

Jennifer Richeson



Professor of Psychology

Ph.D. 2000, Harvard

Biography

Psychologist Jennifer Richeson's research focuses on the social psychological phenomena of cultural diversity. Her work generally concerns the ways in which social group memberships such as race and gender impact the way people think, feel, and behave. Specifically, she examines the processes of mind and brain that give rise to stereotyping and prejudice and, in turn, shape the ways in which individuals experience diversity.

She is currently working on two primary lines of research: the dynamics and consequences of interracial contact and diversity and detecting, confronting, and managing the threats associated with prejudice and discrimination. Through the development of these research streams, Richeson hopes to contribute to a better understanding of intergroup relations, including how to foster cohesive culturally diverse environments.

Her work has been published in various scholarly journals, including *Psychological Science*, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Nature Neuroscience*, and *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, as well as appearing in popular publications such as *The Economist* and *The New York Times*. She was a visiting fellow at Stanford University's Research Institute of Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity in 2004-05. In 2009 she received the Distinguished Scientific Award for Early Career Contributions to Psychology from the American Psychological Association. She was named one of 25 [MacArthur Fellows](#) in 2006 for her work as a leader in "highlighting and analyzing major challenges facing all races in America and in the continuing role played by prejudice and stereotyping in our lives."

In 2015, she won the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship and was also elected to the National Academy of Sciences.

Current Research

Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Dynamics of Interracial Contact. This work builds upon previous research suggesting that increased contact between members of different racial groups can be accompanied by unintended, negative consequences for both whites and racial minorities. Richeson and her colleagues have found that in addition to being a source of stress, interracial interaction can also undermine cognitive performance. Studies in this line suggest, furthermore, that self-regulation in order to inhibit or modulate behavior, thoughts and urges, seems to play an important role in the effect of contact on the cognitive performance of white individuals. Related projects are investigating other concerns and experiences of interracial contact for both whites and blacks. For instance, how do concerns about being the target of prejudice influence racial minorities' interaction experiences? Richeson and her colleagues are also currently investigating potential interventions that will reduce individuals' deployment of effortful self-regulation during interracial interactions, which should make them less cognitively costly.

Discrimination Exposure and Health. Discrimination, unfair negative treatment due to one's race, class, sexual orientation, gender, or other social identity, can be characterized as a stressor that negatively impacts affective, cognitive, and physical well-being. Research suggests, further, that discrimination might lead to these pernicious effects because of the manner in which individuals contend with it. One reason why discrimination is thought to result in at least some of its negative outcomes is because individuals rely on emotion regulation strategies, such as rumination, that are particularly maladaptive. In order to develop interventions to mitigate the negative effects of discrimination, therefore, it is important to understand the pathways that give rise to its effects, including the role of emotion regulation. To that end, this project examines the implications of different emotion regulation strategies in the context of contending with discrimination for self-related outcomes, such as affect, physiological arousal, and cognitive functioning, as well as for group-level outcomes, such as motivation to engage in collective action.

Psychological and Physiological Implications of Managing a Stigmatized Identity.

Research suggests that racial minorities and members of other low-status groups might not benefit as much from intergroup contact and diversity, compared with members of dominant social groups (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). Given the widespread social, societal, and organizational benefits of increased diversity in educational and employment domains, however, it is important to examine stigmatized individuals' experiences as they attempt to persist and even succeed in the face of token status and negative group stereotypes. This NSF-funded project considers the role of "covering"—a compensatory form of self-regulation in the service of managing a stigmatized identity—in stigmatized group members' persistence in the face of threatening environments. Specifically, this project has two aims: 1) to examine the extent to which racial minority and low-

SES students at a predominantly white, private university engage in covering when the value of their group memberships is threatened and/or they are concerned about being the target of prejudice; and 2) to investigate potential intra-personal costs of covering, including physiological stress reactions, feelings of inauthenticity and shame, increased loneliness, and cognitive depletion.

Intra-minority Intergroup Relations. The question governing this project is whether the experiences that often distinguish low-status from high-status group members (e.g., discrimination) may alter the trajectory of such intra-minority intergroup relations so that they unfold differently than do relations between members of dominant and minority groups. Specifically, perceived discrimination may lead members of different stigmatized groups to categorize themselves in terms of a common “disadvantaged” identity and, in turn, produce positive attitudes toward other stigmatized groups. Consistent with this idea, we’ve found that exposing racial minority participants (e.g., Asian Americans) to anti-Asian prejudice leads to the expression of greater perceived similarity with, and more positive evaluations of, Blacks & Latinos. In other words, making ingroup discrimination salient can promote coalitions between different stigmatized groups. Despite these findings, extant work in social psychology suggests that making ingroup discrimination salient can also lead members of one stigmatized group to evaluate other stigmatized groups more negatively. Consistent with this idea, Richeson and her colleagues have found that making sexism salient for White women or making racism salient for racial minorities (Blacks, Latinos) leads to more negative evaluations of racial minorities and sexual minorities, respectively. Taken together, this work suggests that salient discrimination leads to more positive relations among groups within a dimension of identity (e.g., among racial minorities), but more negative relations among groups that cross dimensions of identity (e.g., between racial and sexual minorities). Their ongoing work in this area is examining methods to leverage perceived discrimination on one identity dimension to promote understanding and, perhaps, empathy toward groups that are stigmatized on different dimensions of identity.

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