

Creative Leadership: A Profile of New PSPI Editor Elaine Walker

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Walker

Creativity has long been an important part of APS Fellow Elaine Walker's life. Interested in art since elementary school, she received a scholarship to Washington University in St. Louis with an intended major in the fine arts. Little did she know that when she began working part-time in a psychiatric hospital's art therapy program it would be a life-changing experience. Although she expected the therapy aspect of the program to be secondary, her interests shifted quickly from the art toward the direction of psychopathology. "Working in the psychiatric facility opened my eyes to both the devastating impact of serious mental illnesses and the potential for scientific research to uncover the causes of these disorders," says Walker. This experience and exposure to severely mentally ill patients sparked a curiosity in her that would give her a new appreciation for behavioral research and launch an impressive academic career.

Earlier this year, Walker accepted a new creative position as Editor of the APS journal *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*. She succeeds co-editors APS Fellow Stephen J. Ceci, Cornell University, and past APS President Morton Ann Gernsbacher, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Ceci was a Founding Editor of *PSPI* along with APS Past President Robert A. Bjork, University of California, Los Angeles.

Walker, a native of St. Louis, has worked at Emory University for 20 years and is now the Samuel Candler Dobbs Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience. Emory boasts strong departments of psychology and psychiatry, which has helped Walker create and expand upon her large body of research, particularly research on the neurodevelopmental aspects of schizophrenia spectrum disorders. Currently, her research is focusing on both biological and social factors that influence the development of psychosis during young adulthood, a period during which psychotic disorders tend to appear for the first time.

Walker is mindful of the high bar that has been set for her as editor. “Although it is only eight years old, *PSPI* has already defined itself as a unique and pivotal journal,” said Walker. “It is highly respected by scholars and increasingly visible to policy makers.” She attributes much of the journal’s success to its founders and advisors. “It is noteworthy that the *PSPI* editorial board is comprised of some of the most distinguished psychological scientists in the world. I cannot think of another editorial board that includes such a breadth and depth of experience.”

“*PSPI* serves two major functions,” said Walker. “First, it provides a vehicle for teams of scientific experts to synthesize the findings of research that bear on important issues with relevance to public health and policy. Second, *PSPI* asks its expert teams of authors to directly address the implications of research findings for the general public welfare.”

An important step in bridging the larger gap between science and society is found in this journal, says Walker. “*PSPI* was founded on the premise that scientists have a responsibility to the general public,” she states. “It is, after all, the general public who support the scientific research enterprise, largely through their tax dollars and tuition payments.” The journal, she says, exists as a “forum in which the most accomplished investigators and seminal thinkers offer their informed perspectives for the benefit of the general public, with no expectation of direct compensation for their efforts.”

Walker intends to build on the strong foundation set for *PSPI*. “Moving forward on this course will entail (1) furthering its visibility among psychological scientists, as well as among researchers in other fields; (2) establishing more direct links with individuals and organizations that make public policy; and (3) broadening its reputation as the premier journal for translating important scientific knowledge to the larger society and its institutions.” In this vein, Walker hopes to receive more proposals from APS members and other distinguished scientists who recognize the importance of publicizing research findings on issues that affect public welfare.

Citing the originality of *PSPI*’s mission, its new Editor sees this as one of its strongest suits. “To my knowledge, there is no comparable journal in any other field of science,” she said. “In fact, *PSPI* exemplifies the APS goal of ‘giving science away’ for the benefit of the public good.” Walker hopes that the journal will set an example for other disciplines to follow in terms of the social responsibility of scientists. “It is my impression that psychologists have an admirable sense of social responsibility, and this includes a commitment to sharing their knowledge with the larger community,” said Walker.

As German man of letters Johann Wolfgang von Goethe said, “Science and art belong to the whole world.” Often thought of as unrelated disciplines, Elaine Walker embodies their unifying qualities. Though she began her career as an artist and switched paths to explore and promote science, her desire to provide society with knowledge and enlightenment has remained the same. ?