

Navigating Diverse Environments

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Living and working in a diverse community offers many opportunities, but also many challenges. Jennifer Richeson studies the challenges of navigating diverse environments for both members of dominant groups and members of socially-devalued, minority groups. Using techniques ranging from the examination of nonverbal behavior to the study of brain scans, Richeson and her team have found that most people find it difficult to interact with others across racial boundaries. Indeed, the effort individuals put forth during cross-race interactions, for instance, can leave them cognitively drained. For example, a white individual is likely to perform less well on a puzzle after being interviewed about race-related topics by a black interviewer (and vice versa), suggesting that individuals are devoting considerable mental resources in their attempts to avoid saying and doing “the wrong thing” during the interaction. In addition to studying interracial contact, Richeson is also investigating how racial bias affects health and decision-making, the consequences of managing a stigmatized identity, and intergroup trust. The MacArthur Foundation awarded Richeson with a fellowship in recognition of the creativity and promise of her work.