

Growing Up With APS

August 31, 2017



Photo credit: Jeanne Neville

Everyone has at least one story. -Maya Angelou

I came to the United States in 1986 to join Purdue University's graduate program in cognitive psychology. As I prepared for this relocation, the teasing refrain in my family was "from India to Indiana," bridging the 8,000 some miles between the two locations with a single syllable. I had just completed my first graduate degree in psychology, and had come across Anne Treisman's feature-integration theory of attention. I was blown away. I wanted to do experiments.

Traveling across continents can be a challenging prospect, although I did have some experience with travel within country borders. I grew up first in Central India and then spent 8 years in South India. As a result, I had become somewhat accustomed to big changes, traversing very different languages and cultures. The peripatetic aspect of my early life repeated itself in the United States. I started my graduate training at Purdue, moved to Rice University in Houston to complete my PhD, and then to Philadelphia for my postdoctoral work at Temple Medical School. Perhaps as a fitting counterbalance, I have been at Stony Brook University for almost 25 years now! The journey may have been long and winding, but it was filled with immense good fortune, of learning from the best teachers, scientists, and mentors from the very start.

It was during my stint at Rice that I first heard about a new organization, the American Psychological Society (APS). I began to follow its development with great curiosity, and I soon learned that the Society would hold a convention in Dallas. What luck! I was a broke graduate student, and (jointly) owned an old (very old) car. But the car seemed good enough (just about) for a road trip from Houston to Dallas. And so I presented my first APS poster in 1990. The opportunity to hear about major research

findings not only in my own area but also across the span of psychological science, all within one conference, appealed to me instantly. I have grown up with APS since, presenting talks as well as posters with my students over the years, and serving on committees, as Associate Editor for *Psychological Science*, and more recently on the Board of Directors. It has been a parallel and intertwined journey, it seems, and it is a privilege to become President of an organization that now features a global name, the Association for Psychological Science.

APS will celebrate its 30th anniversary at the 2018 Annual Convention in San Francisco, a moment in time to reflect on this still-young organization's growth. I will look at three time points: (1) near the beginning when APS was formed in 1988, (2) the year before APS changed its name, around 2005 (a period that also falls near the midpoint in the timeline), and (3) the current window of 2016–2017. The first journal of the organization, *Psychological Science*, was launched in 1990. By 2005, the Association had three top-notch journals on its deck, including *Current Directions in Psychological Science* and *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*; the last decade or so saw the addition of two highly successful launches, *Perspectives on Psychological Science* and *Clinical Psychological Science*. This year, APS debuts its first journal on methodology, *Advances in Methods and Practices in Psychological Science*. The new journal, *AMPPS*, will provide a cutting-edge forum for publishing peer-reviewed articles on innovative methodologies, best practices, and reproducibility, as well as research tools and statistics tutorials, from all areas of psychological science. Simply put, this strong portfolio of six journals represents the rich variety of our discipline.

APS membership has grown impressively, too — within and outside the United States. Taking the same three timepoints I used earlier, here is a quick look. With about 400 members around the time of its birth in 1988, APS grew to almost 17,000 in 2005, just before APS changed its name to signal its mission to go global. At that time, about 8% of APS members were from outside the United States. By 2016, membership rose to around 33,000, with about 24% non-US members. That's a nearly two-fold rise in membership since 2005 and a three-fold rise in international membership! About 17% of APS Fellows come from 34 countries outside the United States, and about 25% of the Rising Star designees in the last 2 years have been from outside the United States.

These foundational efforts to internationalize are developing in other new directions also. Two such recent steps have been the exciting and successful conferences held outside the United States (the International Convention of Psychological Science in Amsterdam in 2015 and in Vienna in 2017). The next international conference, in 2019, will be in Paris. I hope that at APS we will continue to find new ways to reach beyond and connect with colleagues globally, especially as we inhabit an unprecedented age of technological connectivity.

In this column, I have touched on two undertakings of APS — journal publications and internationalization. It is important to put these within the context of other major goals that run in parallel in an organization that has an expansive mission. Examples include the APS Diversity Initiative; the goals of clinical psychological science; and the goals of teaching and the APS Student Caucus; public outreach; connecting with funding agencies, legislators, and Congress; and the Annual Conventions. These diverse and coherent goals to strengthen our science and our scientific community are increasingly urgent in times when science must support and enhance the public's understanding of its fundamental importance.

My association with APS has given me a large yet focused space within which to connect with researchers from all areas of psychological science. For someone who grew up with APS since the graduate training years, I appreciate this wonderful opportunity to reach out to faculty and student colleagues by way of this inaugural presidential column. In the coming months, I will be using this podium to address a broad range of topics in our discipline.