

# Siegfried Streufert

The visionary editor of the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*

*It's not often that the expansion of a critical field in science can be traced back to one person; however, that is the case for applied social psychology, which publishes psychological theory and practice in addressing social challenges. The young professor Dr Siegfried Streufert overcame significant academic pushback to found the Journal of Applied Social Psychology. A bold visionary, Streufert established and steered the journal to become the respected publication it is today, shaping the field that carries its name.*

Few scientists can be credited with catalysing the growth of a new field of research; Dr Siegfried Streufert is one. Today, thousands of psychologists and researchers worldwide apply their discipline to address socially relevant issues. This 'applied' social psychology is a vibrant and essential field of research and helps guide social and health policies. When Streufert founded the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology (JASP)* 50 years ago, he legitimised a change of emphasis and provided an outlet for research in this field. In the years that followed, Streufert and his editorial team defined this way of thinking, developing *JASP* into a flagship publication that encouraged a new focus

on applying social psychological research and theory to real-world situations. What makes Streufert's story so remarkable is that it almost never happened.

### SERIOUS SCIENCE

It's difficult to imagine now, but in the first half of the 20th century, researchers in human psychology in the US saw little value or relevance in applying theories, principles, research findings, and experimental methods to understand social issues and offer real-world solutions. They believed research should focus on examining individual human behaviours that could be directly recorded and measured as an objective, value-free

science. This 'behaviourism' approach, as it was known, was an attempt to cement psychology as a 'serious' science. Since emerging in the US in the late 19th century, psychology had struggled against comparison with the more established 'hard' sciences, such as chemistry and physics, and the other life sciences, such as biology, for its place in the fold of scientific research.

This view was sometimes in conflict with European psychology researchers who were not afraid to rely on observational data collection or reported human perceptions to understand human behaviour. This approach was one that the American research fraternity considered 'unscientific'. Proponents of 'behaviourism' preferred to test theories using experimental approaches that provided theory-based performance measurement in a controlled environment. This generally involved small-scale, theory-driven studies with college students as the subjects as the norm. Dr Streufert did not believe that these two views were incompatible. He believed rigorous research could encompass both the laboratory and the 'real' world; theory and application. Further, he believed that social psychological research could be used to both advance basic understanding of human behaviour as well as to be applied to the understanding and resolution of social issues.



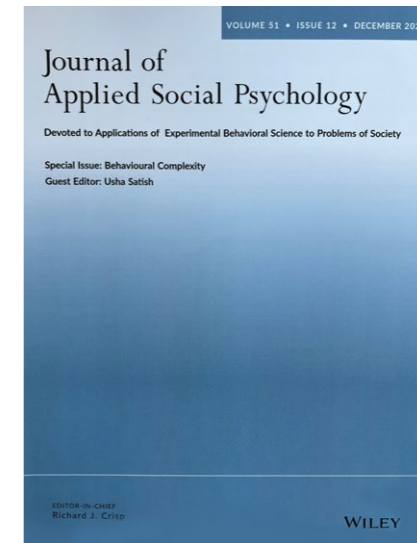
A bold visionary: Dr Siegfried Streufert.

### A JOURNAL FOR A TROUBLED TIME

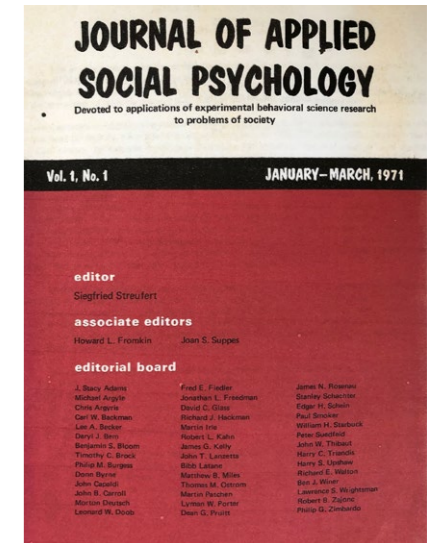
In 1970, Streufert was the new Professor and Head of the Social Psychology and Personality Program at the Department of Psychological Sciences at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, USA. His appointment came at a turbulent time. The country was fractured by the racial, social, and political unrest triggered by the assassinations of President JF Kennedy, his brother Senator Robert Kennedy, and human rights leaders Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, as well as the burgeoning war in Vietnam. There was an upsurge in demand by some more progressive social psychologists to further science and use our understanding to help find solutions to the fundamental issues disrupting the social fabric of the USA.

Streufert sensed this urgency for a more socially relevant approach by psychologists. He also knew that for research to have any impact, it must be effectively disseminated. However, virtually no peer-reviewed psychology journal would touch research focused on finding solutions to complex real-world social concerns. This research needed a voice.

The answer was obvious to Streufert – a new peer-reviewed journal was required to support and publish relevant and applicable social psychological research. To this end, Streufert set out to develop and establish a journal that would 'Bridge the abyss between the two camps in social psychology...that permitted both work designed to test



Streufert founded the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 50 years ago.



theory (no matter how esoteric) and work designed to help solve problems of society.'

### CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR

The biggest challenge was academic pushback. Those psychologists who championed a behaviourist approach to research rejected the idea of a journal that dealt with applying social psychological research to societal issues, believing it would be impossible to combine theory and application without sacrificing scientific rigour. There were also those advocates for applying scientific theory to social issues who sensed this to be the case and saw an opportunity in a

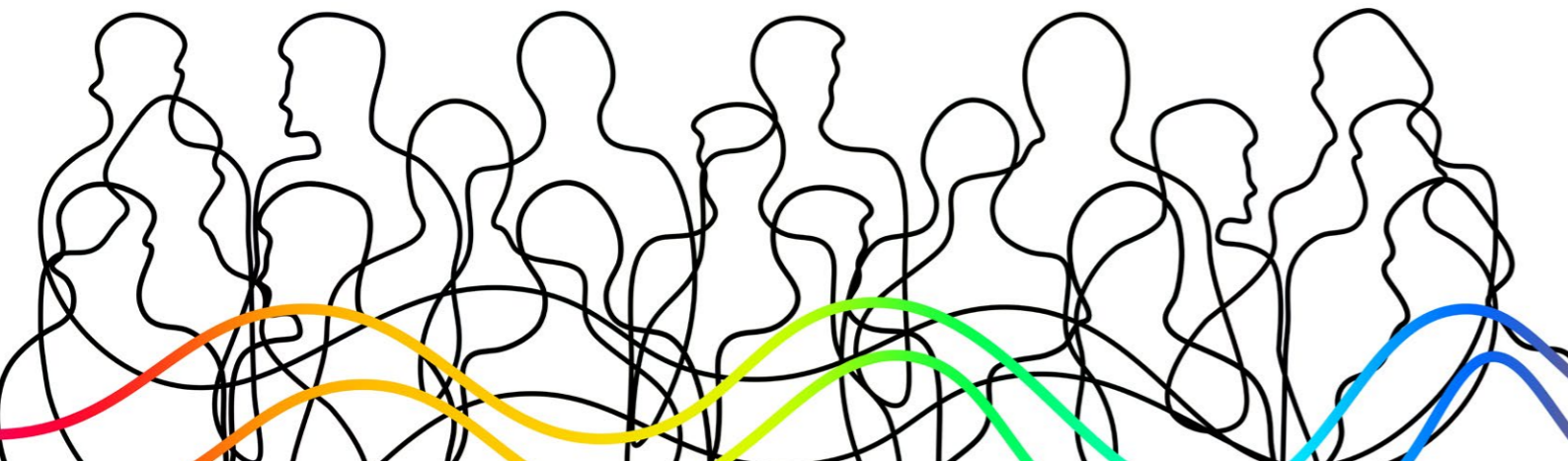
new journal for publishing research that didn't need to meet exacting methodological standards.

Streufert knew that if he were to succeed in helping define this unique and much-needed field within psychology, the research publication that was to be its voice would have to embody excellent research design, high-quality scientific measurement, and meaningful data interpretation.

### DILIGENT AND DETERMINATIVE

When the first edition of the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* was published at the beginning of 1971, Streufert, as editor, laid out its purpose

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Streifert set out to develop and establish a journal that would 'permit both work designed to test theory, and work designed to help solve problems of society.'

in the 'Information for Authors' section at the very front:

*'[It] will disseminate findings from behavioural science research which have applications to current problems of society.'*

Examples of those 'problems' were listed below his statement and included 'problems of society' such as race relations, discrimination, violence, poverty, and the social effects of pollution; 'problems of human development, learning and education', such as the sociology of education; and 'problems of political, social, and industrial organisations', such as social issues in organisational change, labour relations, and political extremism.

Streifert was determined that *JASP* would only publish laboratory and field

### SHAPING A DISCIPLINE

After ten years as senior editor and confident of the journal's health, Streifert stepped aside to allow the Journal to further develop with a new editor. During his tenure at the journal's helm, he had steered it on a clear path as the foundational authority for the nascent field of applied social psychology. The research it published helped shape the field's identity.

Over the following decades, Streifert celebrated the continued growth of both the journal and the field it supported, and he was vital to both. He contributed to the theoretical and applied literature with prodigious research addressing social issues across many domains: in fields as diverse as cognitive complexity, organisational functioning, attitudes, medicine and pharmacology, creativity, stress, the development of objective

whatever area they appeared. Streifert believed that for the complex societal situations that we face, you need correspondingly complex and flexible methods of research.

During his over 60 years in academia, he authored hundreds of papers, books, and presentations. He received his PhD from Princeton University and was on the academic faculty at Princeton University, Rutgers University, Purdue University, Pennsylvania State University College of Medicine, and the State University of New York in the USA, and University of Bielefeld and the University of Mannheim in Germany, and a Resident Scholar at the National Institutes of Health. In the process, he inspired and directed the paths of the next generation of social psychologists who would dedicate their work in more meaningful directions, aiming to tackle the newest social issues facing the world.

When *JASP* celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2021, it was a milestone of mixed emotions for the publication. While half a century of publishing rigorous scientific research had successfully cemented applied social psychology within the broader discipline of social psychology – and bridged the schism between theory and application just as Streifert had envisioned – its founder had not lived to see this anniversary, sadly passing away on 17 April 2019.

Until his death, Streifert remained a bold visionary, motivated by the need to study and understand human behaviour and, importantly, to use that

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research with applications to problems of society that reflected excellent research and scientific rigour.

In fact, in the early years, Streifert and his editorial team rejected 90% of manuscripts submitted, largely because they didn't meet the demanding methodological criteria required. If applied social psychology were to make its mark, Streifert knew that the research driving it would have to be diligent and determinative.

simulation methodologies and measures, and medical training. The diversity of his research over a period of 60 years proved he was equally at ease as a social, cognitive, educational, organisational, and pharmacological psychologist, but throughout this oeuvre runs the same desire to carry out investigations that pointed the way to a greater understanding of the real world. Streifert applied different approaches to explore the same basic issues; writing the best methodology to approach questions, in

understanding to address real, ongoing, and emerging challenges facing society. In the process, he not only laid the foundations for applying social psychology theory but helped shape the field through high-quality academic input and practice. Despite the clear evidence of his vision, commitment, and authority, he often brushed aside with a modest smile any remarks that he was the 'father' of applied social psychology. On this one point, however, he may have been wrong.

# Behind the Research

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### Research Objectives

Siegfried Streufert spent a lifetime championing applied social psychology.

### Detail

#### Collaborators

Dr Susan Streufert and Dr Satish Krishnamurthy

### References

Streufert, S, Nogami-Streufert, G, Streufert, SC, (2021) Launching a new journal: Fifty years of the Journal of Applied Social Psychology, *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 51(12), 1123–1127. [doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12766](https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12766)

### Personal Response

#### What do you remember being Dr Streufert's proudest achievement in his career?

Dr Siegfried Streufert was a rigorous, meticulous, and precise scientist, and he was also creative and artistic. His overriding purpose was always to build a better and brighter future for all.

He was born in 1934 to August and Elli Streufert. August Streufert was a member of the Reichstag in the Weimar Republic. When Hitler came to power, August Streufert and his family were labelled 'enemy of the state'. His father was in a concentration camp and died there. Siegfried spent his early childhood during the Holocaust. Those early life experiences led him to question – and then – research how people seek information and process it to make decisions. Siegfried developed theories and conducted research in a variety of fields: cognitive complexity, prejudice and perception, information processing, decision-making, management, effects of ageing and pharmaceuticals on performance, and complex simulations. Siegfried also wrote beautiful music and stories and poetry.

In all of these endeavours, he appreciated and promoted diversity in ideas and concepts as well as in culture and the arts. He was also an excellent teacher and mentor who felt that knowledge should be shared and built upon. The *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* was just one of his approaches to contribute to a better future.

