

Stacy L. Harris. Health Information Seeking Behaviors of Young Adult African Americans. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in IS degree. April, 2011. 41 pages. Advisor: Claudia Gollop

As consumers are becoming more proactive about their health they are introduced into a boundless world of health information. This information may be searched and received through different information channels and may be tailored to a specific disease or condition, age group, or ethnicity. This research surveys young adult African Americans to discover their health information seeking behaviors. The results of this study indicate that this population is more susceptible to information primarily focused on African Americans, and use the internet, doctors and family as their first information source.

Headings:

Health Information Seeking Behaviors

African American

Young Adult

Consumer Health Information

HEALTH INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIORS OF YOUNG ADULT AFRICAN  
AMERICANS

by  
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A Master's paper submitted to the faculty  
of the School of Information and Library Science  
of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Science in  
Information Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

April 2011

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## **Introduction**

While new technologies are being invented, medical and drug advancements are evolving, and health disparities are on the rise, consumers are bombarded daily with new sources of health information. Some consumers choose to actively search out health information that they believe is vital for their personal and family health. This health information contains topics on health prevention, promotion, accessing health care systems, insurance and specific diseases and conditions. At times this information may be tailored or focused to certain populations based on gender, ethnicity, and age.

This study focused on the health information seeking behaviors of young adult African Americans. Current research focuses on African American health information seeking behaviors of older generations, specific diseases, and specific topics such as the internet. The main goal is to explore the information seeking behaviors of a younger population, information sources, search strategies, and information interaction activities. Researchers will be able to use the data gathered here as a pilot study to expand and study how health interventions can be tailored to specific populations, provide valid health information, and explore new communication channels where health information is transferred.

Cultural diversity in health information will help improve the quality of information, increase information retrieval, and create culturally relevant information sources. Kreuter and Haughton suggest integrating culture into health information

programs and designing materials for specific population subgroups as a diversity strategy. This may aid in enhancing communication effectiveness and help eliminate health disparities. (2006, p. 795) The Institute of Medicine (IOM) has found that there is a major need for research and studies to focus on how important diversity efforts are, and what approaches will be beneficial to the consumer as well as the medical community. (2002, p. 258)

Aside from communication and information seeking, a large amount of research has focused on health treatments and medicine for health problems and diseases. The research completed for this study adds to the current work but lends a special focus on a younger population dealing with information interaction and how culturally relatable the information is. This study will help provide an avenue for future research done on African Americans and health information seeking behaviors. Participants that fit the inclusion criteria of the study were given an online survey that focused on gathering data about their current health information seeking behaviors. They were surveyed based on the research questions listed below.

What type of health information do young adult African American's search for?

What sources do young adult African Americans use to search for health information?

How do young adult African Americans interact with the current health information received?

Do cultural factors affect information retrieval and interaction of young adult African Americans?

## Literature Review

### Young Adults

For the current study population there were limited resources found for general health information seeking. Studies and research generally dealt with children (5-12 years old) adolescents (13-19 years old), and adults, typically older (40 and older). There was no clear delineation of young adults (18-30 years old). It appears that this age group was generally grouped in with the older adults. Or they were specifically categorized as “college students” or “undergraduates” and were used to research topics that focused on racial and ethnic differences and comparisons.

The literature reviewed generally produced results that showed a comparison of races when controlling for just African Americans. An overwhelming majority studied subjects were African Americans only made up a small percentage of the study population. McCaughrin (1995) surveyed students at a large Midwestern university to gather data on health beliefs, behaviors and methods of receiving health information with a focus on AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, alcohol and drugs. Although all races were surveyed the author focused on the Latino population to help demonstrate that understanding backgrounds and belief systems of different groups will help health care workers design interventions to match the program with the clientele.

Rich and Thomas (2008) focused on the BMI, eating disorders and acquisition of health information of African American, Latino and White female college students. Although Rich and Thomas’s research focused on the comparison of ethnicities, they found distinct differences in regards to information received by African American’s from

health professionals in regards to nutrition. Other research from Felton et. al (1997) Sibert et. al (2003) and Fogel and Morgan (2010) focused solely on the comparisons of African Americans, Whites and Latino in regards to health promotion and behaviors in the areas of sexual health, drinking and nutrition.

### **Internet**

The internet is a very popular source for consumers to utilize in their search for health information. According to a survey by Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project, 61% of Americans turn to the web for online medical advice and information. (Pew, 2009) This study looked to gather data on how African American young adults rely on the internet as well as other information channels in regards to finding health information. As the digital divide continues to narrow, internet based health information should be updated and made more adaptable to different populations. If internet-based health information is adequate, then working to train and guide African American patients/families (and their health professionals) to adequate websites could help reduce health disparities. (Kind, 2007)

Associated research that focused on African Americans found that overall, the search process (to find African American health information) was time intensive, and involved the strategic use of multiple search techniques in order to retrieve relevant information. (Ellis-Danquah, p. 65, 2004). From the literature reviewed it appears that much of the culturally relevant health information for young adult African Americans is very hard to find. This study sought to gather data to help determine if the study population utilizes African American themed information and health sites.

## **General Health Information Seeking – African Americans**

Health seeking information behaviors have been studied by Gollop (1997) who looked at information seeking behaviors of older African American women. Lindsey et al (2006) examined the information seeking behaviors of depressed young African American males. Morey (2007) also examined the health information seeking needs of African Americans by using Granovetter's strength of weak ties as a theoretical framework. This framework proposes that the strength of weak ties, a theory from sociology, can explain and possibly predict consumer health information seeking behavior.

Health information seeking behaviors of African Americans concerning specific diseases such as cancer are also popular research interest. Thompson, Cavazos-Rehg, Tate and Gaier (2008) and Matthews, Sellergren, Manfredi, and Williams (2002) focused on cancer as they researched the behaviors of African Americans in regards to health information seeking. These diseases or condition specific studies generally focused on a wide range of ages. This study focused on participants who are between the ages of 18 to 30 years of age. This younger age group commonly referred to as the millennium generation have been described as more numerous, more affluent, better educated, and more ethnically diverse. (Howe and Strauss, 2000) Studying how an African American subset of this generation interacts with health information is a main focus point of this study.



### **Low Income/ Low Literacy**

While searching for literature on health information seeking behaviors relating to African Americans, a large amount of research was found that focused on low income and low literacy of the African American population. Spink and Cole (2001) discussed how different information seeking channels were used by low income African Americans. They found that subjects used formal channels (newspapers, journal articles, etc.) versus informal channels (family and friends) according to what type of information they sought.

Birru, researched how low income or low socioeconomic status African Americans accessed the internet for health information.(2004) She found that literacy may be the most daunting barrier to successful Internet access by low-SES (socioeconomic), low-literacy African Americans. Although not all African Americans who are of low socioeconomic status have low literacy, Birru found that those who do don't always understand nor have access to the appropriate health information.

Birru noted that "While many mainstream health Web sites (including the American Cancer Society, American Red Cross, and National Institute of Health sites) have attempted to address issues of cultural sensitivity through their development of African-American focused Web pages, hyperlinks to some of these sites are buried and may be difficult to find by an individual with low literacy." (Birru, 2004) Although literacy and income levels were not assessed in this study, they provide insight on further research completed in the areas of health information seeking and African Americans.

From the published literature, it is apparent that there is interest in the African American population in terms of general and health information seeking behaviors. Although African American's are considered a minority population they provide a formidable group from which to sample for the purpose of investigating information seeking behaviors. The literature reviewed shows that the young adult African American population has not been a major topic of research in regards to their health information seeking activities.

This study looked at a broad spectrum, not based on gender or specific diseases and conditions to see how health information has been searched for, retrieved, and interoperated with daily life. Survey data provided an understanding on how younger populations are associating with the health information world. These results can be used to tailor interventions; design new ways to deliver information, and help researchers and health advocates reach out to a growing but untapped population.

By expanding on my research and exploring health information seeking behaviors of young adult African Americans, researchers will have valid evidence to present when seeking funding for health interventions, designing information resources, and understanding how certain populations seek information. Based on the growing amount of health disparities that are affecting the African American community it is vital to start prevention and intervention strategies with younger populations. Without the information and data collected in this study researchers may be overlooking and undeserving young adult African Americans when it comes to health information needs.

## **Methodology**

### **Methods**

A survey was chosen as the data collection method. Survey's allows study participants to relay self-reported beliefs and behaviors. For this study, many variables were measured in regards to health information seeking behaviors of young adult African Americans. With this population, it was decided that an online survey with an incentive (\$50 dollar Visa gift card) would entice the most participants to participate. Potential participants in the study population are busy with school, work and other extracurricular activities; therefore a short online survey which can be accessed at any computer **was** thought to be the ideal method to collect data for this study.

### **Survey Design**

This study used an online survey to gather data on the health information seeking behaviors of young adult African Americans. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used in this study. Closed, multiple choice and open-ended questions were included in the form of an online questionnaire. The inclusion criteria for this study were as follows: African American male or females and participants between the ages of 18 through 30 years old. Participants who met the inclusion criteria were asked to read a letter of consent which was provided via a recruitment email (Appendix A). This recruitment email gave a short description of the study, risk, benefits, and contact information for the principle investigator and advisor. A URL link was provided within the recruitment email to allow those interested to participate in the study. For this study participants remained anonymous, and no personal information was solicited except for optional email address. The study questions can be accessed in Appendix B.

There were total of 35 questions; 25 multiple choice, 8 multiple choice with an opened ended option (i.e. If yes specify), 1 ranking and 1 open ended question. They study took approximately 15 minutes to complete. These questions gathered data on the health information seeking behaviors of young adult African Americans. The primary goal of this study is to investigate health information sources, search strategies, retrieval methods, and reliability of information found. This questionnaire was designed using selected questions from Pew Internet and American Life Project questionnaires (Pew, 2004) as well as original questions based on the lack of data found during the literature search.

Section one provided questions on the personal health of the participant to gain an understanding of how the current health status relates to information seeking behavior. Section two used questions from the Pew Internet and American Life Project questionnaire to assess what specific health conditions or problems participants have searched for. Section three focused on where participants found sources for health information. There are four answer choices (Internet, Online/Print Magazines, Books and Other People. If the participants answered that they found information in the choices listed above they were asked to provide a description of the source. Section four provided a question to understand how participants are looking for information. Section five assessed the participant's knowledge and behaviors toward the validity and quality of health information found.

Section six provided questions on how participants interact with the current health information that they have found. This section also provided questions on how the

participants interact with health information that comes from a primarily African American source. Demographics information was collected in section seven. At the end of the survey there is a comments section that was for participants to provide any further information related to the study.

Participants had the option to participate in a drawing for a \$50 dollar Visa Gift Card. Participants who were interested clicked on an associated URL, which asked for them to provide a valid email address. This part of the survey was not associated with the survey data and was completely voluntary. The online survey was administered via Qualtrics, an online survey software package that is available from the Odum Institute at UNC-Chapel Hill via a grant from Qualtrics, Inc.

### **Population Demographics**

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the health information seeking behaviors of young adult African Americans. This study intended to recruit male and female African Americans between the ages of 18-30. Original attempts to recruit study participants at UNC – Chapel Hill were difficult so recruitment efforts were transferred to local HBCU's (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) - North Carolina Central University (School of Business) and Fayetteville State University (OpTIMUM Program). North Carolina Central University and Fayetteville State University are two HBCU's that have a predominately African American student body enrolled in undergraduate, graduate, and PhD programs. A professor from the North Carolina Central University School of Business as well as the student program director for OpTIMUM was contacted to distribute the recruitment email to their students.

The professor from North Carolina Central University School of Business had a teaching load of 199 students for the 2010 – 2011 year that met the inclusion criteria. The OpTIMUM program included a distribution list of 35 students. Out of a possible 234 participants, 30 people, about 13% participated in this study.

North Carolina Central University (NCCU) is a historically black university located in Durham, N.C. The NCCU School of Business offers seven undergraduate majors, as well as a graduate MBA program. The OpTIMUM (Opportunities for Talent Expansion in Interdisciplinary Education for Minorities and Women in Undergraduate Math and Science Program), program at Fayetteville State is sponsored by the Nation Science Foundation. This program provides challenging academic curricula and enrichment opportunities that would encourage and enable minority students to complete baccalaureate degrees in Biology, Biotechnology, Chemistry, Computer Science, and Math. These two populations were chosen as recruitment sources due to their access to participants who were African American and between the ages of 18-30.

## **Results**

The study was conducted for eleven weeks, from Jan. 10 to Mar. 21, 2011. Data was collected during a period of three weeks from Feb. 14 to Mar. 4, 2011. Thirty participants completed the online survey while it was available online.

## Demographics

This study included males and females between the ages of 18-30. Participants were asked to identify their sex, age range and how they racially identified themselves. Due to the term “African American” being used as a coequal term to other racial identifications a question was added to ask participants how they specifically identify themselves. Out of the thirty participants, (n=10) were male and (n=20) were female. Eighty seven percent of the participants identified as African American and only one person identified as “Other”. (Table 1. Demographics) There was an option to enter in text if you identified as “Other”, but the participant did not enter in any specific race.

**Table 1. Demographics**

|                  | <b>n</b>  | <b>%</b>   |
|------------------|-----------|------------|
| <b>Gender</b>    |           |            |
| Male             | 10        | 33         |
| Female           | 20        | 67         |
| Total            | 30        | 100        |
|                  |           |            |
| <b>Age</b>       |           |            |
| 18 – 21          | 10        | 33         |
| 22 – 25          | 12        | 40         |
| 26-30            | 8         | 27         |
| Total            | 30        | 100        |
|                  |           |            |
| <b>Race</b>      |           |            |
| African American | 26        | 87         |
| Afro – Caribbean | 1         | 3          |
| Biracial/Mixed   | 2         | 7          |
| Other            | 1         | 3          |
| <b>Total</b>     | <b>30</b> | <b>100</b> |

## Personal Health

The personal health questions were taken from the from Pew Internet and American Life Project questionnaire. (Pew, 2009) These questions were asked to gauge the participant's overall health, recent visits to the see physicians or medical facilities, and if the participants has a disability or chronic disease that prevents them from fully participating in daily activities. A surprising seventy percent (n=22) of the sample rated their health as only "Good", while twenty percent (n=6) rated their health as "Excellent". The remaining participants seven percent (n=2) rated their health as "Fair", and nobody chose "Poor" or "Don't Know/Not Sure" as an answer choice. (Table 2. Personal Health Rating)

**Table 2. Personal Health Rating**

| <b>Personal Health Rating</b> | <b>n</b>  | <b>%</b>   |
|-------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Good                          | 22        | 73         |
| Excellent                     | 6         | 20         |
| Fair                          | 2         | 7          |
| Poor                          | 0         | 0          |
| Don't Know/Not Sure           | 0         | 0          |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>30</b> | <b>100</b> |

Ninety eight percent of the sample, an overwhelming majority (n=28) reported that they do not have a disability, handicap or chronic disease that keeps them from fully participating in work, school or housework or other activities. In the last twelve months (n=24) participants, eighty percent visited a doctor or medical clinic for any reason, including check-ups, emergency visits or hospital outpatient department, (n=6) thirty percent reported that they did not.



## **Health Topics**

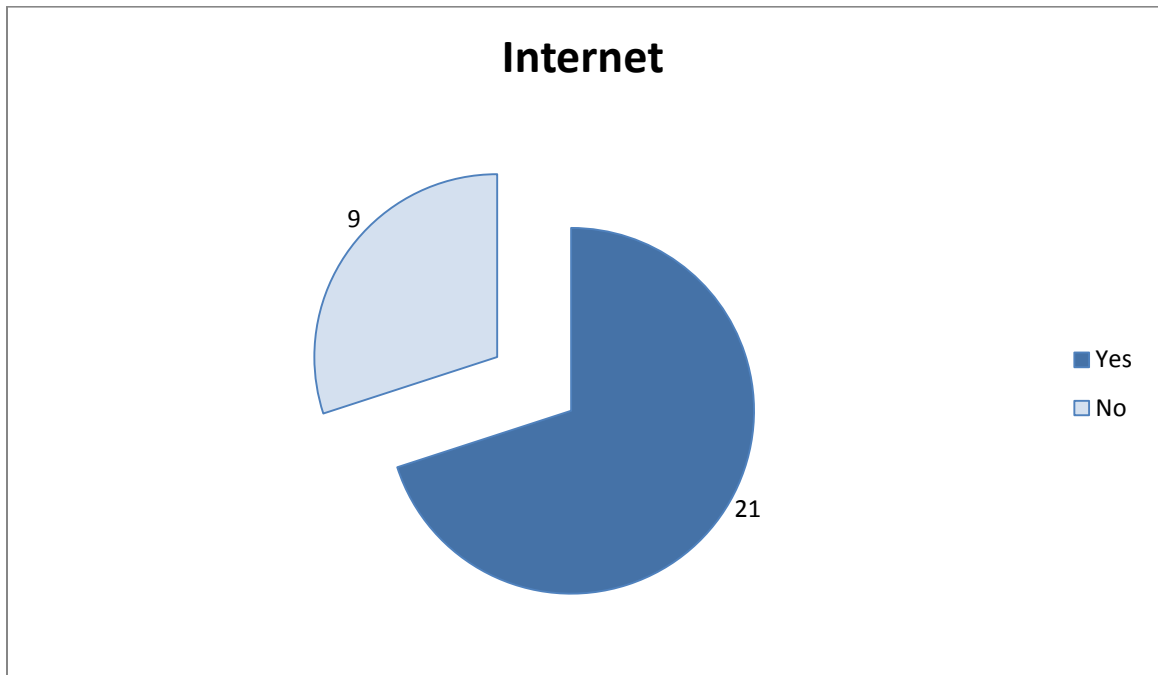
The personal health questions were taken from the from Pew Internet and American Life Project questionnaire. (Pew, 2009) This series of questions gauged what type of health information the sample searched for. For the health topics: medical treatment or procedure, exercise or fitness, prescription or over the counter drugs, and health insurance there are some missing values. Based on the number of responses eighty percent (n=24) searched for specific diseases or medical, eighty percent (n=24), searched for diet nutrition vitamins or nutritional supplements, and eighty two percent (n=23) searched for information on exercise and fitness. Out of the ten topics presented these three were the most searched for health information topics. Thirty percent (n=9) of the participants searched for information on problems with drugs or alcohol. Forty percent (n=12) also searched for information on a particular doctor or hospital. These two topics were the least likely to be searched. (Table 3. Health Topics) See Table 3 below for the complete array of responses to question on health topics searched.

**Table 3. Health Topics**

| Health Topics   | Yes |    | No |    | Missing |
|---|-----|----|----|----|---------|
|   | n   | %  | n  | %  | n       |
| Specific disease or medical problem                   | 24  | 80 | 6  | 20 | 0       |
| Diet, nutrition, vitamins, or nutritional supplements | 24  | 80 | 6  | 20 | 0       |
| Medical treatment or procedure                        | 23  | 79 | 6  | 21 | 1       |
| Exercise or fitness                                   | 23  | 82 | 5  | 18 | 2       |
| Prescription or over the counter drugs                | 22  | 76 | 7  | 24 | 1       |
| Sexual health   | 20  | 67 | 10 | 33 | 0       |
| Depression, anxiety, stress or mental health issues   | 14  | 47 | 16 | 53 | 0       |
| Health insurance                                      | 16  | 55 | 13 | 45 | 1       |
| Particular doctor or hospital                         | 12  | 40 | 18 | 60 | 0       |
| Problems with drugs or alcohol                        | 9   | 30 | 21 | 70 | 0       |

### Health Information Sources

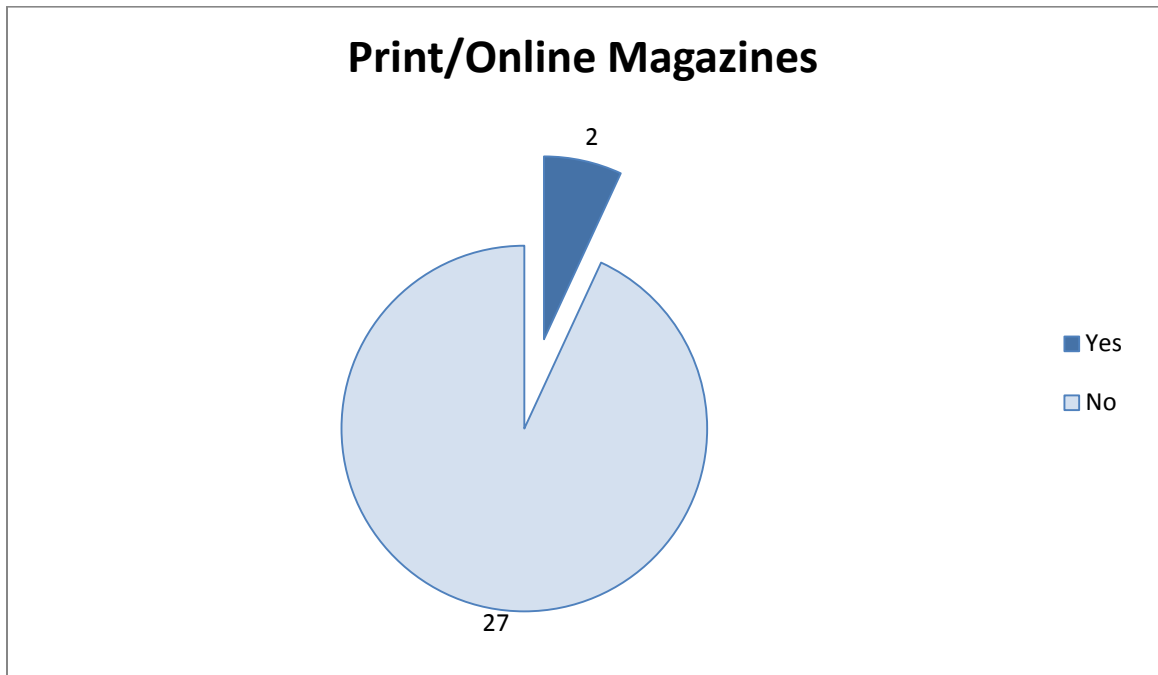
Four sources internet, online/print magazines, books and other people were chosen to represent possible sources of information for health information. Participants were asked to choose whether or not they went to these sources. If yes they were asked to enter in the name, title or URL of the source. The following tables and graphs show the number of subjects that visited each source and a description of the source. Because the text filed for each source question was an open text box, participants were able to enter in as many source descriptions as needed, therefore amounting to more than thirty sources.



**Graph 1. Health Information Source - Internet**

**Table 4. Health Information Source – Internet**

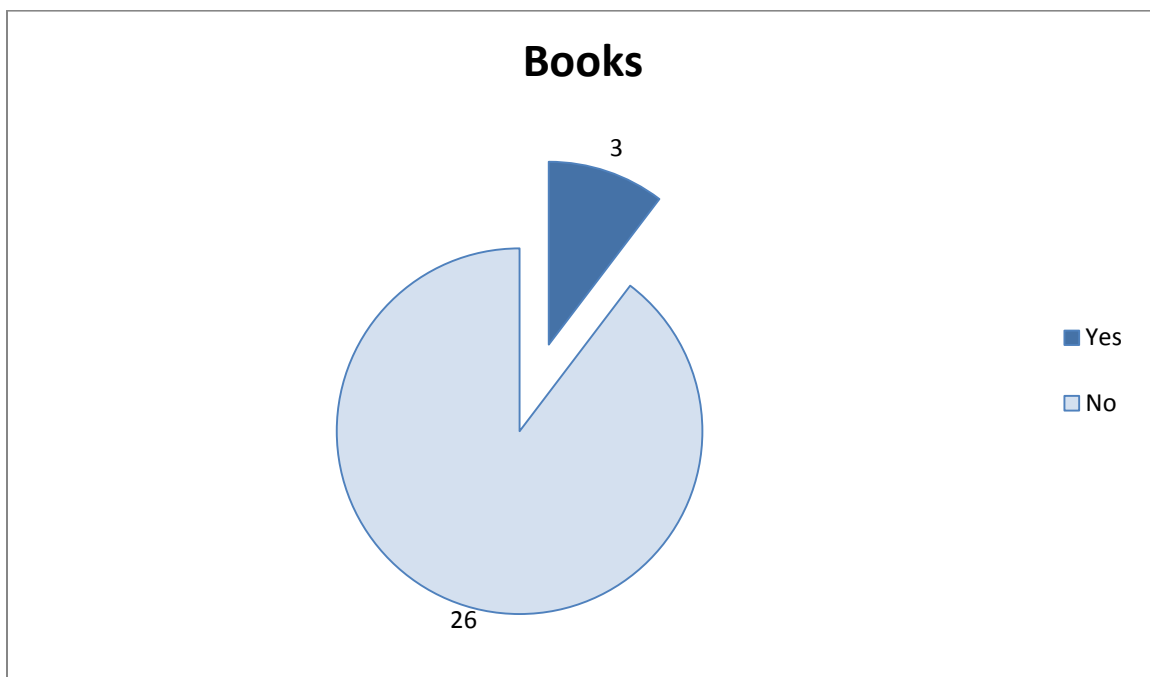
| <b>Internet</b>              | <b>n</b>  |
|------------------------------|-----------|
| Google                       | 10        |
| Webmd.com                    | 10        |
| Menshealth.com               | 1         |
| Message Board                | 1         |
| About.com                    | 1         |
| Wikipedia.com                | 1         |
| Kaiserpermanete.org          | 1         |
| CDC.gov                      | 1         |
| United Health Care (uhc.com) | 1         |
| Yahoo.com                    | 1         |
| P90X Newsletter              | 1         |
| Goaskalice.com               | 1         |
| Askdrsears.com               | 1         |
| <b>Total</b>                 | <b>31</b> |



**Graph 2. Health Information Source – Print/Online Magazine**

**Table 5. Health Information Source – Print/Online Magazines**

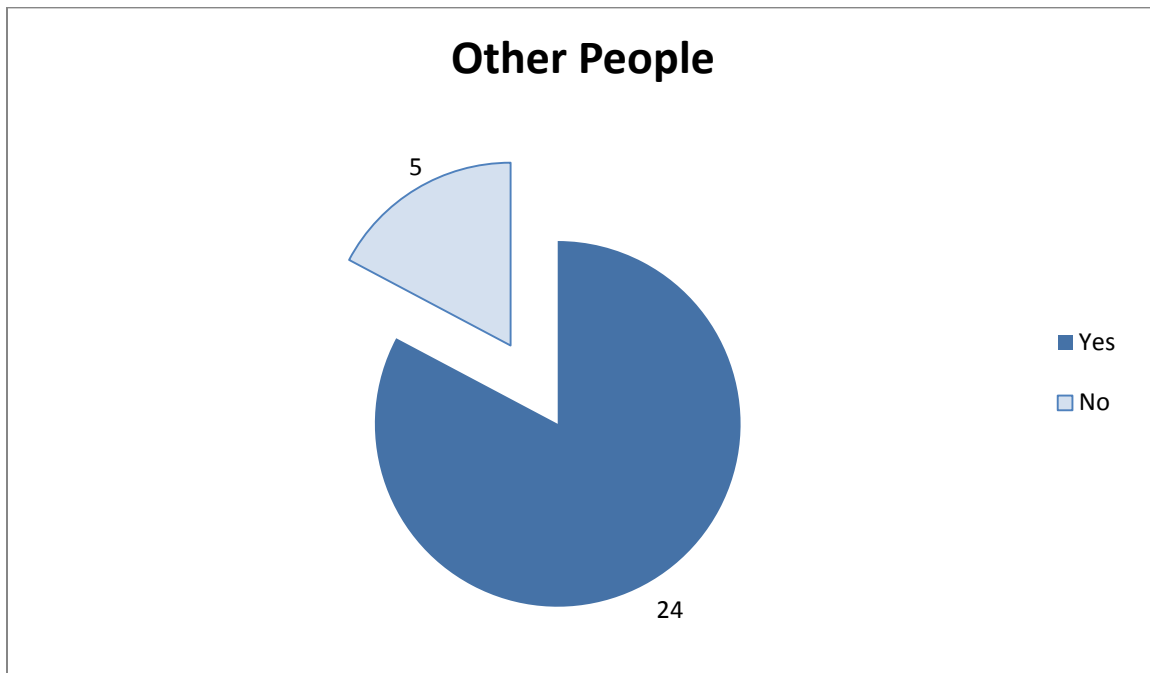
| Print/Online Magazines | n        |
|------------------------|----------|
| Men's Health           | 1        |
| Women's Prevention     | 1        |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>2</b> |



**Graph 3. Health Information Source – Books**

**Table 6. Health Information Source – Books**

| <b>Books</b>                          | <b>n</b> |
|---------------------------------------|----------|
| Dr. Ian's Fat Smash Diet              | 1        |
| 100 Myths on Health                   | 1        |
| Health Multiple Sclerosis Nutritional | 1        |
| <b>Total</b>                          | <b>3</b> |



**Graph 4. Health Information Source – Other People**

**Table 7. Health Information Source – Other People**

| Other People               | n         |
|----------------------------|-----------|
| Doctor                     | 16        |
| Mother                     | 12        |
| Friend                     | 5         |
| Other Healthcare Provider* | 4         |
| Family                     | 3         |
| Aunt                       | 1         |
| Uncle                      | 1         |
| Pharmacist                 | 1         |
| Father                     | 1         |
| Church Members             | 1         |
| Sister                     | 1         |
| Wife                       | 1         |
| <b>Total</b>               | <b>47</b> |

\*Other healthcare providers include: Nurse, Occupational Healthcare Professional, Physical Therapist, and Healthcare Professional.

### Search Strategies

Participants were asked to rank six information sources based on where they would seek health information first. Each source had a default ranking of 1 through 6. Participants were instructed to click and drag the source to the correct ranking position, 1 being the first source used to 6 being the last source used. Table 8. Search Strategies, shows each information source in their default ranking listing. Each numbered column represents how many participants chose the adjacent information sources for each numerical ranking.

**Table 8. Search Strategies**

| <b>Information Source</b> | <b>#1</b> | <b>#2</b> | <b>#3</b> | <b>#4</b> | <b>#5</b> | <b>#6</b> |
|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Internet                  | 15        | 7         | 4         | 2         | 1         | 0         |
| Magazine                  | 0         | 3         | 4         | 7         | 7         | 8         |
| Books                     | 0         | 1         | 6         | 3         | 9         | 10        |
| Family                    | 6         | 5         | 7         | 8         | 3         | 0         |
| Friends                   | 0         | 0         | 3         | 9         | 9         | 8         |
| Medical Professional      | 8         | 13        | 5         | 0         | 0         | 3         |
| <b>Total</b>              | <b>29</b> | <b>29</b> | <b>29</b> | <b>29</b> | <b>29</b> | <b>29</b> |

### **Valid Sources**

Quality and trustworthiness of health information was a topic of focus in this study. Participants were asked how often they checked their health information sources for validity, dates and reliability. Forty percent of participants (n=12) reported that they always check their sources, a close thirty seven percent (n=11) reported that they sometimes check their sources, and twenty three percent (n=7) reported that they never check their sources. Participants were given a sample list of reputable sources (MedlinePlus, WebMD, and MayoClinic) and asked if they had ever visited any of these

sources or sources like these. Seventy three percent (n=22) reported that they had, while twenty seven percent (n=8) reported that they had not visited any of these sources.

The researcher asked these questions on the assumption that the subject population did not visit these sources. They were asked what would persuade them to visit reputable sources over doing a simple text search in a search engine such as Google or Yahoo. Table 9. Valid Sources, displays possibly persuasion variables that would influence participants to visit reputable health information sources. One subject chose “Other” as a reason to what would influence them to visit the list of health information sources provided. Unfortunately they did not provide any text as to the “Other” reason.

**Table 9. Valid Sources**

| <b>Source</b>  | <b>n</b>  |
|--|-----------|
| Prior knowledge of reputable health information sites              | 19        |
| I have visited the valid health websites listed above              | 16        |
| Website information provided by health care professionals          | 14        |
| Advertisement of health information sites on sites you visit daily | 3         |
| Other  | 1         |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>29</b> |

### **Interaction**

Participants were asked if the information received changed the overall perception of their health. Fifty three percent (n=16) reported yes, and forty seven percent (n=14) reported no. Participants were also asked if the health information received or found help them **to** better treat an illness or condition: seventy two percent (n=21) reported yes, and twenty eight percent (n=8) reported no. Table 10. Interaction – Confidence depicts what practices would help participants feel more confident in their ability to find valid health



information. Forty three percent (n=13) of the study participants felt that they were very confident in their ability to find health information. Forty percent (n=12) reported that they were moderately confident, seventeen percent (n=5) reported that they were somewhat confident and no participants reported that they were not confident at all.

**Table 10. Interaction - Confidence**

| <b>Confidence Sources</b>   | <b>n</b>  |
|---|-----------|
| Knowing that the source is providing valid information            | 13        |
| Knowing medical terms used on health sites                        | 12        |
| Knowing the name and location of valid health information sources | 4         |
| Other   | 0         |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>29</b> |

Feelings of satisfaction and being overwhelmed were also investigated as a factor with this study population. Ninety percent (n=27) of the study participants reported that they were satisfied with the health information received, while ten percent (n=3) reported that they were not satisfied. A surprising fifty percent (n=14) reported that did feel overwhelmed when searching for health information, in turn the other fifty percent (n=14) reported that they did not feel overwhelmed.

### **African American Health Information**

This study intended to recruit a population of young adult African Americans. The following data are the results of questions that focused on the African American experience and persuasion when it comes to health information seeking behaviors. Participants were asked if they ever searched on websites that were specific to African Americans. Out of 30 responses only one subject said yes. This subject reported that they

check Essence Magazine's online website, and the O Magazine website. Study participants were also asked to reflect on their culture and decide if the health information they have received is culturally relevant.

Forty seven percent (n=8) reported that did feel that the health information they received was culturally relevant while fifty three percent (n=9) reported that they did not feel it was culturally relevant. Regarding sources of information, seventy percent (n=16) reported that they would be more receptive to health information if it came from a source that was primarily focused on African American culture. Thirty percent (n=7) reported that they would not be more receptive to health information if it came from a source that was primarily focused on African American culture.

Finally participants were asked how much family influences their thoughts and ideas of their health. Forty seven percent (n=14) reported that their family highly influences their thoughts, twenty seven percent (n=8) reported that their family moderately influence their thoughts, and twenty seven percent (n=8) reported that their family somewhat influenced their thoughts. No subjects reported that their family does not influence their thoughts and ideas on their health.

## **Discussion**

This study was designed to evaluate where young adult African Americans find or receive health information. To gauge a well rounded answer the research attempted to gain a measure of the study population's current health. Interestingly seventy three percent (n=22) of the study population rated their health as only "Good". A surprising result seeing that only seven percent (n=2) of participants reported having a handicap or

chronic disease. These participants that categorized themselves as only having “Good” health may think that their health is fine, but could possibly improve on their health in the areas of a better diet, more exercise, and better health knowledge.

Participants were asked what type of health information they usually searched or asked for. Exercise and fitness, specific diseases or medical problem, and diet nutrition vitamins or nutritional supplements were the most popular with 80% or higher of the study population looking for these types of information. These results clearly show that this study population is concerned about their health and based on the answers from question 3 (Does a disability, handicap, or chronic disease keep you from fully participating in work, school, housework, or other activities?) it appears that they are looking for preventive measures for diseases and medical problems.

Exercise and fitness as well as diet and nutrition shows that this population is interested in living a healthier and fit lifestyle. According to The Office of Minority Health, in 2009, African Americans were 1.5 times as likely to be obese as Non- Hispanic Whites. African American women have the highest rates of being overweight or obese compared to other groups in the U.S. About four out of five African American women are overweight or obese. (Obesity and African Americans) These statistics are alarming but from the study population it appears that the young adult population is taking an initiative to become healthier and fit by searching for exercise/fitness and diet and nutrition information.

Medical treatments or procedures, prescription or over the counter drugs, and sexual health were also popular. Sixty seven percent to seventy nine percent of

participants sought information on these topics. Interestingly enough sixty percent of the population reported that they did not search for information on a particular doctor or hospital and seventy percent reported that they did not search for information on drugs and alcohol problems. The rest of the health information topics did not have an overwhelming majority of people who searched for information on them.

The researcher assumed that a majority of participants would use the internet as the first place that they sought health information. According to question 15 (If you were seeking health information which source would you seek first?) the majority of participants (n=18) chose the internet as their first resource for health information. With the internet being one of the most popular sources for all populations, it was inspiring to see that many participants used WebMD.com as their first health information source. Webmd.com is a certified HON Code and URAC accredited health website that offers participants expert health information and advice. From the data collected it appears that participants also default to search engine use; Google.com was tied with Webmd.com as the number one internet health resource. Few respondents reported using print/online magazines or books which shows that the internet or other people are the most popular resources.

Participants reported that their doctor or their mother would be their first information source if they were searching for information from other people. It was not evident if participant's mothers were medical professionals but it's apparent that aside from a doctor, families are the next best health information sources. Asking family members and friends may be one of the more comfortable and reliable information sources for this population. Family is usually easily accessible and can provide reliable

and understandable information. This information is important for those creating and providing health information. They should look to help educate families especially mothers on where to find good and useful health information.

Majority of participants reported that they always or sometimes check the validity of health information. This question was not specific to health information on the internet. Therefore the data is interpreted with the idea that participants thought about all of their health information sources (other people, books, magazines and the internet) to determine how often they check validity. This is a major issue when it comes to health information due to the overwhelming amount of information available. According to this population they usually check the validity.

Participants reported that if they had prior knowledge of reputable health information websites, and had health information website addresses provided by their healthcare professionals they would frequent these sites more often. This data is important for health care providers, because they could provide finding aids for specific conditions or questions that participants (patients) have addressed. Patient confidence in finding health information may also be increased if healthcare providers could provide and discuss reputable health information sites. This would also help to eliminate the feeling of being overwhelmed by providing key informational websites, and helping to increase satisfaction of users (patients).

African Americans are a culturally and family oriented subset of the population. Although considered a minority this population experiences higher rates of illness and death from certain cancers, heart diseases, diabetes, AIDS/HIV, asthma and obesity. There are departments within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services such as

The Office of Minority Health that focus on African American health as well as other minorities. There are also special sections just for African Americans in reputable health sources such as Medline Plus, National Institute of Health (N.I.H.), and Center for Disease Control (C.D.C.). There is a clear effort to focus on health disparities and information sharing to individuals of African American descent.

This study presented questions designed to help understand the perspective from the young adult population. From the data participants did not usually search for health information on websites that were focused on African Americans and majority felt that the information they did receive from their search was not culturally relevant. There are many websites that offer health information that are specific to African Americans but this information is usually hard to find. Some participants may feel that this information is not reliable or is not the first result of a Google search so they would prefer to look for health information in other areas. Participants did reported that they would be receptive to health information if it was primarily focused on African Americans. But from the literature review and study data, it appears that finding this information is a task that many users don't understand how to do or don't have the time to do an intensive search.

Participants also felt that their family influenced their thoughts and ideas on their health. Based on the data there is a pressing need for African American health information to be showcased. This information can come from family physicians, health initiatives in the community, churches, and community centers. By providing health information focused on African Americans, this study population could be more informed and receive the information that is culturally relevant.

## **Conclusion**

Although there is health information that primarily focuses on African Americans, literature on this specific population is scarce. This study aimed to explore the health information seeking behaviors of young adult African Americans. Participants completed an online survey that asked participants to report where they found information, how it they felt about the information, and how culturally relatable the information was. Overall participants found that the internet and other people provided the best health information. It was reported that they felt overwhelmed but generally satisfied with the information they received. In regards to cultural relevance they felt that their family influenced their ideas on health. Participants also felt that they would be more receptive to information if it came from a source that was primarily focused on African Americans. Although minority populations are only a subset of the population it is important to provide health information to all cultures that is relatable and easy to access.

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## Appendix A. Recruitment Email

Recruitment Email/ Letter of Implied Consent

Subject: Health Information Seeking Behavior Survey

My name is Stacy Harris. I am a graduate student in the School of Information and Library Science here at UNC- Chapel Hill. I am currently working on a research study to look at the health information seeking behaviors of young adult African Americans who are between 18 to 30 years old.

An online survey was prepared to record how young adult African Americans search for or retrieve health related information. Completing the questionnaire connotes your consent to be a participant in this study. You will be asked to fill out a quick 15 minute survey. You are free to answer or not answer any particular question and have no obligation to complete the survey once you begin.

Your participation in this study will be completely voluntary and the data will be kept confidential. The data will be reported as a group and I, as the Principle Investigator will only have access to the data.

There are no risks anticipated if you elect to participate in this study.

There will also be no personal benefits anticipated from being involved with it. However, there will be educational or professional benefit from this study, as the information we obtain can be used to help improve research into health information seeking behaviors in relation to African Americans.

As an incentive to take this survey, each survey participant that provides a valid email address regardless if you complete the survey or not will be included in a drawing to win one of two \$50.00 Visa prepaid gift cards.

If you would like to participate please click on the following link.  
[https://uncodum.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_0xPQtJs3KnHnpqc](https://uncodum.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_0xPQtJs3KnHnpqc)

If you have any questions concerning this study please contact me  
at [stacyh@email.unc.edu](mailto:stacyh@email.unc.edu) or my faculty advisor Claudia Gollop at [atgollop@ils.unc.edu](mailto:atgollop@ils.unc.edu).

Thanks,

Stacy Harris

School of Information and Library Science MSIS 2011

UNC-Chapel Hill

## Appendix B. Survey

### Questionnaire

#### Section 1: Personal Health

**1. In general, how would you rate your own health?**

Excellent

Good

Fair

Poor

Don't Know/Not Sure

**2. In the last 12 months, have you visited a doctor or medical clinic for any reason, including check-ups, emergency visits or hospital outpatient department?**

Yes

No

**3. Does a disability, handicap, or chronic disease keep you from fully participating in work, school, housework, or other activities?**

Yes

No

#### Section 2: Health Topics

**1. Have you ever sought health information for the following health topics?**

**This information may have been sought through internet, magazines, books, communication with friends and family, or other means.**

a. Information about a specific disease or medical problem

Yes

No

b. Information about a certain medical treatment or procedure

Yes

No

c. Information about diet, nutrition, vitamins, or nutritional supplements

Yes

No

d. Information about exercise or fitness

Yes

No

e. Information about prescription or over the counter drugs

Yes

No

f. Information about problems with drugs or alcohol

- Yes  
No
- g. Information about depression, anxiety, stress or mental health issues  
Yes  
No
- h. Information about sexual health  
Yes  
No
- i. Information about a particular doctor or hospital  
Yes  
No
- j. Information related to health insurance  
Yes  
No

### **Section 3: Sources of Health Information**

#### **Where do you seek health information?**

##### **1. Internet**

If yes, name any internet sources that provided valuable health information (ex. website names, or URLs)

Yes

\_\_\_\_\_

No

##### **2. Print /Online Magazines**

If yes, name any magazine sources that provided valuable health information (ex. Essence, Men's Health)

Yes

\_\_\_\_\_

No

##### **3. Books**

If yes, provide the name of the book titles that provided valuable health information.

Yes

\_\_\_\_\_

No

**4. Other People (Friends, Family, Healthcare Providers)**

If yes, provide titles (Mother, Doctor, or Family Friend)

Yes

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No

**Section 4: Search Strategies**

- 1. If you were seeking health information which source would you seek first? Each source has a default ranking, click and drag the source to the correct ranking position, 1 being the first source used to 6 being the last source used.**

Internet

Magazines

Books

Family

Friends

Medical Professional

**Section 5: Valid Sources**

- 1. There is a wide range of health information available. This information may come from different sources that may not be the most truthful, up to date, or reliable. After you have found or received health information how often do you check the source for validity, dates, and reliability?**

Always

Sometimes

Never

- 2. There are reputable providers of consumer health information on the web such as MedLinePlus, MayoClinic, WebMD, have you ever visited any of these sites to look for health information?**

Yes

No

- 3. What would persuade you to visit valid health websites such as MedLinePlus, MayoClinic, WebMD, rather than performing a text search with a search engine such as Google or Yahoo? Select all that are applicable.**

Prior knowledge of reputable health information sites  
 Advertisement of health information sites on sites you visit daily (ex. Facebook, Twitter, or news sites)  
 Website information provided by health care professionals  
 I have visited the valid health websites listed above.  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

- 4. Do you ever search for health information on websites that are specific to African Americans (Ex. Black America Web, BlackHealth.org, or Essence/Lifestyle)?**

If yes, provide the source title

Yes

\_\_\_\_\_

No

#### **Section 6: Interaction**

- 1. Did the health information that you have received or found change the overall perception of your health?**

Yes

No

- 2. Did the health information that you have received or found help you better treat an illness or condition?**

Yes

No

- 3. How confident are you in your ability to find valid health information?**

Very confident

Moderately confident

Somewhat confident

Not confident at all

- 4. What would help you feel more confident?**

Knowing the name and location of valid health information sources

Knowing medical terms used on health sites

Knowing that the source (person, internet, book, magazine) is providing valid information

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

- 5. Do you feel satisfied with the health information you have received?**

Yes

No

- 6. Have you ever felt overwhelmed when searching for health information?**  
 Yes  
 No
- 7. As an African American do you feel that the health information you have received is culturally relevant?**  
 Yes  
 No  
 Don't know
- 8. Do you feel that you would be more receptive to health information if it came from a source that was primarily focused on African American culture? (Ex. Family member's website/blogs geared toward African Americans, or African American based magazines or books)?**  
 Yes  
 No  
 Don't Know
- 9. How much does your family influence your thoughts and ideas on your health?**  
 Highly influence my thoughts on my health  
 Moderately influence my thoughts on my health  
 Somewhat influence my thoughts on my health  
 Does not influence my thoughts on my health

### **Section 7: Demographics**

**1. Please indicate your Gender**

Female

Male

**2. Please indicate your age range**

18-21

22-25

26-30

**3. How do you identify yourself?**

African American/Black

Afro Caribbean

Biracial/Mixed

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Comments:** \_\_\_\_\_

This concludes the survey, thank you for your participation. If you would like to be entered in the prize drawing for one of two \$50.00 Visit Gift cards please click on the following link:

[https://uncodum.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_88HBv64c99yNMqg](https://uncodum.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_88HBv64c99yNMqg)



## **Appendix C. Voluntary Email Prize Drawing Website**

**Thank you for participating in the Health Information Seeking Behavior Survey.**

If you would like to be entered into the drawing for one of two \$50.00 Visa Gift cards please provide a valid email address below.

If you have any questions concerning this research study please contact me at [stacyh@email.unc.edu](mailto:stacyh@email.unc.edu) .

Email: \_\_\_\_\_