



## A NOTE OF ENCOURAGEMENT

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I was asked by the editors of this journal to write what they called “an encouraging piece” on overcoming the barriers “aspiring scholars” face in getting their work published and careers launched. As I told them, I’m no expert on this. Everyone gets articles they have slaved over rejected at times – and when it happens it will feel like all the time. And there are also likely to be occasions when anonymous journal reviewers slam your work and, by default, you, with criticisms ranging from unfair to vicious. Such occasions always made me feel “my work is no good, I’m a total loser, I’ll never get published again.” Don’t go that route! You really do need some faith in the value of your work to survive.

If confidence in your ability doesn’t come easily, there are ways to lessen the risk. And that is tip number 1: learn the prevailing discourse(s) of your corner of the discipline, and particularly of your target journal. Check the type of articles it publishes, the languages (terms) used and sources most commonly cited. Reading some works by the editors is always a good idea. In my corner of critical criminology, for example, risk discourse is big (which is why I threw the word into the above sentence). Many citations are to British theorists such as Andrew Sayer, David Harvey, Rose et al. And Foucault is always in there.

Number 2: take advantage of the knowledge and expertise of your professors and peers by asking those you trust to read your draft before you send it out. And ask for advice on where to send it. This is probably easier in a department where faculty numbers aren’t overwhelming and you can get to know them. But even in huge places such as York and U of T, graduate students always have close contact with their supervisors and committees. And speaking as an ex-prof, our egos are often as fragile as yours, so showing you have read and appreciated our work and value our (so-called) (don’t say this!)

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expertise will usually produce results. Most faculty are rushed off our feet, have a million commitments, and constantly feel overworked and underappreciated, so this can be a delicate exercise. On the other hand, helping graduate students is our job – and one of the most rewarding parts of it.

Terry and Tanika also asked me to comment on “barriers to getting one’s work recognized.” There are many. The academic world reflects the power structure of the world economy in important ways, and the dominant country is the US. Scholars from Canada have to show why our empirical work should be of any interest to anyone outside this country. And those of us in socio-legal studies in the Global English-speaking North have it much easier than scholars from countries in the Global South, so don’t complain. This reality is another reason to learn the languages of your sub-discipline and cite the dominant sources – and they will usually be based in the US or, particularly in critical scholarship, the UK. And there are fashions and trends in academe. For much of the 80s and 90s Karl Marx was in bad odour, slammed as deterministic and ignorant about the importance of race, sexual orientation and gender. Choose your journals with extra care if your perspective is out of fashion and explain why your claims go against the established wisdom of the day but deserve publication nevertheless. Or even because of this...

And don’t forget conferences. Many (most?) of the major conferences in socio-legal studies, such as the humongous American Society of Criminology, seem to accept every proposal they receive. (It shows, too, in the quality of way too many of the papers). But major figures in the discipline also attend and often give great papers. Some of the best papers I’ve heard have been at Congress, where the annual meetings of most disciplinary associations in Canada are held. The quality of many Canadian scholars’ work is unsurpassed – but sadly undervalued. Getting to know others in your field is super important. People who know you are much more likely to ask you to contribute to books they are editing or to participate in research collaborations. I hate the word “networking,” it is part of the commodification of academe, we are told to sell ourselves and our “brand” as if we were different coffee flavours. Ugh! But a sincere desire to get to know people whose work you admire and use doesn’t have to be phony. And you can make good friends as well as mentors at conferences.

Finally, “How do scholars balance the desire or need to be published with researching what they are most passionate about?” “Carefully” is the deeply unsatisfactory answer, and “balance” is the key word. Compromise does not have to mean selling out. There are usually (always?) ways to address subjects you care about when researching in what you think are more publishable areas. And you might be wrong in your assessment of what is and is not publishable. Make the piece as good and as relevant as you can, research your venue intensively, take advice from those whose opinions you trust, and submit. The reviewers’ comments, even if the piece is rejected first time around, can be very helpful.

And remember, all of us are uniquely privileged. We are not doing alienated labour. Getting paid (even in short term contracts with zero benefits) for doing research in subjects we choose is a privilege denied to 99% of the world population.