consequences of high levels of chronic, non-racial stress.

Brown et al. (in press) examined the impact of chronic stress exposure, stress appraisal, and discrimination on depressive symptoms among older Black adults. They found that Black older adults with lower stress appraisal reported fewer depressive symptoms. This was not the case, however, for other features of the stress context (exposure, discrimination). They argue that investigating both stress appraisal and stress exposure provides new insight on the specific ways that stress impacts mental health.

Frazier and Brown (in press) investigate the relationship between work-related stress and insomnia symptoms among older Black workers. They examine two indicators of work-related stress—appraisal of job stress and job lock or the inability to leave a job because of the need for financial support or health insurance coverage). Both job stress appraisal and job lock due to financial reasons were associated with increased insomnia symptoms. Religious attendance, however, buffered the negative impact of financial job lock on insomnia, while religiosity exacerbated the effect of job stress on symptoms of insomnia.

Lincoln and Nguyen (in press) investigate racial, ethnic and age differences in familial social support networks and obesity among African American, Black Caribbean, and non-Latino White adults. They examine both the positive (emotional support) and negative aspects (criticisms, arguments) of familial networks. Overall, both Black Caribbeans and Non-Latino Whites had lower rates of obesity than African Americans. Negative interactions with family members were not significantly associated with obesity. However, relationships between emotional support and obesity were complex with different patterns of association based on age, race, and ethnicity.

Hall et al., (in press) examine the relationship between financial decision-making and financial exploitation among older community-dwelling Black adults in the Detroit metropolitan area. The analysis is based on a small non-probability sample using 3 measures of financial exploitation that are also in the Health and Retirement Survey. Comparisons show that the frequencies for these measures are virtually identical. They find that higher scores on financial vulnerability scale are positively associated with the likelihood of being a victim of financial exploitation. In contrast, education is inversely associated with the likelihood of being financially victimized. They further find that financial exploitation vulnerability is positively related to anxiety.

Nguyen et al.'s (in press) article investigates the link between religious involvement and sleep quality among older African Americans. Their research focused on organizational, nonorganizational, and subjective aspects of religious involvement and found that watching religious television programs was associated with more restless sleep. Respondents who attended religious services less than once a year, at least once a week, or nearly every day reported greater sleep satisfaction than respondents who never attended religious services. Subjective religiosity was associated with lower sleep satisfaction. Together, their findings indicate that religious involvement serve multiple functions in the sleep quality of older African Americans. Given the dearth of knowledge on sleep and its determinants in African Americans, this study provides critical information that has implications for understanding noted racial disparities in sleep between African Americans and non-Hispanic Whites, which is an hypothesized contributing factor to broader racial disparities in health.

Mitchell et al.'s (in press) article examined the effects of hope, purpose in life and religiosity on trajectories of depressive symptoms among middle-aged and older Blacks, with a focus on age differences in these associations. They found that depressive symptoms decreased over time for Blacks ages 51-64 years of age, but depressive symptoms remained stable for those 65-74 and increased among Blacks age 75 and older. Hope and purpose in life were inversely associated with levels of depressive symptoms, but were not associated with change in symptoms over time. The effects of hope and purpose in life on depressive symptoms were strongest among the youngest age group and weakest among the oldest. Interestingly, religiosity was unrelated to depressive symptoms. Overall, their findings demonstrate that, among middle-aged and older Black adults, trajectories of depressive symptoms and the effects of psychosocial resources are influenced by age. Among the strengths of this study is the fact that it is one of the first population-based studies to examine the effects of hope and purpose in life on the mental health of middle-aged and older Black adults.

Collectively, the articles in this volume contribute new and more complex understandings of the mental and physical health of older Black adults. By testing the Environmental Affordance Model, conducting research based on the data sets that he pioneered, and uplifting the efforts of junior scholars, the collected works in this volume are fitting and important testimonials to the legacy of James S. Jackson. Readers of this volume will also be interested in the 2021 Annual Review of Gerontology and Geriatrics: Black Older Adults in the Era of Black Lives Matter edited by Chatters (2022), which is also dedicated to the life and work of James S. Jackson.

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Table 1

Selected Program for Research on Black Americans Alumni who are Gerontologists and/or former MCUAAAR Scientists

Name	Rank/Administrative Position	University
Psychology		
Lisa Barnes ¹	Alla V. and Solomon Jesmer Professor of Gerontology and Geriatric Medicine	Rush Medical College
Anmarie Caño ⁴	Dean, College of Arts and Sciences	Gonzaga
Linda Chatters ¹	Paula Meares Collegiate Professor of Social Work, Public Health	Michigan
Mark A. Manning ⁴	Assistant Professor, Psychology	Oakland University
Jacqueline Mattis ^{1,4}	Dean of Faculty	Rutgers-Newark
Sociology		
Waverly Duck ^{1,4}	Associate Professor of Sociology	Pittsburgh
Dawne Mouzon ^{3,4}	Associate Professor of Sociology	Rutgers
Social Work		
Karen Bullock ⁴	Director, School of Social Work	North Carolina State
Letha Chadiha ¹	Rose Gibson Collegiate Professor of Social Work (emeritus)	Michigan
Jaclynn M. Hawkins ⁴	Assistant Professor of Social Work	Michigan
Yuri Jang ⁴	Professor of Social Work,	Southern California
Lydia Li ⁴	Professor of Social Work	Michigan
Karen Lincoln ¹	Associate Professor of Social Work	USC
Reuben J. Miller ^{3,4}	Associate Professor of Social Work	Chicago
Ann Nguyen ¹	Assistant Professor of Social Work	Case Western
Jaime A. Mitchell ^{3,4}	Associate Professor of Social Work	Michigan
Tam Perry ^{3,4}	Associate Professor of Social Work	Wayne State
Trina R. Shanks ^{3,4}	Harold Johnson Collegiate Professor of Social Work	Michigan
Robert Joseph Taylor ¹	Harold Johnson Endowed Professor of Social Work, Director PRBA	Michigan
Daphne Watkins ^{3,4}	Director, Vivian A. and James L. Curtis Center, Social Work	Michigan
Amanda Woodward ¹	MSW Program Director	Michigan State
Xiaoling Xiang ³	Assistant Professor of Social Work	Michigan
Medicine/Public Health/Nursing/		
Tamara Baker ^{2,4}	Professor, Department of Psychiatry School of Medicine	North Carolina
Carmen Green ³	Dean, School of Medicine	CUNY

Name	Rank/Administrative Position	University
Briana Mezuk ²	Associate Chair, Department of Epidemiology	Michigan
Hector Gonzalez ^{3,4}	Associate Professor, Department of Neurosciences	San Diego
Ishtar Govia ¹	Senior Lecturer in Epidemiology, Caribbean Institute for Health Research	University of the West Indies - Mona
Derek M. Griffith ⁴	Director Center for Men's Health Equity. Racial Justice Institute	Georgetown
Sheria G. Robinson-Lane ⁴	Assistant Professor, School of Nursing	Michigan
Vicki Johnson-Lawrence ^{3,4}	Assistant Professor, College of Human Medicine	Michigan State-Flint
Silas Norman ⁴	Director, Kidney Transplant Outreach Clinics	Michigan
Ronica Rooks ^{2,4}	Associate Professor, Department of Health and Behavioral Studies	Colorado-Denver
Consuelo H. Wilkins ⁴	Senior Vice President and Senior Associate Dean for Health Equity and Inclusive Excellence	Vanderbilt Medical Center
	Other	
Kerwin K. Charles ⁴	Dean, School of Management	Yale
Rose Gibson ³	Emeritus Professor, Institute of Gerontology	Michigan
Carl Hill ¹	Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer	Alzheimer's Association
Chivon Mingo ⁴	Associate Professor, Gerontology Institute	Georgia State
Daphne Ntiri ⁴	Distinguished Service Professor, African American Studies	Wayne State
Sela Panapasa ^{3,4}	Associate Research Scientist, Institute for Social Research	Michigan
Wassim Tarrat ^{3,4}	Associate Professor, Institute of Gerontology	Wayne State

Earliest Period Working with Jackson & PRBA

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² Post-Doc Fellow,

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MCUAAAR is the Michigan Center for Urban African American Aging Research