A BEHAVIOR GENETIC STUDY OF SELF-HARM, SUICIDALITY, 
AND PERSONALITY IN AFRICAN AMERICAN AND WHITE WOMEN

Christine Durrett
Dr. Timothy Trull, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

This study is an examination of genetic and environmental risk leading to suicidal and self-harm behaviors in a representative sample of female young adult twins, and racial differences in the strength of those risk factors. Suicidal and self-harm behaviors proved moderately heritable. They were moderately genetically correlated, and weakly environmentally correlated. Self-harm but not suicide attempts also had unique genetic variance. The personality traits of Neuroticism and Novelty Seeking, as well as internalizing and externalizing diagnoses were genetically correlated with self-harm and suicide attempts. After accounting for genetic influence common to personality, diagnoses, and self-harm or suicide attempts, self-harm but not suicide attempts had unique genetic variance remaining. When examined by race, suicidal behaviors were more common in African American than White women, while self-harm was equally prevalent. The heritability of self-harm and suicide attempts did not vary by race, nor did personality traits or diagnostic status differentially predict them.