

Acceptance speech

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Dolores Albarracín, awardee in the Social Sciences category (17th edition)

First of all, it is a great honor to accept this Frontiers of Knowledge Award in Social Sciences. I thank the BBVA Foundation, its selection committee, and the colleagues who nominated me for this recognition.

In 1935, Gordon Allport described attitudes as “the most distinctive and indispensable concept in contemporary social psychology.” Attitudes offered a powerful framework for understanding and influencing human behavior from consumer preferences to racial prejudice, to voting, to health decisions, to environmental conservation, to violence.

In less than a century, social psychologists have investigated how to change attitudes and how attitudes impact behavior. My own work has clarified when messages affect not only attitudes, but also behaviors, and when beliefs mediate versus rationalize attitude change. For example, my collaborators and I have shown that people who are unmotivated and distracted form attitudes based on emotions, but later rationalize those attitudes by forming beliefs in more specific, seemingly “rational” claims. My research has also shed light on how goals for action and inaction affect attitude formation and change, the dynamics of selective exposure to information, and how to change or mitigate the effects of misconceptions. We have also clarified how to change socially beneficial behaviors, both in the laboratory and in the field.

Over the three decades that began in graduate school, I have had the privilege of working with outstanding collaborators, postdoctoral researchers, and students. I thank my mentors, Robert S. Wyer and Martin Fishbein, for nurturing me over the course of four years at the University of Illinois, but also during the decades that followed. I am grateful to my informal mentors, including Alice H. Eagly, Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Wendy Wood, Jeff Fisher, and Blair T. Johnson, and to the colleagues and department chairs who supported me for decades. These include Dov Cohen, Chadly Stern, and Sharon Shavit at the University of Illinois; James Shepperd, Benjamin Karney, and Marty Heesacker at the University of Florida; and Emily Falk, Barb Mellers, Angela Duckworth, Michael X. delli Carpini, John Jackson, and Sarah Banet Weisser at the University of Pennsylvania.

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Thank you.