



Rising Coauthorship in Sociology, 1895 to 2022

 Dustin S. Stoltz¹

Abstract

More than 180,000 articles published in 110 sociology journals over 130 years reveal that coauthoring is increasingly a disciplinary norm in sociological publications. More than 55 percent of all articles published in 2022 were coauthored, and only five journals had lower average coauthoring in the past five years than their overall average. The sample includes both U.S. and non-U.S. journals, as well as specialist and generalist journals. The U.S. journals include those published by the American Sociological Association as well as various regional and specialty journals. When disaggregating the articles by these subcategories, the trend toward increased coauthoring remains.

Keywords

coauthoring, publishing, collaboration, knowledge

In a real sense, there is no such thing as “my” ideas. Scholarship and notions of intellectual property are poor bedmates.

—James March (March and Coutu 2006)

The Social Production of Sociological Knowledge

Although many aspects of the social production of sociological knowledge are lost to the relentless decay of collective and individual memory, some are ossified in practices of citation, acknowledgment, and *claims to authorship*. Of course, no book, chapter, or article is written in isolation, but it is also true that individuals contribute *more and less* to the production of a specific text. Where we draw the lines between influence, assistance, and authorship is governed by disciplinary conventions, as is the value given to “solo-authored” publication in reputation, hiring, and promotion (Biagioli 2000; Leahey 2016). Collaborative research may spur innovation, increase productivity, enhance quality, and improve the impact of scholarship (Wuchty, Jones, and Uzzi 2007; Leahey 2016), as well as allow scholars to cope with the pressure to publish more (Schwemmer and Wiczorek 2020; Warren 2019). Nevertheless, the solo-authored piece remains esteemed—in Bakhtin’s (2013) words, “monologue pretends to be the ultimate word” (p. 293)—perhaps, in part, because of difficulties evaluating the individual contributions to coauthored work (Leahey 2016:87). These considerations both shape and are

shaped by the extent coauthoring is abnormal for a given discipline. The following visualization of nearly 130 years of sociological research in 110 journals demonstrates that coauthorship is not only common but becoming the norm in sociology (see also Leahey 2016:87; Moody 2004; Moody, Edelmann, and Light 2022; Warren 2019).

Constructing the Corpus

This visualization was based on a corpus of more than 180,000 articles published in 110 sociology journals. My selection of journals, although attempting to be exhaustive, is a purposive sample (see Supplementary Material for sampling details). It includes both U.S. ($n=59$) and non-U.S. ($n=51$) journals, as well as specialist ($n=64$) and generalist ($n=46$) journals. The U.S. journals include both those published by the American Sociological Association (ASA) and various regional and specialty journals (e.g., the *American Journal of Sociology*, *Sociological Forum*, and *Symbolic Interaction*). In cases in which journals changed names over the years (e.g., *Sociometry* became *Social Psychology* and is now *Social Psychology Quarterly*), I pool articles using the

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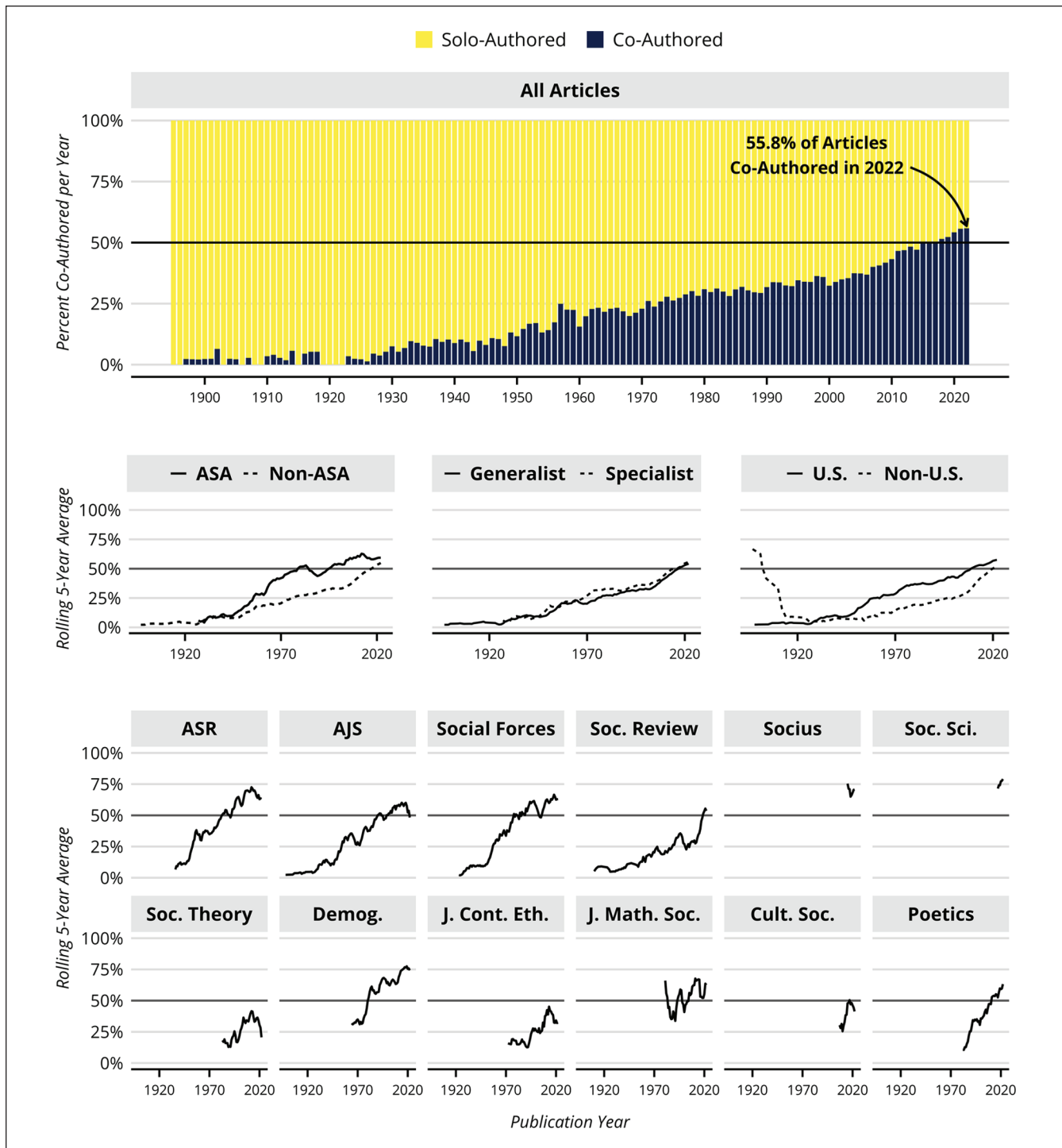


Figure 1. Percentage of coauthored articles published in 110 sociology journals for each year from 1895 to 2022. The solid black line indicates the 50 percent mark for all plots. The top panel shows the aggregate percentages across all journals. The three facets in the middle panel show rolling five-year average percentages disaggregated into (1) American Sociological Association (ASA) and non-ASA, (2) generalist and specialist, and (3) U.S.-based and non-U.S.-based journals. The bottom panel provides rolling five-year average percentages for a selection of 12 journals: the *American Sociological Review*, the *American Journal of Sociology*, *Social Forces*, the *Sociological Review*, *Socius*, *Sociological Science*, *Sociological Theory*, *Demography*, the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, the *Journal of Mathematical Sociology*, *Cultural Sociology*, and *Poetics*.

most recent names. Once the sample of journals was constructed, I used Constellate and the Web of Science to collect all articles published in each respective journal.¹ I then removed book reviews and corrections, resulting in 182,159 total articles. “Online first” publications, which may be published in 2023 issues, are categorized as 2022 publications. In the visualization, articles are categorized as either coauthored or not, and thus no consideration is given to the total count of authors.²

Descriptive Results

Figure 1 (top panel) demonstrates that in the aggregate, coauthoring has steadily marched upward. In 1942, 9.2 percent of articles were coauthored, 31.2 percent in 1982, and 55.8 percent in 2022. When looking only at ASA journals (i.e., those broadly representative of the discipline in the United States³), the trend is roughly similar, except that coauthoring is more common in earlier periods than in non-ASA journals (second panel, first facet). When comparing U.S. with non-U.S. journals (second panel, last facet), the former have more coauthoring than do latter for most years, but that gap is closing (Durkheim’s *L’annee sociologique* was largely a collaborative enterprise in the early nineteenth century).

It is also likely that coauthoring varies by the type of journal. When disaggregating by generalist and specialist journals (second panel, middle facet), the trends remain the same. It may be the case, however, that pooling specialist journals is averaging out extremes. Indeed, specialty journals that tend to have lower coauthorship include theory (e.g., *Sociological Theory* and *Theory, Culture & Society*) and qualitative (e.g., the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* and *Ethnography*) journals, while those with higher coauthorship rates include criminology and demography journals (*Criminology*, the *Journal of Marriage and Family*, and *Demography*) and more quantitative (the *Journal of Mathematical Sociology* and *Social Networks*) journals.

Broadly, journals associated with qualitative subfields tend toward solo authorship, whereas those associated with quantitative subfields tend toward coauthorship, although there is variation within subfields (see also Moody 2004; Schwemmer and Wiecek 2020). For

instance, 59.1 percent of articles published in the cultural-sociological journal *Poetics* in the past five years were coauthored, while 46.5 percent of those in *Cultural Sociology* were coauthored in the same period.

Looking at overall averages for the entire life of each journal, the two recently created *open-access* journals land in the top five. Since their inaugural publication, 67.4 percent of articles in *Socius* and 74.8 percent in *Sociological Science* were coauthored. Furthermore, all 110 journals except 5 had higher average coauthoring in the past five years than their overall average. Taken together, these data suggest that sociology continues to embrace collaborative production.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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Author Biography

Dustin S. Stoltz is an assistant professor of sociology and cognitive science at Lehigh University. He works at the intersection of cultural and economic sociology, with a particular focus on the social, material, and cognitive foundations of ideas and evaluations. His work appears in *Sociological Theory*, *Sociological Science*, *Poetics*, *Socius*, and *Socio-economic Review*, among other outlets. More about his research is available at www.dustinstoltz.com.

¹For a few years, in a few journals, I hand-collected data. With a few exceptions, I am confident that I collected articles during each year the respective journals were active; see the Supplementary Material for details.

²The data and code repository is hosted on GitLab (https://gitlab.com/dustinstoltz/repo_socius_coauthors).

³Journals associated with the ASA are staffed by volunteers who are bound by a code of ethics agreed upon by the membership, and editors are selected by the ASA publications committee, which is representative of the discipline in general, therefore suggesting more prototypical representation of the discipline in the United States.