

Please join us on **Thursday, April 14, 12-1PM, Room 51-279** for a CHS Professional Symposium:

Race-Based Stress and the Health of Black Americans: Evaluating Resilience and Risk

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After the 2008 election of the nation's first Black president, many heralded the historical event as proof of America's progress toward a post-racial society, fulfilling the promise of the Civil Rights era. Despite this optimism, however, the years following the election have been marked by increased reports of racial injustices and heightened public awareness of racial tension in the United States. Within this evolving context, nearly three decades of social science research documents that Black Americans continue to face disproportionate levels of institutional and interpersonal discrimination, leading to increased risk and contributing to persistent racial disparities in health. Despite a substantial literature linking self-reported discrimination and health among Black Americans, there is a growing consensus that there are other dimensions of the Black stress experience that have yet to be adequately assessed.

The goal of this presentation is to demonstrate that the country's changing racial climate necessitates an examination of a broader array of race-based stress and coping processes, beyond experiences of blatant, more traditional forms of discrimination. To evaluate this hypothesis, I utilize a subsample of Black adults from a representative community study in Nashville, Tennessee. Specifically, I assess the prevalence and health-related consequences of "ambiguous discrimination stress", which may occur when individuals try to discern whether differential treatment is due to racial bias. By examining the ways in which this common, yet often distressing experience shapes psychological and physiological well-being among Black Americans, this study provides a more nuanced understanding of the health implications of living in a racialized society. I then conclude by discussing how these findings contribute to my ongoing work to develop the "racial self-awareness" framework, within which we may better conceptualize the complex relationships between the structural, social, and psychological processes that characterize resilience and risk among Black Americans.

Dr. Thomas is a 2016-2017 University of California President's Postdoctoral Fellow in the department of Community Health Sciences at UCLA. She is also an Assistant Professor of Sociology and African American & Africana Studies at the University of Kentucky. Dr. Thomas earned a PhD in Sociology from Vanderbilt University in 2015, and she uses perspectives and methodologies from sociology, psychology, and public health to consider issues of health inequality, race and ethnicity, aging and the life course, and social stratification. Dr. Thomas' recent research assesses race-based experiences of stress and coping that contribute to inter- and intragroup health disparities among the Black population in the United States.

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Hosted by the Department of Community Health Sciences

Light lunch provided