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Citation

Goodman, Allen C., Joshua Goodman, Lucas Goodman, and Sarena Goodman. 2014. "A Few Goodmen: Surname-Sharing Co-Authors in Economics." *Economic Inquiry* 53 (2) (October 30): 1392–1395. doi:10.1111/ecin.12167.

Published Version

10.1111/ecin.12167

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A Few Goodmen: Surname-Sharing Economist Coauthors*

Allen C. Goodman
Wayne State University
allen.goodman@wayne.edu

Joshua Goodman[†]
Harvard University
Joshua_Goodman@hks.harvard.edu

Lucas Goodman
University of Maryland
goodman@econ.umd.edu

Sarena Goodman
Federal Reserve Board
sarena.f.goodman@frb.gov

August 4, 2014

Abstract

We explore the phenomenon of coauthorship by economists who share a surname. Prior research has included at most three economist coauthors who share a surname. Ours is the first paper to have four economist coauthors who share a surname, as well as the first where such coauthors are unrelated by marriage, blood or current campus.

*For invaluable research assistance, we thank Napat Jatusripitak and Carlos Paez, even though their surnames are quite different from ours. Susannah Tobin, no relation to James, thought up the title. We thank Yoram Bauman and four anonymous referees for valuable feedback. We received no support for this research from any source. The analysis and conclusions set forth are those of the authors and do not indicate concurrence by other members of the research staff or the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve. Any errors are Goodman's.

[†]Corresponding author.

1 The Phenomenon of Coauthorship

The phenomenon of coauthorship in the economics profession has been widely explored. Card and DellaVigna (2013), for example, document the fact that the number of authors per economics paper has been steadily growing over time. In the early 1970s, three-fourths of economics articles were single-authored. That fraction dropped to less than one-fourth by 2012. Recent research also points to the importance of how one chooses one's coauthors. Einav and Yariv (2006) explore "alphabetical discrimination", the fact that economists with earlier surname initials have greater career success, and argue that this phenomenon is not observed in academic fields where the order of coauthorship is not determined alphabetically. This suggests that, all else equal, a given economist should choose coauthors whose last names fall later in the alphabet than his or her own name.¹² Freeman and Huang (2014) document the tendency of academics to coauthor with others of a similar ethnic background and argue that homogeneity among coauthors leads to lower quality papers. We leave it to the reader to determine whether this paper is consistent with that finding.

2 Prior Literature by Surname-Sharing Coauthors

Relatively little attention has, however, been paid to the phenomenon of coauthors sharing surnames. The phenomenon is rare but not vanishingly so, for two reasons. First, finding a coauthor within one's own household or extended family likely has lower costs than finding coauthors elsewhere. Hamermesh and Oster (2002) note that rapidly improving communications technology has lowered the cost of coauthoring with distant researchers, rendering this fact less relevant. They also point out, however, that researchers seem to choose coauthors in part for their consumption value and not just their productivity. In short, family members may want to coauthor simply because they enjoy working together more than with non-family members.

¹Engers et al. (1999) show that alphabetical ordering by surname is actually an equilibrium in a market where participants are interested in evaluating the relative contribution of coauthors. That this paper uses first names to order coauthors suggests the stability of that equilibrium.

²McNollgast (1990) avoids this ordering challenge by collapsing all coauthors' surnames into a single surname. For details, see web.stanford.edu/group/mcnollgast/cgi-bin/wordpress/mcnollgast/.

Second, surname-sharing among economists is common. To show this, we use the raw data from Card and DellaVigna (2013), which covers all publications from 1970-2012 in the American Economic Review, Quarterly Journal of Economics, Journal of Political Economy, Econometrica and the Review of Economic Studies.³ We identify nearly 9,000 unique economists, of whom 45% share a surname with at least one other economist in the data. Within that group, 43% share a surname with only one other economist, 17% share a surname with two other economists, and 10% share a surname with more than 10 other economists. The five most common surnames are Smith (35), Lee (30), Brown (24), Chen (22) and Miller (21). As a result, many surname-sharing collaborations are at least theoretically possible.

Systematically searching for evidence of such collaborations is quite challenging, given that no common search engine allows one to specify such a search. Entering “Smith and Smith” into Google Scholar, for example, simply yields results for articles authored by a single Smith, and wildcards are of no additional help. We were thus aided greatly by the data from Card and DellaVigna (2013), which does allow such searching. Within the more than 13,000 papers contained in that data are 33 papers written by 28 unique pairs of surname-sharing coauthors, with no examples of surname-sharing by more than two coauthors.⁴ We then supplemented these examples through the less rigorous methodological approach of introspection, asking around, and scanning www.econjobrumors.com threads concerning “famous couples”.⁵

We ultimately found four types of relationships generating surname-sharing. The first and most common type of such coauthorship is by married economists with the same surname. Prominent examples of this include Romer and Romer (2013) on monetary policy, Reinhart and Reinhart (2010) on macroeconomic crises, Summers and Summers (1989) on financial markets, Ostrom and Ostrom (1999) on public goods, Ramey and Ramey (2010) on parental time allocation, Ellison and Ellison (2009) on internet-based price elasticities and Friedman and Friedman (1990) on personal

³We thank Stefano DellaVigna and David Card for sharing this data, without which much of this analysis would have been impossible.

⁴For purposes of this paper, we focus on research whose coauthors all share a surname. This excludes examples such as Reinhart, Reinhart, and Rogoff (2012), whose inclusion of Ken Rogoff as coauthor was disqualifying. We also dismissed intriguing but ultimately irrelevant research such as Gordon and Dahl (2013), in which one coauthor’s surname is the other’s first name.

⁵We encourage readers to send us further examples by leaving comments at scholar.harvard.edu/joshuagoodman/blog/surname-sharing-coauthors.

choice.

The second type of such papers are those authored by economist siblings. Examples of this type include Kehoe and Kehoe (1995) on general equilibrium models, Dal Bó and Dal Bó (2011) on social conflict, Ulph and Ulph (2013) on climate change policy, Ahlin and Ahlin (2013) on product differentiation, and Pope and Pope (2009) on college sports. All of these examples involve pairs of brothers. We have found only one example of brother-sister coauthorship, Sexton and Sexton (2014) on conspicuous conservation, the authors of which are twins. Our research uncovered no pairs of sister coauthors, pointing to a substantial gap in the literature.

The third type, parent-child coauthorship, is rarer, perhaps because of the disincentives for young researchers to have senior coauthors who will receive the bulk of the credit for the research. We have found only three examples so far.⁶ The first, Levy and Levy (1982), is a finance paper written by a father and son. The second, Van Praag and Van Praag (2008), is an exploration of the phenomenon of alphabetical discrimination by a father and daughter for whom the issue is quite salient in all research but the paper in question. The third, Tremblay, Tremblay, and Tremblay (2011), was written by two parents and their son studying a Cournot-Bertrand model of competition. We know of only one example of grandparent-grandchild coauthorship, Modigliani and Modigliani (1997) on risk-adjusted performance. More such collaborations should be possible, suggesting another front on which progress can be made.

The fourth and rarest type of surname-sharing coauthorship involves unrelated individuals who happen to be on the same campus. We have found only two such examples.⁷ Rosen and Rosen (1980) on federal taxes and home ownership was written by two unrelated faculty members at Princeton. Chen and Chen (2011) on social identity was written by a University of Michigan faculty member and his then doctoral student.

⁶We exclude Stinebrickner and Stinebrickner (2014) because, though son Todd is an economist, father Ralph is a computer scientist by training.

⁷One of us once coauthored a paper with an unrelated John Goodman, Jr., but the generational suffix renders this research irrelevant to the current study. See Goodman and Goodman Jr (1997).

3 Our Contribution

Our contribution to this literature is twofold. First, we believe this paper is the first written by four economists who share a surname.⁸ All of the aforementioned examples have only two coauthors, except for Tremblay, Tremblay, and Tremblay (2011), which has three. The one example we have uncovered of a published economics paper with four surname-sharing coauthors is Skarbek, Skarbek, Skarbek, and Skarbek (2012), written by two brothers and their two wives. We argue, however, that this research does not diminish our contribution, for two reasons. First, though David and Emily Skarbek are husband and wife economists, Brian and Erin Skarbek are husband and wife attorneys. As such, the paper has only two economist coauthors. Second, when that research project began, both women still had their maiden names. The fourway name-sharing arose only because of two marriages and the resulting name changes that occurred during a lengthy publication process.⁹ We therefore suspect that the shared surnames may be endogenous to the publication process itself.

Our second, and related, contribution is that the four coauthors of this paper are unrelated by marriage, blood or current campus. This paper arose when two of us (Sarena and Joshua) who had overlapped in graduate school and were often mistaken for siblings or spouses were connected by a mutual friend to one of her graduate students (Lucas). We then identified a fourth coauthor (Allen) through a search of the AEA website. None of us has ever been or is currently married to any of the other of us. Nor to our knowledge are we siblings, parents, children, cousins, or any other sort of familial relation. It is, of course, theoretically possible that we share a Goodman-surnamed ancestor in some prior generation, but we have no empirical evidence that this is true.¹⁰ The fact that all four of us specialize in applied public economics (broadly defined) is an additional, aesthetically pleasing coincidence.

⁸We feel fortunate that Todd, Ralph, Lori, Diana and Monica Stinebrickner have yet to post or publish their working paper “Inter-family coordination in the collection of a detailed longitudinal survey: evidence from the collection of the Berea Panel Study”.

⁹David Skarbek graciously shared these facts via personal correspondence.

¹⁰None of us is sufficiently interested in exploring this fact to spend money on DNA-testing services.

4 Conclusion

This paper is the first coauthored by four non-related surname-sharing economists. Our main contribution is showing that such a collaboration is feasible. We also note that, for papers with more than two coauthors, surname-sharing eliminates the “*et al*” penalty documented by Simcoe and Waguespack (2011). Though the many expected citations to this paper will refer to it as Goodman *et al.* (2015), such citations will provide equal amounts of publicity to all of us coauthors.

Future breakthroughs on this topic should be possible. We believe much could be learned if only economists John Turner (University of Georgia), Lesley Turner (University of Maryland), Nicholas Turner (U.S. Treasury Department) and Sarah Turner (University of Virginia) would find a way to work together. Substantial progress might also come from collaboration between Janet Smith (Claremont McKenna College), Jeffrey Smith (University of Michigan), Jeremy Smith (University of Warwick), and Jonathan Smith (College Board), whose work could explore the impact of both surname-sharing and first initial-sharing. Finally, we encourage cousins Erzo F.P. Luttmer (Dartmouth College) and Erzo G.J. Luttmer (University of Minnesota) to consider collaborating for reasons too obvious to state.¹¹ This area seems ripe for exploration.

¹¹An exhaustive list of such potential collaborations can be found at ideas.repec.org/homonyms.html. We thank Christian Zimmermann for pointing this out.

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