

## Collaborative Lessons Learned under the Tutelage of Gilbert Geis

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In 1995, when I faced the critical decision of selecting a dissertation topic, Dr. Paul Jesilow introduced me to Emeritus Professor Gilbert Geis. This encounter, whether by chance or intentionally orchestrated by Paul, resulted in collaborations with Gil that changed the course of my academic career. My work with Gil taught me many valuable lessons about academic scholarship. Gil was a mentor and role model for students because of his exceptional talent and willingness to help aspiring, and, at times, struggling scholars. Those of us fortunate enough to have collaborated with him learned the importance of persistence, organization, and skilled writing. My initial work with Gil created substantial anxiety and presented a somewhat intimidating challenge. Most writers are insecure about their work and I am no exception. What could I possibly produce on the first draft that might be acceptable to a professor of such high caliber? In the end, I can only assume all was good based on my continued collaborations and friendship with Gil.

**Lesson 1:** Red ink is a sign someone cares. Gil is infamous for his red ink edits and comments. Despite my initial trepidation and shock at the marks on my articles, I quickly came to realize the value of his editing. Gil never failed to delete the one sentence or paragraph I believed to be the most powerful and articulate in the paper or chapter. Ultimately, the deletion turned out to be a wise choice made by a fine editor. We all fall into bad habits and good collaboration means sharing strengths and weaknesses in our writing styles. Gil was quick to note needed changes, particularly my fondness for commas.

Collaborating with other scholars, students, and practitioners helps us to remember to write clearly and concisely. Gil conveyed to me a respect for the power of words. His vocabulary potentially exceeds John Updike and I'm always amused after a student admits to having a dictionary in hand when reading one of Gil's articles. I cherish feedback on my writing and rather than automatically clicking "accept changes" on an edited paper, I examine what went wrong and why. Any negative images of Gil's red ink were erased for me when I embraced the bleeding on my paper as an opportunity to learn.

**Lesson 2:** Collaboration inevitably results in disagreement. Gil and I co-authored *Stealing Dreams* (Dodge and Geis 2003), co-edited *The Lessons of Criminology* (Geis and Dodge 2002), and worked together on other publications. Not once did we stumble over any of the ethical issues or problems he presented in his commentary, though once or twice we disagreed on the order of authorship. Gil was true to his word and preferred (stubbornly insisted may be a more accurate description) on placing students or young academics making their way through the tenure and promotion process as first authors. After completing our last publication titled *Global White-Collar Crime* (forthcoming), I urged Gil to take lead authorship, but he adamantly insisted otherwise and made me promise to see the article through to the end as first author should anything happen to him. I respected his wishes. Avoiding the pitfalls of ethical dilemmas in collaborations, particularly related to authorship, may present challenges,

but when communication and respect are valued and placed at the forefront of the endeavor the chances of disagreements are lessened.

**Lesson 3:** Students provide insightful, new perspectives on research. Scholars often become myopic or weary of writing after researching a particular subject for a lengthy period of time. Collaborating with students offers a unique opportunity to serve as a mentor and see novel approaches. Students are incredibly talented and come to the table with innovative ideas. Faculty can build student relationships toward a mutually beneficial goal through collaboration. I still remember my first journal publication co-authored with Dr. Edith Greene (Dodge and Greene 1991) and the excitement of seeing a tangible product resulting from hours of research and writing. This publication would not have occurred during my undergraduate studies without the collaboration of a talented senior scholar.

**Lesson 4:** Accept the frustrations of revise and resubmit. Gil often commented on the insidious manner in which publications were deemed worthy of attention by leading journals. His acknowledgement of Dr. Don Gibbons is testimony to the right way to approach manuscript reviews. Gibbons, for those unfamiliar with his work, is a masterful editor. In fact, I often find myself revisiting his work as a reminder of the importance of superior writing skills (see e.g., Gibbons and Farr 1998; Gibbons 1995). While we mentor our most talented students on publications, we are also obligated to a generation of college students who desperately need help developing writing skills, which is unlikely to occur by giving multiple-choice tests. Consider, for example, a professor so despondent and tired after years of reading poorly written assignments in a master's level program he decided matching tests were an acceptable option. Admittedly, all the students reported his matching tests were wickedly difficult, though none believed the experience held much educational value. Students learn through the process, and whether or not the work is publishable or readable, they need feedback at all levels to become better writers.

Rejection is never easy, but it frequently happens to even the best of scholars. A faculty member may feel responsible for dashing the hopes of a student, but persistence will pay off. After a series of rejections on a particular article, I received Dr. Frank Cullen's (2002: 18) contribution to the *Lessons of Criminology*. I took to heart his three-day policy after a rejection: "one day to weep; one day to find a new journal; and one day to send the manuscript out again" continues to serve as inspiration for not giving up. I also believed if Cullen, one of the finest scholars in our field, could be rejected by 39 publishers on a submitted book persistence counts. His book eventually was published and recognized for a distinguished scholarship award.

Collaboration with students is essential to strengthening our work. To truly understand the advantages of collaborations, I encourage all graduate students to read the essays in *Lessons of Criminology* (2002), which emphasize the importance of co-authored publications and offers insight from the leading scholars in our field. Dr. Frank Scarpitti (2002: 85) also noted the importance of working with students and eloquently stated: "Working with students, sharpening their skills, influencing their thinking, and assisting their careers are the ways most academics leave a meaningful and lasting legacy." The value of working with students should never be underestimated.

**Lesson 5:** Do the right thing for your students. A graduate student recently came to me for advice on publishing. Currently, he is learning to navigate the intricacies of academic publishing and is determined to succeed in these murky waters (admittedly, a recent reviewer called my writing verbose, but I take no umbrage over the comment). This student had completed a paper for a class, and the professor noted its potential for publication. This is an example of excellent mentoring; however, the student was unsure of his next step. He was torn in his decision to collaborate with the faculty member or attempt a publication on his own. I was unable to give him any pat answers. What I did tell him was to consider the pros and cons of the situation. On the one hand, collaboration with an established scholar has many advantages and can assist in making the process of publishing a peer-reviewed article easier. His work, on the other hand, is sophisticated and publishable as a solo-authored piece. Ultimately, he would need to make the choice based on the best possible scenario for his continued studies. Ideally, collaboration offers a true learning experience when undertaken in everyone's best interest.

**Lesson 6:** Collaboration with students is an essential part of teaching. Though many scholars may not face the ethical "surprises" that develop in collaboration with students, Gil's message serves as a harbinger to faculty about the pitfalls of self-absorption. His words describe the pleasure and disappointment of equally sharing our successes and failures (even revise and resubmits) as a learning experience. Consider, for example, the current push by some publishers to encourage senior scholars to author a textbook at the expense of junior scholars who are tasked with doing all the work. This marketing scheme strikes me as unethical, and I am confident Gil would agree. Faculty members hold a position of power over students and untenured assistant professors; taking advantage of one's position is unethical and unforgivable.

The opportunities for misconduct in research and publications among faculty are numerous. I'm reminded, for example, of a professor who routinely sent students out as a classroom exercise to conduct qualitative interviews, which he would later publish as his own work. This

behavior, as noted by Gil, should be “scrupulously avoided.” In another instance, this professor told anyone willing to listen, including the university’s retention and promotion committee, the co-author on several publications merely served as a typist. Not surprisingly, gender played a role in the process; the complaining author was male and the “typist” female. How unfortunate it would be if in the future we require specific contractual agreements for collaborative work. Gil warns us to respect and value student and colleague collaborations yet be ever vigilant to the egotistical nature driving our endeavors.

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