

“Envy Up, Scorn Down: How Status Divides Us”

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Questions?

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Susan T. Fiske

Eugene Higgins Professor
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Status-comparison compels people, even as it stresses, depresses, and divides us. Comparison is only natural, but the collateral damage reveals envy upward and scorn downward, which arguably poison people and their relationships. Several experiments—using questionnaire, psychometric, response-time, electro-myographic, and neuro-imaging data—illustrate the dynamics of envy up and scorn down, as well as proposing how to mitigate their effects. Initial studies suggest the importance of status. Other data show how scorn down minimizes thought about another’s mind; power deactivates mental concepts. Turning to envy up, other studies demonstrate that Schadenfreude (malicious joy) targets envied outgroups. However, counter-stereotypic information, empathy, and outcome dependency can mitigate both scorn and envy.

Professor Fiske investigates social cognition, especially cognitive stereotypes and emotional prejudices, at cultural, interpersonal, and neural levels. She is most known for the continuum model of impression formation, her power-as-control theory, the ambivalent sexism theory, and the stereotype content model showing fundamental dimensions of social cognition. Her current project, funded by the Russell Sage Foundation, is Envy Up and Scorn Down: How Comparison Divides Us.



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