



Suffering in Plain Sight: Analyzing Racial Disparities in Maternal Emergency Care

INTRODUCTION

Literature

- Black women face disproportionately high rates of mistreatment and adverse outcomes during childbirth.¹
- Racial Bias plays a key role in these inequities, influencing how medical providers perceive and respond to patients' pain.²
- These biased perceptions are rooted in historical medical practices that exploited Black women's bodies and reinforced harmful stereotypes related to pain tolerance, reproduction, and womanhood.³
- Because empathy and emotion guide helping behaviors, biases in empathic responding may contribute to disparities in maternal care.⁴

Purpose

We examine how racial bias affects people's perceived pain and humanity in mothers during labor.

Hypothesis

It is predicted that Black mothers will be rated lower on perceived pain, and humanity compared to White mothers. This effect will be moderated by the perceiver's race.

METHOD

Participants

We recruited an equal number of Black ($n = 250$) and White ($n = 250$) participants.

Material

Race manipulation: Participants were randomly assigned to examine real-life photographs of either Black or White mothers' facial expressions during labor.

Perceived Pain

"How much pain is the person experiencing?" $\alpha =$

- Dehumanization Questionnaire (Lekka et al., 2021)⁵

"This person is uncivilized (vs. uncivilized)" $\alpha =$

- Trait Empathy (Konrath et al., 2017)⁶

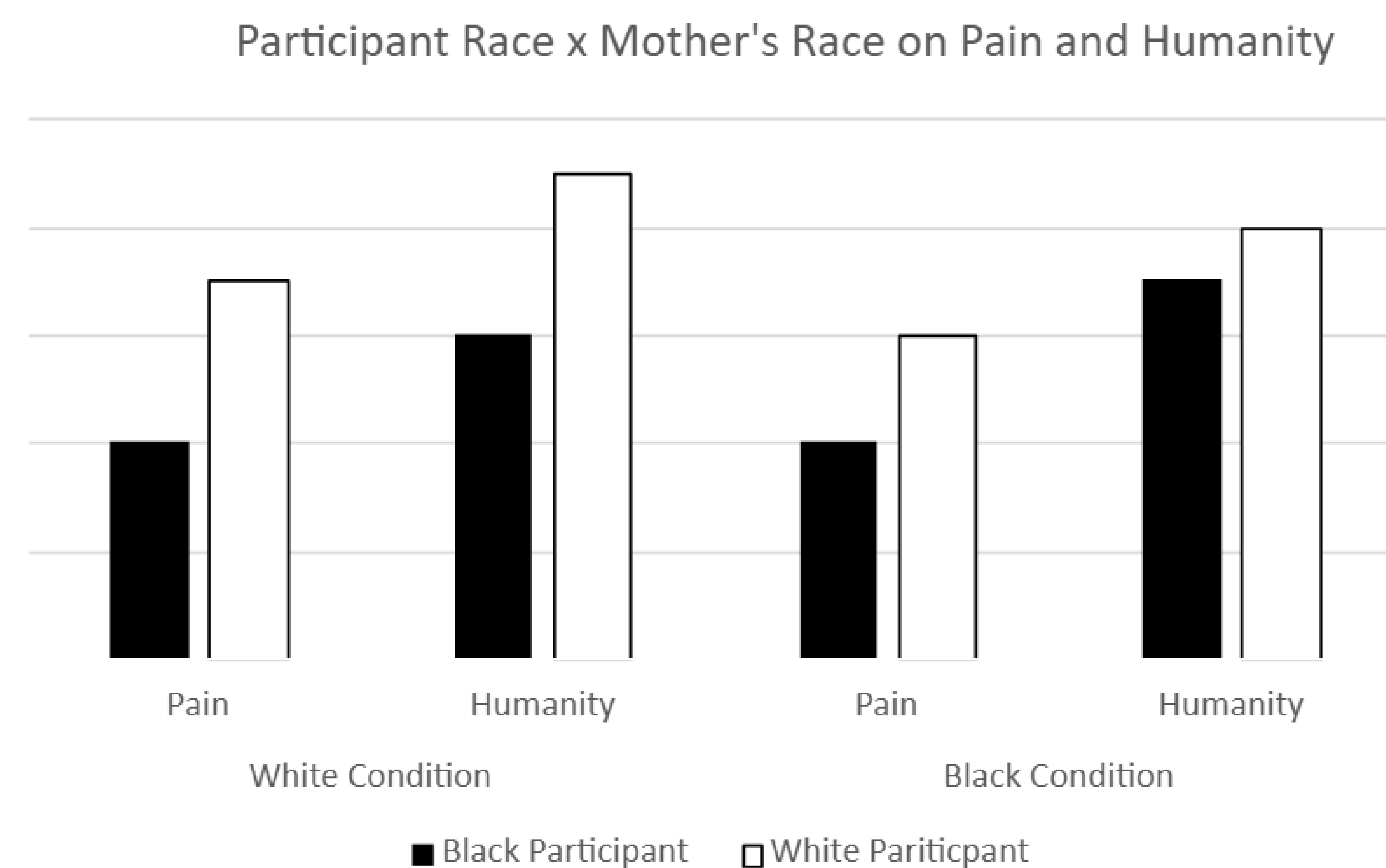
"I am an empathetic person." $\alpha =$



EXPECTED RESULTS

We expect a main effect of racial bias on perceived pain and humanity of mothers in labor. Specifically, White mothers will be rated higher in pain and humanity than Black mothers.

Expected effect of condition and participant race on perceived pain and humanity.



The predicted effect shows that Black mothers are rated as feeling less pain and as less human than White mothers. With Black participants giving lower ratings overall than White participants.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings

- It is expected that there will be evidence of racial bias in perceived pain and dehumanization of birthing emergencies, in that White mothers' pain and humanity were perceived as higher than those of Black mothers.
- It is also expected that these relationships are consistent between Black and White participants.

Discussion

- If supported, these findings would suggest a small bias in responses to Black and White faces, potentially reflecting greater familiarity with White faces due to media exposure rather than explicit racial bias.
- We believe research on Black women is important for increasing awareness of harmful experiences affecting Black individuals and for addressing gaps in existing research.

Limitations

- Participants were not in a clinical setting, which may differ from real patient interactions.
- The sample's racial diversity is narrow, and including more perspectives could help the results better reflect our expectations.

Future Directions

- Examine whether these effects extend to medical professionals who care for women in labor, as physician-patient interactions may influence the clinical environment and quality of care.
- Including racial groups such as Native Americans, to examine whether bias or familiarity influences emotion recognition.

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