

Dr Hannah Snidman

# Concerns of Psychology Researchers Working with Marginalised Groups

[doi.org/10.33548/SCIENTIA1312](https://doi.org/10.33548/SCIENTIA1312)



PSYCHOLOGY & NEUROSCIENCE

Personality and social psychology researchers must consider a number of ethical factors when conducting research involving marginalised populations. These considerations may differ depending on whether the researcher belongs to the community they are researching or not. Dr Hannah Snidman from Marymount University sought to explore the experiences of researchers who work with underrepresented groups. Her work provides insights into current concerns and best practice recommendations when conducting research with marginalised populations.



### Psychology at the Margins

The term 'marginalised group' refers to a section of the population that experiences systematic disadvantages and exclusion from mainstream society, often due to factors like ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or socioeconomic status. Social and personality research with marginalised groups is important to aid understanding of the psychological impact of marginalisation, discrimination, and social exclusion. While social psychology explores how people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others, personality psychology investigates individual differences in people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. Together, these disciplines examine how social context and individual differences shape human behaviour, thoughts, and emotion.

Dr Hannah Snidman uses psychology research techniques to explore the important ethical considerations for researchers undertaking research with marginalised groups. These considerations may differ depending on whether the researcher is a member of the community they are researching (ingroup) or not (outgroup). Thus, the team highlights a knowledge gap for ingroup and outgroup personality and social psychology researchers when working with marginalised populations.

Dr Snidman and her colleagues Katarina Swaringen and Dr Lindsay Rice surveyed researchers who study marginalised populations. The survey included questions regarding best ethical practices and experience of struggles when working with marginalised communities.

Twenty-two researchers completed the survey, comprising both outgroup and ingroup researchers. The team thematically analysed responses to the survey to extract patterns of experiences reported by researchers, and then explored the differences in responses between ingroup and outgroup researchers.

### Insights from Researchers in Practice: Bias, Belonging, and Burden

Dr Snidman and her colleagues identified key themes from the responses to the survey. The first theme was *bidirectional trust*: researchers expressed concern about gaining and maintaining trust with target communities. Outgroup researchers offered suggestions for building interpersonal connections with participants, which included demonstrating good intentions and treating participants with dignity and respect. They suggested that establishing trust with participants may be easier for ingroup researchers compared with outgroup, though researchers noted that ingroup members of research teams may feel additional pressure to ensure their research benefits the community.

The second theme identified was *conflict between the goals of academia and research ethics*. Academic goals (such as grants, awards, and publications) are dependent on meeting tight deadlines. The fast-paced nature of academia conflicts with the length of time necessary to create trust between researchers and participants. If the communities being researched feel that their wellbeing is not a priority compared with academic goals, they may be reluctant to participate in studies. Therefore, a dilemma exists for researchers who are under time pressures to meet deadlines but want to adhere to the best ethical practices for participants.

Another common theme that Dr Snidman and colleagues identified from the data was the *importance of understanding and respecting community norms when engaging with communities*. Outgroup researchers expressed difficulty in ensuring their language was appropriate, highlighting a desire to avoid unintentionally violating social norms and disengaging participants as a result. Understanding community norms is much easier for ingroup members, as reflected in their survey responses.



*Participant compensation and recruitment* was another theme described by researchers. They noted compensation as a necessary component of the research process; however, not all researchers have access to the same resources. Additionally, it can be more difficult to finance research with marginalised communities compared to research with the general population. Outgroup researchers cited difficulties with recruiting participants, potentially due to lack of bidirectional trust and/or lack of financial incentives.

Both ingroup and outgroup researchers raised ethical concerns about *the risk of portraying the community as stereotypical or homogenous*. Ingroup researchers were conscious of their biases and noted an effort to look beyond their own group identity and prioritize the recruitment of a representative and diverse sample. However, one ingroup researcher commented that all researchers should explore their own biases, regardless of their relationship to the community being researched.



### Exploring Ethical Challenges in the Field

The themes described share a commonality—bias. Ingroup researchers expressed concern at being perceived as biased towards their own experiences as a member of that group, while outgroup researchers worried that their lack of familiarity or education about the target population may introduce bias to the study. To mitigate these potential sources of bias, researchers suggested involving both non-community and community members in the research team.

Positionality statements are a common technique employed to reduce perceived bias in qualitative research, as they increase transparency about the researchers' social identities and potential

biases. Most researchers reported often opting out of providing positionality statements due to a lack of knowledge of the subject, or worries that revealing social identities may influence how people perceive their work. Additionally, some researchers expressed that a requirement to include positionality statements presents a double standard for researchers studying marginalised groups compared to those who do not.

### Recommendations for Inclusive Research

After analysing the survey responses, Dr Snidman and her colleagues developed recommendations for researchers working with marginalised groups. With regard to inclusion of group members in the research process, the team supports providing monetary compensation as an ethical means of collaboration. Though their study focused on the experiences and perspectives of researchers, Dr Snidman and her colleagues noted the necessity of considering the lived experiences of group members when creating knowledge and developing solutions for research involving marginalised groups.

The team stresses the importance of engaging in reflective thought prior to conducting research and throughout the research process, as this may reduce the impact of bias on studies. They suggest that social and personality psychology researchers write private positionality statements to increase awareness as to how their own identities may influence their work. However, they do not recommend mandatory inclusion of positionality statements in manuscripts and grants, as this may result in discrimination by editors and reviewers. They observed that qualitative researchers more commonly engage with reflective practice compared with quantitative researchers. However, as anyone can hold biases that impact their work, the team recommends that all researchers engage in reflective thought before commencing a research project.

Dr Snidman and her colleagues also identified some necessary structural challenges in academia. The researchers recommend that awards, promotions, and grants should prioritise long-term projects that involve building trust in communities over fast-paced research that produces quick results without building trust. They also hope that more funding be awarded to community-specific organisations and studies.

### Looking Ahead: Building on the Foundations

Dr Snidman and her colleagues highlight the need for future research to include a larger group of participants, to strengthen a comparative analysis of experiences between ingroup and outgroup researchers studying marginalised groups. They suggest enhancing recruitment efforts and conducting follow-up interviews as methods for obtaining a larger study group. Other additional recommendations include incorporation of quantitative components, such as statistical analyses of differences between researchers working with marginalised and non-marginalised groups, or between ingroup and outgroup researchers, which may allow for expansion of the themes identified.

Dr Snidman's work provides recommendations to support not only researchers engaging with marginalised groups but also participants in this field, and lays the foundation for more inclusive, respectful, and responsible engagement with marginalised populations.



Article written by Victoria Joy, MSc



## MEET THE RESEARCHER

### Dr Hannah Snidman

School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Marymount University, Arlington, VA, United States

Dr Hannah Snidman obtained her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Bradley University in 2019, and went on to complete her Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy in Experimental Psychology from Texas Tech University. Her research interests centre on allyship, minority stress theory and experiences of transgender and nonbinary individuals. As of 2024, Dr Snidman works as an Assistant Professor in Psychology at Marymount University and she is passionate about teaching psychology, research methods, and women and gender studies topics to university students. Dr Snidman has published several research papers and delivered numerous presentations on topics spanning ethics, identity, and equity.

#### CONTACT

[hsnidman@marymount.edu](mailto:hsnidman@marymount.edu)

<https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=bNFBwXwAAAAJ&hl=en>

[https://x.com/hannah\\_snidman](https://x.com/hannah_snidman)

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/hannah-snidman-5a0834252/>



**MARYMOUNT**  
UNIVERSITY

#### Disclaimer Statement:

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and are based on their academic research. They do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Marymount University.



#### KEY COLLABORATORS

Katarina S. Swaringen, Wake Forest University

Dr Lindsay Rice, Texas Tech University



#### FUNDING

This research was supported in part by resources provided by Marymount University's School of Social and Behavioral Sciences.

This study was approved by the Texas Tech University Institutional Review Board [#IRB2021-201]



#### FURTHER READING

Snidman HR, Swaringen KS, and Rice L, Not me-search, you-search: Ethical considerations for research involving marginalized outgroups, *Accountability in Research*, 2024, 1-22. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08989621.2024.2408287>

