

Susan Fiske, awardee in the Humanities and Social Sciences category (12th edition)

We are deeply honored by this immense and completely unexpected award. Along with my co-awardee Shelley Taylor, I am grateful for the generosity and vision of the BBVA Foundation in establishing these awards, as well as the hard work of the nominators and selectors in recognizing the importance of science to society. We hope to represent the social sciences well in the inaugural year of their inclusion in the Frontiers Awards, because our work reflects the contributions not just of our labs but of the whole fields of research that we brought together.

We appreciate our particular Award's recognition of multidisciplinary inventive integration. In synthesis, there is creativity. New ideas grow not just at the center of normal science but also at the periphery where one field of science overlaps another. The intellectual freedom to combine insights from neighboring fields requires a willingness to risk a look over the edge, maybe with equal parts imagination and innocence, equal parts rebellion and reinvention. Respecting the persistent scientific challenges, but viewing them from more than one epistemic perspective, takes a calculated risk, because the territory is beyond the map, so you define the map as you go. Even if you draw the map, maybe no one else will follow, choosing instead to stay in their home field. Despite the risk, the potential rewards are great, both conceptually and empirically.

Let me illustrate. Our 1984 book, *Social Cognition*, in effect founded a field. Its topic is how people make sense of each other. This everyday experience of forming impressions turns out to be a miracle of sorts. People infer other people's unobservable predispositions from their behavior in context. Human behavior is a complicated phenomenon to interpret. Behavior is an inherently ambiguous, unreliable, noisy signal. But it's the social perceiver's main basis for inferring another person's mood, attitudes, intent, personality traits. The perceiver's challenge of mind-reading requires insight from two fields of psychological science: social psychology, which studies face-to-face interactions, and cognitive psychology, which studies human information-processing. Having to integrate different approaches to the same phenomena sharpens the analysis. Eclectic sources allow the scientist to choose the best theoretical frameworks and most precise tools for

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the problem at hand.

The project began around 1980, when a psychology department head invited a new assistant professor to write a book for his prestigious series, capturing the emerging field at nexus of cognitive science and social psychology. This was an intriguing challenge because young faculty were beginning to teach this topic—and certainly lots of people were investigating it—so these were exciting times. But the field had no coherent framework. And in my field, junior faculty are not supposed to write books. Undaunted, the assistant professor (me) invited her advisor (Taylor) to co-author the book, a fortunate choice because the first edition had more than 1100 references. Fortunately also, Taylor specialized in the adaptive role of positive illusions: excessive optimism, sense of control, and self-confidence. These were useful illusions in completing the project. Fiske specialized in biases and how teamwork can overcome them, also useful here. Altogether, collaboration was advisable. But the risk was great, and the outcome uncertain.

The goal was combining cognitive and social psychology to see how people think about people. This was a challenge because the two fields have different norms and sensibilities. Cognition lends itself to a keen focus on specific processes of thinking (attention, memory, inference), for example, how many units can a typical person hold in mind (classically, 7 ± 2). Online mental resources have limited bandwidth in the short-term moment. We coined the term “cognitive miser” to express this meta-theory: limited-capacity human thinkers will develop shortcuts to reason, for example, about pandemic contagion. Instead of reading all the details of each new study, one might follow the advice of a trusted, respected authority. Instead of reading the demographics about who’s contagious, one might follow one’s gut feeling about who is contaminated, for example, strangers rather than family.

Suddenly, the problem is not just cognition, but social cognition. Determining who is contagious, trustworthy, or expert are not simple judgments, but people judge each other all the time. In contrast to the cognitive approach of breaking the problem down into small pieces, social judgment requires looking at the whole person. What happens when the limited capacity processor meets a whole complicated human? It takes shortcuts, but in this case, stereotypes. Cognitive misers simplify the human world into ingroups that are on their side, with warm intent and outgroups who are not trustworthy; besides warm people judge those groups competent to act on their intent (or not). For example, scientists are viewed as competent but not so warm. Old people are viewed as warm but incompetent. Refugees are stereotyped as neither. Like other



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cognitive shortcuts, these stereotypes persist because they are efficient, useful even if inaccurate or unfair. This cognitive approach to prejudice suggests the normality of categorizing people into groups and judging them by stereotypes.

Social cognition research like this has exploded over the 40 years since we wrote the first edition, growing from 508 pages to 658 pages in the 2021 edition, and now including applications to health, education, organizations, politics, and more. In all these settings, people must make sense of each other in order to survive and thrive. We were lucky to be writing the first overview, to define the field. In reviewing this work, we had three aims: to report, conveying the science accurately; to synthesize disparate ideas and results; and to entertain, showing how fun it is to solve puzzles about people.

The question was whether we could succeed. In the short-term, many were skeptical, including my own department at the time. Gradually, the book became a favorite resource. More than 20,000 citations later, the book receiving this Award from the BBVA Foundation affirms that taking the risk did advance our science, for the greater good. Thank you.