

2023 Mayhew Lecture

Aging and the Social Brain: The Role of Social Networks in Alzheimer's Disease



DR. BREA PERRY

Research suggests social connectedness reduces dementia risk and helps older adults maintain cognitive functionality and quality of life. However, little is known about the specific underlying social and biological mechanisms. This presentation provides an overview of potential pathways through social bridging (i.e., cognitive enrichment through expansive social networks) and social bonding (i.e., neuroendocrine benefits of integration in cohesive social networks). Results from a cohort study of older adults that combines social network methodology with data on general and social cognitive function and neuroimaging biomarkers are presented. These findings provide insight into specific etiological mechanisms and have important implications for cognitive health disparities that can be leveraged to inform policies and programs supporting brain health and cognitive function in older adults.

Dr. Brea Perry is the Allen D. and Polly S. Grimshaw Professor in the Department of Sociology, Associate Director of the Irsay Family Institute for Sociomedical Sciences Research, and the Interim Vice Provost for Research at Indiana University. Her research investigates the interrelated roles of social networks, biomarkers, social psychology, and social inequality as cause and consequence of health and illness. Her work often focuses on psychological and brain diseases, including neurological disorders common in aging, mental illness, and substance use disorders. Dr. Perry has received funding from multiple National Institutes of Health, including NIDA, NIDCR, NIA, and NCRR, as well as the National Science Foundation and several charitable foundations. She has served as Chair of the American Sociological Association's Section on Medical Sociology, Series Editor of *Advances in Medical Sociology*, and Associate Editor of *Alzheimer's & Dementia*. She was elected to the Sociological Research Association in 2021 and was a National Academy of Medicine Emerging Leaders in Health and Medicine Scholar from 2019-2022.



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