

'Racial discrimination & health: new analyses of how power affects what we study, from measuring exposure to measuring embodiment – an ecosocial approach'

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Professor Nancy Krieger Harvard School of Public Health

Weston Theatre Level 1, J.G. Crawford Building, Building #132, Lennox Crossing, ANU, Canberra



Rigorous study of how racism harms health requires conceptual clarity: about the theories we use to articulate causal relationships and the methods we use to measure phenomena and test our hypotheses. In this presentation, I draw on the ecosocial theory of disease distribution to analyze how racial inequality becomes embodied, discuss why reliance solely on self-report measures of exposures to racial discrimination may be problematic, and share the first set of findings of the My Body, My Story study, focused on links between racial discrimination and risk of chronic disease. This investigation, based on 1005 US-born black and white study participants, age 35 to 64, who were members of community health centers in Boston, MA, employs a new implicit measure of exposure to racial discrimination, along with self-report measures of racial discrimination. Results

provide stark evidence of racial/ethnic inequities in economic resources and exposure to racial discrimination, even among members of community health centers, with the black participants more likely than the white participants to be impoverished, to make stronger associations for themselves and their group to be a target of racial discrimination, to self-report exposure to racial discrimination, and to manifest higher levels of social desirability. Study findings also show that implicit and explicit measures of racial discrimination are not equivalent, with results additionally pointing to why research in this area must directly grapple with issues of power and inequity, and how both not only drive the phenomena we seek to study, but also affect the measurement of exposure and its effects.

Nancy Krieger is Professor of Society, Human Development, and Health at the Harvard School of Public Health and Co-Director of the HSPH Interdisciplinary Concentration on Women, Gender, and Health. Dr. Krieger is an internationally recognized social epidemiologist, with a background in biochemistry, philosophy of science, and the history of public health, combined with over 25 years of experience as an activist in issues involving social justice, science, and health. Some of Professor Krieger's research includes: studies on racism, discrimination and health, including blood pressure and birth outcomes; socioeconomic and racial/ethnic disparities in breast cancer; and research on appropriate measures of social class (individual, household, and neighborhood), both for population-based monitoring of social inequalities in health and studying women, gender, class, and health.

Presented by

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