

Comparative Observations on Collaborative Research and Joint Publishing: A Response to Gilbert Geis

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Let me suggest from the beginning of this comparative essay that the territory covered under the umbrella of collaborative research and joint publishing may be very subjective and idiosyncratic. Let me also suggest that the territory travelled here can be more complex than the late Gilbert Geis alludes to in his short essay on the subject. This is especially true today when one considers the numerous venues available for publications that are not explored by Geis. Next, let me suggest that I think Geis came to believe that joint publishing had become the norm or natural order of social sciences like criminology and criminal justice. Finally, it seems to me that Geis implies that contemporary collaborative research and joint publications are less a matter of rational choice decisions made by aspiring authors to disseminate their work than they are the products of some kind of imaginary or inexorable demand to do so.

In the course of this essay I will try to follow the general flow of Geis' self-reflections and thematic narratives. Along the way, with most examples, I will not name names nor leave any significant identity markers to the individual or those parties involved because she/he/they might have objected to my going public with this information had I given them a heads up or sought their permissions to do so. Such are the ethics or parameters of writing an essay on the relative absence of the transparency of academic evaluation, publication, and recognition. At the same time, I will name names or leave markers in a couple of examples where I do not believe the individual parties involved will care that I have.

At the tail end of the Vietnam War when I first began writing for publication, it was still customary for scholars to write articles alone, although co-authored work was probably as common then as now. By contrast, multiple (three or more authors) or joint-authored articles are certainly more common today. This has probably been the case for nearly twenty years or since the publication of multi-authored articles began to "take off" with the adoption of the almost exclusive use of quantitative research and large data sets by mainstream criminologists and criminal justices. Without doing any calculations, however, I would argue that while the number of joint-authored publications has definitely grown, these still do not constitute anything approaching the majority of published works, especially when one considers the exhaustive listing of publishing venues.

In other words, I disagree with Geis when he asserts "it is somewhat unusual to see an article in a criminological journal with a single author." Actually, it is really a matter of where one looks and what one reads. While Geis' claims are undoubtedly true for some venues, especially those narrowly positivistic-oriented journals like *Criminology* or *Justice Quarterly*, this is not the case for many other journals that incorporate a broader conceptual and theoretical lens like *Theoretical Criminology*, *Critical Criminology*, *Crime, Media, and Culture*, *Criminology and Public Policy*, *Social Justice*, or *Crime, Law, and Social Change*.

When it comes to publishing my own work, I have generally but not always (depending on the nature of the

research and/or writing venue) preferred to go it alone rather than to collaborate with co- or joint authors, whether colleagues or students. However, when it comes to publishing the work of others, specifically involving that of budding young scholars, I have found the means to assist them to publish independently. As an editor or in the role of what I have come to think of as the “invisible co-author,” those authors and I have found a way to avoid in many instances the commonplace ethical dilemmas of joint publishing broached by Geis. Accordingly, based on my invisible co-authorship roles as an editor of one kind or the other (e.g., Book Review Editor at different times for *Social Justice* and *Critical Criminology*, Series Editor of *Issues in Crime and Justice* for Rowman & Littlefield, and Editor of seven books as well as a two-volume encyclopedia), I claim the right to pontificate here. All in all, in these combined editing capacities I have worked with more than 175 authors to assist them in bringing their work to published fruition.

In terms of my “oddest” experiences with co-authoring and joint-authoring, allow me to refer to a brief illustration of each. In the case of one failed co-author venture with a younger scholar who shortly thereafter became a prolific author in the field, we submitted for publication an “integrated general theory of...behavior” first to *Criminology* and second to a journal that I cannot recall the name of (as this was back in the 1990s). Rejected by both journals, this co-authoring team “broke up” and went our separate ways. A few years later, the other author wrote a highly regarded book framed by the same basic theoretical formulation, including our illustrations and so on that had been previously submitted and rejected by those journals without ever mentioning any of my input. Admittedly, he was the first author and I the second as he was savvy enough to seek me out, thinking incorrectly in this instance that it would be easier for him to publish his ideas with me than without me. Over the years, our paths have crossed from time to time and I have never called him out for not acknowledging my contribution to his theory. What’s more, after his theory had appeared in at least two published venues, I highlighted it as an exemplar of integrated theories in one of my two criminology textbooks without ever mentioning my contribution (until now).

More recently, at the other end of the publishing spectrum, I jointly published in 2009 an article with seven other authors in *Critical Criminology*, “That was Then, This is Now, What about Tomorrow? Future Directions in State Crime Studies.” Subsequently, when the lead authors of this piece invited me to contribute to an updated version of that article, I declined as I never felt that I was particularly engaged in, or had contributed much of anything, to the first statement. My obtuse points are that I have been more engaged and have contributed more to the work of others where my name has not been listed as a co-

or joint author than when it has appeared, as in this instance.

More generally, the inexact science or rather art of publication and the proper or fair recognition of the achievement obtained by two or more authors are even more complex to assess if and when consideration is given to the various activities that might (or might not) have taken place with a manuscript during the editing processes. For these and other reasons, I pragmatically encourage young scholars to go it alone whenever possible. If one can publish by oneself, then one can bring something of value to a research project when the opportunity or time comes to collaborate and jointly publish. Those who publish primarily or exclusively as members of teams of five or six without learning to do so alone, often find it difficult to make the transition to solo publishing, which vastly limits opportunities for disseminating their work.

Without addressing the assorted sites for publication, allow me to continue with the observations of the “invisible editor” who may be present or absent as a co- or joint author in publishing ventures. More specifically, as the editor of the publication of more than 100 original chapters in my anthologies, I am very much present in many of those pieces written typically by single authors and occasionally by two. In terms of some of these chapters, usually because they have required the most work (for whatever reasons) on my part to get them ready or acceptable for publication, these become even more reflective of the invisible editor as co-author.

Similarly, when awarding or giving credit to jointly authored articles or textbooks in general, where some of the co-authors become absent from either the research or the writing dimensions of the project or in rare instances from both, there is virtually no accountability. Not unlike the legendary cases in academia and the one anonymously cited by Geis of the two economic graduate students who had agreed to put each other’s name on everything they published, the same may also be the case when it comes to apportioning out the credit for multiple editions of books with several and/or changing authors over time.

In terms of the faculty member offering a valuable gift to his graduate student that Geis refers to, I can definitely relate and believe that this illustration applies equally well with respect to junior tenure-track faculty. In a similar manner, this may not be all too different from the significant roles played by faculty who formally and informally contribute to the development and chapter rewrites of master’s theses and doctoral dissertations as well as to those subsequent articles that may be generated as a result of the invisible editing or co-authoring processes experienced by those emerging scholars.

As for many of the other issues raised by Geis, I do not disagree with or have anything of significance to add about academic plagiarism, the writing of letters of recommendations, whose name appears first or second in a publication and the meaning given to this ordering of

authors versus the value of solo-authored publications, the insularity of most college and university departments, the value of doing collaborative cross-disciplinary work whether one is a student or a faculty member, as well as the difficulties, precautions, and flexibilities that are associated with, and necessary to take, when conducting collaborative research and joint publishing. I also agree with Geis when he says that he is “not impressed with the whole process of manuscript review” and that he finds the distinction between “whether a journal is or is not peer-reviewed silly, since it is the quality of the material that is of essential importance.” I would add further that the distinction between peer-reviewed versus non-peer reviewed publications is not always as it appears. In many instances, publications in the former have actually been solicited up front from the editors by way of an invitation to the authors, including from “top tiered” journals, to write an article that the journals’ editors are looking for.

Allow me to close out this commentary by echoing and expanding upon what Geis had to say about collaboration in general and in relation to law journals in particular. In writing about one of my own joint publishing experiences, I hope to shed some light on or to capture some of the rational choice decision-making process that I believe enters into whether or not an author/researcher/scholar publishes his or her work alone or with others regardless of venue. One of the most satisfying collaborations and joint publishing ventures that I have had during my forty-year academic career was when I conducted research with one graduate student who also happened to be a felony trial judge and a part-time lecturer in constitutional and criminal law and with one colleague, a newly hired tenure-track assistant professor.

Let me underscore from a rational choice perspective that neither the student/lecturer, the Honorable Donald Shelton, the junior faculty member, Young Kim, nor myself as the senior full professor could have carried out the research and published the subsequent articles (Shelton, Kim, and Barak 2007; Kim, Barak, and Shelton 2009; Shelton, Kim, and Barak 2009; Shelton, Barak, and Kim 2009-10) without the participation from the other two collaborators. Together, however, it was relatively easy for us to accomplish the required tasks. In this illustration, we were all fully engaged and worked hard on the project from start to finish. Over the course of four years of collaboration, this included the designing, pre-testing, and administering of survey questions to more than 2000 subjects at two different courthouses, the coding and entering of data (thanks to my graduate assistant Katie Martin), and several analyses of our research findings. Part of the analysis included the squaring of various theories from the subfields of criminology, communication studies, and law and criminal justice, which allowed us to elucidate on juror decisions to acquit or convict in relation to the popular legal myths of the so-called “CSI effect” for seven different criminal scenarios.

The take away here is that each of us had a fundamental and overlapping understanding of the problem and the questions that we were tackling. But more importantly, each of us brought to the venture a unique set of skills and expertise that were absolutely essential not only for evaluating the so-called CSI-effect on both the behavior of attorneys and jurors, but also for explaining at the same time how the inter-relations of culture, media, and law were affecting the due process of criminal adjudication in everyday courtroom practice.

As Geis notes, compared to publishing in social science journals, law journals are another matter altogether. What’s more, these journals “tend to be highly erudite (though not always), but have the advantage that there are more than one hundred and they permit multiple submissions.” Authors may, accordingly, receive multiple offers to publish their manuscripts within a couple of weeks or less after submission. Each journal’s offer to publish is usually conditional for a period of time; so authors find themselves in the unique position of weighing the pros and cons of deciding which journals to accept or reject for their publications. It’s also a more open process than in the social sciences and a lot more fun compared to sitting around and waiting for at least a month or two before a publishing decision is rendered—one submission at a time—by an individual criminology or criminal justice journal.

From the beginning of our collaboration I had decided that since the judge and my junior colleague, for different but related reasons, needed the publications (and I did not) that one of them would be the first author on whatever we jointly published from our research. Moreover, as Geis stresses the first author has the burden of navigating the world of online publishing, which can be cumbersome when submitting to numerous law journals at the same time. In effect, by deferring to my colleagues here, I had the judge to run interference with respect to the articles that ended up in law journals and Kim to do the same with respect to our criminal justice publication. During the course of our research and writing together, the full-time working judge and part-time instructor, managed to complete his M.A. in Criminology and Criminal Justice and subsequently his PhD. in Judicial Studies. He also authored the first of his two books, *Forensic Science in Court: Challenges in the Twenty-First Century* (2011), published in my Issues in Crime and Justice Series for Rowman & Littlefield.

Finally, and quite revealingly, during the time of our two research studies and the joint publication of our articles, Kim was tenured and promoted to associate professor. However, this did not occur without differences of opinion between the personnel committee and the department head over Kim’s contributions to our collaborative venture. Fortunately, as luck would have it, I was also the chair of the personnel committee at the time and was able to make the affirmative case on Kim’s behalf.

Had I not been positioned where I was in his evaluation process, the tenure and promotion decision might have gone the other way. Such are the vulnerabilities of collaborative research and joint publishing when one is not the “lead” or first author in the listing of names.

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