

# Julie O'Brien

## Statement & Background

### **About me**

I'm a behavioral scientist working in tech. I have a PhD in Social Psychology (from the University of Maryland, College Park) but have spent my career with one foot in academia and one foot in industry. I do research and rely heavily on basic social psychology constructs, but I do that in service of designing interventions and products with large organizations, nonprofits, and startups. I've studied the full range of human behavior with a goal of making the world a better place. I believe that the SPSP community has enormous potential to influence applied work -- and my goal is to make this happen. I've spent the past year on the newly formed Applied Psychology Committee and I hope to continue this work as a member of the Board of Directors.

### **How I hope to contribute to SPSP**

We have a growing number of societal problems to solve (e.g. climate crisis, chronic disease, racial justice, migration, political unrest, extremism, etc.) and each set of problems involves human decision making and behavior. However, there is a mismatch between the groups building solutions to these challenges and the groups who truly understand the psychological mechanisms that contribute to them. I believe that there is an important role to play for the SPSP community in contributing to applied work to make it more impactful and efficient in solving these challenges.

At the same time, I also see an opportunity for the SPSP community to learn more from the applied world. With big data and the pace of new product development, there are many new nuances of human behavior that are being uncovered but not yet well understood. These new problems can and should advance theory, but this requires the academic community to have greater access to this data, an openness to collaboration with industry, and greater fluency with big data and product development.

Our opportunity to bridge these two worlds is now -- organizations are increasingly adopting behavioral science methods and principles - many of which originate in social and personality research. However, these organizations do not see social and personality psychology as a critical part of behavioral science and therefore do not understand the value we bring. The SPSP community should be a more visible presence in the larger behavioral science community and make a more clear contribution.

In short, I believe that there could be a great synergy between the SPSP community and the applied world, if we are intentional about building bridges. This will require that the SPSP community works to understand how applied groups work, and that applied groups begin to see the value the SPSP community can provide. If elected, I will outline a path forward that bridges this gap and moves us towards a more impactful future.