

What's in a Name?

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Starting a column about APS changing its name with the famous question Juliet posed to Romeo in their eponymous play may seem a bit of a stretch, but I simply couldn't find a way to fit "APS" into S. Ellis' (1965) "Name Game" template. (If "Shirley, Shirley bo Birley Bonana fanna fo Firley..." doesn't ring a bell for you, you can Google "The Name Game Lyrics" for a first exposure or refresher course.)

Nonetheless, like a Elizabethan drama replete with twisted plot, a courtship that started eight years ago, survived a plunge from the balcony into a first ballot defeat, resurrected itself despite clashes between warring clans, and recently found true love in the form of an overwhelmingly supportive vote has led APS to change its name to the "Association for Psychological Science."

Do names matter? Again we need only turn to the world of entertainment for the answer. For those growing up in the pre-Zellwegerian age, there was a certain fascination with tracking how movie stars changed their names. Thus, Bernard Swartz became Tony Curtis (a.k.a. "the American Dreamboat") and, my own personal favorite, Leonard Sly metamorphed into beloved singing cowboy Roy Rogers. Later decades saw Prince deconstructing the idea of having a name at all (hmmm, the organization formerly known as APS) and Sean Combs working through a seemingly neverending set of variations (I don't think he's used A-Psych yet, but, hey, he's still relatively young).

So it's now official: APS is keeping it's acronym, but changing what it stands for. Acronym stability will undoubtedly help control the spiraling costs of our organization's logo-, stationary-, and business card- related expenses. But it's not without its downsides. If you were planning on putting your treasured collections of vintage APS swag up for sale on E-Bay, envisioning instant wealth from its newly collectible status, we're really sorry (but rest assured that an APS Convention Barbie in mint condition should still bring top dollar). And then there's that pesky "APA-APS" thing. For those of us hoping for an end to those terribly embarrassing times when we're trying to make a point about how terrific APS is, only to find that darned last vowel insinuating itself where only a consonant should tread, there's no help here. On a personal note, I believe I got through all of my convention-speak at last year's meeting without a major acronymical confusion; but then, like an stampede of suppressed white bears, I had a total meltdown during the most recent APS board retreat.

That immutable acronym notwithstanding, there are some very significant changes afoot. The "Association for Psychological Science" has replaced the "American Psychological Society" and as I parse it, we are now: (a) an association rather than a society; (b) about psychological science rather than psychology; and (c) no longer, in name, an American group. Let's consider the implications of each of these in turn.

Association, Not Society

Frankly, I had no idea whether this was a significant difference ($p < .05$) or not (however, I'm sure the more etymological amongst us did). I once swore to myself never to revert to using "the dictionary says" in an *Observer* column (reserving that dreaded conversational gambit for boring my friends and

colleagues in real life). But this time, I had no choice. Checking online (while my unabridged Webster lies in a forlorn state of dusty neglect across the room), it appears that although both are made up of groups of people, societies have a common cultural and economic structure, mixed at times with a whiff of the “fashionable elite.” So there is a difference, and it seems like we are adopting the more open, classless, multi-cultural moniker. Good for us! Anything that smacks of hegemony, clubbiness, and exclusion really goes against the grain of what APS stands for.

Psychological Science, Not Psychology

I know there’s an argument that psychology already implies science (you know, that “the study of” thing). But, in today’s world, the term “psychology” has become an umbrella so broad that it seems to encompass every person on the planet who has anything to say about the human condition, regardless of whether those statements are based on formal science, intuition, personal experience, plain ol’ common sense, or communications from extraterrestrials. So, even if it shouldn’t be necessary, it is. APS is reaffirming that it is about the *science* of psychology, regardless of whether psychological science appears in the laboratory, the classroom, the clinic, or in any of the myriad places that psychology has proved to be important and relevant.

No Longer an American Group

APS came into being as an organization addressing U.S.-centric issues including: (a) increasing research funding for psychological science at NSF and NIH; (b) building congressional understanding of and support for basic behavioral research; (c) perceived split loyalties and conflicts-of-interest between science and practice at APA; (d) the need for a manageable-sized annual convention where those who produce, apply, and teach psychological science could interact, present, listen, and learn from each other; and (e) the need for a national organization that was lean, responsive, effective, and fleet-of-foot. APS clearly hit the “sweet spot” for addressing these needs, as reflected in its record growth, roster of superb journals, innovative and flourishing convention, and widely recognized influence in Washington speaking on behalf of psychological science. In recent years, APS has attempted to reach out to psychological scientists in other countries; however, the “American” part of our name clearly worked against these efforts. Our new “nationality-free” name is much more consistent with the international nature of our field and hopefully sends a clear welcoming signal to psychological scientists around the world.

New Beginnings

A new name can help energize and refocus APS at a time when psychological science is facing challenges (and opportunities) on many fronts. We are continuing to expand our stable of first—rate journals, with the new *Perspectives on Psychological Science* premiering soon. We are planning to restart our efforts to build an endowment fund to provide financial stability and support for ongoing APS activities and new initiatives. And there are already lots of exciting ideas being explored for making APS a more international organization.

So let’s send out the (re)birth announcements, celebrate our new beginnings, think internationally, and try to watch out for those acronyms. The Association for Psychological Science is here, and a rose by any other name just wouldn’t smell as sweet.