INTERWOVEN SOCIAL DETERMINANTS: RACE, EDUCATION, AND HEALTH IN THE UNITED STATES


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Educational attainment and racial assignment are essential determinants of health in the United States. Despite broad interest in how these social factors affect well-being, understanding of how they interact to simultaneously influence health is limited. Indeed, comprehension of how education manifests as a determinant of health across racial groups is largely constrained to comparisons of population averages and effect-sizes. To help develop foundations about how race, education, and health interact in the United States, I compare Black and White sample populations in terms of the effect that attaining a college degree has on self-rated health. In addition to describing how Black and White populations differ in average effects, I: (1) describe how both populations vary in how education is leveraged to protect health; (2) examine how educational gradients vary within Black and within White populations—and what differences in within-group behavior say about inequality between groups; and (3) explicate how residential context—a social feature that is organized by race in the US—modifies the association among education and health. Taken together, these three chapters demonstrate that education is a racialized social process, or that how education comes to bear on health is heavily dependent—in multiple and complex ways—upon one's racial assignment.