Reacquainting Two Cultures
to prevent a silent de-elsification of nutrigenomics?

I. Two Cultures

Sir Charles Snow, being a writer and a scientist, felt that he was moving among two groups — comparable in intelligence, identical in race, not grossly different in social origin, earning about the same incomes, who had almost ceased to communicate at all (Snow, 1959, p. 2). He called these two groups the two cultures. These two cultures referred to those involved in the natural sciences and those in the humanities.

In his day, it was not customary to distinguish between the humanities and the social sciences. In nutrigenomics, for instance, one can distinguish between ELSA on the one hand, and science on the other, making it a two-cultured endeavour.

Many argue that this division is an awful thing. Snow did so, and presently, it is also said that natural science, the humanities and social sciences should no longer solely exist as disconnected from one another.

IV. Sensitisation

Drawn from biology, a possible definition would be to render an organism sensitive to a serum via a series of exposures. Exposures are a prerequisite to interaction: one has to pursue a certain proximity in order to interact. Researchers continuously expose themselves to the field they study, enabling them to see deeper and more clearly into its heart. Since, in ELSA, the subject of study are scientists, the actors from the field of study are exposed to the researchers as well.

Methodological terms, such as participation, interaction, expertise, satiation and sensitisation all describe aspects of cognitive and normative exchange and are thus all connected. To this particular type of study, participation is very important, since it provides the opportunity to interact on a large scale. Interaction is something that happens between practices, between science and ELSA and between the scientist and the ELSA researcher, across the boundary between the two.

Sensitisation makes this boundary easier to cross in both directions. Finally, sensitisation may even lead to an interactional expertise. Interactional expertise enables an individual to meaningfully comprehend and engage in debate and discussions in a practice that is not native to him or her, as if it were so, where contributory expertise enables someone to contribute insights and actually participate to a practice, fully mastering its language, normativity and materiality (Collins and Evans, 2003, 2004; Collins et al., 2006).

Expertise cannot be acquired by reading papers or books; it can by participation, interaction and sensitisation. Sensitisation contains elements of a cognitive, as well as a normative recognition and outreach over the boundaries between science and ELSA. It requires a lot of work and failure is a real and imminent danger. Accordingly, the relation between researcher and object of study is in constant peril. If ELSA researchers were to constantly try to sensitise scientists — here, ‘indocilicate’ perhaps would be a better word — that may lead to overkill, an imbalance — irritation — and perhaps even expulsion.

Both science and ELSA may benefit from an active attempt to make the boundary between them more permeable. Although it takes a lot of hard work, it may make them more sensitive and more relevant to one another.

Bart Penders

NWO Maastricht University
Health, Ethics & Society, PO Box 616, NL-6200 MD Maastricht, the Netherlands

email: b.penders@zw.unimaas.nl

Keywords
ELSA
Academic

Both parties have own agenda
Both domains are independent
Solely information flow
No “real” connection to actual issues at hand

Keywords
ELSA
Pragmatic

One-party sets agenda
One domain dominant
Solely information exchange
Selective preference in ethical, legal and social research

Keywords
ELSA
Sensitisation

Both parties set agenda
Both domains interdependent
Cognitive, normative and information exchange
Interactive expertise

Keywords
ELSA

Academic
Information flow alone does not result in a recognition or awareness of the “other” domain with either domain.
A research agenda (science & social science) is solely dictated by the science only as science is selective upon the ELSA domain, including mostly “facilitating” professionals thus being socially relevant issues for inquiry.

Information flow alone in one direction, from science to ELSA. This does not result in a recognition or awareness of the “other” domain with either domain.
Two agendas exist, a scientific agenda and an ELSA agenda, which need not overlap. ELSA states the science only as a source of data, leaving the scientists the option to ignore ELSA. The scientific agenda that is not so relevant and the ELSA agenda has little connection to actual research practices.

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“Academic” ELSA

“Pragmatic” ELSA

“Sensitisation” ELSA

Science and ELSA set agenda

Science

Information flow

ELSA

Information flow

ELSA

Information flow

ELSA

No cognitive / normative exchange

No cognitive / normative exchange

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