Higher Status Boosts Mastery
For
White, Not Black, American College Women’s Future Selves

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Health Outcomes in Black vs. White American Women

Infant Mortality per 1,000 live births

(CDC, 2002)
Explanations for Ethnic/Racial Health Discrepancies?

Lower income

• Less access to resources such as healthcare
• Less access to information on health

Lifestyle risk factors

• High rates of smoking among Black Americans
• Dietary habits

Cultural mistrust of healthcare providers

• Noncompliance
• Less likely to see healthcare providers
Black American women from middle and upper classes have surprisingly high rates of infant mortality
What Accounts for Poorer Health Outcomes in Black American Women?
Mastery

An overall perceived sense of control over one’s life events

(Skaff et al. 1996)

• Can be addressed as hopelessness, helplessness, locus of control, powerlessness

(Turner, Lloyd, Roszell, 1999)
Mastery Orientation Scale
(Pearlin, 1978)

1. I have little control over the things that happen to me.
2. There is really no way I can solve some of the problems I have.
3. There is little I can do to change many of the important things in my life.
4. I often feel helpless in dealing with the problems of life.
5. Sometimes I feel that I’m being pushed around in my life.
6. What happens to me in the future mostly depends on me.
7. I can do just about anything I really set my mind to do.
SES and Mastery

Mastery

SES

(Turner, Lloyd, & Roszell, 1999)
The Current Study

SES and mastery
• Black and White American women

Experimental method
• Causality
Participants & Method

Participants

- N = 42
- Smith College students
- About evenly divided between Black American and White American women

Method

- Imagined one’s future as low or high social status
- Measured mastery using Mastery Orientation Scale (Pearlin, 1978)
Results

![Bar chart showing results for White American and Black American. The chart indicates a significant difference (*).](chart.png)
SES and mastery
White vs. Black American women

Mastery vs. SES
- Black women: Increasing mastery with increasing SES
- White women: Decreasing mastery with increasing SES
Why are these results important?

• A low sense of mastery among high-status Black women is a potential contributor to Black-White health disparities
  – For the general population, a higher SES predicts a higher sense of mastery, and therefore better health outcomes, but this is not true for Black women

• Poorer health outcomes for Black Americans cannot be explained solely through lower socio-economic status
Future Research

• To what extent does a sense of mastery affect overall health outcomes?
• Would this study yield the same results if conducted in an environment that is not primarily White (like Smith)?
References


THANK YOU

Any Questions?