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## AP-LS Student Committee

### Career Corner

**Issue Contributor:** I-An (Amy) Su, 2020-2021 Student Committee Experimental Liaison

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*The Career Corner intends to highlight individuals who work at the intersection of law and psychology, where they come from, how they got there, and how their experiences influence their research, teaching, and/or practice. This edition of Career Corner profiles Michael Lamb, Ph.D., Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Cambridge. Dr. Lamb's research focuses on investigative interviews of child victims and witnesses and the relationships between developmental science and public policy. Dr. Lamb is co-author of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Protocol, the recipient of the 2003–2004 James McKeen Cattell Fellow Award from the Association for Psychological Science, and the former President of the APA Division 7 (Developmental Psychology). Dr. Lamb is serving as the Editor-in-Chief of Psychology, Public Policy, and Law, and the 2020-2021 Secretary of the APA Division 41 American Psychology-Law Society. I-An (Amy) Su, M.S./LL.B., a 2nd year Ph.D. student at Cornell University, Founding and Managing Partner of LegalChime Attorneys-at-Law, and the 2020-2021 Student Committee Experimental Liaison interviewed Dr. Lamb and co-authored this column with Emma Marshall, a 5<sup>th</sup> year J.D./Ph.D. Student at University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and the 2020-2021 Student Committee Chair.*

**AP-LS Student Committee:** How did you become interested in law and psychology?

**Dr. Lamb:** My interest began when I was an undergraduate student majoring in psychology, economics, and law. I saw that each of these disciplines offered different understandings of similar concepts and contributed to addressing real-world problems. I was fortunate from early on in my studies to be encouraged to think in this way. When I began my studies, there was not much respect for applied research, as basic research was seen as much more valuable. I was quite fortunate to work with people who already knew the value of applied research. They encouraged me to tackle problems that would matter in the real world.

**AP-LS Student Committee:** Can you please describe your career trajectory, starting with your time as a graduate student?

**Dr. Lamb:** As a graduate student, I began working on attachment theory with Mary Ainsworth, who was, at the time, a scholar leading an exciting new approach to thinking about child development. Early on, I became interested in broadening the focus of attachment theory to address more diverse kinds of relationships beyond the primary relationship between mother and child. Based on my personal experiences growing up in Africa, I knew children are often surrounded by various caretakers. Therefore, I thought it was essential to start to think about how attachment theory could apply to the other relationships a child might have, such as relationships with other parents or with siblings or grandparents. This more expansive approach seemed vital to me as society continued to change and more children were growing up with a variety of caretaker relationships. I also began to be interested in the diversity of parent-child relationships—such as when children have been abused or when their parents have separated. These

interests quickly led me to become more focused on initial approaches to the study of psychology and law in addition to normative patterns of development. In this work, we engaged with family law questions, particularly questions of separation and divorce. We then focused on child abuse and how such abuse affected both parent-child relationships and children's development. Over the last three decades, I have mostly focused on studying child witnesses and their testimonial capacities.

**AP-LS Student Committee:** What led you to your work in the *National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)* and work in academia?

**Dr. Lamb:** I was fortunate to get a job at NICHD with a boss who instructed me to focus on what he called high-risk research. The organization prioritized these questions and made it possible for me to spend time developing the NICHD Protocol. This work would have been impossible to do outside NICHD because it required access to real investigative agencies and children who had experienced abuse. This research primarily involved working with police officers and social workers and developing relationships with agencies, which is time-consuming and expensive. I do not think I could have done that research if I had not been in the situation where I did not have to apply for grants. We worked on forensic interviewing from the late 1980s into the 1990s, but it was not until 1996 that we had our first empirical publication on this work, so there was a long lead time. Had I not had the resources to do preparatory work during this time, we never would have gotten to the point of developing the full Protocol. I was also fortunate to have great colleagues who were willing to take the time and invest the effort to keep moving in that direction.

**AP-LS Student Committee:** What are the most satisfying aspects of your career?

**Dr. Lamb:** Given how my mentors have encouraged me, the most satisfying aspect of my career has been to see investigative agencies start to embrace the techniques we developed and then to see them come around and say, "Gosh, it is different." It is also rewarding that the NICHD Protocol was created with many practitioners working with us from the beginning. I do not think the old model, in which researchers and experts tell practitioners what to do, was beneficial. I have learned an enormous amount from police officers and social workers who say, "This does not work." This kind of feedback leads to a discussion that helps me better understand how practitioners view the problem and understand real interviews' dynamics. The process of learning from and discovering new things with other people is what I find most fulfilling about this field, which is also enormously fun.

**AP-LS Student Committee:** Have you faced any major obstacles in your career? If so, what were they, and how did you overcome them?

**Dr. Lamb:** I was already far along in my career when I started working on the NICHD Protocol, so I could take the risk of spending many years trying to see whether the approach could work. In earlier stages of my career, that would have been a suicidal thing to do. The critical thing to keep in mind is that you need to try to move your research in a direction suited to your career stage. There were many false starts in our work on the NICHD Protocol. We tried to do things that did not work. However, we learned as much from those experiences as when things did work out. It has also been tough for us to publish field studies. We would frequently have people write reviews recommending rejecting our papers because, for example, we did not know for sure that the children in our studies had experienced abuse. In the real world, we usually do not know whether people have experienced abuse. We have to rely on a variety of indirect indicators to establish the validity of the research. Such uncertainty is a challenge that is particular

to people working in field contexts. Nevertheless, overcoming these challenges is one of the rewarding aspects of doing work in psychology and law.

**AP-LS Student Committee:** Can you describe your history in AP-LS? When did you first become involved in the organization and its leadership?

**Dr. Lamb:** My first conference was in 1995. Back then and to the present, AP-LS has always been my favorite conference. It is relatively small so that you can talk to people, and people are friendly and supportive. There are many opportunities for students to make presentations. That is such a contrast with the other organizations whose conferences I used to attend. Thus, my interest in AP-LS is because it is a fun conference to attend. When I began editing *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, I attempted to identify people at the meeting whose work might be suitable for the journal. However, after more than 20 years of going to their conferences, I realized I should perhaps put something more into the organization. That is when I became slightly more involved in the organization's leadership. It was an attempt to give something back and do something for an organization that had been so rewarding to me personally.

**AP-LS Student Committee:** Can you please describe your role as Secretary on the AP-LS Executive committee?

**Dr. Lamb:** I only became the Secretary about six months ago, and I must confess that I did not aspire to become the Secretary. I agreed to be involved in the election to be a Member-at-Large, and then nobody was willing to become a Secretary, so I agreed to participate in that election. Anybody who knows me will chuckle about that. Unlike most Americans who seem to grow up knowing how to type, I still type with two fingers. Therefore, my minutes will be brief and probably contain more typos than most secretarial work. Being the Secretary is an opportunity to see how the organization operates. Often, as people who go to the conference or are members of the group, it is easy to be unaware of all the demands, requests, and work needed to keep the organization running smoothly. In my experience, AP-LS is an exemplary organization because it is small and democratic. There is an effort to include people, listen to everybody, and hear different perspectives. A survey last year highlighted people who had less than positive experiences in AP-LS, and to me, it was revealing to read that report. That AP-LS survey found out about those experiences and then undertook to change the experience for those who have had felt not appreciated, not supported, or not accepted. That is a sign of a good organization: they recognize what is going on and solicit feedback from its members to see what problems can be identified. It makes me proud to be part of the group.

**AP-LS Student Committee:** If there was a time machine and you could go back in time to give yourself one piece of advice about graduate school, what would it be and why?

**Dr. Lamb:** The biggest mistake I made was that I was desperate to finish as quickly as possible. I was a foreign student in the United States, and I was sure somebody would soon figure out that I did not belong there and tell me I had to leave. So, it was vital for me to get my degree before they figured it out. I felt as if I was in a race against the university's standards and expectations. As a result, I did not take advantage of the breadth of things I could have done during this time. I did not try different sorts of research or spend as much time going to classes and lectures as I should have done. I know now students are under much more pressure than I was. Still, I would tell graduate students to avoid narrowing their focus too quickly and not to limit themselves. Be open to different sorts of experiences beyond those that you are required

to have and allow yourself to recognize that as a graduate student, you have a unique opportunity to explore and learn in an environment that you probably will not have again.

**AP-LS Student Committee:** What advice can you give to undergraduate students interested in psychology and law about how to decide on a graduate school program?

**Dr. Lamb:** The one piece of advice I would give is to go to AP-LS. Go there to listen to talks on topics that interest you, and then go and talk to the students who present work that is interesting to you. Ask about their experiences and mentors and how they got to study those topics, and the extent to which they feel enriched, rewarded, supported in their current contexts. That is the most useful way to get that information. Given that AP-LS is going to be virtual this year. It will be possible to listen to presentations and then follow up with the authors. I recommend that you also contact the senior people involved and see whether they are looking for new graduate students. Do your interests match theirs? It makes sense to look for a training program where there is more than one person whose work interests you both because it allows a greater breadth of training and also because we never know what's going to happen. If a particular topic does not work out or a specific mentoring relationship does not work out, it is good to have some backup options. Fortunately, though, all of the significant psych-law programs have many active research groups and opportunities.

**AP-LS Student Committee:** From your perspective, what are the biggest challenges facing the field of psychology and law today? How can students address those challenges?

**Dr. Lamb:** The psychology-law field, in some ways, is in a much better place than many other domains of advanced study in psychology. Because psychology-law professionals can work in various contexts and take their skills and talents and work in academia, agencies, police forces, correctional environments, and larger public defender offices, which have their specialists. To the extent that you focus narrowly on specific research programs, particularly one that involves, say, working in an analog context, you may be reducing your opportunities for application in field settings. So, psychology-law students' challenge is to try and keep those different options on the table. If you are a risk-averse person like me, then you want to keep as many options on the table as you can. I would advise anybody going into the field now to keep that in mind and to be opening doors rather than closing them at this point.

**AP-LS Student Committee:** What general advice do you have for AP-LS student members?

**Dr. Lamb:** What makes this psychology-law community rewarding is the fact that people are open and welcoming. I would urge people at whatever level to take advantage of that. If you have a question for someone in particular or on a specific study domain—send them a message. In my experience, people always respond and are happy to share information and talk about their experiences. Especially during this pandemic, most of us are trapped in our little rooms and have little opportunity to be with others. Now more than ever, it is a good idea to consolidate links within the community and learn from each other and see that people are eager to share what they know with others.