

Online citation: Geis, Gilbert. 2012. "Observations on Student-Faculty Collaborative Research and the Ethics of Joint Publishing." *Western Criminology Review* 13(3):34-38. (http://wcr.sonoma.edu/v13n3/Geis.pdf).

Observations on Student-Faculty Collaborative Research and the Ethics of Joint Publishing

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Before his recent passing, Gil Geis submitted this article on faculty-student collaboration with publishing. You'll find the work here as an invitation for commentary by others on collaborative authorship. The next edition of WCR will include responses to Gil Geis' call as well as commemoration of his life and work.

Keywords: authorship, ethics, publishing, student-faculty collaboration

When I first began writing for publication in criminology and criminal justice outlets, shortly following the Second World War, it was customary for a scholar to write an article alone. The manuscript would be rejected or accepted (sometimes with a few suggested changes that often were made by the editor with the author's approval) and then published. Universities were likely to pay for reprints because they believed that circulating the publication would contribute to their own prestige. Today, of course, it is somewhat unusual to see an article in a criminological journal with a single author. My oddest experience with this phenomenon was a piece we published with five authors and eight subjects (Geis, et al. 1985).

I got into the business of co-authoring with students while at the University of Oklahoma when, in the last of my five years there, I taught a research seminar with seven seniors. We focused on publishing, stressing that surveys are (or were) the easiest approach to producing a publishable article. Four of the seven students turned in papers that were published and, having acted as midwife, I co-authored all of them. One was with Herb Costner, who later became graduate dean at the University of Washington (Costner and Geis 1968). Another was with Joseph Cook, who, as a medical doctor, would become executive director of the International Trachoma Institute that fought that disease in Africa and the Mideast (Cook and Geis 1957). The third was with Robert E. L. Talley, subsequently a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army (Geis

and Talley 1957). The fourth article, the most prestigious, was with Marilyn Kunkel who, following the path of many women of the times, married during her senior year, raised a family, and disappeared from my radar screen (Kunkel and Geis 1958). Forty-two years later that article would be the impetus for a comprehensive legal analysis of the issue we had raised: whether the defense or the prosecution has the advantage of speaking last in criminal trial (Mitchell 2000). Another senior, Donald Parker, not in the class, became a "with the help of" co-author of a book that we wrote with an anthropologist about the migration to Africa from Boley, an all-black Oklahoma town (Bittle, Geis and Parker 1964). Parker rose to the rank of captain in the Navy, retired, and became dean of business schools, first at the University of Wyoming, and then at Oregon State.

In the remainder of this article I primarily want to address matters regarding the logistics and ethics of faculty-student collaborative research and, secondarily, to comment on some aspects of what I regard as problems with the processes involved in the publication of criminological articles. I claim the right to pontificate on the subject of co-authorship because I've written articles, book chapters, or books with 124 persons, about a third of them students. And with some of the 124, there have been multiple co-authored publications.

A major snake pit in regard to collaborative work is a situation in which a student proclaims that a faculty member has stolen something that he or she produced, be it a term paper, a research proposal, a comment in an

informal setting, a classroom observation or some other source. The allegation is that the faculty member had or was going to publish something based on the student's input as his or her own and original work. Few veteran scholars have escaped being informed by a student about a colleague at their college or university or elsewhere who is alleged to have been guilty of such behavior.

Obviously, scrupulous avoidance of conditions under which such an allegation might fester is in order, although such conditions may be difficult to recognize and to adjudicate. If it is likely that the accusation may have some truth, person-to-person negotiations should be started post haste, preferably with a third person acceptable to both parties. The burden of proof has to shift to the faculty member if credible evidence is forthcoming that there had been, or was likely to be, a meaningful infringement on the student's informational territory. The simplest resolution, if the infringement is not substantial, could involve (unless there is blatant plagiarism) a gracious footnote acknowledgement. If the student provided key ideas or information, I prefer co-authorship. To do so will hardly hurt the faculty member significantly, and it hopefully could generate goodwill that will have a payoff, perhaps (although not likely) in a later, amiable collaboration. At least, it should lay the matter to rest.

There exist other problems in faculty-student coauthored publications. Even if the faculty member places his or her name second, hiring committees are quite likely to presume that the work was basically the product of the faculty person. This prejudice can be overcome in a letter of reference, although sophisticated reviewers are not likely to take such letters as the literal truth. Indeed, I had a colleague who always indicated in such letters that who he was writing about was the very best student he ever had mentored. As far as I know, he never had two students apply for the same job. A more direct resolution is to list the student as the first author, although this will not totally avoid the suspicion that the student could not have produced the publication without the input of the faculty member.

Very recently, I was told by a graduate student of a rather unusual situation. A faculty member insisted on submitting a jointly composed article with the student as the sole author. She had tried to cajole the faculty member, who had contributed notably to the thrust of the article and its statistical material, to share in the authorship. She thought he was a comer in the field and she wanted that public affiliation with him. She had a doubt, albeit a very slight one, that he didn't think the article, which had been submitted to the top journal in the field, was worthy of him.

She probably didn't adequately appreciate that the faculty member was offering her a valuable gift. Hiring committees tend to have considerable respect for single-authored student publications. But they also know that collaboration with a well-published senior colleague, who

knows the game, often offers the best prospect for an uncluttered path to tenure.

The most ingenious route-to-tenure scheme (probably apocryphal) is said to have involved two quite competent economics graduate students who agreed to put each other's name on everything that they wrote. They easily got tenure, the story goes, and then went their individual ways.

My strong tendency these days is to list my name last on anything involving collaborators; in part, because I'm retired am it makes no difference—and in part, I'm sure, because it is a kind of reverse snobbery. One of the great advantages for me of placing my name at the tail end of the collaborating authors' names is that the first author has to bear the burden of the submission and the nagging sequelae that follows before an article finally appears in print.

Collaborative cross-disciplinary work is one of the more challenging options for students. After all, both criminology and criminal justice inherently involve issues and interpretations that fall within the purview of a variety of distinctive academic domains. During a year when I was a visiting professor in the School of Criminal Justice at SUNY Albany, the faculty included a social psychologist (with a specialty in penology), three sociologists, two lawyers, a social worker, and a retired police officer, plus the polymath Leslie Wilkins, a man who never earned a Ph.D., but had served as dean of the late-lamented School of Criminology at the University of California, Berkeley. For me it was an invigorating intellectual climate, although the actual climate of upstate New York drove me back to southern California, to an area with a deserved reputation of having sunny weather for shady people.

Andrew Abbott, a top-notch scholar at the University of Chicago, has maintained that the traditional boundaries of college and university departments lead to an outpouring of insular, uni-dimensional, and parochial research (Abbott 2001). For a student contemplating collaboration with someone in a distinctively different field, the reward can be a reputation as a team that does pioneering collaborative work and is unique in its approach and subject matter. It also is likely that the effort, in due time, will take unchallenged command of the cross-disciplinary subject that has been selected, presuming it is a "hot" subject, such as environmental crime. Another advantage is that some journals tend to be hospitable to research products that go beyond the boundaries of their own limited concerns. journals, for instance, are particularly receptive to social science contributions and, blessedly, the articles they publish tend to be quite short and to the point. In one notable instance, Stephen Rosoff, at the time, a graduate student in our department did a survey of students' ratings of different medical specialties as part of his dissertation on medical fraud. Dermatology came out the poorest, perhaps because of the experience of the students with acne conditions. We nudged him to turn his finding into a journal article. He did, and to our surprise, a dermatology journal accepted it (Rosoff and Leone 1989).

Law journals are another matter. They tend to be highly erudite (though not always), but have the advantage that there are more than one hundred of them and they permit multiple submissions; that is, you may send your manuscript to as many law journals as you think may accept it. Dealing with the senior class law students who edit these journals can be a taxing job or, if you are lucky, an excellent learning experience about meticulous attention to all elements of your contribution. The footnoting demands for law journals and reviews, most outsiders and many insiders agree, are daunting and tend grimly toward the pedantic. But all persons working in the field of criminology and criminal justice ought to understand the elements of legal research. At Wisconsin, where I did my Ph.D., Marshall Clinard required all his graduate students to spend a year taking classes in the law school. However, it might have been more appropriate to enroll the students in composition classes.

The disadvantage of cross-disciplinary collaboration is that it can prove to be a rather lonely enterprise. Also the need to command to some extent a field beyond your own can be overwhelming. In addition, it is always arguable how senior criminology and criminal justice professors will view a vita that includes publications in areas unfamiliar to them. When my department was interdisciplinary, there was a question of hiring Albert Cohen, an eminent criminal justice scholar (Cohen 1955). "Is he a psychiatrist?" asked one faculty member, himself a psychologist. Not long after, we broke up into traditional groupings, with criminology extending its boundaries to incorporate what was called "law and society," a field of study particularly attractive to pre-law students.

For me, the major problem with collaborative work inheres in my sense of responsibility and guilt if what is submitted, especially with a student collaborator, is not accepted. I take rejections of my own solo writing rather casually, certain that the outcome is a product of the poor judgment of the reviewers or, more likely, their good judgment and my failure. I dislike greatly "Revise and Resubmit" recommendations, now almost par for the course, although I plan to have the phrase engraved on my tombstone.

The best way I've found to avoid a sense of guilt and responsibility for failed collaborations is to truncate the roster of articles that I will attempt to write with student collaboration. I strive to increase considerably the likelihood that what we do will see the light of print by working with students largely on articles that have been solicited for an edited book or journals that are seeking manuscripts on specified topics. Typically, I'll write the editor to learn if what I have in mind jells with what he or she might like to see. It seems to me that, with enough

deadline leeway, it is possible to write sensibly and constructively on almost any subject about which you have some basic understanding and that interests you. I would emphasize this last item strongly: it is yourself that you ought to seek to delight with your scholarship; otherwise, research and writing is likely to become a drag.

I also find emphases on whether a journal is or is not peer-reviewed silly, since it is the quality of the material that is of essential importance. I also am not impressed with the whole process of manuscript review. I think it is arguable that the elaborate machinery produces better work than those articles that appeared in *Crime & Delinquency* when Don Gibbons, as editor, made publication decisions on his own. Besides, since peer reviewing involves editors sending submissions to persons with a vested interest in the subject, there is a strong tendency to replicate mainstream matters to the neglect of more heterodox material. [Similar iconoclastic views have been put forward by Abbott (1999)].

It is essential to determine beforehand, with some precision, who is going to do what and when in collaborative research, and yet to be flexible about unanticipated delays and barriers. If there is a discussion of the strategy of the effort, and there should be, one of the parties ought to produce a memorandum, indicating this is what I believe we agreed upon; please let me know if I omitted anything or have gotten anything wrong.

Finally, I would encourage graduate students (and at times their faculty) to learn to write well: editors will lovingly review your material with a mellow attitude if it is literate. It need not sparkle like a *New Yorker* contribution, but it should not be turgid or loaded with jargon.

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Dr. Gilbert Geis was a Professor Emeritus of Criminology, Law and Society at the University of California, Irvine. He was best known for his research on white collar crime, though his work spanned the fields of sociology, psychology, history, criminology, criminal justice, law, media studies, education, and policy studies. He published 30 books, 250 journal articles, 100 chapters and 30 monographs. In addition to the many awards and honors he received, Dr. Geis was awarded the Western Society of Criminology Paul Tappan award for outstanding contributions to the field of criminology in 1979. Dr. Geis passed away in November 2012, shortly before the publication of this commentary.

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