

# Robert Rydell

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## **What does your research focus on?**

I am currently engaged in two distinct lines of research. Members of my lab and I have been most interested recently in stereotype threat (individuals' worries about confirming negative stereotypes about their ingroup). We have been examining the negative impact the pejorative stereotype that "women are bad at math" has on women's mathematical learning, incidental learning, and executive functioning. My research has also focused on understanding and explaining how indirect ("implicit") attitude measures can differ substantially from direct ("explicit") attitude measures during attitude formation and in response to attempts at attitude change.

## **What drew you to this line of research? Why is it exciting to you?**

In regards to stereotype threat, I became interested in this work because my mother is an engineer (and thus very good at math). She used to tell me stories about how her teachers in high school actively discouraged her from being an engineer because she is a woman. They instead encouraged her to be a teacher, because "a teacher's schedule would allow her to have the summers off to raise her children." It always amazed me to hear how she was stereotyped and discriminated against because of the preconceived notions about what women should be like. As for attitude formation and change, I was drawn to this research by discussions with my graduate advisor, Allen McConnell.

**Who were/are your mentors or psychological influences?**

My biggest influence has been Allen McConnell (my graduate advisor). He continues to be an amazing role model, mentor, and friend. Diane Macke also had a huge influence on me when I was a post-doc in her lab. She was extremely supportive and gave me the freedom to pursue research issues that were important to me. I have had so many mentors because the area of research I work in, social cognition, is a relatively close-knit community. But, I want to mention Dave Hamilton (who was a great influence during my post-doc), Sian Beilock (who helped to get me involved in stereotype-threat research), and my wonderful colleagues at Indiana University, Ed Hirt, Jim Sherman, Rich Shiffrin, and Eliot Smith, who serve as mentors daily.

**To what do you attribute your success in the science?**

I would attribute my success to being around exciting and smart people. In addition, I can also be stubborn at times. This motivates me to continue to test “old” ideas in new ways.

**What’s your future research agenda?**

My future research will focus on why stereotype threat inhibits women’s ability to learn. What are the cognitive mechanisms through which threat hurts learning? This is what I want to understand at this point in time.

**Any advice for even younger psychologists? What would you tell someone just now entering graduate school or getting their PhD?**

It is much more difficult and takes more dedication than you would think. You have to really love the process of research and be alright with extremely long delays of gratification. It is kind of funny that you ask this question because my younger brother is applying to graduate schools in psychology right now.

**What publication you are most proud of or feel has been most important to your career?**

Rydell, R. J., & McConnell, A. R. (2006). Understanding implicit and explicit attitude change: A systems of reasoning analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 91, 995–1008.

I am proud of this publication because it was my dissertation and it was the culmination of years of hard work with my advisor.