



Bleau, R. (2016) A word from the Chair. *Social Psychological Review*, 18(1), pp. 3-4

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Deposited on: 07 April, 2016

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# A Word from the Chair

Renée Bleau

**W**HEN I THREW MY HAT INTO THE RING, to stand for Chair of the Social Psychology Section of the British Psychological Society (BPS) back in the summer of 2015, part of my motivation was to defend the theoretical assumptions to which discipline of Psychology should be committed, and to promote Social Psychology as the quintessential element within the discipline. Following due process and as result of some good fortune, I was duly elected and took up my duties on 11 September 2015. One of the most encouraging aspects of the role to date is the discovery that the Social Psychology Section-Committee is such a dynamic, enthusiastic and engaged group and was led previously by a very proactive Dr Abigail Locke, who has gone on to become one of the new BPS trustees.

Returning to reflect on Psychology's theoretical assumptions and although they may be obvious to us as insiders, I think it is important that, with the ascendancy of Neuroscience, we advocate for our discipline as distinctive, that is, one to be supplemented, not supplanted by Neuroscience. I have observed elsewhere (Bleau, 2014) the vast sums of money being invested in Neuroscience, citing editorials from *Science* (Leshner, 2013) and *Nature* (Headstart, 2013) (for example, one billion Euros for the European Commission's Human Brain Project), and I also posed the question, 'does this contemporary focus on neuroscience make sense?' I assert that if we are interested in people, and why they do what they do, then it doesn't, because to put it simply, as we, as psychologists, all know, and as the BPS website proclaims: 'Psychology is the scientific study of **people**, the mind and behaviour' (my emphasis, [www.bps.org.uk](http://www.bps.org.uk)). Although many psychologists are not unhappy with the 'neuro' prefix that now seems ubiquitous, certainly not all have adopted it, perhaps for varying reasons. Time will tell as to whether Psychology will have stood up for itself, or whether in 50 years time, Psychology will be no more, and Neuroscience will have supplanted it indeed. What happens next however ought not just to be a matter for funders and REF exercise officials to decide, but also for scientists (of all kinds) to decide, using conceptual arguments and empirical evidence, as to what there is, and how such entities are to be understood. But there are also further political and advocacy dimensions in play, and as I have alluded to, my goal is to be a member of the team who stands up for Psychology as a distinctive discipline, distinctive in its focus on people as quintessentially social beings.

A more current and pragmatic concern, which was a focus for my predecessor Dr Abigail Locke, and hers before her, Professor Evanthia Lyons, is promoting Social Psychology in terms of its actual and potential impact. In particular, when it comes to public policy that relates to people, then it is clear that Psychology as a discipline should have a fundamental role to play. Undoubtedly our current President Professor Jamie Hacker Hughes has been enormously active and influential in raising the profile of Psychology during his term of office in this regard, and I am sure Professor Peter Kinderman will be productive in a similar manner. Social Psychology research in particular focuses on people as social beings with certain basic human needs, among them: the need to belong, the need to communicate and the need to find meaning. In line with the stated BPS Strategic Goal on impact in public policy (for the full BPS Strategic Plan 2015–2020, see <http://www.bps.org.uk/what-we-do/bps/governance/strategic-plan/strategic-plan>) my hope as new Chair is for the SPS committee and SPS members to be at the forefront in this important drive, demonstrating the links for policy makers. More power to us all.

<sup>1</sup> Albeit I do take issue with the reification of Mind, implied by the use of the definite article 'the' (NB relatedly, an argument from Psychology for the reification of Self, however, is my work in progress).

Renée Bleau

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## Dr Renée Bleau

Social Psychology Section Chair, 2015–2017.

## References

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