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Review of Joan E. Seiber, ed., *Sharing Social Science Data: Advantages and Challenges*

Martha L. Brogan

University of Pennsylvania, brogan@pobox.upenn.edu

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NOTE: At the time of publication, the author Martha L. Brogan was affiliated with Yale University. Currently June 2007, she is Associate University Librarian for Collection Development and Management at the University of Pennsylvania.

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Review of Joan E. Seiber, ed., *Sharing Social Science Data: Advantages and Challenges*

Abstract

This concise and straightforward collection of essays, written by leading authorities who create, document, disseminate, and use social science data, builds on the earlier, seminal report of the Committee on National Statistics of the National Research Council, *Sharing Research Data* (National Academy Press, 1985). Subsequent conferences focusing on social science data sponsored by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1988 and 1989 inspired much of the work in this volume.

Comments

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Bender nowhere systematically analyzes what he means by the *public* and the *public sphere*. Recent controversies over multiculturalism together with contemporary advances in the technologies of communication and persuasion make this a vexed matter indeed. Fortunately, the present work serves as a sort of parergon to Bender's more extensive examination of this question, shortly to be published under the title *History and Public Culture*.—David S. Sullivan, *Stanford University, Stanford, California*.

Sieber, Joan E., ed. *Sharing Social Science Data: Advantages and Challenges*. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1991. 168p. \$46 (ISBN 0-8039-4082-3).

This concise and straightforward collection of essays, written by leading authorities who create, document, disseminate, and use social science data, builds on the earlier, seminal report of the Committee on National Statistics of the National Research Council, *Sharing Research Data* (National Academy Press, 1985). Subsequent conferences focusing on social science data sponsored by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1988 and 1989 inspired much of the work in this volume.

Major archives that organize and disseminate social science research data have existed since the 1940s, gaining in strength during the 1960s when the Interuniversity Consortium of Political and Social Research (ICPSR) was founded at the University of Michigan. However, promotion of data sharing has intensified since the mid-1980s, by which time most funding agencies, including the NSF, systematically required investigators to deposit their primary data at a public archive within one year of project completion. The NSF requirement now even extends to data gathered by graduate students on NSF-funded fellowships. New policies intended to advance open scientific research coincided with more widespread access to computers, facilitating data collection, analysis, and distribution. The convergence of these trends has brought social science

data increasingly into the mainstream of scholarly research. Readers familiar with the Research Libraries Group's 1989 assessment of information needs in the social sciences will find that *Sharing Social Science Data* reinforces and illuminates many of its findings.

Editor Joan E. Sieber, who is professor of psychology at the University of California, Hayward, has assembled a coherent and compelling case for data sharing, concentrating on the need for archived data for current research interests. The first part of *Sharing Social Science Data* uses three carefully selected case studies to illustrate how different disciplinary trends and methodological perspectives influence scholarly research, drawing on investigations in demography, anthropology, and criminal justice. These examples document the complex issues in contemporary social science research and are worthy of close consideration.

V. Jeffery Evans describes a number of innovative hybrid projects that blend demographic constructs with various behavioral and social science methods of data collection, resulting in multilevel research designs that answer multidisciplinary questions. The strengths and weaknesses of data sharing in anthropology are ably presented by Douglas R. White. White writes:

Data sharing occurs in anthropology when there are shared theoretical, methodological, and data collection paradigms such as in archaeology and physical anthropology, and in areas of sociocultural or development anthropology. . .

He demonstrates how comparative data sets from diverse disciplines like environmental science, historical demography, and development studies permit anthropologists to test hypotheses about human populations in new ways. From his perspective further progress hinges on standardizing documentation, fully implementing a computer workstation concept that "combines advanced methodologies with ease and reliability in data management," and maintaining mechanisms for cost-effective, international dissemination of information.

In the final chapter in this section, the investigating team uses criminal and civil justice research, specifically the Spouse Assault Replication Program sponsored by the National Institute of Justice, to explore how issues of confidentiality and protection of privacy of research participants, as well as the proprietary interests of researchers, were resolved in a multi-site field experiment while still achieving the standards and policies of data sharing.

Part II, on the "Elements of Successful Data Sharing," includes three chapters: "The Science of Data Sharing" by economist Martin David; "Establishing and Operating a Social Science Data Archive," by Josefina J. Card and James L. Peterson; and "Use of Shared Data Sets in Teaching Statistics and Methodology," by Sieber and Bruce E. Trumbo. Well-documented data sets, according to David, should permit the user to assess their "completeness, reliability, appropriateness of design, error, ambiguity, and portability." He then elaborates on weaknesses of current data documentation, using technical measures best understood by the specialist, although his interpretations and concepts are accessible to all readers. Card and Peterson discuss the purpose and structure of a centralized data archive from their perspective as professional psychologists who operate a commercial facility, Sociometrics, Inc., which is under contract to various federal funding agencies to manage social and behavioral data. Most of their criteria for evaluating a centralized data archive transfer to a university setting as well. Finally, Sieber and Trumbo discuss how the use of real data sets in teaching generates student interest and focuses their attention on substantive research problems rather than statistical techniques.

In the third section, "Challenges," Sieber poses questions most frequently asked by social scientists about the value of sharing data. She divides them into three groups: the professionally unconcerned who are either naively willing to share or reject sharing altogether; the concerns of neophyte investigators; and

the informed concerns of experienced investigators. Two key factors will influence more widespread acceptance of data sharing—greater recognition and rewards for researchers who do share data, and, more systematic training of beginning social scientists in the value and methods of data sharing. Vivian Weil and Rachele Hollander close the volume with "Normative Issues in Data Sharing." Trends toward team research, the erosion of boundaries between private and public research institutions, and the participation of government, industry, and foundations as funders call for the development of standards in data sharing. Weil and Hollander identify the following seven factors which need common guidelines: data quality, access, proprietary interests, maintenance (organizational support), privacy interests, informed consent arrangements, and assistance to users of data along with lending criteria.

Sharing Social Science Data effectively distills many aspects of the current debate about data sharing into a cogent argument. In many university settings, social science data archives are attached to specialized research institutes and often operate independently from the library. However, as more and more data sets become available in multiple formats or migrate from the domain of mainframe computing to the scholar's workstation, social science librarians need to forge closer alliances with data archivists. As this review goes to press, Sociometrics, Inc. has announced the release of *The American Family Data Archive*, which combines over 20,000 variables from 10 nationally recognized studies on family dynamics and child care. It exemplifies recent capabilities in the flexible "packaging" of data and its documentation, and, makes the complementary roles of librarians and data archivists more visible.

Librarians who wish to keep current of the evolving discussion about data sharing might consider joining the International Association for Social Science Information Service and Technology (IASSIST), which also sponsors a lively

electronic discussion group, or the Association of Public Data Users (APDU)—neither of which are mentioned by Sieber.—*Martha L. Brogan, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.*

Bibliographic Instruction in Practice: A Tribute to the Legacy of Evan Farber. Ed. Larry Hardesty et al. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Pierian, 1993. 168p. \$35 (ISBN 0-87650-328-8).

What Is Good Instruction Now? Library Instruction for the 90s. Ed. Linda Shirato. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Pierian, 1993. 184p. \$35 (ISBN 0-87650-327-X).

Working with Faculty in the New Electronic Library. Ed. Linda Shirato. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Pierian, 1992, 195p., \$35 (ISBN 0-87650-291-5).

Ann Lipow begins a 1991 LOEX conference presentation reproduced in *Working with Faculty in the New Electronic Library* by promising her audience that "because ours is a practical occupation," her talk will quickly turn to the "nitty gritty." It is at this level that the collections under review define their utility. Although this turn to the nitty gritty—rough, pestiferous, and hallowed ground of practicers everywhere—intends to persuade us of the detailed real-life veracity and value of these volumes, it ensures a certain tedium as well.

These volumes are the three most recent in Pierian's Library Orientation Series, which began in 1972 with a collection documenting the first of the LOEX conferences. Two of the volumes, *Working with Faculty in the New Electronic Library* and *What Is Good Instruction Now? Library Instruction for the 90s*, constitute the proceedings of the nineteenth (1991) and twentieth (1992) LOEX conferences; *Bibliographic Instruction in Practice: A Tribute to the Legacy of Evan Farber* includes papers presented at the fifth (1992) bibliographic instruction conference sponsored jointly by Earlham College and Eckerd College as successors to a series held at Earlham.

Both LOEX volumes reproduce four papers and a dozen "instructive" and

poster sessions. The papers tend to be synthetic, hortatory, and prognosticating, while the session reports describe projects designed around specific user groups, technological applications, courses and fields, or methodologies and "problems." *Working with Faculty* finds Evan Farber rehearsing the arguments for and challenges of working with faculty in any environment; Ann Lipow discussing how librarians at the University of California, Berkeley, communicate with faculty; Nathan M. Smith et al. describing Project FORE, a hypermedia library skills program at the University of Utah; and Fred Roecker and Thomas Minnick talking about the *Gateway* that provides online guidance in research at Ohio State University, and about the *Gateway's* relationship to the "how-to-college" requirement the university places on all incoming students.

The second LOEX volume, *What Is Good Library Instruction Now?* offers Thomas T. Surprenant on teachers and students and the library's future place in their work; Virginia Tiefel on a number of university library projects to enhance user services with electronic information technologies; Mary Reichel on the complex of issues surrounding developments in scholarly communication, learning theory, and the future of libraries and librarianship; and Hannelore B. Rader on the last twenty years' work among library instruction practitioners, a period during which she sees an evolution from concern with library orientation to a more broadly conceived information literacy.

Bibliographic Instruction in Practice epitomizes the work of Evan Farber and others at Earlham College since they began their now famous program in the 1960s. After Farber's introductory paper, in which he rehearses the familiar arguments for library instruction and the development of the Earlham program, the volume reproduces papers that describe departmental instructional rationales and goals, specific assignments, and instructional techniques. Transcripts of discussions, presentations, and testimonials cover the librarian's role in