ICPSR Data Brunch Podcast
Episode 12: Sampled Beginnings
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Transcript

Dory Knight-Ingram:

Hey, everyone. And welcome to Data Brunch with ICPSR. If you love data, this is going to be food for thought. I'm Dory.

Anna Shelton:

And I'm Anna.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

We are recording these episodes...

Anna Shelton:

Are they lepisodes? We're recording some lepisodes.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

What is a lepisode? Okay, let's try that again.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

We are recording these episodes live from a hybrid work environment, so please excuse cameos from canine colleagues or the human colleagues, kids in class and other unexpected moments. We'd love to hear from you. Please suggest guests and topics and give us other feed on our website. You can also use the hashtag data brunch to tag us on social media.

Anna Shelton:

Awesome. Some quick business upfront, if you are listening to this episode at a later date, you can always visit icpsr.umich.edu to see current job listings and other upcoming events. But, as of recording, we are hiring. We have four open positions, including a product owner and a research area specialist. We've had some people reach out to us about these positions. It's pretty exciting at ICPSR right now. We are growing, so it's a really cool place to be. Please do reach out to us if you have questions about those positions. We'd love to hear from you. We also have some data training coming up, including a webinar on preregistering a study and the research life cycle. You can find those on our homepage. They're mostly open to the public and they're free, so please do come and join us.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

One of the best things about ICPSR, besides the data, is the community of ICPSR people who simply love data. In a moment, you will hear from ICPSR, director of product owners, Abay Israel and ICPSR quality and production support manager, Kilsang Kim, who chat about how they came to ICPSR, fond memories of their work and Abay getting lost on his first day as an ICPSR intern. Today's conversation between Abay and Kilsang is part of ICPSR's collection of interviews recorded by StoryCorps. The StoryCorps

interviews were a gift from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, also known as IMLS, as part of ICPSR's National Medal for Museum and Library Service that ICPSR won in 2019.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

The medal honors museums and libraries for outstanding community service. ICPSR was recognized in the library category for its exemplary data stewardship efforts. These interviews are provided courtesy of StoryCorps, a national nonprofit, whose mission is to preserve and share humanity stories in order to build connections between people and create a more just and compassionate world. To hear the full conversation between Abay and Kilsang, and check out others in ICPSR StoryCorps collection, visit the ICPSR collection at storycorps.org, which we will link in our episode notes.

[Musical interlude]

Abay Israel:

My name is Abay, I am 36 years old, and today is May 22, 2020. I am here in lovely Ann Arbor, Michigan recording with a friend colleague and coworker of mine, Kilsang, who's here with me.

Kilsang Kim:

Hi, my name Kilsang. Well, I'm kind of the partner in crime with Abay, working for ICPSR here in lovely Ann Arbor. Finally, we've got some great weather today. We are informed that we are supposed to have a nice conversation about ICPSR and this is something we always like to do. Abay, I always wondered, what was your earliest memory of ICPSR?

Abay Israel:

Ooh, my earliest memory, if I can think about this. It was back in 2005. I was recruited as an intern for the aspiring Summer Internship Program at the time. It was Rita Bantom and David Thomas, who came to campus and were talking about this magical place of Ann Arbor, how lovely it is, how you would learn about research, you would learn about data. They saw this, they came in high. They were saying how ICPSR is this unspoken gem that a lot of graduate students in school talk about. I didn't know about it at the time.

Abay Israel:

I remember coming here the very first day of my internship program, and I remember it just being green and people were smiling and people were saying, hello and good afternoon and good morning. That's very different from being in New York or being in Atlanta. It was just warm and welcoming. I used to [inaudible 00:06:08] felt like a home space. It was so odd. I loved it. It was a very strong memory in my mind, thinking that this place was welcoming and this place was just a place that I can find friends and find companionship and a strong community. What about you? Do you remember your first memory about ICPSR?

Kilsang Kim:

I was a graduate student here at Michigan and I was looking for a summer job, just on the economics department posting board. This was way back, I think around 2003. On the board there had something called an ICPSR Summer Program computer consultants. This is going way back to when we still had

computer rooms at the Summer Program. Nowadays, everybody's got a tablet, everybody has a laptop, so nobody really need the computer rooms now, but then we had two big computer rooms in Helen Newberry for the Summer Program. This was a pretty good job for any graduate students who've taken any kind of methodology courses because the pain was pretty good.

Kilsang Kim:

Boy, how much fun it was. Every year, nearly 900 to 1,000 international and US students will gather here at Helen Newberry. It just one big summer party. Everybody that's supposed to be doing work, but I think most people are just having too much fun. How full the bars were at the end of the day after all the courses were. That was my kind of introduction into this because I didn't know what ICPSR was at that point. All I knew it was a summer job that paid well and when I got there, it looked fun. From there, I got kind of suckered in, never left.

Abay Israel:

No, I'm right there with you. I'm right there with you. It's like that's how they get you.

Kilsang Kim:

Yep.

Abay Israel:

They bring you in during the summer. I came in during the summer, I'm originally from the Caribbean. I came in during the summer and I was like, "This place is amazing." I decided this is where I wanted to build my career and come back to grad school and all that stuff and then the winter hit. That winter came in 2007 and I was like, "What is this? What is this madness? What is this white stuff on my costume?" I had no heat in my car at the time. I was like, "Okay, well, the summers are nice, but the winters were crazy." I don't know, did you have any memories of your first winter in Michigan, Kilsang?

Kilsang Kim:

Well, not the first one, but the second or third one when we had the huge snowfall. That was interesting. But then again, I originally come from Korea, Seoul, so we've got basically the same weather as here in Ann Arbor. So, weather wise, I was very familiar with. Korea's a little bit more in the extremes in the summer and bit more milder in the winters, but yeah, you hear from a lot of our colleagues, how they got kind of suckered in when they were undergraduates or it was their first job. They stayed here for a summer or worked for a year on a particular project them went to do whatever. And when they finished their training or program, they get a kind of email saying, "Hi, we hear that you finished. Did you... We've got a lovely job posting, would you be interested?" And you'd be very surprised how many people in the building going back in to ICPSR.

Abay Israel:

That's true. That's true. For mine, I... So, I came as a summer [inaudible 00:10:21] in 2005, and then I returned to ICPSR in 2007. But, between that time I did a stint of investment banking in New York. The banking thing, it was great for what it was. I had a good time, but then I realized I felt a family here in Ann Arbor. I wanted to come back and I was thinking I would only stay for a year. I would stay for a year work for that 2007, 2008 year and then apply for grad school and then see how the wind blows. I think both of us are economics people.

Kilsang Kim:

Yeah.

Abay Israel:

We both went to grad school back at home. Michigan is great for that. And then one year turned into two, turned into five, turned into 10. I think I've been here what, 13 years now? It's insane. How long have you been here, Kilsang?

Kilsang Kim:

Oh, I've been here... Well, my association again started at 2003 and I think I've worked every single summer or part-time, knocking about. I think only started full-time about six or seven years ago, but I have a kind of an interesting history at ICPSR because I started off at the Summer Program as a computer statistical consultant then I moved into the team lead deposition for that, which was a lot more in setting up for the computing environment for the Summer Program. Then through that job, I got a part-time job working for CNS, which is the computer and networking support group. I worked there for, I think, about three years then I finally moved over to curation, which it's...

Kilsang Kim:

Normally curation is kind of the gateway into ICPSR and into all the other departments, but I took kind of the long way round. After curation, I moved to my current job, which is a data project analyst, so I've kind of knocked around the building quite often. I'm probably one of the people who've been situated in multiple places. I think Lynette might have the other record of the most moved inside ICPSR, but depending on which job I was doing, and even in that job, I got moved around quite a bit inside the building. I think in kind of if you divide up the whole building into four major quadrants, I think I've been in every single one of those quadrants.

Abay Israel:

I think you're right. I think you beat me for sure because I started as an intern, I went into curation, I became the program manager for internship and then I moved into the technology and development side.

Kilsang Kim:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Abay Israel:

That's crazy though. Most of the colleagues that we work with here have similar trajectories. I don't think they bounce around as many times to us, but you hear similar stories that people are talking about. They started as usually curation, you're right.

Kilsang Kim:

Yep.

Abay Israel:

They started off with curation and then they became a project lead or they become a supervisor, they became an archive director. Just being at ICPSR and University of Michigan affords you that luxury that

you can explore different places and even come back, or just explore different opportunities. I think that's a really great place to work.

Kilsang Kim:

Yeah. It's one of the kind characteristics... Well, we say curation is probably the [inaudible 00:13:55] core of ICPSR. Curation means actually getting the data sent in from the PIs and then that data in itself gets, well, basically curated such that what comes out is a totally different piece, sometimes to what comes in. In the sense of not the data itself changing, but the usability of the data such that I'm sure a lot of methodology core students who managed to kind of... Probably not so much now, but way back, it was really... When I was doing my graduate course, it's very hard to get good data to kind of do reputation work. You take... One of our first methodology courses would ask us to go and pick a paper, a very famous paper, and then replicate the results of that paper.

Kilsang Kim:

And I remember being so happy that I managed to find the actual data for that paper, but the problem is there was no documentation, there was no explanations, there was no detail explanation on what kind of weights were used. I had to use the published paper to figure out, backwards workout by experimentation. Even with all that work, I couldn't exactly get what the results that were published in that paper. What we hear in ICPSR, especially in the curation department does, is make sure that's possible that all the variable labels are clearly denoted, there's no errors in it, the value labels are correct and the associated documentation actually matches up. From one of our properly curated studies, you should have not... I doubt you'll have that much problem.

Kilsang Kim:

I've done it. I've done testing through our curated work, that we are testing online statistical analysis software. One easy way to do it is get one of our curated data sets, look at the documentation, look at the original paper that's been published from it, do one of the simple tabulations or covariance tables and yeah, numbers match down to... [inaudible 00:16:22] That's my point. That's kind of always been a lot of the starting point for our staff members is doing that very, very important work. Once they move over to managerial positions, project manager positions, developed positions, having that common background in the building makes it so much easier for us to have this common goal saying, "Yeah, data is important. Good curated data is more important than anything else."

Abay Israel:

Do you remember the time that we did the karaoke event with the director with Maggie during a webinar?

Kilsang Kim:

Yes, especially while I didn't have a singing voice.

Abay Israel:

That was great. That was so much fun, I remember that. There was another memory that I have that just stands out too. This was years ago, another colleague, Kathryn [inaudible 00:17:24], Lavender now. Wow, Kathryn Lavender, Kevin Kapalla. We used to play little tricks on each other. We had a Marilyn Monroe doll, not a doll, a cutout.

Kilsang Kim:

[crosstalk 00:17:36].

Abay Israel:

We had that cut out and we put it in different odd places throughout the building. We'd always have fun with Kevin put in notes on Marilyn saying, "It's not you, it's me." Kind of really funny back and forth. We would have jokes with each other. We would come and put stuff on our door. And I remember us taking one time where we had a bunch of sticky notes and we organized the sticky notes in a mural of Marilyn Monroe. And he came into his office and he was like, "Wow." Just things like that.

Abay Israel:

The fun about ICPSR, the ability to connect with friends, the ability to build new technology that what both of us are doing now to provide data and to provide learning resources and to continue to push the boundary of what social science research can be in this environment and a world where data is just becoming such a strong currency. I think there's no other place like ICPSR and frankly, I'm inspired every day to be here, inspired to work with you, Kilsang, and I hope that we continue to build new things and build up this community. With that being said, I really want to thank all those who've listened to our story and had as much fun as we had going through our memory lane here at ICPSR and StoryCorps.

Kilsang Kim:

Yeah. Thank you very much for having us. It's a pleasure to expound on this, spiel on and be boastful about an institution that I think has great meaning to both of us. Hopefully, people who've listened to this recording, hey, come and visit us, we're on the web.

[Musical interlude]

Anna Shelton:

Wow. That's fantastic. Every time I hear it, it's fantastic. I just love Abay and Kilsang, y'all are the best.

In new data, we have the 2016 Latino Immigrant National Election Study, which is also known as LINES. This is a panel study of Latino foreign-born residents of the United States. It includes some really interesting variables. One of the variables is, "Do you think that what happens generally to Hispanic people in this country will affect you a lot, a little, not very much or not at all?" It's just an incredible study and really important for research into immigration and politics and voting, all kinds of things.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

Thank you for that, Anna. We also have some great new research spotlights in the ICPSR Bibliography of Data-related Literature, including three new spotlights. Including mental health, criminal justice and physical health. All three of those focus on the LGBTQ population.

Anna Shelton:

I love those research spotlights. I get totally geeked out about those. I think they're so cool. That's the end of the episode. Thank you all for being with us.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

If you aren't already, subscribe now on Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. Tell us what you like to hear by filling out the feedback form on our website and share your thoughts on social media, using hashtag data crunch.

Anna Shelton:

And thank you as always to the over 700 members of ICPSR. This podcast would not be possible without the ICPSR members. I want to give a shout out to our newest members, Kyungpook University in Korea, and of course, a special thank you to our producers, Scott Campbell. Woo hoo.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

You can get in touch with us by visiting our website icpsr.umich.edu, or emailing us at icpsr-podcast@umich.edu.

Anna Shelton:

I'm Anna.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

And I'm Dory. And thanks for joy running us at ICPSR's Data Brunch.