
Data in Society: Challenging statistics in an age of globalisation – a progress report ...

by Jeff Evans

The day after the last RadStats conference in London (2015), it struck John Bibby and I that it would soon be 20 years since the publication of the last Radical Statistics collection, *Statistics in Society* (1999) (and even longer since *Demystifying Social Statistics* (1979)). This third collection, edited by Jeff Evans, Sally Ruane and Humphrey Southall, is taking shape. After securing a contract for the book from Policy Press, we are receiving first drafts from authors for some 25 or so chapters. The aim is to give authors feedback by the end of March, to receive the revised chapters towards the end of May and to hand the book over to the publisher at the end of July. The book will be published in May 2019.

The use of both ‘statistics’ and ‘data’ in the title is to capture the tension between two views of the *materials*, the *methods* and the *professional and disciplinary basis* of our work: the statistical data, statistical analysis, and the statistics and allied professions / disciplines, on the one hand; and ‘data’ (sometimes ‘big’), data analytics, and data scientists, on the other. The book title does not mention ‘big data’, since this is not the central focus of the book – it is about much more.

The aims of the book include:

- to explore ongoing developments in the uses of data and the role of statistics in contemporary society
- to raise levels of critical understanding in terms of the role and significance of statistical data and statistical claims
- to invite a wider public of non-specialist readers, including third sector, professional and service user groups, to consider how statistics are used in social discourse and argument, to advance interests and to achieve particular, often political ends.

The audience for the book will include:

- Scholars and students in applied statistics, and in research methods for a range of social science, economics, geography, health and business areas, at intermediate or final year undergraduate level, or postgraduate level;
- Those training in areas such as social work, youth and community work, teaching and nursing;
- Practitioners in the above fields, plus community activists and other campaigners using statistics as a campaigning tool and wanting to critically understand their use by others; and, of course,
- Members of the Radical Statistics Group.

Most higher education and training courses for the groups above include an introduction to the use of statistics. The introduction of Q Step programmes to enhance the level of teaching of quantitative methods to social science undergraduates in UK Universities has led to an increased emphasis on quantitative material across the whole range of social sciences and related fields, in undergraduate and taught post-graduate programmes.

The contents of the book are as follows.

Introduction to the Book by the Editors

Section 1: How Data are Changing

- Administrative data: The creation of Big Data by Harvey Goldstein and Ruth Gilbert
- ‘A Survey Shows ...’ by Roy Carr-Hill
- Social data by Humphrey Southall + Author tbc
- What’s new about Data Analytics? Author(s) tbc
- The changing occupational landscape of statistical work by Kevin McConway

Section 2: Counting in a Globalised World

- Transnational Organisations and the Globalising of Educational Policy by Jeff Evans and Roy Carr-Hill
- Counting the Population in Need of International Protection Globally by Brad Blitz, Alessio D'Angelo and Eleonore Kofman
- Researching the invisible. The challenges of measuring illicit financial flows, including the movement of money between companies and jurisdictions to avoid tax by Richard Murphy
- Climate Change and the Construction of Controversy - Author(s) TBC

Section 3: The Changing Role of the State

- Social insecurity and the changing role of the (welfare) state: Public perceptions, social attitudes and political action by Christopher Deeming and Ron Johnston
- The uneven impact of welfare reform by Tina Beatty and Steve Fothergill
- Privatisation and commercial confidentiality: the manipulation and disappearance of statistical data in the health service by Sally Ruane and Alison Macfarlane
- Devolution by David Byrne
- Who owns official statistics? The work of the UK Statistics Authority by David Rhind

Section 4: Economic Life

- Tax and spend decisions: Numbers and Numeracy as Preconditions for Democracy by David Walker
- The Tax Avoidance Industry by Prem Sikka
- The Financial System by Rebecca Boden

- Changes in working life by Paul Bivand
- Measuring and evaluating trends in inequality by Stewart Lansley

Section 5: Inequalities in Health and Well-being

- Key divisions in society Author(s) TBC
- Promoting Well-Being: The Statistics of Public Health Intervention Strategies by Jan Böehnke, Stephanie Prady, Philip Quinlan
- Re-engineering health policy research to measure equity impacts by Tim Doran and Richard Cookson
- Ageing and Pensions: Trends in Life Expectancy and Healthy Life Expectancy for pensions by Jay Ginn and Neil Duncan-Jordan

Section 6 : Advancing social progress through critical statistical literacy

- Teaching and training by Malcolm Williams. Luke Sloan and Charlotte Brookfield
- Data Journalism as Data Activism? Collaborative Data Infrastructures for Changing What Counts by Jonathan Gray and Liliana Bounegru
- The public interest work of the Royal Statistical Society by Hetan Shah
- Facilitating Access to Data for Political Decisions and Debate by Jim Ridgway and James Nicholson
- Fact checking organisations by Will Moy
- Exposing the ‘funny numbers’ of precarious employment: a critical resource for challenging neoliberalism by Nour Dado, James Goodman and Keiko Yasukawa

Concluding chapter to the book by the Editors
.....

Throughout its gestation, the book has benefitted from the support of Radical Statistics, its members and its friends. Two early meetings in London in Oct. 2015, and in York in Feb. 2016, were attended by ten to twelve members / friends, and supported by the Radical Statistics Troika with expenses. Since then, appeals to the mailing list have elicited valuable suggestions for ideas and chapter authors. We thank everyone who has supported the book's development so far, and in particular John Bibby and Jan Böhnke, for their contributions. We look forward to your continued support and interest.

During this period, there has also been discussion of a parallel collection, a "statistical handbook for activists". Perhaps this idea will re-emerge. Who knows what ideas will occur to people at the Radical Statics conference, or in the weeks ahead?

Jeff Evans, for the Editors of the Book