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INTRODUCTION

Urban centers throughout the United States face similar health challenges, such as high rates of chronic disease, limited healthy food access and low socio-economic status among community residents. Residents within these settings often must rely on a local corner or grocery stores located within their neighborhoods, of which many are known for selling low-quality, high-cost healthy foods – if available. Owners of these small businesses often do not reside within the communities they serve and have different socio-cultural identities than their consumers.

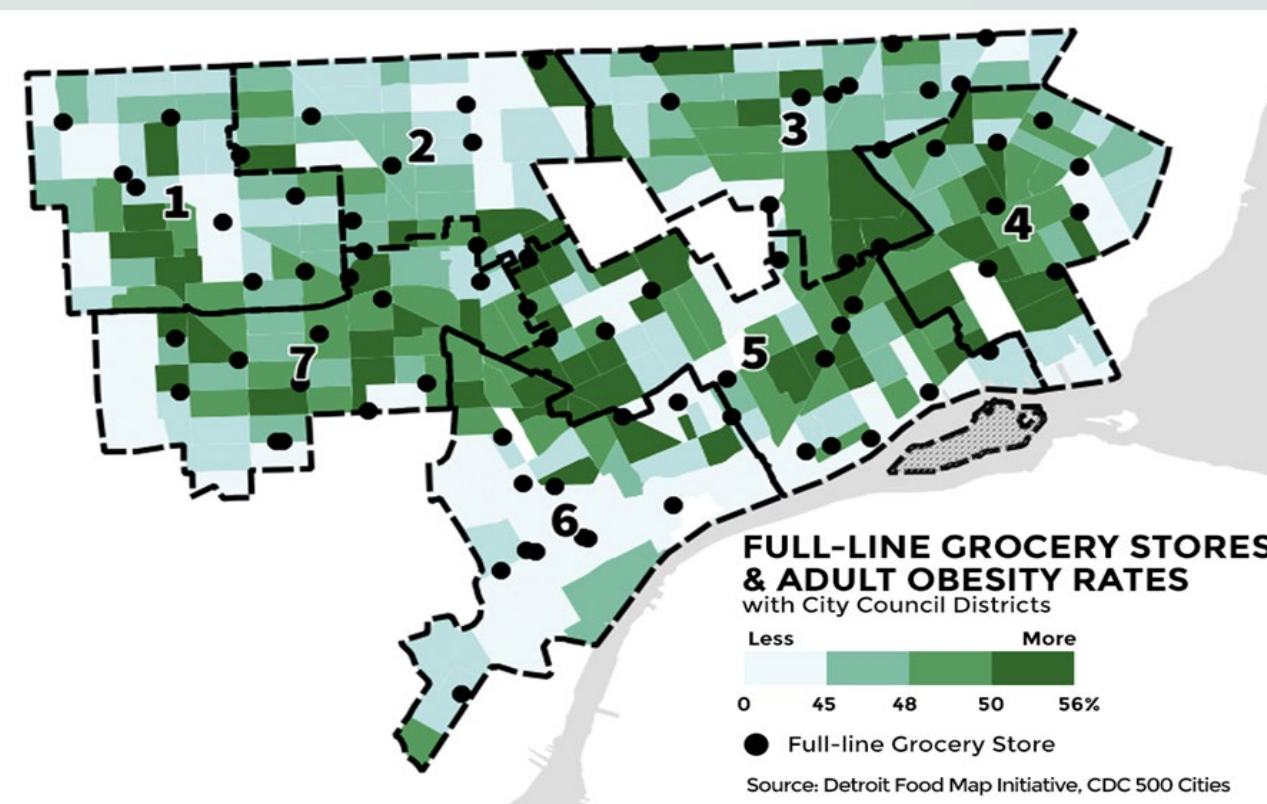


Figure 2: Detroit Grocery Stores and Obesity Rates (2017)

METHODS

A qualitative, multiple-case study design was used to unpack consumer reports of experiences with store owners in their communities and to align these narratives with store owner descriptions of their relationship. Interviews were conducted with store owners/lead managers (N=7) in seven urban centers and among consumers/community stakeholders in Baltimore (N=15); Buffalo (N=3); Boston N/A; Chicago (N=3); Detroit (N=5); Minneapolis (N=2); and Washington, DC (N=4). Case study reports from the seven communities were also reviewed for descriptions of neighborhood demographics.

Table 1: Study Data Collection

Data Collection Method	Urban Centers (N=7)
Store Owner/Manager Interviews	(N=7)
Consumer/ Stakeholder interviews	(N=32) Conducted in 7 communities
Case Study Reports	(N=7)

This study is part of a seven-city series looking at how healthy food retail has been impacted by COVID-19 with financial support from Healthy Eating Research, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

SOCIO-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Table 2: Community and Socio-Economic Status and Store Owner Demographics

Community	Baltimore	Boston	Buffalo	Chicago	Detroit	Minneapolis	Washington DC
Store Zip Code	21218	02124	14208	60621	48214	55406; 55409	20018
Population	576,498	675,647	278,349	2,746,388	639,111	429,954	689,545
Percent White, not Hispanic/Latino	27.7	44.7	43.4	33.3	11.0	59.7	36.7
Percent Black/ African American	62.7	24.2	35.2	29.2	77.1	18.9*	45.4
Percent Latino/ Hispanic	5.7	19.5	12.2	28.6	7.7	9.6*	11.1
Percent in Poverty	20.0	28.4	28.3	17.3	33.2	18.3*	15.5
Percent with HS Diploma	85.5	87.8	85.7	85.9	81.9	90.4	91.9
Store Owner Race/ Ethnicity	White	White (1) Latino/ Hispanic (1)	Black/ African American	Arab/ Middle Eastern/ Chaldean	Arab/ Middle Eastern/ Chaldean	N/A	White/ European
Store Owners Living in Community	0	N/A	1	0	0	N/A	0

*Area around the two Minneapolis stores had 45.7%-62.7% people of color living around the stores and 23.8%-29.6% living in poverty

Figure 1: Store Owner Gender

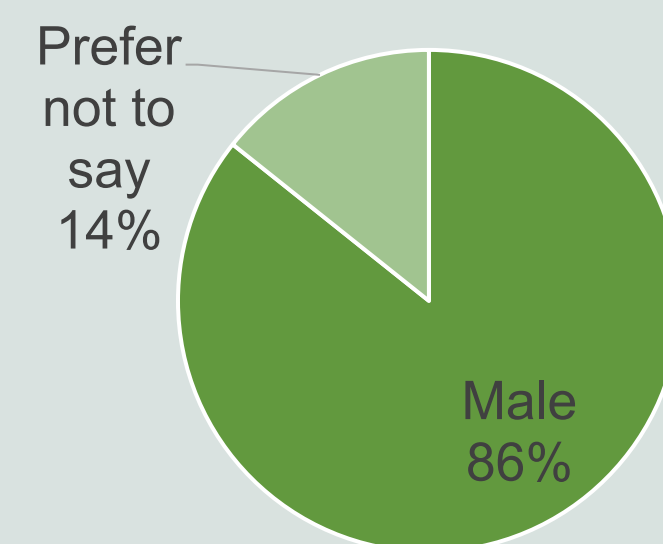
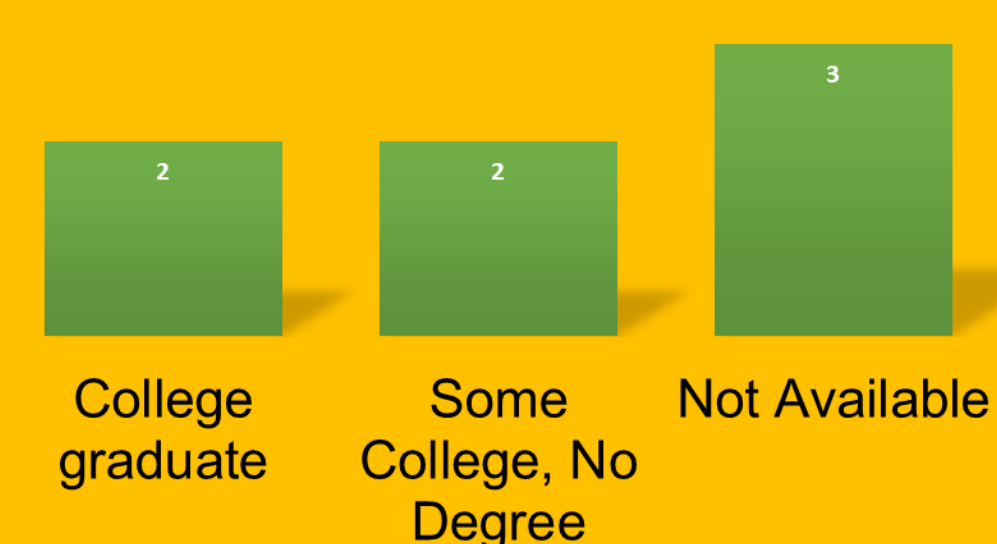


Figure 2 Store Owner Education



CONSUMER/STAKEHOLDER RESULTS

Consumer/Stakeholder narratives illustrated several positive and negative influences on consumer shopping behaviors in local grocers, likely due to differences and similarities in socio-cultural backgrounds of store owners and consumers:

- Positive:* Almost all consumers who reported positive interactions and held a positive association with their local store resided in neighborhoods or communities where their local store owner also resided. In many cases, the store owner also held a similar ethno-cultural background as their consumers.

I think they do a pretty good job. Their prices are higher than [regional grocer], but you get a better quality. They were there when [regional grocer] was closed, which I think was extremely important. I'm talking about the [regional grocer] on [street] Street that's right outside the neighborhood.

I love it. I come here all the time I know where everything is and I like the customer service., the cashier's, the managers. Everyone is wonderful here.

There are other stores it's I don't think, maybe it is technically a food desert right there, but like, there are other stores but they're really expensive. Yes, organic, and there's a [Chain Store] but they don't always have necessarily what I'm looking for. So I remember the first time I walked into [Store], I got a little teary eyed because I was like oh my god, I didn't even realize this was here this is everything that I've been looking forward to...

- Negative:* In contrast, almost all consumers who reported negative interactions and held negative associations with their local store resided in neighborhoods or communities where their local store owner did not reside. In addition, the store owner often did not have a similar ethno-cultural background as their consumers.

I was a say they're...and just in my opinion, like as a grocery store they're not really necessarily active. Like they don't do a lot of community stuff, you know, they don't do anything to service the community. They're just, you know, just a grocery store for the most part.

Big change. The owners before lived in the neighborhood. They cared about the neighborhood. If you needed something and didn't have the money, come on in. Yeah we know you gonna make good on it.

CONCLUSIONS

It is important to understand the community dynamics within these stores as they can negatively impact the project if store owner-consumer relationships are not harmonious and trustworthy. Understanding the context within these urban centers can assist other health practitioners working in retail settings with similar contextual issues. Assessments of community dynamics should take place prior to the launch of any retail intervention, especially when there are socio-cultural differences between store owners and consumers.