

EDITORIAL

Community psychology and the public interest: 2018 Newbrough award for best graduate paper

“Community psychology and the public interest” was the title of the late J.R. “Bob” Newbrough’s 1979 Division 27 (Community Psychology) Presidential address delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (Newbrough, 1980). Bob was a longtime editor of the *Journal of Community Psychology* and helped start the community (for a time called Transactional-Ecological Psychology) graduate program at Peabody College for Teachers in the 1960s which has evolved into the current interdisciplinary Ph.D. Program in Community Research and Action (CRA) at the Peabody College of Education and Human Development, now part of Vanderbilt University.

In that APA address, Newbrough (1980) argued for a clear definition of community psychology as a professional discipline based on nonclinical skills and responsibilities that psychologists have to advance and uphold in the public interest. That is also what Gibbs (1983) argued for in her invited address to Division 27, noting that, no matter how well intentioned, a primarily clinical or mental health response to an environmental health threat can actually harm communities’ ability to be taken seriously and protect themselves through grassroots environmental justice action. I am pleased and honored to introduce an article that furthers the legacy of Newbrough and Gibbs. “From Victims to Citizens: Emerging Activist Identities in the Anti-fracking Movement in Bulgaria” by Dr. Nikolay Mihaylov is based on part of his doctoral dissertation, entitled “Releasing the Waters: A Sociological Study of the Anti-fracking Movement in Bulgaria,” which was cowinner of the 2018 J.R. Newbrough Award for Best Graduate Paper in the Department of Human and Organizational Development at Vanderbilt.

I was Dr. Mihaylov’s doctoral thesis advisor (along with committee members Holly McCammon, Marybeth Shinn, Paul Speer, and Ken Wallston), and Nikolay is among the very best students with whom I have ever worked or taught over the past 34 years of my career. In addition to his interdisciplinary major in CRA, Nikolay completed a graduate minor in Quantitative Psychology and has a Masters in Clinical and Counseling Psychology from Sofia University. He is now Assistant Professor of Public Health at the Medical University of Varna, Bulgaria, and is well on his way to becoming a prominent researcher in both community psychology and environmental health and justice. He has also conducted evaluation research on school- and community-based preventive interventions, and along with Ronald Harvey, is helping to create and establish community psychology as a new field in Bulgaria, which is vitally important work both for the growth and development of our field and, more important, for interdisciplinary, community- and systems-based health and social justice intervention in less resourced countries throughout the world (Hanitio & Perkins, 2017).

Nikolay’s piece which follows, like his dissertation, epitomizes scholarly excellence and innovation, is methodologically rigorous, and makes important contributions to theory, research and action—the elusive trifecta! His article investigates the emergence, development and implications of activist identities as an element of Bulgaria’s successful social and political movement to ban, for both environmental and public health reasons, fracking for fossil fuel extraction. But more broadly, his study relates to the promotion of wellness, especially the important and central concepts of: a) promoting positive attachments between people and place, including psychological concepts of sense of community and place attachment; b) development of personal and group/interpersonal political understanding and competencies, including citizen participation, community organizing and empowerment; c) developing, preserving, settings of environmental health and wellness outcomes; d) having the

empowering sense of being in control of one's own and one's community's fate; and e) coping effectively with environmental threat and political and social stress as well as community psychology's critical intersections with sociology, environmental health/science, and policy/politics. Those vital, interdisciplinary intersections at the roots of community psychology in Swampscott, Massachusetts, in 1965, were diminished—if not lost—for several decades, but are now an important and re-emerging trend in our field (Perkins & Schensul, 2017). Nikolay's highly sophisticated and complex study was solidly grounded in community psychology and those other fields as well as his regional expertise in Post-Soviet era Balkan politics and culture, and informs work in each of those disciplines and points to implications for other regions of the world facing similar fracking developments and organized local reactions, including throughout much of North America.

His project was the first truly systematic exploration of a community organizing and citizen mobilization effort in modern Bulgaria. It represents a fruitful opportunity for culturally anchored, comparative research that produced many findings and insightful observations with both theoretical and social significance. It was no surprise that, in addition to the Newbrough Award, his doctoral research earned a competitive Public Policy grant from the Society for Community Research & Action. I am especially pleased that the Newbrough Award Committee, SCRA Policy Committee, and the *Journal of Community Psychology* all recognize and value the public interest policy relevance of Dr. Mihaylov's research. The following article serves to remind us of the importance of community psychology for our participants' and collaborators' as well as our own social identities as activists and more broadly for social movements and environmental health and justice.

Douglas D. Perkins

Department of Human & Organizational Development, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee

Correspondence

Douglas D. Perkins, Department of Human & Organizational Development,
Vanderbilt University, Nashville,
TN 37203-5721.
Email: d.perkins@vanderbilt.edu

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