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Making Connections: Law and Society Researchers and Their Subjects

David M. Engel*

This essay explores the theme of the 1998 annual meeting of the Law and Society Association: "Making Connections across Disciplines, Theories, and Methods," focusing in particular on the connections between researcher and subject and between researcher and researcher. The essay discusses three recent articles, by Joseph Sanders and V. Lee Hamilton, by Barbara Yngvesson, and by Margaret Montoya. These articles illustrate recent creative efforts by law and society researchers to forge new kinds of connections to their subjects. The articles also illustrate fundamentally different conceptions of the role of the researcher and of the methodologies on which sociolegal studies might be based. These differing conceptions are considered as part of a more general argument that epistemological contradictions are an essential part of our efforts to apprehend the world we seek to describe. They connect law and society researchers to one another and ensure the vitality of our field.

This year's Program Committee announced an evocative theme for our meeting: "Making Connections across Disciplines, Theories, and Methods." I want to explore the theme of "making connections" in my talk today. Law and society scholarship takes many forms, ranging from surveys to experiments to historical studies to ethnographies. But somewhere near the core of much of our research is a connection between two people, the researcher and the subject. I would like to offer an appreciation of the ways in which law and society scholars make this important connection and, at the same time, to celebrate the contribution of the so-called subjects of our research—"so called" because our interviewees have often been more like partners in producing new and surprising understandings of law and legal institutions.

Thanks to Joe Sanders, Lee Hamilton, Barbara Yngvesson, and Margaret Montoya for inspiration. Thanks to Frank Munger for his usual insights and encouragement. Thanks to Jaruwang Engel for making it possible for me to write during a difficult time. This essay is dedicated to the memory of my father, Edwin A. Engel. Address correspondence to David M. Engel, School of Law, O'Brian Hall, University at Buffalo, Buffalo, NY 14210 (email: <dmengel@acsu.buffalo.edu>).

From Stewart Macaulay's Wisconsin lawyers and businessmen (1963) to Malcolm Feeley's (1979) judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys, from Jane Collier's Zinacantan villagers (1973) to Valerie Hans and Neil Vidmar's (1986) trial jurors, our research subjects have spoken to us about the presence—and absence—of law in their everyday lives, and we have listened.

The term "research subject" is problematic in several ways, but it is especially problematic if it suggests mindless passivity. Our interviewees are not potted plants. Sometimes they take over the encounter and leave us wondering who has set the agenda. Twenty years ago, I interviewed a Baptist minister in my study of a rural Illinois community. Halfway through the interview, he said, "And just as you've interviewed me, I'm interviewing you. . . . If God were to take your life today, do you know [if] you'd go to heaven?" He went on to say, "This is important . . . I could help you." What kind of help was he offering? Was he trying to help me learn more about law and community in Sander County, which I had thought was the purpose of our interview? No, he seemed to have something rather different in mind. His helpful intentions soon became clear when he told me, "You can be saved, right here in this office today, if you just simply give your life to Christ. Would you like to do that?" As I left his office, I mentally placed a check mark next to his name on my interview list of community observers. I imagine he also placed a check mark next to my name on a list of his own—a list of souls who wandered through town and, in his view, needed counseling on the one and only way to get to Heaven. Interestingly, Erwin Smigel (1969) provides a similar account of his interviews with Wall Street lawyers. They, too, were inclined to seize control of the interview agenda. Thirty years ago, Smigel (p. 24) wrote:

A researcher approaching these [lawyers] on their "home grounds" must be wary lest he become the respondent and the lawyer the interviewer! As the investigator sits in one of the soft chairs usually offered, it may be he who . . . finds himself confiding his feelings and revealing his problems. The danger in interviewing interviewees is that they sometimes forget the role they are expected to play.

Apparently evangelical ministers and powerful Wall Street lawyers have something in common: they both battle the law and society scholar for control over the framework of the interview. Research subjects can control the encounter in other ways, too. Santos (1995:177–81) recalls that one of his interviewees in a squatter settlement in Rio de Janeiro chased him off with a rifle. During a period of brutal fascist rule, this interviewee failed to see the distinction between a social science investigation and a police investigation.¹

¹ Santos explains that he inadvertently described his project with the Portuguese word *investigação*, the same word used for a police investigation. But he goes on to make

Our subjects are not docile and passive, nor would we want them to be. Our research succeeds when we make a connection with people who become active and creative participants in the scholarly project. We do not, like some scientists, travel to far-off places to retrieve blood and stool specimens from our subjects. We do not seek their tissues or fluids. We seek their ideas. We may connect with our subjects through survey questionnaires, through participant observation, through historical records or narrative interviews. Whatever approach we use, we hope that our interviewees will act as sociologists of everyday life, not just as people who are observed but as observers of their own worlds (see Clifford 1986b; Woolgar 1988b). Even when we simply ask what happened—did you ever have an accident, suffer discrimination, or see a lawyer?—we receive in response their account, their interpretation of the reality of everyday life. With their accounts, we construct our accounts; with their sociologies, we write our sociologies.

How, then, should we characterize this all-important connection between researcher and subject in law and society research? Different scholars would surely give different answers, but many would agree that law and society researchers have tried to understand and communicate the perspectives of those who are habitually ignored by legal scholars and by policymakers. In some cases, we have sought the views of the poor and disempowered, but in other cases our subjects—like Smigel's Wall Street lawyers—have belonged to powerful elites. In either case, we have found that their everyday experiences are poorly understood by others and seldom studied. Whether we study the privileged or the disempowered, the connection between researcher and subject remains central to law and society scholars precisely because our legal and political system tends to overlook the views that, from our perspective, reveal the most about what law is and how it works.

One of the most exciting aspects of our field is the diversity of forms and methods by which we frame the encounter between researcher and subject. Furthermore, we are in the midst of a period of creativity and experimentation, and we can see new approaches springing up around us. I would like to describe three recent articles that exemplify significantly different forms of connection between researcher and subject. My purpose is to pay tribute to researchers and subjects who have participated in three imaginatively conceived fieldwork encounters, but I also want to argue that the differences among these three studies are, as Carol Greenhouse (1995) has observed, the differences that *connect* us as scholars to one another. Our differences connect us

the point that this may not have been a simple semantic misunderstanding. He finds some disturbing similarities between the investigative mission of the social scientist and that of the Brazilian police.

and shape law and society as an intellectual field. So my topic today is really about two kinds of connection: not only the connection between researcher and subject but also the connection between researcher and researcher.

In their 1996 article, "Distributing Responsibility for Wrongdoing inside Corporate Hierarchies: Public Judgments in Three Societies," Joe Sanders and Lee Hamilton participate in a unique transnational collaboration with eight Japanese and Russian colleagues. Together they examine the judgments that people make about responsibility for injuries that are caused by actors within corporations. In everyday life, people continually make judgments and assign responsibility for wrongful acts,² and when such judgments address corporate wrongdoing, they have great significance for the law. Judgments of this kind have deep roots in the cultural, economic, and political context, so it is especially notable that the authors are able to compare differences among citizens in the capital cities of three very different countries—the United States, Japan, and Russia. Together, the international team fashioned four vignettes of corporations and injuries and administered them in the form of a factorial survey to 1,800 subjects. By varying these vignettes for different interviewees, the researchers could determine how respondents attribute responsibility differently according to differences in the corporate actor's degree of intentionality, the actor's position in the corporate hierarchy, and the degree of influence exerted on the actor by corporate colleagues and superiors.

Joe and Lee present their findings with great care and sensitivity. They observe that members of the public in all three societies are rather reluctant to hold individuals fully responsible for conduct that takes place within corporate hierarchies (pp. 850–51). Russian respondents were less likely to hold the corporations themselves responsible, presumably because Russians in 1993 still perceived their corporations as lacking in autonomy and therefore less responsible for the harms they caused (p. 847). American respondents were more likely to hold individual actors within corporations to a higher standard of responsibility. Japanese respondents were most inclined to forgive and even approve injurious conduct within corporations if such conduct represents conformity to group decisions or to a boss's directive (p. 854).

² "Human existence may be viewed in part as threading one's way through a succession of choice points. . . . Each such choice point involves making implicit or explicit judgments about the relative desirability of the alternatives involved. One can divide human existence into time units so small that individuals are constantly making choices about what to do in the next time interval, a circumstance that completely contradicts human experiences. Choices are being made continually, but most do not surface to be experienced as self-conscious choosing" (Rossi & Anderson 1982:17–18). This essay appears in a collection of essays on the factorial survey, cited by Sanders and Hamilton in their methodology section.

As intriguing as Joe and Lee's findings are, I want to focus my discussion on the nature of the connection between researcher and subject in their study. One of the aspects of the connection that I find most fascinating derives from the process of storytelling on which the study rests. Nowadays, a great deal of law and society research involves the attempt by researchers to elicit stories from their interviewees. In Joe and Lee's study, the process is reversed: the researchers are the storytellers. The international team of investigators spent a week together constructing stories of corporate injuries³ and then sent their survey assistants into the field to tell these stories to the research subjects. The subjects were not, of course, passive listeners. They responded to the four vignettes with stories of their own—that is, with responses that revealed their own perceptions of who should be held accountable or who should be treated with understanding, compassion, or approval when corporate behavior leads to misfortune.

The process of trading stories, which lies at the heart of this study, did not bring the researchers into face-to-face contact with their subjects. Joe and Lee did not sit in the living rooms of the Japanese and Russian respondents, nor did they themselves talk on the telephone to the respondents in Washington, DC. The power of the factorial survey resides in the large number of interviewees who take part. The large N requires that the storytelling take place at a distance, mediated by other colleagues, translators, and survey assistants. The moment of contact that occurred in these three national studies is thus, for our purposes, somewhat speculative, but intriguing nonetheless. How did the research subjects in each country perceive the interview? Did the respondents in Washington, DC, associate the interview with Naderesque critiques of corporate misconduct and political debates over reform? Did the Japanese respondents experience uneasiness when asked to make individual judgments in a culture where, according to the authors, such judgments are typically formulated within social groups? And what of the Russian respondents? The survey was administered in Moscow in 1993 during a turbulent period in which democratic principles and procedures were being introduced into a previously authoritarian society. How did the research subjects perceive the moment of contact when the interviewer knocked on their door and asked them to make judgments about the wrongfulness of corporate conduct?

³ Three of the four vignettes were based on actual examples of corporate wrongdoing. The first was based on cases of corporate pollution, such as the Love Canal case, the Minamata case, and the Exxon *Valdez* oil spill. The second was based on the Ford Pinto case. The third was based on cases involving pharmaceuticals with allegedly dangerous side effects, such as MER-29. The fourth vignette was an entirely fictitious story of a newspaper reporter or editor who suppresses a story about a corporation's mishandling of toxic waste in order to protect the corporation from shutting down during a bad economic time. See generally Sanders & Hamilton 1996:834–35.

Was this a threatening experience reminiscent of interventions by the old KGB, or did the interviewees perceive it as another exhilarating example of the new democratization? Converse and Schuman (1974:44), writing about the Detroit Area Study, which was one of the contexts out of which Joe and Lee's research developed (see Sanders & Hamilton 1998), refer to the "blatant equality of the cross-section survey." The research method itself rests on liberal democratic assumptions, analogous to the principle of one-person-one-vote. The opinion of each interview subject counts equally, regardless of status or power. When they registered their opinions, did the Russian interviewees sense some connection between the sociolegal survey on corporate wrongdoing and the electoral processes of their new democracy? Did the contact between researcher and subject itself carry an implicit political message?

This fine article by Joe Sanders and Lee Hamilton, because it is imaginative, sophisticated, and ambitious, leads us to ask these questions and many others. Ethnographers sometimes respond to excellent survey research with a desire to conduct close, qualitative study of the phenomena described. Similarly, researchers who tend to rely on survey techniques often respond to small-scale participant observation or interpretive research with a desire to conduct broad-based quantitative analyses. Is there any higher compliment we can pay than to seek to engage with one another's research in our own way? The literature of law and society contains many examples of cross-fertilization involving different disciplines and research methods. This is one of the ways in which, as Carol Greenhouse observed, our differences really do connect us.

The second example of an imaginatively conceived connection between researcher and subject is Barbara Yngvesson's recent (1997) article, "Negotiating Motherhood: Identity and Difference in 'Open' Adoptions." This article, which is also part of a larger, transnational study, focuses on open and closed adoptions in the United States. It explores the legal and social practices that have shaped our understandings of mothers, children, and families in conventional, closed adoptions and the way in which those understandings have been challenged and reshaped by so-called open adoptions. Early in the article, Barbara quotes David Schneider: "An ex-husband or ex-wife is possible, and so is an ex-mother-in-law. But an ex-mother is not" (1997:37, citing Schneider 1968:24). Her article imaginatively probes the paradox of the "ex-mother," which is, as Schneider observes, culturally impossible yet is legally required by closed adoption practices that erase the birthmother's name from the child's birth certificate and demand that the birthmother sever all connections to her child. Yet the very existence of the conventional, closed, legally recognized adoptive family rests on the willingness of the

birthmother to relinquish her child and become that which is culturally impossible—an ex-mother:

Only by outlawing [the birthmother] (splitting her off) through various forms of legal and social closure—sealed records, rewritten birth certificates, the silences that meet revelations that one is a birthmother or that one is a child with “two mothers”—can the adoptive family *become* a family “as if” it were biological, and the adoptive mother become “real.” (P. 71)

Open adoption challenges these conventional categories and understandings. When the birthmother and adoptive parents reaffirm her relationship to her child and to the child’s new family, they subvert conventional understandings of mother, child, and family. Barbara’s article conveys the complexity of open adoption and sympathetically portrays the efforts of some who have been willing to attempt it.

The connection between researcher and subject in this article is quite unusual. Like the participants in open adoption, Barbara as researcher both acknowledges and transgresses conventional roles. In part, her article is a conventional fieldwork study based on interviews with birthmothers, adoptive families, social workers, and attorneys; in part it is also an account of Barbara’s own experiences as an adoptive mother who maintains a significant connection to her son Finn’s birthmother, Diana, and his birthrelatives. The text of the article alternates between fieldwork reports, excerpts from Barbara and Diana’s diaries, and Barbara’s own first-person narratives. The reader experiences frequent shifts in authorial voice and perspective, as third-person observations blend with first-person insights and recollections, and Barbara as researcher blends with Barbara as adoptive mother. At one point, for example, Barbara explores the experiences of a birthmother named Cassie, whose child was adopted by Steve and Jane Campbell. Barbara describes her discussions with Cassie and with a social worker from the open adoption agency. When the social worker observes that the Campbells do not realize Cassie’s reluctance to interfere with their family, Barbara—the interviewer—interjects an observation based on her personal role and family experience as well as her role as researcher:

You see, that’s the thing that I think that adoptive parents *absolutely do not understand*, because they have constructed it in a totally different way, that this woman is going to come back after the child, and I always felt that because the birthmother that I was dealing with, and I think this is true of Cassie, was so restrained and worried that somehow she didn’t want to interfere with Finn’s connection to us, that it was, it was up to me to keep the relationship . . . going. . . . (P. 60)

By presenting this dialogue in her article, Barbara is simultaneously observing Cassie and the Campbells with the social worker

and observing herself as an adoptive mother engaged in a conversation with other participants in open adoptions.

In this article, the connection between researcher and subject continually shifts and inverts itself. At times the researcher is the subject. In one memorable passage, Barbara describes her son Finn opening a Christmas present and announcing "It's from my Mom, Mom." His words are striking and revealing in themselves, but Barbara makes the moment even more complex by presenting it from the perspective of Barbara's own *mother*, who was present at the time and later recalled that Barbara looked "momentarily 'crestfallen'" when she heard Finn's double Mom expression (p. 67). This gets complicated indeed—the author quotes her mother who observed the author reacting to the words of her adoptive son. Who is the researcher and who is the subject? Barbara deliberately shapes the article around the continual movement of observational perspective, like a camera that swoops in and out and switches from distant to closeup and from ground level to overhead shots. At the same time, she openly acknowledges and draws upon her own "positionality" (Abu-Lughod 1991), the sometimes multiple roles through which she establishes a relationship to her subject matter.

Margaret Montoya's article, "*Máscaras, Trenzas, y Greñas: Un/Masking the Self While Un/Braiding Latina Stories and Legal Discourse*" (1994), represents yet another creative and innovative approach to establishing the connection between researcher and subject. Joe Sanders and Lee Hamilton told and heard stories at a distance; Barbara Yngvesson engaged in multiple shifting subjectivities. By contrast, Margaret's article is consistently autobiographical. There is no ambiguity or shifting of the author's voice or perspective in this article: It is written in the first-person singular and combines recollections of family and childhood with observations about law school and law teaching. Yet it would be foolish to say that this is simply an article about Margaret Montoya as law student and law professor, a sociolegal study with an *N* of 1. Rather, this is a rich and complex study of law, legal education, and the legal profession in relation to those who may be seen—or may even see themselves—as racial and cultural outsiders.

The article begins with a recollection of Margaret's mother braiding Margaret's hair before sending her to school each morning. The tight and tidy braids, or *trenzas*, provide one of the themes of the article. Margaret's mother tells her that without the braids, her teachers and classmates might see her as untidy, or *greñuda*, a second theme. Margaret now realizes that her mother was teaching her

that our world was divided, that They-Who-Don't-Speak-Spanish would see us as different, would judge us, would find us lacking. Her lessons about combing, washing, and doing home-

work frequently relayed a deeper message: be prepared, because you will be judged by your skin color, your names, your accents. They will see you as ugly, lazy, dumb and dirty. (Pp. 187–88)

The third, and overarching, theme of the article is the mask that Margaret felt compelled to wear in order to participate in the Anglo world. She writes, “My *trenzas* and school uniform were a cultural disguise. . . . Presenting an acceptable face, speaking without a Spanish accent, hiding what we really felt—masking our inner selves—were defenses against racism passed on to us by our parents to help us get along in school and in society. We learned that it was safer to be inscrutable” (p. 190). The article proceeds in powerful and illuminating ways to probe these three themes—*máscaras*, *trenzas*, and *greñas*—demonstrating the ubiquity of masks, the creative possibilities associated with braiding together the strands of different cultures, and the risks associated with appearing exposed and—potentially—unkempt and unacceptable. Margaret skillfully weaves together these closely related themes, revealing as she does so her perspectives as a member of “the first generation of Latinas to be represented in colleges and universities in anything approaching significant numbers” (p. 190). The article culminates in a remarkable scene: Margaret is now a law professor attending an academic conference in Mexico City on conditions of Chicanos in the United States. When she delivers her paper, she faces an excruciating dilemma. What language should she use—the perfect English that is a product of her years spent in Anglo schools and universities, or what she describes as her sometimes imperfect Spanish, which remains an essential link to her family and community?⁴ With great emotion, she finally improvises, speaking alternately in Spanish and English, braiding together the two languages and the two cultures that constitute her life experience:

I knew it wasn't neat and orderly: my *greñas* were showing for all to see. I shrugged off my mother's concern about how others might judge me, and there I stood “sounding *greñuda*.” But this new identity, this contradictory and ambiguous identity, was my own. I felt authentic. My public persona, like my private face and private speech, no longer reflected only those who had dominated me and my people. I found my voice, *mis voces*. (P. 219)

In Margaret's first-person narrative the researcher and the subject are, in a sense, one; yet, despite the fact that the article draws extensively on details from Margaret's own life, it is essen-

⁴ “For me, speaking Spanish outside of the home makes me feel vulnerable: especially speaking Spanish where the majority speak so much better than I. . . . (The unease of this experience is recreated in the effort of writing in Spanish and not knowing where words are accented or whether the vocabulary is exact. I am painfully aware that my written Spanish reveals my assimilation in the same way as my spoken English does.)” (p. 219 n.120).

tially outward-looking. It is not at all self-absorbed, but continually points the reader to a broader culture and community and to a new understanding of pluralism in American society. The compelling narrative line is heard above a strong counterpoint of footnotes discussing academic research on law and the latino/a community. Because of her great skill in managing this style of writing, one feels that the deeper she digs into her own past, the broader and more generous her vision becomes. Her personal storytelling, she observes, is part of a "search for unifying identifiers and mutual objectives" (p. 217). Its contribution lies both in the specificity of its description and in the generality of its implication.

Margaret's article, like Joe and Lee's and like Barbara's, thus presents a third reimagining of the connection between researcher and subject. In her work, the subject is paradoxically both the researcher herself and a broader societal group that has been recognized, if at all, in terms of its stereotyped outsider status in relation to an imagined social mainstream. In the reflective image of the autobiography, the reader sees more than just the writer and her own personal experiences. The paradox of the self-portrait is stunningly conveyed in John Ashbery's much-acclaimed long poem, "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" (1975). Ashbery's extended meditation on a self-portrait by the Renaissance painter, Parmigianino, helps us to understand Margaret's article and the complex aims and purposes of her narrative form. Ashbery tells us that Parmigianino, the first artist to paint a mirror portrait, captured his own image not in a flat mirror but in a rounded, convex surface that made the painter appear to occupy a self-contained, globe-like world of his own. The painter extends his right hand toward the viewer, but the convex mirror curves the hand along its surface and back into the rounded world occupied by the mirror image. What is it that the self-portraitist has attempted and accomplished? The painting presents a complete world. It is, writes Ashbery, "the porch" of another universe by which we, in the late 20th century, can peer back in time and try to comprehend something totally outside our own experience. By viewing this self-portrait, we become caught up in the paradox of looking into a mirror and discovering that our own face is the face of another who is at that very moment attempting to connect us to his world. Ashbery writes:

So that you could be fooled for a moment
Before you realize the reflection
Isn't yours. You feel then like one of those
Hoffmann characters who have been deprived
Of a reflection, except that the whole of me
Is seen to be supplanted by the strict
Otherness of the painter in his
Other room. We have surprised him

At work, but no, he has surprised us
As he works. (P. 74)

The self-portrait thus presents the viewer or, in Margaret's case, the reader, with a paradoxical sense of encountering a world that is wholly Other yet recognizing at the same instant the powerful connection of that world to ourselves and our own world. Ashbery writes toward the end of his poem:

. . . This otherness, this
"Not-being-us" is all there is to look at
In the mirror, though no one can say
How it came to be this way. A ship
Flying unknown colors has entered the harbor. (P. 81)

Margaret's achievement in her article is to sail this ship into the harbor and to show us quite explicitly the connections between her own portrait of self, family, and community and the literature and research concerns of law and society.

I had originally thought that these three articles represented different points on a continuum of law and society research, ranging from a more broad-based, cross-sectional engagement between researcher and subject to a more personal and singular connection. Now I'm not so sure. Each approach now seems closely related to the others; they are additive, not alternative. Each of the three methods in some sense builds on the others and speaks to their silences. Joe and Lee's broad-based surveys illuminate issues of subjective judgment, cultural perception, and identity. Many of the issues explored in their surveys were originally raised in small-scale, close-grained ethnographic studies. Margaret, in her intensely personal account, looks inward but thereby pushes our understanding outward and connects her autobiographical recollections to a body of social scientific research on assimilation, pluralism, the latina/latino community and the law. Barbara demonstrates the potential connection between classic participant-observation techniques and personal narratives. All three studies share a fascination with the cultural frameworks within which legal identities are constructed. Do the three studies represent different points on a research continuum, or is the continuum actually a Möbius strip?⁵

In pointing to the interconnections between these three articles, I do not mean to suggest that, beneath their rather different surfaces, they are somehow the same. It is their differences that I want to celebrate, not their sameness. The senses of sight, touch, and smell are not, beneath the surface, fundamentally the same, but they are all essential—and essentially different—ways of apprehending the world. Similarly, these three articles apprehend the world in essentially different ways and grow out of different assumptions about the role of the law and society researcher in

⁵ Thanks to Frank Munger for suggesting this metaphor.

relation to her subject. These assumptions are not necessarily consistent with one another. For example, James Clifford (1986a:5, citing de Certeau 1983:128) has observed that when researchers rely extensively on literary devices—such as Margaret Montoya’s metaphors of masks, braids, and unkempt hair—they may appear to violate fundamental scientific conventions that require a language that avoids ambiguity and multiple levels of meaning. These conventions would emphasize the importance of scientific “transparency,” so to speak, in order to make replication or alternative interpretations of the research possible. But on the other hand, those researchers who attempt to engage their subjects in a more distanced, neutral, and scientific relationship may appear to ignore recent critiques of realism in social science. These critiques have suggested that it is impossible to speak in a “meta-Voice” that transcends its social context and somehow distinguishes itself “from the characters/voices about which it wishes to make an observation” (Woolgar 1988a:12). Thus, different approaches to the connection between researcher and subject—including the three I have discussed today—may represent fundamentally inconsistent views about the law and society enterprise as a whole.

At times, these inconsistencies and internal critiques have troubled our field. But diversity in our theories and methods can also provide inspiration and can lead to new bursts of creativity, as evidenced in these three articles. The proliferation of connections to the worlds we study has broadened our field and deepened our understanding. Law and society researchers have generally valued pluralism in the societies we study. How could we dispute its importance in our own scholarly community?

I am not making a weak argument for mutual tolerance, however, but a strong argument in favor of the proposition that we as law and society scholars are mutually dependent on one another. Just as a human being benefits from all five senses, so does our field benefit from fundamentally different means of making connections to the sociolegal world we seek to understand. As human beings, our cognitive processes must operate at multiple levels simultaneously. The violinist who performs with intense emotion must at the same time methodically count each beat and measure as she plays. By engaging with the music in both ways simultaneously, she establishes a richer connection and brings the music to life. It is the same in our own field. We know the world through connections with others that are fashioned in many different ways, and we depend on their epistemological contradiction as well as their redundancy and overlap. Differences in the way we make connections with our subjects reflect this basic human need to explore our social surroundings through multiple, qualitatively different forms of cognition and insight. Our field is enriched by the growing variety of forms and

approaches, for each new approach at one level signals new possibilities at other levels, and each insight obtained through one mode of investigation suggests new issues to pursue using other modes of investigation. The differences in our connections to our research subjects are the differences that connect us to one another, and they ensure the vitality of the field of law and society.

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