

The Ethics of Epidemiological Research
Limitations in the Use of Race
Cooper and Freeman

Tremendous variation exists in the rates of many chronic diseases across racial groups, but technical and conceptual limitations hamper the ability of using racial comparisons to deduce the causes. Race is confounded by social class which itself varies with race and cannot be measured with equal validity between races. Statistical “adjustments” for race can be misconstrued as genetic effect. Socioeconomic status is often a more effective means of grouping people, but it is poorly defined. The biological concept of race does not equal the genetic. When trying to determine genetic effects, both the genetic and environmental contributions must be considered. (We can’t separate them yet). Phenotypic variation = genes + environment. The “grand” theory of race based genetic susceptibilities must be replaced with rigorous criteria to determine when a trait can be ascribed to some genetic origin.