

Memories of Spence

May 28, 2016

APS Past President Janet Taylor Spence, [who died in March 2015 at the age of 91](#), loved the pursuit of psychological science and inspired all who worked with her. In a special symposium chaired by another APS Past President, Kay Deaux, and APS Fellow Lucia Albino Gilbert, scientists shared their perspectives on Spence's wide-ranging contributions to psychological science.

Spence's contributions to the field, first in the area of anxiety and later in the realm of gender, have been far-reaching. Her research on anxiety included the development of the Taylor Manifest Anxiety Scale, a method for relating dispositional levels of anxiety to performance. In the 1970s, she became interested in gender-related research, a topic that would continue to engage her long past her retirement from the University of Texas in 1997. In a highly productive collaboration with the late Robert Helmreich, Spence developed several measures for gender-related characteristics and attitudes, including the "Attitudes Toward Women Scale" and the "Personal Attributes Questionnaire," both of which investigators continue to use.

Deaux, a professor emerita at City University of New York and a long-time collaborator of Spence's, and Gilbert, a former student of Spence's, talked about Spence from a personal standpoint and showed selected clips from "[Inside The Psychologist's Studio with Janet Taylor Spence](#)," an interview that Deaux conducted with Spence in 2010.

Sian L. Beilock, who 4 years ago received the Janet Taylor Spence Award for Transformative Early Career Contributions, a recognition APS created in Spence's honor, discussed Spence's work on the link between individual variation in anxiety and performance. Beilock, a psychology professor at the University of Chicago, has received widespread recognition for her work showing how students' anxiety relates to their academic success and how parents and teachers influence that effect. In [one of her most recent studies](#), published in *Psychological Science*, Beilock and her colleague Susan Levine led a team that found children of math-anxious parents learned less math over the school year and were likely to be math-anxious themselves — but only when the parents provided frequent help with math homework.

APS Fellow Alice. H. Eagly of Northwestern University spoke about Spence's contributions to gender studies — including research on traits, stereotypes, and attitudes — and how the concepts Spence developed are now integrated into contemporary theories of gender.

Eagly's own gender-related research has included examinations of sex differences and similarities in leadership, and she recalls the confidence Spence exuded in an era when women were rare in the ranks of research university faculty.

APS Fellow Donald J. Foss, (University of Houston), who worked for many years with Spence at the University of Texas at Austin, discussed his late colleague's contributions as a journal editor and a writer — talents that earned her the National Academy of Sciences Award for Scientific Reviewing.

Look for a detailed report on this symposium in the Convention issue of the *Observer*, coming this summer.