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Destined to Die Prematurely: An Examination of African American Life Expectancy

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American Female Life Expectancy: **81.4 years**
Black Female Life Expectancy: **78.5 years**
American Male Life Expectancy: **76.6 years**
Black Male Life Expectancy: **72.3 years**
(The World Bank, 2017)

Research Question

Why do African American males and females have shorter life expectancies than the national averages?

Introduction

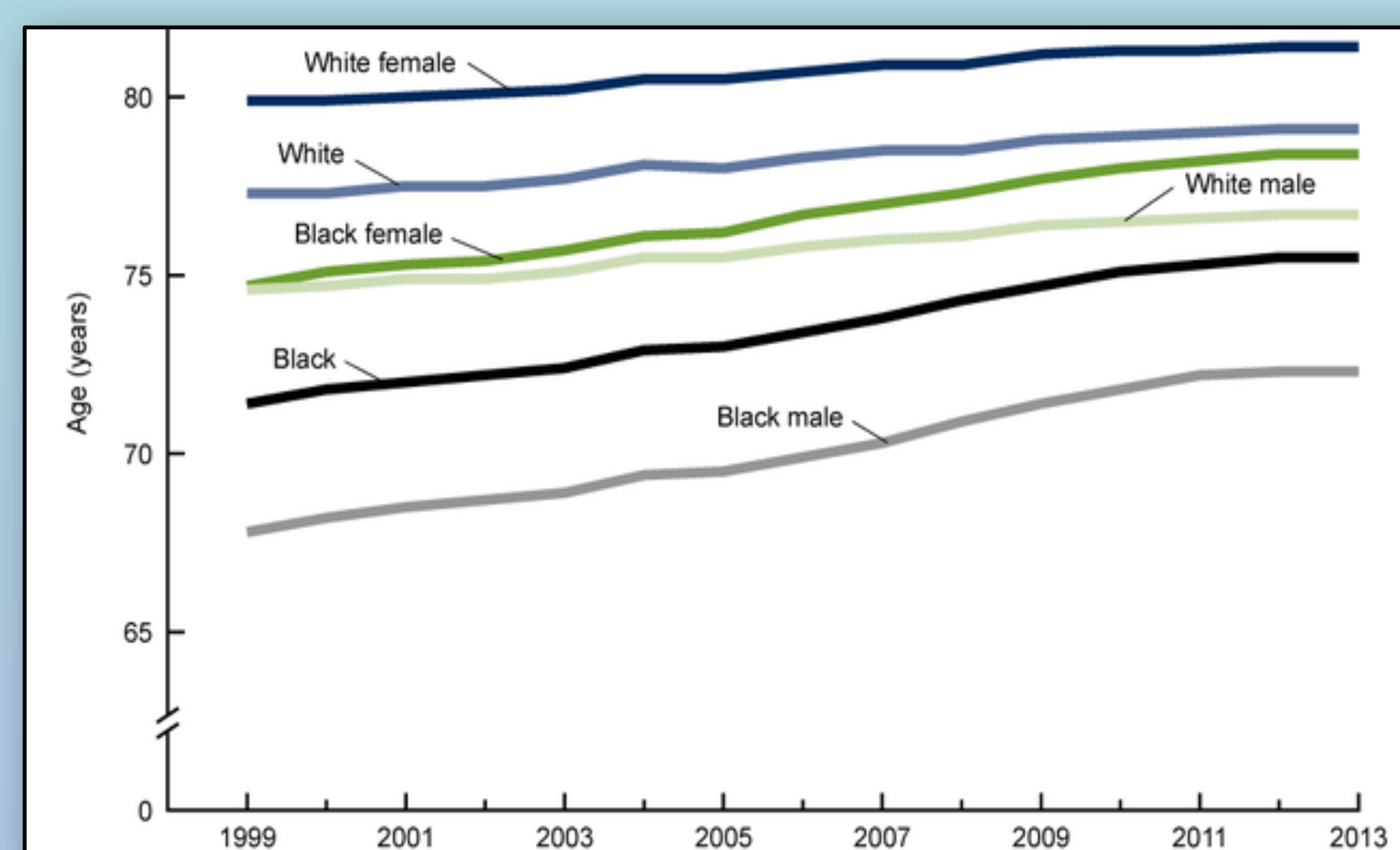
In recent decades, scholars have noted the connections of health, socioeconomic status, and the role that individual, systemic, and institutional racism, legal and de-facto segregation, and criminalization (Wacquant, 2009) have had in producing health disparities, including unequal life expectancy rates between black Americans and other racial groups in the country.

Many rationalize this troubling disparity by citing individual “lifestyle factors” as a primary cause, thereby suggesting that health outcomes are a simple matter of individual choice.

Otherwise known as healthism (Cheek, 2008), this ideology fails to acknowledge how social determinants such as where one lives, household income, and education can impact one’s ability to directly control their own health within constrained conditions. This study seeks to examine the historical underpinnings of racial disparities in health and how they ultimately impact life expectancy.

Previous Literature & Purpose for Current Review

A vast amount of literature considers specific factors and how they impact the gap in life expectancy between black Americans and their white counterparts. Many of these articles discuss disease incidence and prevalence without taking into account the origins of the differences in said factors. Many fail to recognize and/or consider the fact that race is socially constructed and that the racial disparities seen across all fields of study stem from the division of people according to phenotypical traits. This review attempts to display how the vestiges of early American history are still impacting the world, particularly in terms of health. An overview of early American history will be connected to the main reasons African Americans are projected to live shorter lives than their counterparts.



Life Expectancy by Race
(Business Insider, 2017)



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STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Methodology

This project is still in progress. So far, a myriad of articles have been reviewed to draw conclusions and create an in-depth literature review. Utilizing the College at Brockport electronic databases, full-text works have been analyzed. Attempts to limit the amount of literature to be reviewed have been challenging due to the abundance of information on health disparities between the races overlapping in several disciplines in addition to recurrence of similar information. Primary focus has been limited to the top non-genetic factors that influence life expectancy: socioeconomic status, living conditions, disease prevalence, and healthcare quality. Searches initially included only the keywords African American and life expectancy; the words socioeconomic status, urban, and healthcare have been being used in various groupings to find literature with a narrower focus. Reviewed articles have come from various professionals including scientists, health professionals, and sociologists; author credibility has been important in deciding which articles to choose.

Results

So far, the articles reviewed have come to the same conclusion; socioeconomic status, as well as other social determinants undoubtedly affect overall health status. There are definitely connections between race and health that are not just genetic. Racial grouping and its proceeding oppression of American minority groups, specifically African Americans, has created numerous consequences that we still see in our world today. This continuous oppression, though not as obvious today, has kept minorities dependent and not able to prosper in terms of education and income and ultimately health. All of these factors can lead to lower quality of life and poor health down the road.

- conclusions to be determined

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