

**Knowledge, Attitudes, and Malt Liquor Beer Drinking Behavior Among  
African American Men in South Central Los Angeles**

by  
**Didra Brown Taylor**

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CALIFORNIA SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY  
Los Angeles

Knowledge, Attitudes, and Malt Liquor Beer Drinking Behavior  
Among African American Men in South Central Los Angeles

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology

by

Didra Brown Taylor, M.A.

2000

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Didra Brown Taylor, M.A.  
2000

CALIFORNIA SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY  
Los Angeles Campus

The dissertation of Didra Brown Taylor directed and approved by the candidates  
committee, has been accepted by the Faculty of  
the California School of Professional Psychology  
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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## DEDICATION

To the ancestors whose spirits provided me with strength during the completion of this dissertation:

Grandma Bea  
Papa Frank Garland  
Uncle-Dr. Walter Hines  
Dr. Burt W. Taylor  
Uncle Willie Ray King  
Gary Rippetoe  
Uncle Gerald Caldwell

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## PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS



Taylor, D. (2000). From Rhetoric to the Real. In Powell, A., "Message 'N A Bottle: The Scandal Continues, Vol. 2" Renaissance Press: Chicago.

Taylor, D. (February, 2000). Malt Liquor Beer: What It Is and What It Ain't. Presented at the Tri-Community Alternative Education Center, Compton, CA.

Taylor, D. (December, 1999). Malt Liquor Beer and African American Men: The 40oz Scandal. Presented at the Collaborative Alcohol Research Center Colloquium Series, Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science, Los Angeles, CA.

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Brown, D. & Powell, A. (August, 1997). "The Use of African Themes and Symbols: Countering the Psychobio-spiritual Attacks on the African Mind by the Malt Liquor Beer Industry." Presented at the 29th Annual National Convention of the Association of Black Psychologists, Washington, D.C..

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Taylor, D. (in press). Sobering Research: From Rhetoric to the Real. In Powell, A. (Ed.), Message In a Bottle: The Forty Ounce Scandal Vol.2.

Brown, D. (October, 1996). Preliminary Finding of A Pilot Study: Malt Liquor Beer Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behavior of African American Men in South Los Angeles. Presented at the "Put an End to the 40ounce Trend" Community Hearing, Los Angeles, CA.

Brown, D. (August, 1996). A Resolution to the Problem: Understanding African American Men's Behavior, Attitudes and Knowledge Regarding Malt Liquor Beer in

South Los Angeles. Presented at the 28th Annual National Convention of the Association of Black Psychologists, Chicago, IL.

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Brown, D. (March, 1996). Brick House Malt Liquor and the Continual Attempts to Destroy African American and Latino Minds. Presented at the Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment, Los Angeles, CA.

Grills, C., Bass, K., Brown, D., Akers, A. (1995) Empowerment Evaluation: Building Upon a Tradition of Activism in the African American Community. In Fetterman, D., Wanderman, A. and Kafterian, S. (Eds.), Empowerment Evaluation: Knowledge and Tools for Self-Assessment and Accountability. Sage, CA. pgs. 123-140.

Grills, C. & Brown, D. (August, 1995). A Survey of Alcohol and Tobacco Billboards in the African American Community. Presented at the 27th Annual National Convention of the Association of Black Psychologists, Los Angeles, CA.

#### MEDIA INVOLVEMENT

May 22, 1997	“Front Page” Radio Show, KJLH 102.3FM, Los Angeles, CA
March 15, 1997	“The O.P.M. Show”, KSBR 88.5 FM, Orange Coast College, Irvine, CA
March 12, 1997	“Front Page” Radio Show, KJLH 102.3FM, Los Angeles, CA
March 10, 1997	<i>Death In a 40oz. Bottle</i> , Inglewood News, p10
March 7, 1997	<i>Gardena Resident wins Al Jarreau Fellowship</i> , California Crusader, p3
March 6, 1997	<i>South Los Angeles Resident wins Al Jarreau Fellowship</i> , L.A. Watts Times, p10
March 6, 1997	<i>Los Angeles Resident wins Al Jarreau Fellowship</i> , Herald Dispatch, pA8

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Knowledge, Attitudes, and Malt Liquor Beer Drinking Behavior

Among African American Men in South Central Los Angeles

by

Didra Brown Taylor

Doctor of Philosophy in Clinical Psychology

California School of Professional Psychology, Los Angeles

2000

Shelly P. Harrell, Ph.D., Chairperson

Alcohol use continues to be one of the most serious and complex social and health-related problems affecting the African American community today. A review of the literature suggested that African American drink less but suffer from more negative consequences of drinking. Although African Americans are only 14% of the population, they are reported to consume 30% of malt liquor beers. Most surveys which seek to measure alcohol consumption patterns for African American men refer to questions related to mainstream alcohol types. For African American men, the literature has not addressed these phenomena nor adequately provided a culturally-specific theoretical framework by which to start addressing these issues. The present study uses an Africentric perspective based on the Association of Black Psychologists Behavioral Change Model (Nobels, et.al. 1998) to provide the conceptual framework for

understanding the influence that age, level of education, and employment status have on African American men's knowledge, attitudes and malt liquor beer drinking behavior.

One hundred and fifty (N= 150) African American men between the ages of 20 and 89 participated in this study. The mean age was 43.4 years old. Almost all of the men were married, employed and had an average of two children. Most of the participants have lived in Los Angeles at least eleven years.

The study hypothesized that there would be significant demographic differences (i.e., age, education, employment) on the levels of malt liquor beer knowledge, community and personal standards regarding malt liquor beer use, and alcohol and malt liquor beer use categories. None of these hypotheses were supported. The study also hypothesized that the perceived behavioral effects of consuming malt liquor beer would be more negative (e.g., aggression, fighting), positive/social (e.g., outgoing), and introverted (e.g., quiet) than other alcoholic beverages. These hypotheses were supported completed for wine and "wine" coolers, partially for regular beer, but not at all for hard liquor.

Overall, the men surveyed had very little knowledge regarding alcohol use. Specifically, knowledge regarding the alcohol content for both malt liquor beer and regular was low. With regard to name brand knowledge, participants correctly named a malt liquor beer brand more often than they correctly named a regular beer brand. In addition, 47% named a malt liquor beer brand when asked for a regular beer brand. Almost all of the men surveyed believed that the African American community is being targeted by malt liquor beer makers.

With regard to attitudes, participants held higher personal standards regarding malt liquor beer use than community standards. The men made a clear distinction between what they feel is acceptable for themselves and what is acceptable drinking practices for others. Advertising and pop culture were reported to have little influence on whether they drank malt liquor beer while alcohol use by family and others in the community most influenced their decisions to drink. Many of the men in this sample reported they tried malt liquor beer before the legal age and were as young as 5 years old. Malt liquor beer consumption patterns varied with men reporting to drink a forty-ounce bottle of malt liquor beer once a week. The typical patterns of drinking were weekday and weekend mornings. The need to escape, the need to socialize and the effect of advertising were not seen as motives for drinking.

These findings can be understood in the context of the ABPsi Behavior Change Model. Alcohol and malt liquor beer knowledge, attitudes, and drinking behavior are perhaps influenced more by factors common to African American men (e.g., South Central Los Angeles environment, cultural connection, racism) than by demographics differences within the group. Future research should continue to explore the meaning of , and the influences on, malt liquor beer knowledge, attitudes, and drinking behaviors among older (versus adolescent) samples of African American men. Research should also more explicitly incorporate sociocultural, sociohistorical, and sociopolitical constructs in the assessment of malt liquor beer drinking behavior. Implications for intervention and prevention are provided.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The devastation is already being felt by community residents who must somehow cope with the behavior of those “hooked” on the “cheap high” of the beer (malt liquor beer) that is twice as strong as regular beer....(Parham, 1991).

As early as the Atlantic slave trade, alcohol was employed as a commodity of barter in the trade of African men, women and children (Mannix, 1962). The link between deadly drugs and Africans in America can be traced to the era of the slavery. During American enslavement of Africans, alcohol was very much a part of the weekend and holiday social life of many plantations; often thought by many slave holders to be a means of release for slaves from long hard hours of work as well as a method of diverting Blacks from thoughts of escape to freedom (Franklin, 1967). However, some slave holders refused to allow their slaves access to alcohol for fear that such activity would lead to rebellion and slave revolt on the plantation.

Subsequent to the era of American slavery, Blacks found themselves isolated from the diverse social and recreational activities that whites enjoyed. Thus, many found relaxation and recreation in the form of heavy drinking at public taverns and private homes, especially on weekends and during holidays (Harper & Saifnoorian, 1991). Herd (1987) states that the stress associated with migration of Blacks to urban northern cities in search of jobs during the early 1900s appears to have resulted in increased use of alcoholic beverages and subsequent alcohol-related problems.

Alcohol use continues to be one of the most serious and complex social and health-related problems affecting the African American community today. African Americans are about 50% more likely than whites to be clients in alcohol treatment

programs (Caetano & Kaskutas, 1995) . Alcoholism is the secondary diagnosis in 65% of hospital bed admissions and is implicated in 61% of job absenteeism, 84% of traffic deaths, 70% of suicides, 80% of homicides, 90% of stabbings, 70% of all violent crimes, and 60% of all automobile accidents (Rebach, 1992). African American males are disproportionately impacted by alcohol-related problems, as indicated by the death rate for liver cirrhosis which is double the rate of white men (Nobles & Goddard, 1989). Yet, research on alcohol knowledge, attitudes, and behavior among African Americans is meager (Harper & Saidnoorian, 1991). A study conducted in Los Angeles of one hundred and ninety-one problem drinkers, found that malt liquor beer was the second (18%) only to fortified wines (46%) as the most preferred alcohol beverage (Los Angeles County, 1989). It has been established that there is a problem in the African American community concerning consumption of alcohol generally, and of malt liquor beer specifically.

#### Malt Liquor Beer (MLB)

There appears to be no literature documenting the entry of malt liquor beer into African American communities. Interviews with elders and longtime residents of the African American community in South Central Los Angeles suggest that Billy Dee Williams was the first celebrity to advertise a malt liquor beer product (Colt 45) in the mid-1970s (Brown, 1996). In the 1980s a flurry of community groups, grass roots organizations, ministers, and entertainment personalities brought attention to this high alcohol content beverage because of reports it was being marketed and sold to under-aged youth.

Today, malt liquor beer is reportedly the drink of choice among African American youth (Saltonstall, 1993). It has nearly twice the average alcohol content of

mainstream brand (regular) beers and can have an alcohol content from 6% to 12% per volume (Marin Institute, 1994). Malt liquor beer is commonly found in 40 and 64 ounce containers sold as a single serving in mostly African American communities (Marin Institute, 1994).

The most common malt liquor brands are: Colt 45, Olde English 800, Magnum, Schlitz Malt Liquor, and St. Ides. Different brands have differing alcohol contents which may also vary by state (Martin & Nirenberg, 1991). Until 1997 manufacturers were not legally bound to disclose the alcohol content of malt liquor beers. Today any fermented malt beverage can be called beer (Alcohol Beverage Control, 1996). Also, when the alcohol content is above 5.7% alcohol (by volume) the alcohol content must be indicated on the label so that consumers are aware of how much alcohol they are drinking (Beverage Industry News, 1997). Prior to the passage of the “labeling law” malt liquor could not be called beer because the alcohol content (anything above 4% alcohol by volume) exceeded the legal limit to be called lager or beer. It can be said that malt liquor beer by definition is an illegal product (Line, 1993; Forget, 1988)

A comparison among the different types of alcohol and malt liquor beer reveals that one 40-ounce bottle of St. Ides (8% alcohol by volume) has the same amount of alcohol (by volume) as almost six 12-ounce cans of regular beer (at 4.5% alcohol by volume); five 5-ounce glasses of wine (12% alcohol by weight); and five 1.5-ounce of mixed drinks (40% pure alcohol by volume) (Brown, 1996).

According to the California Highway Patrol’s DUI drinking profile, if a person weighs between 170 and 189 pounds, consumes four 12-ounce cans of regular beer over a two hour period, and attempts to drive a motor vehicle, he/she is definitely (as opposed to



likely or most likely) driving under the influence (DUI) with a blood alcohol level of .08% to higher. When a person consumes one 40-ounce bottle of malt liquor beer and attempts to drive, he/she is definitely (as opposed to likely or most likely) driving under the influence. Not only are malt liquor products harmful themselves, they are believed to be a 'gateway' drug that paves the way to polysubstance addiction (Prevention File, 1990; Kandel and Yamaguchi, 1993).

### African Americans

The research literature indicates that African Americans tend to be group drinkers, drinking in a social context with friends and relatives as opposed to drinking alone (Caetano, 1997). African Americans also tend to drink more frequently and heavily during the weekend. Their "heavy drinking" tends to begin in the age group 20-24 and reach a peak in the age group 35-39 (Caetano & Kaskutas, 1996). The consequence of this is that African Americans tend to drink for a longer period of time and hence are more likely to suffer from the negative consequences of long-term heavy drinking as reflected in high mortality rates due to cirrhosis of the liver (Sutocky, Schultz & Kizer, 1993). In many communities, street drinking has become a social custom with many African Americans drinking on the street corner, outside liquor stores, in automobiles, and in front of homes and stores. As a group, African Americans have higher rates of both abstainers and heavier drinkers than whites (Herd, 1993; Caetano & Kaskutas, 1996). It is estimated that African Americans spend more than \$12 billion annually on alcohol. According to the Institute on Black Chemical Abuse, African Americans consume one-third of all malt liquor although they constitute only 12% of the population (Marin Institute, 1994).