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Seren Snow

Lifetime of research on prejudice and resilience earns Brenda Major national recognition

Brenda Major's research has reshaped how psychology understands stigma, prejudice and resilience, influencing both scholarship and social policy. A distinguished professor emeritus at UC Santa Barbara, she has now received the William James Fellow Award from the Association for Psychological Science (APS), the organization's highest honor.

The award recognizes her lifetime of groundbreaking contributions, which have redefined the study of prejudice from the perspective of those targeted by it and advanced society's understanding of discrimination, health disparities and psychological resilience.

[Major](#) is one of three recipients of the award this year. The recognition also honors fellow awardee Dacher Keltner '84, who earned his bachelor's degree in psychology from UCSB and is now a professor at UC Berkeley.

The APS cited Major for scholarship that is "creative, numerous and deep in intellectual merit, with significant implications for society's most important social problems."

“I am thrilled to receive this honor and to have my work recognized in this way,” Major said.

An internationally recognized expert, Major has spent five decades advancing the psychology of stigma and resilience, creating a new paradigm for understanding prejudice from the perspective of those who experience it.

The award is the latest in a series of honors for Major, who was also [recently recognized with the 2024 APS Mentor Award](#). An elected fellow of the National Academy of Sciences, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Major has authored more than 200 articles and book chapters, in addition to two edited books. Her work has been consistently funded by the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health.

Mary Hegarty, distinguished professor and chair of the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, praised Major’s foundational work and scholarly legacy.

“I am delighted that Brenda has received this well-deserved recognition for her extensive contributions to advancing the scientific understanding of stigma, prejudice and discrimination,” Hegarty said. “Brenda is an outstanding colleague and role model, and she has been an inspiring mentor to her students and postdocs. It is truly an honor and a pleasure to have her as part of our department.”

A pioneer in social psychology, Major has dedicated her career to understanding how people experience and cope with stigma and discrimination. Her work emphasizes psychological resilience — the ways individuals preserve self-esteem, well-being and health despite adversity — and has shaped scholarship on issues ranging from intergroup relations to diversity policies. In addition to authoring more than 200 publications and editing influential volumes such as “The Psychology of Legitimacy,” and the “Oxford Handbook of Stigma, Discrimination and Health,” she has held leadership roles as president of both the Society of Experimental Social Psychology and the Society for Personality and Social Psychology.

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