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Letters1#1

H. Russell Bernard

A letter from H. Russell Bernard.

[Editor's Note]

H. Russell Bernard, editor of the *American Anthropologist*, spent three days in early 1986 in the *World Cultures* editorial offices in La Jolla, Doug White's home office, learning to use the journal so as to teach a class the next year on cross-cultural research. In a labor of love, he went through an on-screen reading of each of the first three issues of the journal, line-by-line, as Doug White took notes for revisions. Both of us learned a great deal by this careful scrutiny. What follows is a statement that Russ prepared, as a letter-to-the-editor, at the end of his sojourn. Most of his suggestions have also been incorporated into the journal. Russ was especially helpful in articulating the "evolutionary and self-contained" editorial policy that was implicit in the journal organization, but is now more thoughtfully stated on the editorial masthead. This policy has been used to eliminate much of the clutter in the earliest editions in favor of a simplified, state-of-the-art, self-contained presentation.

Letter: Improvements to the Journal:

These are some ideas and formats for increasing the usefulness of drw's world cultures/maptab programs.

The whole journal should be evolutionary and self-contained. That is, anyone who wants to start from scratch and become proficient in cross-cultural studies should be able to start from the beginning of the journal (Volume 1#1) and develop increasingly good skills at building databases and analyzing data. Proficient cross-cultural researchers should be able to benefit from the data published in the journal, right from the beginning. But new researchers, whether professors or students, should be able to learn how to actually conduct this sort of research by subscribing to the journal.

Codebooks should be of two types: terse and verbose, or quick and expanded. The quick codebook (or list of commands in procedures) should be easy-to-follow mnemonics. For each such abbreviated notation there should exist an expanded version that a user can get to on the machine itself. Variables need very careful, expanded coding in an expanded codebook, in order to reduce misunderstanding about what variables mean. Confusion about the meaning of variables can lead to all kinds of mischief and can introduce yet another source of unreliability into already-suspect data.

The programmer should not leave any behavior trails anywhere in the journal. There are serious temptations to do this, but they should be weeded out and kept in a **separate** set of files for use by other programmers and in updating the package (journal and programs). For example, when you recode variables from the original Cross-Cultural Cumulative Coding Center or Ethnographic Atlas codebook, it is very easy to imagine that users need to know this; the result is terribly verbose and cluttered. New users need to know only the codes that **this** package uses to refer to societies and variables. Experienced cross-cultural researchers (and new researchers as they 'use up' the capabilities of the 186-society database, for example, or others published in this journal) will want to know how the codes in World Cultures map (or not) onto those of the Human Relations Area Files [Ed: Outline of Cultural Materials]. This can be placed in a separate file, labeled clearly and tucked away for those users who need it or want it. The principle in all file construction should be to make them as simple and as self-contained as possible.

There needs to be a file, menu-driven, of easily understood, easily invoked statistics that operate on the databases that are constructed by the maptab options, or from the user's own data. Chi-squared should be the single stat for testing distributions. It should have a user-transparent test that goes away and peeks at a table and prints out only the probability and the degrees of freedom, and so forth. Nominal data should be testable for associations by lambda, but there needs to be a short description of the pitfalls of lambda. Ordinal associations should be testable by Gamma, Kim's d, and Wilson's e stats, depending on which of the three ordinal measurement models (monotone relation, monotone function, monotone 1-to-1 function) is chosen by the user, following Lin Freeman's clear formulation of ordinal measurement in his forthcoming *Journal of Mathematical Sociology* article [Ed: Russ learned about this development in his visit to Irvine]. Here the user should get a short paragraph describing the models in Lin's paper. Interval variables should be testable for association by at least two regression-type stats, preferably Pearson's pmc, or Spearman's roc.

There also needs to be an expanded codebook of procedures. The note above about the cautions in using lambda is an example.

Projects Needed: Users should be invited to contribute specific papers or other projects to the journals. For example, there is a need for a dictionary of synonyms of tribal names. Such a dictionary would make it unnecessary to include more than one name in the Standard Cross Cultural Sample, or other databases. Bibliographies are needed in order to make it easy for researchers to build particular databases. Articles on how to do particular tasks would be very welcome.

H. Russell Bernard
February 20, 1986