



**The Birth of *Psychological Science in the Public Interest***

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Subscribers to the American Psychological Society's flagship journal, *Psychological Science*, will find the May 2000 issue accompanied by a bonus: the first issue of *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* (PSPI). The publication of PSPI represents a major new initiative by APS, an initiative that we think will prove to be a watershed event for our science.

Bjork and Ceci

The central tenet of the PSPI initiative is that the best of psychological research is a critical societal resource; the findings that derive from our science are directly relevant to matters of national concern that are of strong, often intense, public interest.

The mission of PSPI is to identify topics of broad interest-outside of psychology as well as within, and to commission teams of distinguished scientists (typically three) to write a report summarizing what the best of psychological research has to say on those topics. These commissioned reports, which we anticipate being similar to reports by panels of the National Research Council, but focused on issues where psychological research has a central role, will then be published as separates to be included, twice a year, along with the May and November issues of *Psychological Science*.

**Scientific American as a partner in the PSPI Initiative**

An especially innovative and important aspect of the PSPI initiative is that *Scientific American* will be a partner. John Rennie, editor-in-chief of *Scientific American*, has agreed to publish versions of PSPI reports that have been rewritten for his magazine's broader audience. Each PSPI report will serve as the complete, archival findings of a given project team. *Scientific American's* writers, in collaboration with the authors of a PSPI report, will then rewrite the report for the magazine's audience.

We are enthusiastic about our partnership with *Scientific American*, which has the potential to increase greatly the impact of PSPI reports among scientists, laypersons, and policy makers. We have also explored linkages with other major media, such as National Public Radio, to maximize our efforts to "give away" responsible scientific psychology. By sharing with the public what scientific psychology has to offer individuals and society, the PSPI initiative has the potential to counteract the image of our field generated by what the public hears on talk radio or sees in the pop psychology shelves of bookstores.

**Initial PSPI Projects**

In the inaugural PSPI report "Psychological Science Can Improve Diagnostic Decisions," authors John Swets, Robyn Dawes, and John Monahan demonstrate that psychological science has powerful tools for analyzing and enhancing decisions that can augment, and sometimes replace, human judgments based on intuition or personal experience. We do not anticipate, however, that every PSPI project team will arrive at similarly positive or cohesive conclusions. In some cases, a careful analysis of the relevant findings may lead a team of authors to conclude that there is simply no basis for some intervention or technique. What drives the selection of PSPI projects is the public-interest importance of a potential topic and the extent to which relevant findings exist, not a pre-judgment as to what conclusions the investigators are likely to reach.

The following are additional topics we have already commissioned:

- Do herbal products such as Gingko enhance cognitive functioning? (Team leader: Paul Gold, members: Larry Cahill, Gary Wenk; PSPI project editor: Elizabeth Loftus)
- Do smaller classes result in superior achievement, and if so for which types of students? (Team leader: Ronald Ehrenberg; members: Doug Willms, Dominic Brewer, and Adam Gamoran; PSPI project editor: Steve Ceci)
- Are projective tests valid diagnostic and predictive instruments? (Team leader: Scott Lillienfeld; members: James Wood, Howard Garb; PSPI project editor: Elaine Walker)
- Is self-esteem causally related to academic performance and social adjustment? (Team leader: Roy Baumeister; members: Jennifer Cambell, Joachim Krueger; PSPI project editor: Steve Ceci)
- Do SAT coaching courses boost scores when appropriate controls are present? (Team leader: Wendy M. Williams; member: Charles J. Brainerd; PSPI project editor: Lewis P. Lipsitt)
- What is the most effective way to teach reading for various types of learners? (Team leader: Keith Rayner; members: Barbara Foorman, Charles Perfetti, David Pesetsky, Mark Seidenberg; PSPI project editor: Henry Roediger)

### **The Case for Juried Analyses**

Today, there is a greater sense of accountability facing psychologists than ever before. Taxpayers, elected officials, and funding agency administrators are insisting with increasing fervor that publicly funded research and training be relevant to enhancing national welfare. Scientific psychology has enormous potential in this regard. It has produced a steady stream of findings highly relevant to the nation's welfare-in such diverse domains as child rearing, schooling, employment screening and training, counseling, treatment of affective disorders, policing, human-factors design, organizational/interpersonal aspects of the workplace, and countless other areas.

Psychologists, however, have not always spoken with a unified voice (witness the contradictory claims made in the aftermath of the recent Elian Gonzalez case), and often we have spoken prematurely (consider some of the early claims made about the efficacy of drug refusal training programs such as DARE, the viability of controlled drinking vs. abstinence for alcoholics, certain forms of therapy).

If we take seriously George A. Miller's enjoinder to "give away psychology," we must make certain that what we give away reflects the best and most reliable of scientific psychology. To do otherwise is not only akin to shooting ourselves in the proverbial foot, but also betrays our obligation to seize the potential of our science to improve the human condition.

PSPI is a means of increasing our confidence that what psychology gives away is based on the most scientifically prudent analysis of the total corpus of relevant data, rather than a partial, one-sided, premature, or misleading component of what is may often be a complex array of seemingly contradictory findings. In the May 2000 issue of *Psychological Science*, we describe the policies and procedures that govern PSPI reports, including how topics are chosen, teams are selected, and the myriad "checks" designed to optimize fairness.

We hope that PSPI will be useful to consumers, policy makers, and professionals in their effort to understand which claims are based on scientifically adequate data and which are not. And we hope that researchers and teachers will find PSPI reports valuable as "state of the art" assessments of important topics and issues.

### **A Role for APS Members**

In addition to the projects that are underway, others are being planned, and many others are under consideration, some of which were e-mailed to us by individual members of the American Psychological Society. Our experience thus far convinces us that the PSPI initiative can profit greatly from the involvement of individual members of the Society. We welcome ideas for possible PSPI projects, but also input that might be of value for the authors of a given PSPI project that is underway. Readers should feel free, for example, to alert team leaders and/or project editors to research findings that-owing to their being new or not available in a mainstream publication-might not otherwise be known to a project team.

The two of us and the other members of the PSPI editorial board are genuinely excited by the potential of this new initiative. We hope that the membership of the Society, in our shared commitment to psychology as a science, not only shares our excitement, but will work with the board to help insure that the promise of this initiative is realized.

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