

Introduction

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Many psychology researchers have become highly effective in conveying the applied significance of academic research and serving as expert sources of scientific information. But for others of us, having such an impact might seem elusive—we might ask ourselves, “How did they do that?” while at the same time finding it hard to envision being able to do the same. Most of us have never received training in how to make our research matter or how to engage effectively with nonacademic audiences, yet these are skills we need to maximize the impact of our work.

This book is designed to fill these gaps in our professional training. Soon after I joined the faculty at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, I had the good fortune of encountering kindred spirits who share my commitment to using rigorous academic research to address social issues and serve the public interest, while enabling others to do the same. Together, we cofounded the Public Engagement Project (<http://www.umass.edu/pep>),

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Making Research Matter: A Psychologist's Guide to Public Engagement, L. R. Tropp (Editor)
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an initiative that supports and trains faculty to engage with nonacademic audiences to inform public policy and enrich public debate. Although I began to see how many principles of effective engagement can transfer across disciplines and institutions, valuable lessons can be learned and knowledge can be gained from focusing more specifically on engagement among academic researchers in the field of psychology.

This book has therefore been developed as a resource for any psychology researcher who seeks to enhance their ability to engage with non-academic audiences and to make their work more accessible and useful in addressing real-world concerns. The chapters in this book were written by experienced scholars who not only are excellent researchers but also have been extraordinarily effective in articulating the social relevance of their scholarship and developing productive relationships with non-academics across a broad range of institutions and public settings. Through their succinct chapters, these contributors highlight key insights gained from years of experience and provide readers with tips and strategies that can facilitate their engaged work. As a whole, this book will help psychology researchers—and potentially researchers in other social science disciplines—to develop greater confidence and skill in communicating and working with nonacademics, while enabling those with prior engagement experience to broaden the domains in which they work.

As we consider embarking on a path to engagement, it can be useful to reflect on the many different ways in which we might become an engaged scholar. Perhaps the first image that comes to mind is the prospect of seeing our name or that of a colleague in the media. Clearly, this can be an effective way to broaden the reach of our work, and we can adopt a variety of specific strategies to share our work effectively through such means. Chapter 2 by Schalet and Chapter 3 by Sommers focus on these strategies to prepare readers for writing op-ed pieces and blog entries for high-profile news outlets, being interviewed for radio or television, or publishing a book for a popular audience.

But there are also many other models for engagement and approaches we can take toward becoming an engaged scholar. Depending on our goals and interests, we might want our research to inform public policy at the

local, state, or national levels; in particular, Chapter 4 by Downing and Chapter 5 by Dalton and Bazerman describe how to approach and work with policymakers and government agencies to have maximum impact. Instead, we might seek to engage with the legal system or law enforcement. In Chapter 6, Borgida and Fiske provide crucial insights regarding how scientific evidence can be used in litigation, and in Chapter 7 Glaser and Charbonneau detail strategies for establishing effective collaborations with law enforcement. Alternatively, we may seek greater involvement working within social institutions and communities; Maruyama and Westerhof (Chapter 8), Penner (Chapter 9), and Bond and Haynes-Baratz (Chapter 10) offer both specific guidelines and broad insights regarding how best to cultivate partnerships within schools, hospitals, and community-based organizations. We might also seek guidance about how to train students to work effectively in these settings and how varied forms of engagement can mesh with our other professional goals, issues addressed by Franco-Zamudio and Langhout (Chapter 11) and Dovidio (Chapter 12). Whatever forms of engagement match who you are and what you care about, this book aims to provide you with crucial insights and knowledge that will enhance your ability to make your research matter.¹

¹The chapters included in this book focus heavily on engagement activities in public domains and social institutions as they often emerge in the United States. Admittedly and regrettably, this single edited volume cannot do justice to the vast and dynamic ways in which relations with public audiences and social institutions are likely to vary around the world. But it is my hope that psychology researchers from other countries will find insights that are useful and relevant to their own societies' social, political, and institutional contexts.