

Insiders and Outsiders

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When social groups interact, notions of “insiders” and “outsiders” develop. Using a variety of approaches – psychological, physiological, and neurobiological – Valerie Purdie-Vaughns seeks to understand relationships between social groups and reduce intergroup bias and conflict. In particular, she investigates how minority and majority groups interact, focusing on experiments that closely mirror real-world scenarios. For instance, several recent studies have examined how the anxiety of feeling stigmatized can lead to dysregulated eating and psychological distress. By linking neuroendocrine and stress biomarkers to contextual features of real-world settings, Purdie-Vaughns is able to understand the interaction between physiological mechanisms and environmental factors underlying stigmatization and group relations. Linking biology to social contexts allows her to better design effective solutions to social problems.