Racial Health Inequalities Revisited: The Toxic Burden of Cultural Racism

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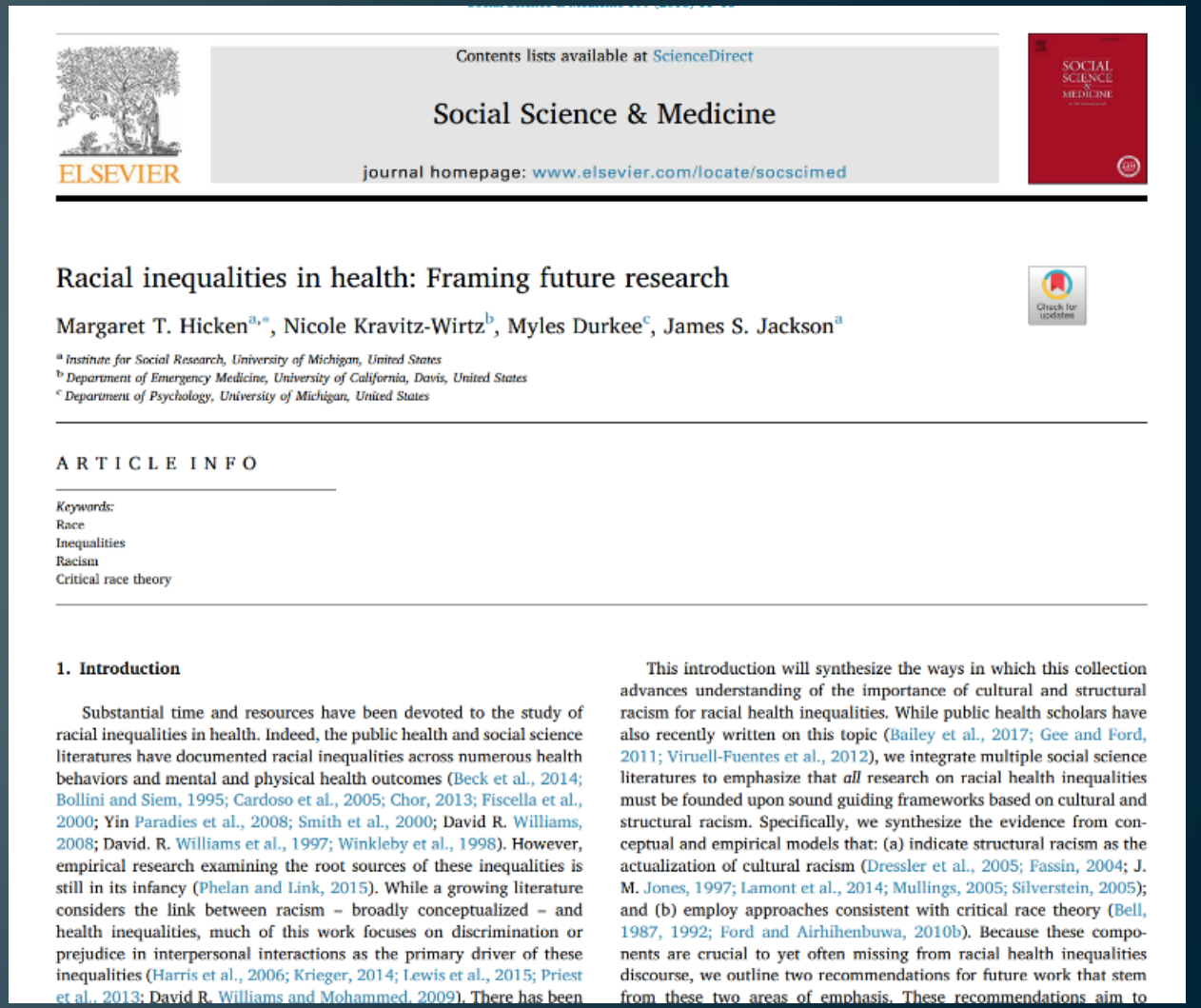
Overview

- What is cultural racism?
  - What is its relation to structural racism?
- What are some psychosocial impacts of cultural racism?
  - Blackness is misrecognized by society
  - Vigilance is heightened among Black Americans
- What is vigilance? What is the psychobiology of vigilance?
- Is vigilance related to health? To racial health inequalities?



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Racial inequalities in health: Framing future research

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1. Introduction

Substantial time and resources have been devoted to the study of racial inequalities in health. Indeed, the public health and social science literatures have documented racial inequalities across numerous health behaviors and mental and physical health outcomes (Beck et al., 2014; Bollini and Siem, 1995; Cardoso et al., 2005; Chor, 2013; Fiscella et al., 2000; Yin Paradies et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2000; David R. Williams, 2008; David. R. Williams et al., 1997; Winkleby et al., 1998). However, empirical research examining the root sources of these inequalities is still in its infancy (Phelan and Link, 2015). While a growing literature considers the link between racism – broadly conceptualized – and health inequalities, much of this work focuses on discrimination or prejudice in interpersonal interactions as the primary driver of these inequalities (Harris et al., 2006; Krieger, 2014; Lewis et al., 2015; Priest et al., 2013; David R. Williams and Mohammed, 2009). There has been

This introduction will synthesize the ways in which this collection advances understanding of the importance of cultural and structural racism for racial health inequalities. While public health scholars have also recently written on this topic (Bailey et al., 2017; Gee and Ford, 2011; Viruell-Fuentes et al., 2012), we integrate multiple social science literatures to emphasize that *all* research on racial health inequalities must be founded upon sound guiding frameworks based on cultural and structural racism. Specifically, we synthesize the evidence from conceptual and empirical models that: (a) indicate structural racism as the actualization of cultural racism (Dressler et al., 2005; Fassin, 2004; J. M. Jones, 1997; Lamont et al., 2014; Mullings, 2005; Silverstein, 2005); and (b) employ approaches consistent with critical race theory (Bell, 1987, 1992; Ford and Airhihenbuwa, 2010b). Because these components are crucial to yet often missing from racial health inequalities discourse, we outline two recommendations for future work that stem from these two areas of emphasis. These recommendations aim to

Cultural Racism

A Very Brief Introduction

What is Racism?

[Racism is] "a political system, a particular power structure of formal [and] informal rule, socioeconomic privilege, and norms for the differential distribution of material wealth and opportunities, benefits and burdens, rights and duties." (p.3)

"… where members of the dominant group create or accept their societal privilege by maintaining structures, ideologies, values, and behavior[ial norms] that have the intent or effect of leaving non-dominant-group members relatively excluded from power, esteem, status and/or equal access to societal resources." (p.43)

"Racism is above all, a technology aimed at permitting the exercise of biopower – the tool that allows us as a society to regulate the distribution of death." (p.18)

Whose life counts?

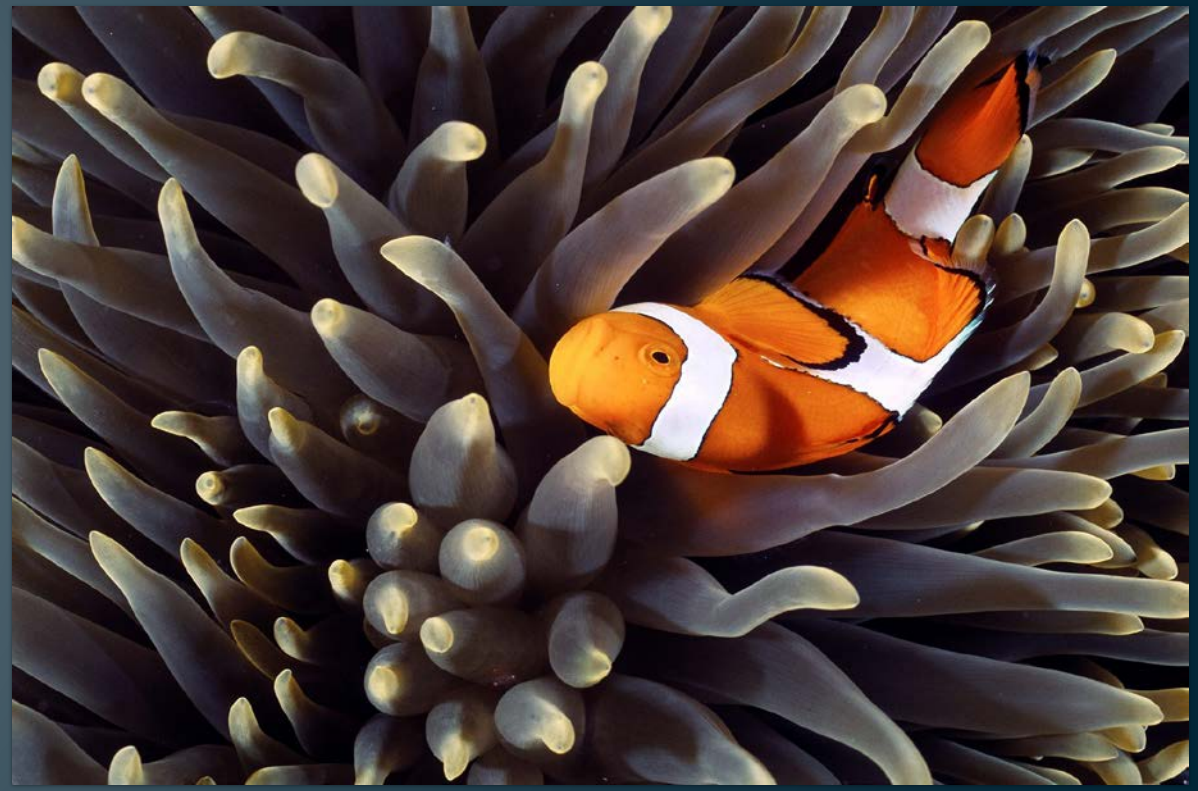
Cultural racism is the shared understanding of who is worthy of full symbolic or legal citizenship based on racialized group membership.

A Distortion Lens

Cultural racism acts as a distortion lens that renders racialized and racially-hierarchical institutions neutral and rational.

A Symbiosis

Structural racism is based on a strong symbiotic relation among institutions, which exist and operate to support cultural racism.



A Shapeshifter

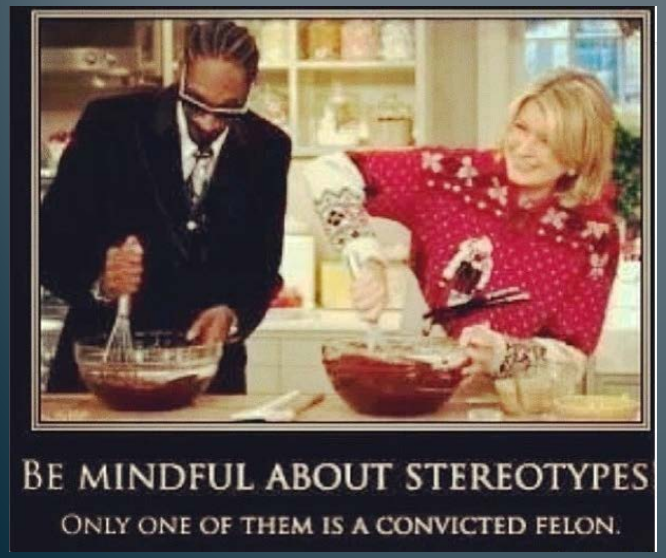
The institutions that comprise our social structure adapt to contemporaneous sociopolitical norms.

An Eraser

Structural racism includes the erasure of historical processes that could clarify the link between racialized groups and health.

Cultural Racism & Vigilance

Misrecognition of Blackness



For Black Men, Fear That Masks Will Invite Racial Profiling

African-American men worry that following the C.D.C. recommendation to cover their faces in public could expose them to harassment from the police.

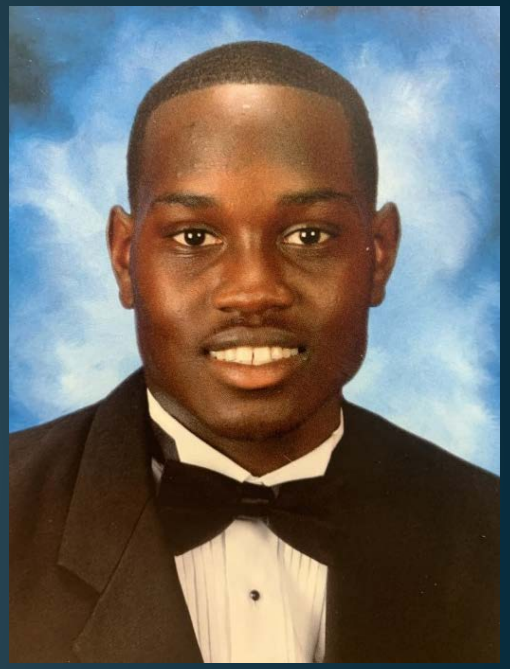
As the coronavirus spreads, black men face two concerns: the virus and those who see their covered faces as threatening. Brittainy Newman/The New York Times

By Derrick Bryson Taylor

April 14, 2020

When Allen Hargrove leaves his Brooklyn apartment to get groceries, he does so with an underlying feeling of worry. It's not just the coronavirus pandemic: As a black man, he fears he could draw unwanted attention by wearing a mask in public.

"I have a sense of anxiety wearing the mask," said Mr. Hargrove, 33, who described himself as having a "football build," at 220 pounds. "It makes me more aware of how I'm being perceived."



Vigilance: Impression Management

Appearance

"...when I'm going shopping, I prepare myself...it's like I will take forever to find me something to wear because I feel I'm not going to be treated right...and I feel I shouldn't have to do that, but I do that because I'm treated different. I think when I go out everyday some situation is going to happen as far as racism." (p. 35)

"I kind of find myself thinking a lot before I leave my house, like: Do I look too threatening? Like, maybe I shouldn't wear this, maybe I shouldn't wear that. Sometimes, when I didn't even need my backpack, but I'd carry it with me anyway … "(p.124)

Vigilance: Impression Management

Speaking

"Because I felt that whites were constantly assessing the level of my intelligence and overall humanity, I was careful to speak with the greatest form of articulation. I made sure my statements were valid, factual, and creative. It became such an automatic response to my environment" (p. 265)

"…[M]y sister criticized me for putting [what] she calls my "white-on-white voice" on [the phone] to get a rental car. But I needed a rental car and I knew that I could get it. I knew if I could get this guy to think that he was talking to some blonde, rather than, you know…I don't have to deal with that, I want to get the car." (pp.54-55).

Vigilance: Social Avoidance

"I used to work on the Upper East Side, and I didn't really shop at any of the stores because I didn't want to be followed, and that's a problem. That's definitely a problem. I have the money, and I demand respect, but my way of demanding respect is to just to avoid going to those stores." (p. 371)

"It just depends on what the situation is, whether or not it's personal, business; it just kind of depends on what, you know, exactly what it is. I usually don't go places where I'm not wanted, so I'm not the kind of person that trailblazes – where people tell you that you don't want you in a certain situation and you persist." (p.275)

Vigilance: Preparation for Slights

"Blacks must be constantly aware of the repertoire of possible responses to chronic burdensome discrimination. One older respondent spoke of having to put on her "shield" just before she leaves the house each morning … as she leaves her home, she has tried to be prepared for insults and discrimination in public places, even if nothing happens that day." (p, 110)

"...[I]t's like you get tense. Because you know...I know this person is going to say something that's going to make me, my heart rate [go up], or maybe have to hold back my tears while I'm talking to them... with a White person, you know that some level of racism is going to hop out of their mouth... And so you have to prepare your body for that." (p.35)

Vigilance & Stress Biology

Anticipatory & Ruminative Stress

The Stress Biology of Vigilance

Anticipatory stress

- Activation of the biological stress response system in anticipation of a potentially stressful situation
- Anticipation of the situation, even in the absence of the actual situation is enough
- Normal, healthy part of human physiology
- BUT, chronic anticipatory stress may result dysfunction of the stress response system

Ruminative stress

- Occurs with the prolonged cognitive representation of a stressful situation
- Can transform an acute stressor into a chronic stressor that repeatedly activates the biological stress response system

The Stress Biology of Vigilance

Is the potential for possible prejudice & discrimination stressful?

Is the knowledge of a racially hostile environment stressful?

Vigilance & Stress

Sample

- 240 healthy Black women 18-30
- Convenience sample from the Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti area

Vigilance & Stress

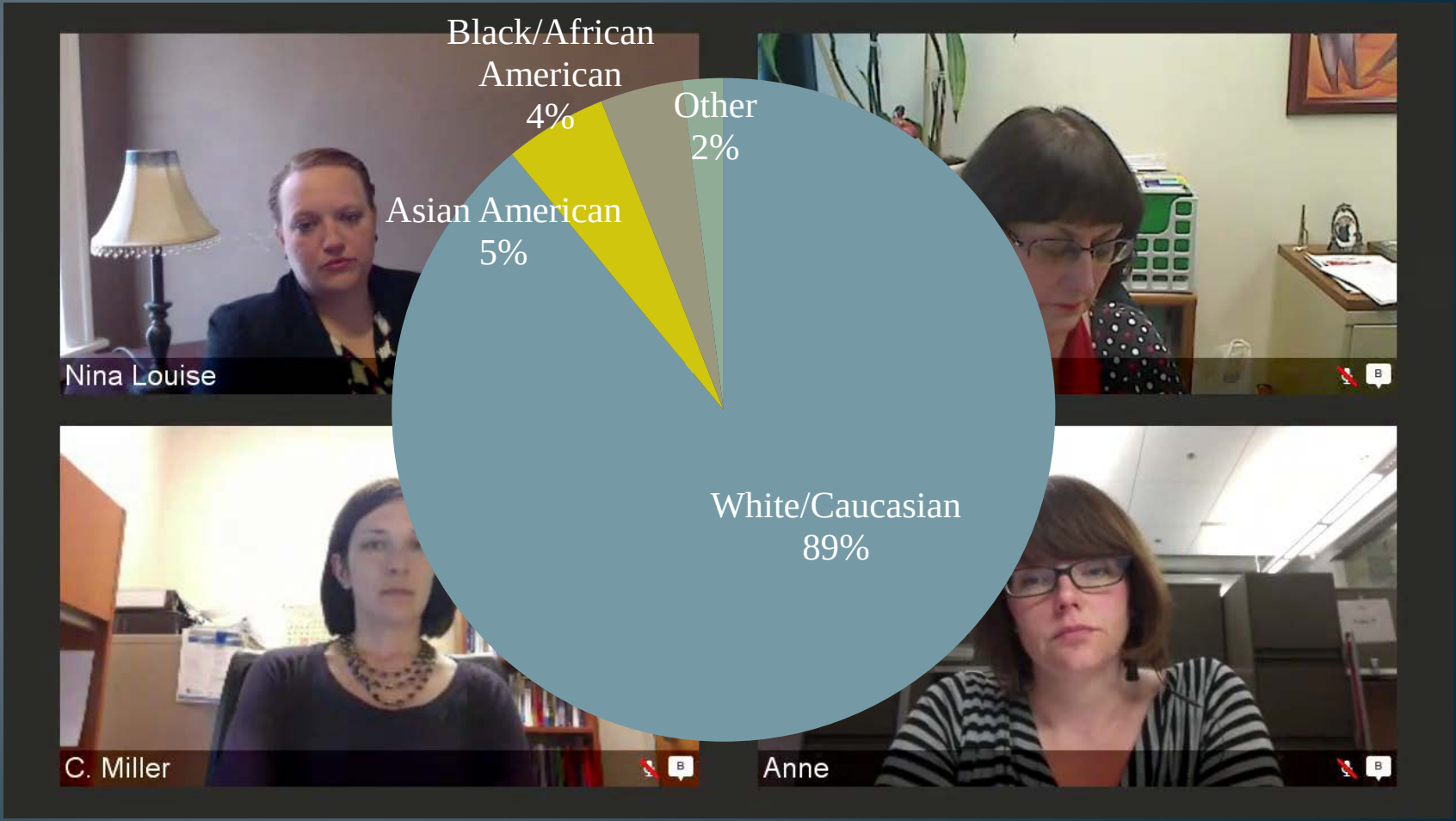
Experimental manipulation: Trier Social Stress Test

		Vigilance	
Panel/staff race	Panel attitudes	Low	High
White	Hostile	A1	A2
White	Friendly	B1	B2
Black	Friendly	C1	C2
Black	N/A	D	

- Deception: Study on job interview process
- Speech and math test in front of expert panel
  - Speech on personal strengths for ideal job
  - Panel drawn from "Michigan Association of Human Resources Administrators"

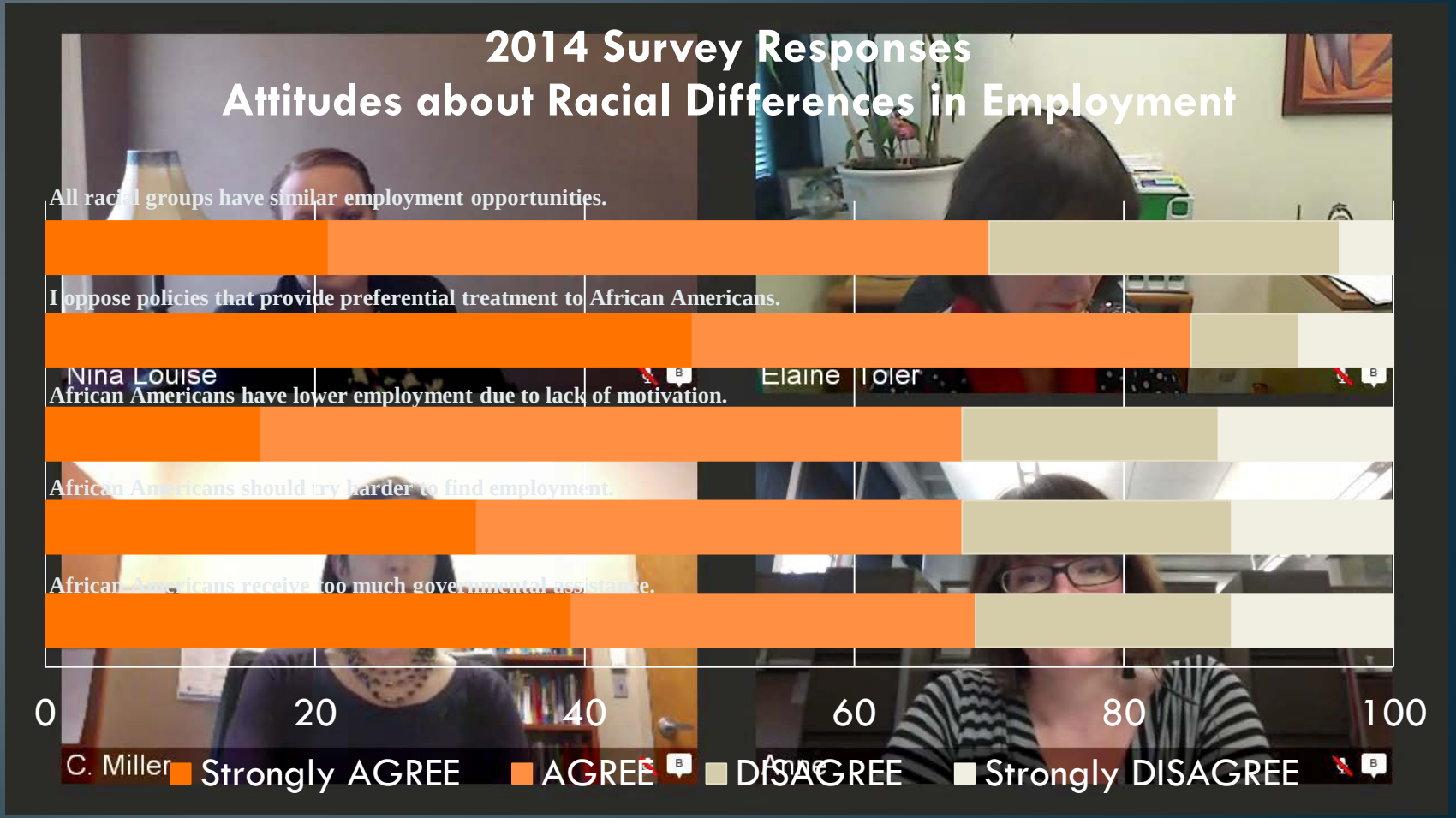
Vigilance & Stress

Panel A: White/hostile



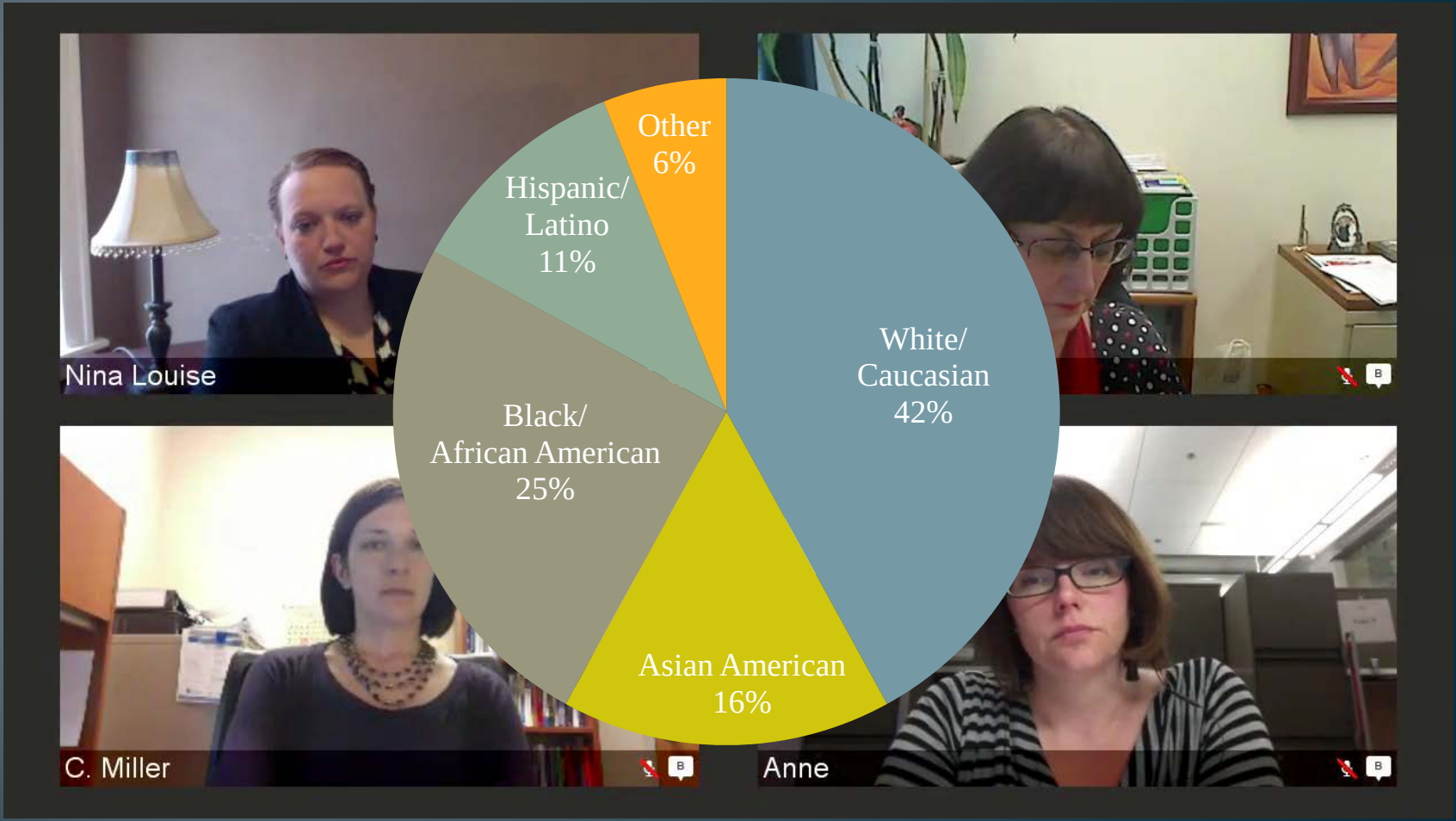
Vigilance & Stress

Panel A: White/hostile



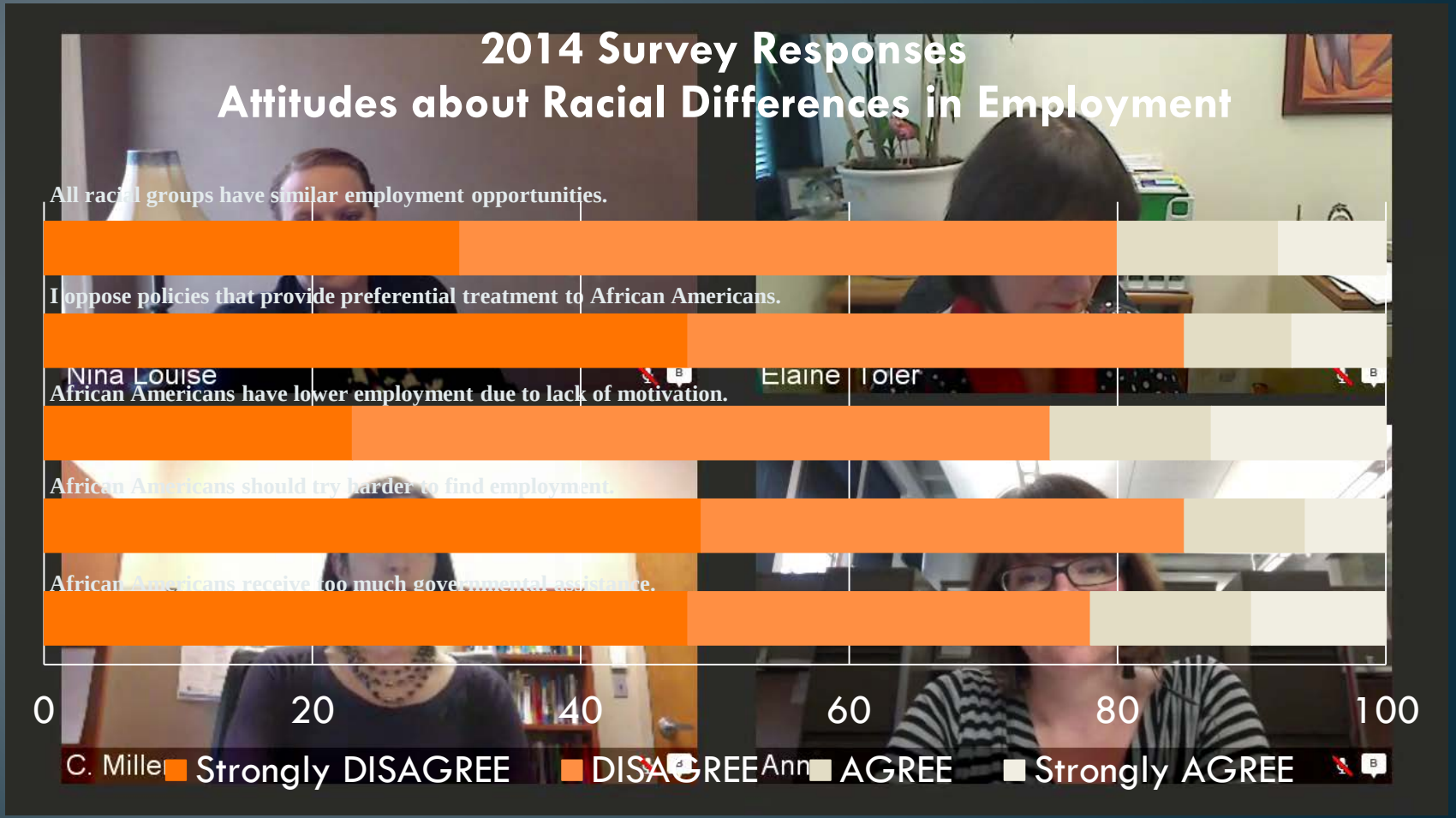
Vigilance & Stress

Panel B: White/friendly



Vigilance & Stress

Panel B: White/friendly



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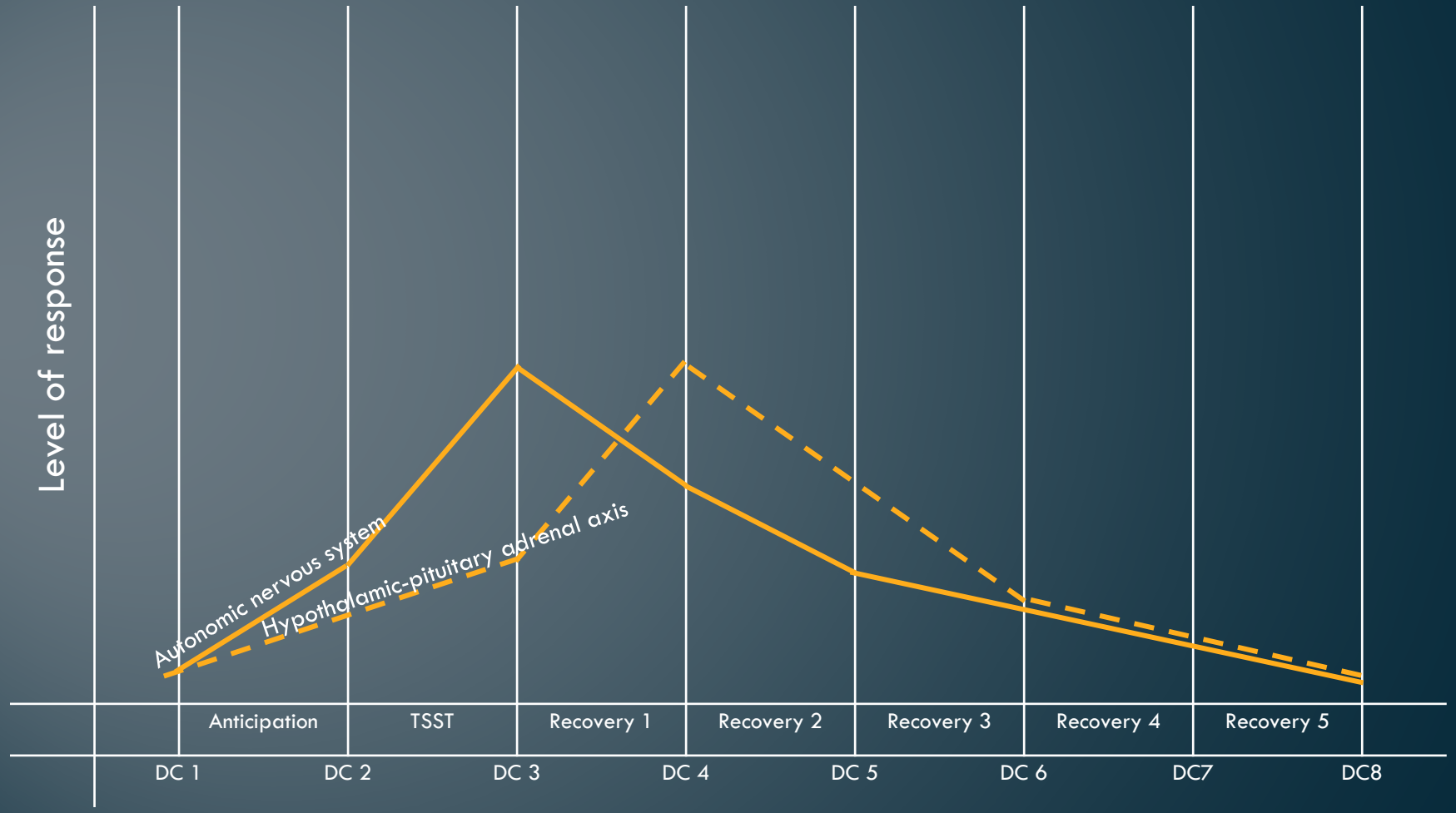
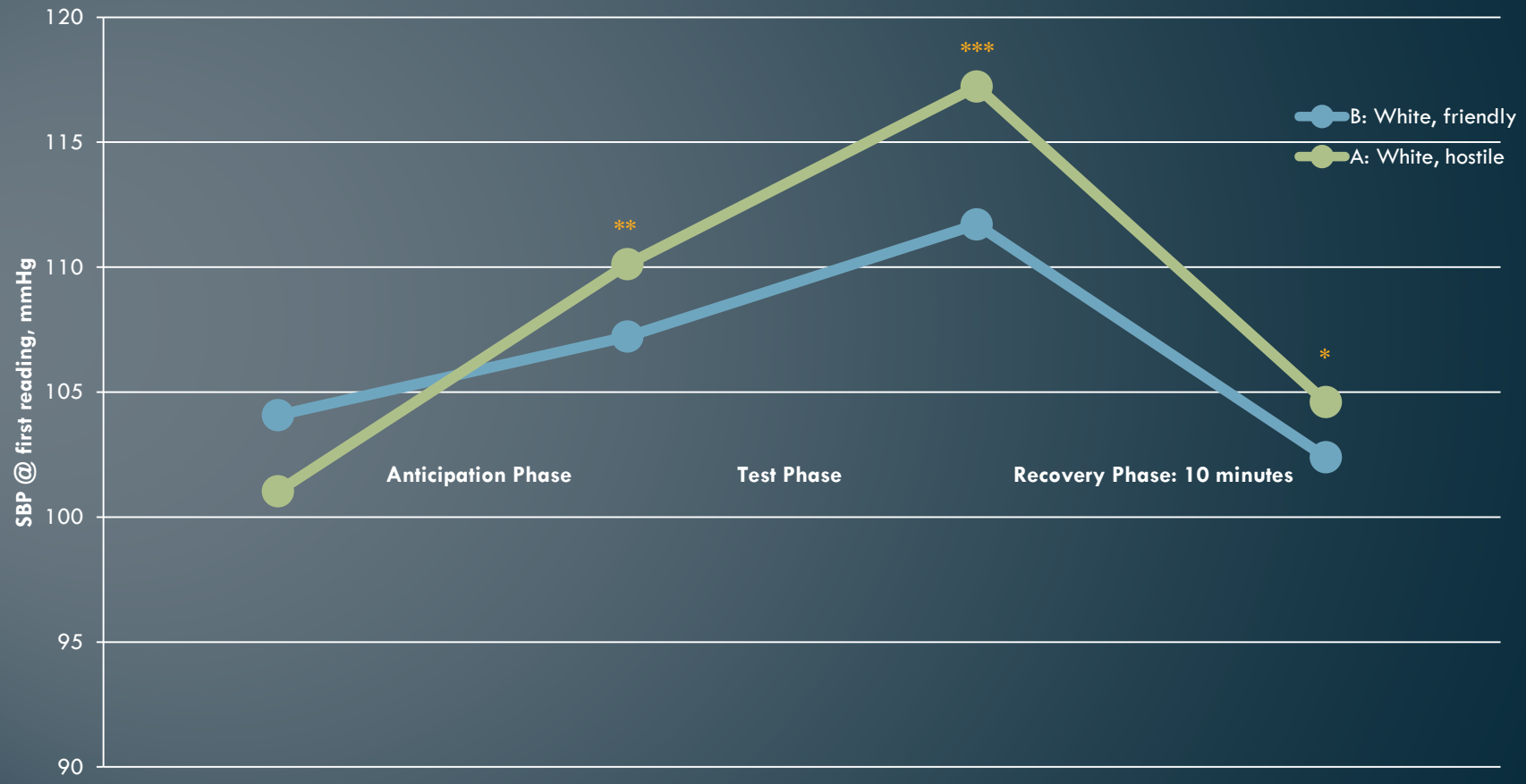
Vigilance & Stress

Chronology of laboratory visit



Vigilance & Stress

Trends SBP during TSST Phase, by Treatment Group



Chronic Vigilance & Health Inequalities

Empirical Examinations

RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Hypertension Prevalence: Reconsidering the Role of Chronic Stress

Margaret T. Hicken, PhD, MPH, Hedwig Lee, PhD, Jeffrey Morenoff, PhD, James S. House, PhD, and David R. Williams, PhD

Racial and ethnic disparities in hypertension are some of the most widely studied and consequential sources of social disparities in health in the United States.[1–3] For example, recent prevalence estimates show that roughly 40% of Black adults but only 30% of White adults have hypertension.[4] In addition, the incidence of hypertension occurs at younger ages for Blacks than Whites.[1] These disparities are reflected in the larger burden of hypertension-related health and economic costs carried by non-White than White Americans. For example, mortality rates attributable to hypertension are

Objectives. We investigated the association between anticipatory stre
known as racism-related vigilance, and hypertension prevalence ir
Hispanic, and White adults.

Methods. We used data from the Chicago Community Adult Health
a population-representative sample of adults (n = 3105) surveyed in 2001
to regress hypertension prevalence on the interaction between race/e
and vigilance in logit models.

Results. Blacks reported the highest vigilance levels. For Blacks, ea
increase in vigilance (range = 0–12) was associated with a 4% increase in t
of hypertension (odds ratio [OR] = 1.04; 95% confidence interval [CI] = 1.0
Hispanics showed a similar but nonsignificant association (OR = 1.05; 9
0.99, 1.12), and Whites showed no association (OR = 0.95; 95% CI = 0.87,

Conclusions. Vigilance may represent an important and unique so
chronic stress that contributes to the well-documented higher preval
hypertension among Blacks than Whites; it is a possible contributor to

"Every Shut Eye, Ain't Sleep": The Role of Racism-Related Vigilance in Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Sleep Difficulty

Margaret T. Hicken · Hedwig Lee · Jennifer Ailshire · Sarah A. Burgard · David R. Williams

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Abstract Although racial/ethnic disparities in health have been well characterized in biomedical, public health, and social science research, the determinants of these disparities are still not well understood. Chronic psychosocial stress related specifically to the American experience of institutional and interpersonal racial discrimination may be an important determinant of these disparities, as a growing literature in separate scientific disciplines documents the adverse health effects of stress and the greater levels of stress experienced by non-white compared to white Americans. However, the empirical literature on the importance of stress for health and health disparities specifically due to racial discrimination, using population-representative data, is still small and mixed. In t
we explore the association between a novel measure of racially salient chronic stress—"racism-related vigilance"—and sleep difficulty. We found that, compared to the white adults in our sample, black (but not Hispanic) adults reported greater levels of vigilance. This vigilance was positively associated with sleep difficulty to similar degrees for all racial/ethnic groups in our sample (white, black, Hispanic). Black adults reported greater levels of sleep difficulty compared to white adults. This disparity was slightly attenuated after adjustment for education and income. However, this disparity was completely attenuated after adjustment for racism-related vigilance. We found similar patterns of results for Hispanic compared to white adults, however, the disparities in sleep difficulty were smaller and not statistically significant. Because of the importance of sleep quality to health, our results suggest that the anticipation of and perseveration about racial discrimination is an important determinant of racial disparities in health.

An African American proverb/saying derived from Blues Lyrics (but used widely in the African American community) to denote profound distrust, antagonism, or awareness in situations where someone might be deceived (Prahlad 1996).

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The weight of racism: Vigilance and racial inequalities in weight-related measures

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ABSTRACT

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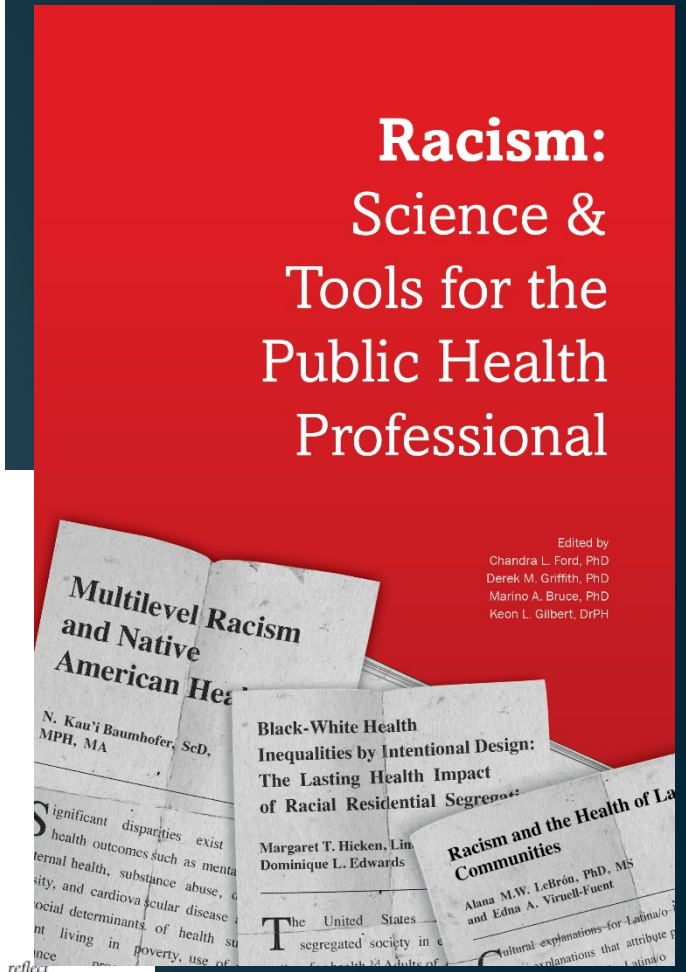
Death by a Thousand Cuts: The Health Implications of Black Respectability Politics

Hedwig Lee
Margaret Takako Hicken

The authors introduce the concept of "vigilance," capturing behaviors that reflect attempts to navigate racialized social spaces on a daily basis. Specifically, vigilant behaviors include care about appearance and language to be treated with respect, avoidance of social spaces, and psychological preparation for potential prejudice and discrimination. Furthermore, these behaviors align with those discussed in Black respectability politics debates. Using data from a population-representative sample of Black adults in Chicago, they report that vigilance is associated with poor physical and mental health indexed through chronic health conditions, depressive symptoms, and self-rated health.

Keywords: black respectability politics, health inequalities, racism, vigilance

Engaging in behaviors that align with mainstream White, heterosexual, Judeo-



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