



## Community Psychology Coverage in Introduction to Psychology Textbooks

Heather M. Bauer, Olya Glantsman, Lauren Hochberg, Carleigh Turner  
& Leonard A. Jason<sup>1</sup>

**Author Biographies:** *Heather Bauer* obtained a Bachelor's degree in Psychology from DePaul University, during which she began her interest in Community Psychology. *Olya Glantsman*, PhD, earned a doctorate in community psychology and a graduate certificate in women's and gender studies from DePaul University in 2013. She is currently the director/coordinator of their undergraduate concentration in community psychology and a visiting professor in DePaul's psychology department. She also serves as an affiliate faculty member of the Community Psychology Ph.D. program. Dr. Glantsman has been active in the Society for Community Research and Action (American Psychological Association, Division 27) since 2002. Her research interests include cultural diversity, improving academic environments for students and faculty, community psychology values, and the teaching of psychology. *Lauren Hochberg* is an Intern at DePaul University's Center for Community Research, and studies Community Psychology and Sociology at DePaul University. *Carleigh Turner* is a graduate of Miami University, and currently a Care Advocate at Gateway Foundation & Volunteer at DePaul University Community Psychology Lab. *Leonard Jason* is a professor of Clinical and Community Psychology at DePaul University. He is the Director of the Center for Community Research, where over 25 staff work on 4 NIH-funded studies.

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<sup>1</sup> DePaul University

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**Author Notes:** Address correspondence to Leonard A. Jason, Center for Community Research, DePaul University, 990 W. Fullerton Ave., Suite 3100, Chicago, IL 60614

## Community Psychology Coverage in Introduction to Psychology Textbooks

### Abstract

The field of Community Psychology is approximately 50 years old, and it has become an active and invigorating source of ideas (e.g., prevention, ecological theory, sense of community, empowerment, participatory-based research, providing care to marginalized populations, etc.) for the overall field of Psychology. However, many undergraduates have never heard of this discipline in part because introductory Psychology textbooks are not providing adequate coverage of this field. The current study examined 53 introductory Psychology textbooks, published between 2010 and 2016, for their coverage of the field of Community Psychology. Findings indicated that only 17% of these textbooks contained an adequate representation of the discipline of Community Psychology. The lack of adequate coverage of this field in most introductory Psychology textbooks has significant implications for attracting undergraduates to this content area. Fifty percent of the textbook authors responded to an email that provided them information regarding the current study, and many indicated that new versions of their textbooks could include information from the field of Community Psychology. This positive response suggests that many authors are willing to better represent the field of Community Psychology in their introductory Psychology textbooks.

In 1965, attendees of the Boston Conference on the Education of Psychologists for Community Mental Health, commonly known as the "Swampscott Conference," recognized the lack of adequate mental health services for the most vulnerable and marginalized populations; this was the birth of the field of Community Psychology in the US (Anderson et al., 1966).

This field incorporates ecological theory, research, and practice regarding contextual issues regarding the relationship and mutual influences between people and their social environments (Kelly, 2006). Community Psychologists work to reduce stigma and oppression by providing those who are marginalized genuine opportunities to be involved as agents of change in their own communities (Kloos, Hill, Thomas, Wandersman, Elias, & Dalton, 2012). This discipline seeks to prevent adversities and promote wellness through building upon existing community assets and individual

strengths (Cowen, 1994). Community Psychology is deeply rooted in values including social justice, empowerment, and collaboration, which are used to address the issues and problems plaguing our society such as poverty, homelessness, and drug abuse (Moritsugu et al., 2013). These ideas are summarized in the Society for Community Research and Action's (SCRA, 2017) website that states: "Community Psychologists go beyond an individual focus and integrate social, cultural, economic, political, environmental, and international influences to promote positive change, health, and empowerment at individual and systemic levels."

However, if Community Psychology is underrepresented within introductory Psychology textbooks, it could reduce the awareness and interest in this field of study among undergraduates. Such underrepresentation could affect undergraduate students' opportunities to

learn of the potential within this field to better understand and ultimately help solve many social and community problems. Undergraduates exposed to Community Psychology could use its principles in their future careers, and some might even decide to obtain further training in this discipline.

### **Evidence of Underrepresentation**

There is evidence that the field of Community Psychology is underrepresented in introductory Psychology textbooks. As an example, Lucas, Raley, Washington, and Blazek (2005) examined 57 full length and brief introductory Psychology textbooks published between 2000 and 2003. The authors found that the term Community Psychology was used in only 21% (12 of the 57) of the textbooks. In an unpublished study, Sarkisian and Taylor (2009) evaluated 36 introductory Psychology textbooks published between 2005 and 2009 for language clearly related to Community Psychology and found that only 31% (11 out of 36) of the textbooks included any language clearly related to Community Psychology. Finally, Griggs and Jackson (2013) analyzed nine brief introductory Psychology textbooks published between 2011 and 2013, and their article indicated no mention of the field of Community Psychology.

Two of the studies above are dated, as the study by Lucas et al. (2005) examined textbooks only up to 2003 and Sarkisian and Taylor (2009) examined textbooks up to 2009. In addition, the Griggs and Jackson (2013) study only analyzed brief introductory Psychology textbooks. There is a need to examine introductory Psychology textbooks that have been more recently published.

The purpose of the present study is to analyze the extent to which Community Psychology is mentioned in full length (as opposed to brief) introduction to Psychology textbooks published between 2010 and 2016. In

addition, the study investigated whether a textbook included an adequate discussion of the field. The results of this study provide up-to-date information about the coverage of Community Psychology that is available to students through introductory Psychology textbooks.

### **Methods**

#### *Materials*

The sample included 53 introductory Psychology textbooks. Each textbook was the most recent edition, published between 2010 and 2016. Either a physical or electronic version of each textbook was reviewed. The electronic version of a textbook was accessed via Amazon.com.

#### *Procedure*

As an initial step, a list of the most recent editions of introduction to Psychology textbooks was assembled. The list was generated using a broad search on Google, and then using a more refined search on Textbooks.com and Amazon.com. Some key words used to find textbooks on these websites were 'psychology', 'introduction', 'understanding', 'discovering', and 'essentials'. Next, a search was done on Amazon.com to look specifically for an electronic version of each textbook. Textbooks that did not have an electronic copy available online were requested through an Interlibrary Loan system at DePaul University's library.

#### *Searching for References to Community Psychology*

Once a textbook was secured, the book's index was searched for the terms 'Community Psychology' or 'Community Psychologist'. If either of those terms were listed in the book's index, then the pages listing either term were read in their entirety. If 'Community

Psychology' or 'Community Psychologist' were not listed in the book's index, then the book's table of contents was reviewed to find information pertaining to the various subfields of Psychology. If the book's table of contents indicated that the book had information pertaining to the various subfields of Psychology, then the pages dedicated to this information were read for reference to 'Community Psychology' or 'Community Psychologist'. Data were recorded regarding whether or not the book mentioned 'Community Psychology' or 'Community Psychologist'. If either term was mentioned, then the location of either term as well as the description provided for either term were recorded.

#### *Analysis of Content*

Next, the textbooks' descriptions of Community Psychology were analyzed for whether they described essential aspects of Community Psychology, which included a number of terms such as: *empowerment, providing care to marginalized populations, principles of ecological theory, prevention, collaboration, sense of community, participatory approaches, and improving the overall quality of communities* (Jason et al., 2004; Kloos, Hill, Thomas, Wandersman, Elias, & Dalton, 2012; Moritsugu, Vera, Wong, & Duffy, 2013). If a textbook included a discussion of the various subfields in Psychology, to be counted as an adequate description, Community Psychology had to be mentioned and described alongside the other subfields in Psychology. In addition, if an author mentioned Community Psychology in two different textbooks, both accounts of the descriptions of Community Psychology were recorded (e.g., King, 2015, 2016).

Examples of adequate descriptions of Community Psychology included the following: "improve the quality of relationships among people, their community, and society" and "create communities that

support residents' needs" (King, 2016, p. 17); "work to create social and physical environments that are healthy for all" (Myers & DeWall, 2016a, p. 12); and "ensure that psychological services reach people who need help but tend not to seek it," "prevent psychological disorders by promoting resilience and other personal strengths," "work with community leaders and neighborhood organizations to improve stressful conditions that can cause psychological disorders" (Bernstein, 2016, p. 6).

#### **Results**

A total of 53 introductory Psychology textbooks were analyzed for naming and describing the field of Community Psychology. Only 14 of the textbooks, or 26%, referred to Community Psychology, but only 9 of the textbooks, or 17%, contained an adequate representation of Community Psychology. Five textbooks that mentioned the term Community Psychology did not include an adequate representation or definition. For instance, three referenced Community Psychology in the Appendix, one referenced the field in a chapter devoted to psychological treatment methods, and one referenced the field in a chapter devoted to other applications of Psychology. Table 1 presents the textbooks that were included in this study in chronological order according to their publication date. Those that mentioned the term Community Psychology were highlighted in yellow. Additionally, Table 1 indicates which highlighted textbooks contained an adequate representation of Community Psychology.

Following this data collection, we contacted the authors of the introductory Psychology textbooks and indicated the relatively low percentage of textbooks with any mention of Community Psychology. Furthermore, we indicated a willingness to work with them on revisions of their textbooks if new ones were released (see Appendix A). Out of the 52

authors<sup>2</sup> contacted, 26 (50%) responded to the emails. Consequently, many of the authors indicated that new versions of their textbooks were being written, or would be in the future, or modules in current books could be written, and 58% (n = 15) were receptive to including information about the field of Community Psychology.

Here are a several of the written responses (permission was received from the authors to include these quotes in the article): “You make a compelling argument that intro texts should include material on community psychology” (J. Nevid, personal communication, Nov. 2, 2017); “Thank you for bringing this to our attention, and we’ll definitely be in touch to make sure the definition/material is presented appropriately” (C. Sanderson, personal communication, Nov. 1, 2017); “...your criticism is well founded. Admittedly, all intro psychology books are bursting at the seams, and already far too long, largely because we try to include far too much. But I very much agree that at least some representation of community psychology is needed, and that our book and most others have fallen short in that regard” (S. Lilienfeld, personal communication, Oct. 31, 2017); “Some of my early introduction to psychology involved reading Seymour Sarason and other psychological scientists who discussed the importance of a sense of community and how people think, feel and act. Please do send us as much material as you can think an educated person should know” (C.N. DeWall, personal communication, Oct. 10, 2017); “It is always a pleasure hearing from faculty about ideas for inclusion or correction. As you point out, we don’t say anything about community psychology but would be open to the possibility of at least a couple of sentences” (G.J. Feist, personal communication, Oct. 9,

2017); “So we are thinking that we would like to highlight this field, as it’s been ignored until now, and the best way to do that would be in one of our features” (S. Ciccarelli & N. White, personal communication, Oct. 11, 2017); “...I would be very interested in reviewing any materials you want to share to help bring me up to speed” (L. Freberg, personal communication, Oct. 9, 2017); “What a good idea!...At a bare minimum we see ensuring that the material we described above is presented ...differentiating the roles of social psychology, health psychology, and community psychology, as well as by explicitly recognizing community psychologists currently cited in the text. Of course much more might be possible, depending on what your perusal of our materials suggests to you” (J. Mitterer & T. Martini, personal communication, Nov. 8, 2017).

### Discussion

In summary, as shown in Table 1, most introduction to Psychology textbooks published between 2010 and 2016 do not contain any reference to Community Psychology. In addition, only 17% of the textbooks contained an adequate representation of Community Psychology. Similar to the prior findings of Sarkisian and Taylor’s (2009), our study suggests that the field of Community Psychology is underrepresented in the most recent editions of introduction to Psychology textbooks. On a more positive note, 50% of the contacted textbook authors responded to our email which described our findings. In addition to their responses, several of the authors expressed an openness to include Community Psychology content in future editions which was an unanticipated and welcome second-order outcome of our study.

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<sup>2</sup> We were not able to find contact information for one of the textbooks.

Table 1. Names and authors of Introductory Psychology Textbooks

Name of Publication	Copyright Year	Author(s)	Mention CP?	Location of Description
Psychology: Foundations and Frontiers, 10th Edition	2016	Bernstein	Yes- Adequate	With Subfields
Discovering Psychology: The Science of Mind, 2nd Edition	2016	Cacioppo & Freberg	No	N/A
Psychology, 5th Edition	2016	Ciccarelli & White	Yes	Appendix
Introduction to Psychology: Gateways to Mind and Behavior, 14th Edition	2016	Coon & Mitterer	Yes- Adequate	With Subfields
Essentials of Understanding Psychology, 12th Edition	2016	Feldman	No	N/A
Psychological Science, 5th Edition	2016	Gazzaniga, Heatherton, & Halpern	No	N/A
Psychology in Your Life, 2nd Edition	2016	Grison, Heatherton, Gazzaniga	No	N/A
Discovering Psychology, 7th Edition	2016	Hockenbury, Nolan, & Hockenbury	No	N/A
Introduction to Psychology	2016	Kalat	Yes- Adequate	With Subfields
The Science of Psychology: An Appreciative View, 4th Edition	2016	King	Yes- Adequate	With Subfields
Understanding Psychology, 11th Edition	2016	Morris & Maisto	No	N/A
Exploring Psychology, 10th Edition	2016	Myers & DeWall	Yes- Adequate	With Subfields & Appendix
Psychology in Everyday Life, 4th Edition	2016	Myers & DeWall	No	N/A
PSYCH, 4th Edition	2016	Rathus	No	N/A
Real World Psychology, 2nd Edition	2016	Sanderson & Huffman	No	N/A
Psychology, 12th Edition	2016	Wade & Tavis	No	N/A
Barron's AP Psychology, 7th Edition	2016	Weseley & McEntarffer	No	N/A
Psychology: Core Concepts, 8th Edition	2016	Zimbardo, Johnson, McCann	No	N/A
Psychology and the Real World, 2nd Edition	2015	FABBS Foundation & Gernsbacher	No	N/A
Psychology: Perspectives and Connections, 3rd Edition	2015	Feist & Rosenberg	No	N/A
Understanding Psychology, 12th Edition	2015	Feldman	Yes	"Treatment" Chapter
Psychology in Action, 11th Edition	2015	Huffman & Dowdell	No	N/A
Experience Psychology, 3rd Edition	2015	King	Yes- Adequate	With Subfields
Psychology, 11th Edition	2015	Myers & DeWall	Yes	Appendix
Psychology in Modules, 11th Edition	2015	Myers & DeWall	Yes	Appendix
Essentials of Psychology: Concepts and Applications, 4th Edition	2015	Nevid	No	N/A
What is Psychology?: Foundations, Applications, and Integration, 3rd Edition	2015	Pastorino & Doyle-Portillo	Yes- Adequate	With Subfields
Introducing Psychology, 3rd Edition	2015	Schacter, Gilbert, Wegner, & Nock	No	N/A
Essentials of Psychology, 6th Edition	2014	Bernstein	Yes- Adequate	With Subfields
Psychology, A Journey, 5th Edition	2014	Coon & Mitterer	No	N/A
Psychology: A Concise Introduction	2014	Griggs	No	N/A
An Introduction to the History of Psychology	2014	Hergenbahn & Henley	No	N/A
Psychology with Updates on DSM-5, 6th Edition	2014	Hockenbury & Hockenbury	No	N/A
Psychology, 7th Edition	2014	Hockenbury, Nolan, & Hockenbury	No	N/A
Psychology	2014	Licht, Hull, & Ballantyne	No	N/A
Psychology: From Inquiry to Understanding, 3rd Edition	2014	Lilienfeld, Lynn, Namy, Woolf	No	N/A
Psychology, 3rd Edition	2014	Schacter, Gilbert, Wegner, & Nock	No	N/A
Invitation to Psychology, 6th Edition	2014	Wade, Tavis, & Garry	No	N/A
Learn Psychology	2013	Carter & Seifert	No	N/A
Psychology, 7th Edition	2013	Davis, Palladino, & Christopherson	Yes	"Other Applications" Chapter
Psychology, 6th Edition	2013	Nairne	No	N/A
Introduction to Psychology, 10th Edition	2013	Plotnik & Kouyoumdjian	No	N/A
Psychology: Themes and Variations, 9th Edition	2013	Weiten	No	N/A
Psychology and Life, 20th Edition	2012	Gerrig & Zimbardo	Yes- Adequate	With Subfields & "Treatment" Chapter
Careers in Psychology: Opportunities in a Changing World, 4th Edition	2012	Kuther & Morgan	No	N/A
Psychology: Concepts and Applications, 4th Edition	2012	Nevid	No	N/A
CLEP Introductory Psychology Book with Online CLEP Test Preparation, 2nd Edition	2012	Sharpsteen	No	N/A
Psychology: An Introduction	2011	Lahey	No	N/A
Psychology: Concepts and Connections, 10th Edition	2011	Rathus	No	N/A
Psychology, 8th Edition	2010	Gleitman, Gross, & Reisberg	No	N/A
Psychology, 6th Edition	2010	Kowalski & Westen	No	N/A
Psychology: The Science of Mind and Behavior, 5th Edition	2010	Passer & Smith	No	N/A
Psychology, 2nd Edition	2010	Schacter, Gilbert, & Wegner	No	N/A

Coverage of Community Psychology Content

The essential concepts of Community Psychology were mentioned in at least several textbooks, and these descriptions included *empowerment, providing care to*

*marginalized populations, principles of ecological theory, prevention, sense of community, and improving the overall quality of communities.* For example, present in King's textbook were examples of providing care to marginalized populations: "providing

accessible care for people with psychological problems” and “cater[ing] to people who have traditionally been underserved” (King, 2016, p. 12 & 17). Additionally, Bernstein’s textbook (2016, p.6) explains that ensuring “psychological services reach people who need help but tend not to seek it,” and “work with community leaders... to improve stressful conditions that can cause psychological disorders”. It is apparent that there are at least some textbooks that provide both the Community Psychology term and an adequate description of the field.

### *Limitations*

Future researchers could collect data on the overall popularity of each textbook in this study. Doing so may provide a more comprehensible approximation of the number of students that are exposed to the field of Community Psychology in their introduction to Psychology textbooks. It is also of importance to review textbooks in other subfields of Psychology (abnormal, social, developmental) as well as other disciplines (social work, psychiatry, and public health) to evaluate their coverage of the field of Community Psychology. There is also a need to evaluate non-US based introduction to Psychology textbooks in future studies. Qualitative analyses of Community Psychology content would also add more rigor to future studies. Finally, future studies could review materials to determine how well Community Psychology as a field is represented in Internet social media sources.

### *Future Directions*

Community Psychology’s future will be influenced by whether Psychology textbooks and the media adequately reference this discipline. If students and the public are not aware of this field’s significant contributions to the resolution of social and community issues, practitioners and researchers will be

less likely to be identified as possible collaborators when these issues are tackled by community groups at the local levels as well as within more policy domains (Jason, 2013). Thus, underrepresentation of Community Psychology in Psychology introductory textbooks and a variety of media sources could lead to less opportunities for widely using the types of community-based research that exist within our field.

As one possible action step, Community Psychologists might encourage the use of those introduction to Psychology textbooks that do contain appropriate coverage of this field in their respective institutions and courses, and these are noted in Table 1. We have sent positive and congratulatory emails to several textbook authors who have represented the field of Community Psychology extremely well, and these authors emailed us back their appreciation for this feedback. Our group is also currently sending to authors, who expressed interest in more information about the field, definitions of Community Psychology as well as descriptions of possible jobs available for those trained in this area, which are located on the website of the Society for Community Research and Action (2017).

In addition, during our interactions with publishers, there are also opportunities for us to encourage the adoption of Community Psychology material in a variety of dissemination products. As an example, recently, the Psychology editor of a major publisher approached the last author with a request to write a textbook for the field of Community Psychology. This began a series of discussions, and the editor was very open to exploring opportunities regarding introducing the field of Community Psychology into two introductory Psychology textbooks that were currently being written for this publisher, as well as other books on careers in Psychology. Clearly, there are multiple ways to help disseminate our field



and our innovative approaches, and examples in this article represent just a few of many ways of accomplishing this goal.

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## Appendix A

Dear:

We are faculty members at DePaul University's Psychology department, and are active members of the American Psychological Association's Division 27 Community Psychology. Our field has a long history, emerging in the United States in the 1960s. Our professional organization, the Society for Community Research and Action (SCRA), currently has 1,301 members. Of those, 298 list an address outside of the United States.

Upon conducting a study on representation of our field in the Introductory Psychology textbooks, we were surprised to learn that most did not have any information about our field, and a few had only briefly mentioned it. We did notice that the research and ideas of Community Psychologists were cited, but they were not identified as being members of our field. For our field to be known by students taking Introductory Psychology courses, it is important to have some mention of what our discipline has offered to psychologists in terms of: prevention (versus treatment), competencies (versus weaknesses), collaboration across disciplines, ecological understanding of people within their environments, diversity, and community building as a mode of intervention. These concepts have provided psychologists a focus on new ways of thinking about contextual factors and how participants could be more involved in applied research efforts. Community Psychology also considers public health-based, systems-oriented, and preventive approaches to mental and physical difficulties. We wonder if you might be considering publishing a revised text in the introductory area, and if so, whether you might be willing to work with us in making sure the field of Community Psychology is adequately represented. We would be happy to provide you with any necessary materials including various versions of the definitions of our approach. We would be willing to provide content ranging anywhere from one paragraph to a module. Please let us know if you will be interested and willing to work with us on this project.

Sincerely,

Olya Glantsman, Ph.D. ([Oglantsm@depaul.edu](mailto:Oglantsm@depaul.edu))

Leonard Jason, Ph.D. ([Ljason@depaul.edu](mailto:Ljason@depaul.edu))

DePaul University