Reviewer's report

Title: The Influence of Active Coping and Perceived Stress on Health Disparities in a Multi-Ethnic Low Income Sample

Version: 1 Date: 13 September 2007

Reviewer: Laura Stoppelbein

Reviewer's report:

General
The present study attempts to address an interesting and potentially important question: what is the influence of coping on health disparities. The present study has a number of strengths. The study is methodologically while also showing good external validity and generalizability. The representation of both Black and Hispanic populations within the study sample is also a significant strength of the study. Additionally, I felt that the introduction and discussion sections were well written and flowed well. Additionally, their data analyses seemed to address the questions posed in the present study. Despite these strengths there are a few minor issues that still need to be addressed.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1) It would be helpful if the authors more clearly stated the gaps in the current literature and how this study addresses these gaps. One example might be that the current study extends the JHH to other minority populations (e.g., Hispanic populations) or the inclusion of oral health and not just general health was addressed in the present study.

2) In the introduction and throughout the paper, when referring to avoidant coping, the authors use the term “John Henry Active Coping Scale (JHAC)”. Since the authors are testing the John Henry Hypothesis (JHH) referring to active coping at JHAC can be somewhat confusing for the reader. Is the JHAC assessing active coping or a construct slightly different than active coping? If it is simply a measure of active coping, the authors should replace their references to the measure in the introduction, results, and discussion with the term “active coping”. If JHAC is measuring a construct other than active coping then further information needs to be provided to explain how it is different.

3) The general approach to data analysis appears to be appropriate. However, the authors indicate that they first examined the 3 way interaction and then tested lower order interactions and main effects. This is generally the opposite of how these types of analyses are performed. First, main effects are entered into the equation, then lower order to higher order interactions. If the interactions are significant, the main effects are not interpreted, rather the significant interaction effects are interpreted.
Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

1) The authors briefly discuss a relation between chronic stress/health/coping strategies at the top of page 5. Then they go on to discuss the John Henry Hypothesis and sight a couple of studies that have examined this hypothesis among Blacks. It would be nice if the authors could include a little more detail on these studies since this hypothesis is the focus of the analyses.

2) In the Participants section at the top of page 7, the authors indicate that each interview lasted 27 minute and a mean yield of .6 interviews were completed each hour. I think that the authors can remove the mean yield and just provide the reader with how long the interviews lasted.

3) In the Measures section, the authors need to indicate the scaling of the self-rated health question (e.g., 1=Excellent?) and if higher scores on the PSS and JHAC are indicative of more stress/more active coping.

4) On the JHAC, the authors reference “scales” of the measure in the 2nd sentence of the last paragraph on page 9. Are there subscale and if so how many and what do they assess?

5) The authors indicate in the Discussion section on page 14 that SES was significantly associated with general health for whites and Hispanics but the relation was “mediated” by stress. The authors did not conduct mediational analyses, rather the relation appears to have been moderated by stress in this case. If the authors wish to assess mediation, they would need to follow the steps laid out by Barron and Kenny. In general any reference to mediation should be removed.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests