

Trends and Developments in Community and Applied Social Psychology: JCASP 1991–2010

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This paper looks back on the trends and developments in and of the *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology* since its inception twenty years ago. We review to what extent the aims that were originally set for *JCASP* have been fulfilled. The trends in nationality of authors, themes of publications and their methodology are discussed. Possible implications of these trends and developments for *JCASP* and its future are pointed at. Copyright © 2010 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

The Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology (JCASP) has existed for 20 years exactly; reason for a little celebration and also an appropriate moment to look back at its development. We will do so from the perspective of editors: Geoffrey Stephenson was Editor, together with Jim Orford, from 1991 till 2002, when he and Jim Orford retired and Geoffrey became Advisory Editor. Sandra Schruijer took over as Editor in 2002, first sharing the editorship with Janet Bostock and David Fryer for more than a year. From mid-2004, Sandra has been sole Editor. She is about to step down and hand over to Flora Cornish, who will be the new Editor from the 1st of January 2011. In this contribution, we will sketch developments within the journal (editorial practices, content, reputation). Also, we describe the nationality of authorship, as well as the themes and methodologies that are present in *JCASP*, examining trends over time. We shall try to make sense of these developments and will venture to make points that may be helpful to those responsible for the development of the journal in the next 20 years.

JCASP was developed from its predecessor, *Social Behaviour: An International Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, edited by Geoffrey Stephenson (UK) and James H. Davis (US). *Social Behaviour* aimed to provide a vehicle for publication of the work of those social psychologists whose social problem-focussed work in different fields of application did not readily find an outlet in mainstream psychology journals. It fairly soon became clear, however, that the title of the journal did not adequately reflect its aims, and that the journal would more appropriately fulfil its mission by emphasizing its appeal and potential as a UK/European-based journal of community psychology. Hence, with the active and crucial encouragement of our Publishing Editor, Michael Coombs, *Social Behaviour* underwent metamorphosis into *JCASP*, 5 years after publication of the first issue.

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It is salutary to reflect briefly on the somewhat diverse and many-faceted aims of *JCASP* as set forth in the Editorial published in the first issue. They may be summarized as follows.

Rapprochement between applied social and community psychology: The editors (Jim Orford and Geoffrey Stephenson) and associate editors (Jim Mansell and Steve Reicher) clearly perceived an underlying common purpose between the two fields, which they said should be collaboratively strengthened. Briefly, theory from social psychology should enrich the field of community psychology, in fulfilling the common goal of ‘alleviating the preconditions of human distress’ (Mansell, Orford, Reicher, and Stephenson, 1991, p.1) in community organization and practice.

Widening the field of community psychology: Community psychology at the time was preoccupied with developing clinical psychology practice in community-based teams, away from the decommissioned large mental and mental handicap hospitals. In contrast, applied social psychology typically tried to address human and social problems in a wide range of organized settings, including mental health and community care, but also in education, health, occupational, legal, charitable, race relations, politics and many other settings and endeavours, but using for the large part laboratory experimental methods and student participants. The centrality of community interests in all these was to be addressed by *JCASP*, in real settings.

Commitment to synergy of theory and practice: This was to be achieved (a) in the practical application of theory and the recognition of theory in good practice; (b) in the encouragement of dialogue at all stages including publication of work in progress; (c) in the encouragement of contributions from practitioners; (d) in the soliciting of responses to published work from those who are the subject of investigation, analysis or comment and (e) in the encouragement of participatory methodologies.

Commitment to removal of exploitation and oppression from people’s lives: This aim was not developed at any length, but was, rather, offered as an appropriate value for community psychology, which should be ‘aimed at giving all people greater control over their lives’ (p. 3).

Drawing in practitioners was made possible by inviting them to write comments on research articles. Replies to these commentaries were also published and thus a discussion between research and practice could begin. That practice, although quite strong in the first few years, has since diminished. It was revived briefly in the concept of *Praxis*—a journal section where practicing community psychologists or other practitioners relevant to the field of community psychology could contribute. More significantly *JCASP* created space for special issues: In the beginning once a year, but increasing later to twice a year. These dealt substantially with social problems and topics of contemporary relevance to practitioners, thus ensuring that practitioners were drawn into the readership, if not the authorship, of the journal. In addition, besides traditional articles, other types of publication, commentaries and replies to these, and book reviews, brief reports, short research notes and later on commentaries on current social issues, were introduced, and these served to broaden and liberalize the journal, in accordance with the initial aims of the first editors.

That there was a need for the journal thus envisaged can be derived from the fact that already in its fourth year, *JCASP* started publishing five issues per year and exactly 4 years later introduced six issues a year. In terms of growth, Table 1 sets out the trends in numbers of articles and number of authors (for reasons of convenience we have created categories of 5 years):

The number of articles and authors increased in absolute numbers (due mainly to the increase in issue numbers) and there is a slight increase in the number of authors per article

Table 1. Absolute numbers of articles and authors, and, average number of authors per article, per 5 years

	91–95	96–00	01–05	06–10
Absolute number articles	115	151	167	172
Absolute number authors	234	311	391	415
Authors divided by articles	2.03	2.06	2.34	2.40

N.B.: Numbers (articles and authors) for 2010 are extrapolated from the first four issues of that year.
Not counted: Brief reports or editorials, book reviews.

over time (as a consequence, we guess, of increased collaboration or the publication pressures authors face).

JCASP was conceived of as a journal with a UK/European base. However, it was always envisaged that *JCASP* would be an international journal, and the Editors recognized early on that an international perspective would be an important feature in the journal. Hence, our editorial board was expanded to help encourage a cross-cultural dimension. Table 2 shows the percentage of different nationalities of the overall authorship, broken down into 5-year periods. The following trends in authorship are evident. Authors from the UK were predominant in the early years, and remain the nationality that publishes most in *JCASP*, yet decline in overall presence. Australia and New Zealand combined are on the rise, as is Italy, and so perhaps is North America (USA and Canada).

Thus, while the UK dominance is decreasing (though still high in absolute terms), the remaining Anglo-Saxon community has been contributing more strongly. The share of the Anglo-Saxon world thus remains high, though slightly diminishing. Leaving aside the British, it looks as if the European contribution is rising over time, but this increase is largely due to an increase in Italian authorship. The Italian presence is quite strong, taking fourth place overall behind the UK, Australia and New Zealand combined and the United States combined with Canada. Behind the Italians, it is the Dutch that are contributing most, followed by the Belgians, then the Germans and then the Spanish, Norwegians and Finns. All these nationalities have remained constant with the exception of the Belgians who did not publish in *JCASP* in the first 10 years of its existence but were since then drawn in. The increase in authorship of the Italians and the Belgians is related to two special issues, whose guest editors were from these respective countries, and in which Italian and Belgian research featured prominently. This maybe points to an interesting and fruitful intervention for the future if we want to draw in other nationalities.

It needs to be noted that various continents and countries are largely absent. The presence of authors from Asia, South- and Middle America are minimal (although there

Table 2. Share of various nationalities of the total authorship, per 5 years (in percentages)

	91–95	96–00	01–05	06–10
UK authors	56	60	40	28
AUS/NZ authors	7	10	14	21
USA/CAN authors	10	8	15	12
Eur (w/o UK)	19	16	17	22
Italian	2	3	9	10

For 2010, only four issues are included.
Not counted: Brief reports or editorials, book reviews.

have been occasional authors from Malaysia, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Vietnam, China, Brazil, Peru, Chile, Mexico, Ecuador, Guatemala, El Salvador, Colombia). Africa fares a little better and is slightly on the increase, mostly due to the contribution of South-Africans (with occasional authors from Zimbabwe, Uganda, Nigeria, Tanzania), yet the African participation overall is still very limited. There have been five Israeli authors and no further authors from the Middle-East. Within Europe, participation from Eastern Europe is marginal (with some contributions from Poland, Romania, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, many of these as part of one special issue, but not a single one from Russia). No authors from the Balkan countries feature in *JCASP* either. Also noteworthy is that a large country like France has only provided one author in *JCASP*'s 20 years of existence—less than Switzerland and Portugal, not to mention Spain and Italy.

If *JCASP* truly wants to make participation in the journal less skewed in geographical terms, which seems desirable for a community journal that is concerned about power distribution, various measures can be taken more consistently than has been done in the past: Invite authors from underrepresented countries to act as guest editors of special issues, recruit them more systematically to the editorial team and board, use them as reviewers and proactively solicit articles.

It is difficult to do justice to the sheer variety in contributions that have been published by *JCASP* over the last 20 years. On a general level one could say they all deal with, one way or another, mental health, community health or psychological well-being. The whole spectrum of health and well-being is manifested in the content of the journal: Articles on health and well-being in the context of unemployment, (im)migration, gender, mental health services and care provision, police behaviour, physical illness, mental handicap, learning disabilities, violence, addiction, environmental issues, peace and war, urban environment, marriage, family, parenthood, adolescence, religion, human rights, sexual behaviour, poverty, power distribution, social support, sense of community, social integration and participation, refugees, citizen participation, body weight, charity, stress, natural disasters, etc.

Having had a closer look at the various themes over the years, it appears that several topics have received consistent attention. What has concerned the *JCASP* authorship most are issues related to ethnicity, ethnic identity, migration and acculturation, multiculturalism, racism and prejudice. We suspect that this reflects the keen interest of social psychologists in these themes. Published articles on these themes have doubled in number over the years. A close second topic, present throughout *JCASP*'s history, pertains to sexual practices, sexual health/illness and sexual identity. A third domain is represented by studies on addiction, alcoholism, drug (ab)use and gambling, although interest in these issues seems to have levelled off somewhat. The same applies to research into police behaviour (community policing, police interrogation). However, attention to violence, crime, bullying and abuse is rising. Interest in problems regarding body weight, homelessness and unemployment recurs at intervals.

It is difficult to think of themes or approaches that are conspicuously absent from *JCASP* but one can think of a few. There appears to be not much interest in issues related to, for example, consumption culture, animal welfare, natural resource depletion, pollution, pandemics, sports and leisure. Religion and spirituality are also relatively absent, but we can reveal that a special issue on this topic will appear straight after this one.

Most contributions are written from a community and/or applied social psychological perspective. A clinical psychological angle that was represented in the early years of *JCASP* has become a little less visible, and the application of European social psychological theories to social problems increasingly prevalent. An organizational

psychological perspective is almost absent, which is strange. One might have expected organizational psychologists, as social psychologists do, to take the opportunity to explore the wider environmental and community dimensions of their work. Moreover, we would expect interest in the functioning of organizations in the domain of mental and community health, and its impact on the quality of their services, and on the well-being of its employees to be of interest to the *JCASP* readership. The only research that reflects an organizational psychology perspective is that on bullying and work load. But one can imagine other relevant themes for *JCASP*. Apart from the functioning of (care) organizations, topics that are traditionally studied by organizational psychologists, such as corruption, whistle blowing, exploitation, collaboration and participation, to name a few, are central to a community psychology that is concerned with social justice.

JCASP reports qualitative and quantitative research. Favourite data collection techniques are interviews, focus groups, observations, documents, texts, experiments, questionnaires and surveys. Although positivism is strong, ethnographic, constructionist and interpretative approaches are gaining ground. Qualitative methodologies are slowly taking over from quantitative ones. Discourse analysis in particular is becoming more popular. The range of different methodologies is increasing over time. It is important to note that, given that *JCASP* is a psychology journal, considerably less than 10% of the research articles report research conducted with undergraduate students, and if research with students is reported, the topic under investigation almost always has high relevance for the student population.

It would appear that *JCASP* has established for itself a distinctive role amongst community and social psychology journals. *JCASP* now comes close to publishing what came to be called 'European' social psychology, perhaps more closely than the flagship journal of the European Association of Social Psychology—*European Journal of Social Psychology* (*EJSP*). Several decades ago, when the European Association of Social Psychology was established, various European psychologists voiced the need to develop a European social psychology, in contrast to, if not in conflict with the US model (Jaspars, 1986; Moscovici, 1989). Such European social psychology was to be less individualistic than the American version and to have a greater applied value. It needed to build on a Euro-American tradition of psychology, founded by Kurt Lewin (Moscovici & Marková, 2006). An individual was to be conceived of as a social agent in a larger socio-structural and cultural context (Jaspars, 1986); different system levels needed to be linked so as to be able to explain social behaviour (Doise, 1986; Jahoda, 1986). Theory and application needed to be integrated and more emphasis needed to be devoted to real social issues (Graumann, 1988; Jaspars, 1986; Stephenson, 1988). European social psychology was to put 'substance over method' and hence rely less exclusively on laboratory experiments with undergraduate psychology students (Jaspars, 1986). Intellectual traditions in social psychology that have been labelled European are (see Jaspars, 1986; Scherer, 1993; Smith, 2005; Wittenbaum & Moreland, 2008): Social identity theory and intergroup relations (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), minority influence (Moscovici, 1976) and social representations theory (Moscovici, 1981).

The work that is published by *JCASP* fulfils many of these characteristics. The wider public for sure is studied: Immigrants, people with a learning disability, police officers, nurses, young mothers, victims of violence, children, refugees, etc. As mentioned above, far fewer than 10% of the studies reported employ university students and then only if the subject under investigation has relevance to students such as dating, sexual behaviour, helping behaviour. An explicit feature of *JCASP* is to put individual and social behaviour in

a community context, or in a larger social, political, cultural or economic context. Submissions that do not do this, or only do so in the form of minor background variables, are referred to other journals. Experiments are published by *JCASP* (there is nothing wrong with experiments) but they are almost all field experiments or quasi-experimental studies that evaluate the impact and effectiveness of interventions. All these elements reflect the applied focus of *JCASP*. This is in stark contrast to *EJSP* (Schruijer, 2010), where the laboratory experiment studying undergraduate behaviour remains the most popular methodological choice, as in US mainstream journals of social psychology. Finally, the typical European traditions, such as social identity theory and social representations theory, are very well represented by *JCASP*.

It is striking how research traditions and communities within and between the fields of social and community psychology are separate. Authors publishing in *EJSP* hardly ever cite relevant sources in *JCASP* (regarded as ‘community’ and therefore outside the methodological realm of mainstream, experimental social psychology), while citations in the reverse direction are much more common. Authors in *EJSP*, more likely to be American over time (Schruijer, 2010), in turn cite the American based *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* (*JESP*) more than *JESP* authors themselves cite *EJSP* sources. While Social Identity Theory and European perspectives on minority influence have had some impact on American social psychology (e.g. Wittenbaum & Moreland, 2008), social representations theory seems not to have migrated across the transatlantic and authors use, apart from *JCASP*, various other outlets as publication targets such as national journals or books.

That American and European research traditions are separate and asymmetrical has, of course, been noted before, for example by Tight (2007), who studied the publication practices of the main journals in higher education and found evidence for a separation between the American research community and that outside of it. Where there was influence, it seemed to be unidirectional, namely, flowing from the US to Europe (Tight, 2007). With respect to community psychology, it is sad to note that many American-authored submissions to *JCASP* appear not to be aware of much or any research done in Europe or of research published by a UK/Europe-based journal such as *JCASP*. This impression is confirmed by a very recent chapter on community psychology in the *Annual Review of Psychology*, where not a single article published in *JCASP* has been referred to (Trickett, 2009). Inspection of articles in *JCASP*, on the other hand, reveals that community psychologists in European countries are much more inclined to pay due respect to relevant publications in US journals.

And so, to conclude, the aims of the first editors are certainly visible in the *JCASP* of today. Community psychology has been given a social psychological fillip, and *JCASP* has proved a valued outlet and source of encouragement to social psychologists whose interests and methodologies lay outside the mainstream. This has, we would claim, served to widen and strengthen the field of community psychology. We would hope that community psychology is a more salient category for many psychologists working ‘in the field’ to improve social well-being and social justice. Whilst ‘practitioners’ have not written much for the journal, we hope that *JCASP* is a journal that is on the radar of policy and decision-makers in many different areas of practice in community settings. Maybe the time has come for new editors to return to the problem of how more regularly to engage the participants and users of research in dialogue and collaboration.

How is community psychology likely to develop in the next 20 years? Well, crystal ball gazing, we would suggest, is not appropriate for editors who are departing the scene. The

question is only relevant in the present context insofar as the new editors wish to influence research that is undertaken and ultimately submitted for publication. *JCASP*'s first editors did specify those developments that they wished to see manifested in *JCASP*. Maybe our biggest 'failure', at least in respect of our aims, was in not drawing practitioners more fully into dialogue with researchers, and not significantly influencing the submission of participative research and commentaries. Quite likely, we were battling against political, economic and academic publication pressures that conspired to prevent such research and publication. More 'successful', perhaps, has been the encouragement of social psychologists engaged in, or who are prepared to participate in, the creation of what might be called a community orientated applied social psychology, thereby enlarging the theoretical and practical usefulness of community psychology. We would make the point that, whatever the editors of a scholarly journal try to bring about, they are at the mercy of the contributors' pragmatically influenced ambitions. They may try to influence those ambitions, but the scope for influence is limited by the number of active researchers willing and able to respond to their promptings. Notwithstanding these reservations, we would suggest in conclusion that the burgeoning growth of different communities wrought by developments in telecommunications deserves to be highlighted, and their social, moral and psychological implications investigated. These different 'community psychologies' no doubt impinge on one another and this opens up new complex theoretical and practical challenges for 'community psychology' as a discipline. Undoubtedly, it is important that we remain open to new methodologies operating in these new domains of social experience.

These 20 editorial years have been an exciting and rewarding time, not without the occasional element of intense conflict and rivalry over competing models of community psychology. We hope that any such conflicts will in future be managed amicably! As new Editors enter the fray, it will be good for us to settle into a more reflective role, and, over time, to observe future developments with great interest and, no doubt, not a little nostalgia. We wish Flora Cornish as the new Editor and her editorial team consisting of Arjan Bos, Darrin Hodgetts, Inga Lasinskaja-Lahti, Wolfgang Wagner and Esther Wiesenfeld lots of success and a wonderful collaborative experience in editing *JCASP*, and in nurturing the developing field of community and applied social psychology.

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