ICPSR Data Brunch Podcast Episode 17: Democracy's Data

Original Air Date: December 2022

Transcript

Scott Campbell:

Okay.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

Hi everyone. Oh-

Scott Campbell:

Oh sorry. Sorry.

Annalee Shelton:

Blooper, first five seconds!

Scott Campbell:

I was going to give you the go-ahead. Well, anyway it's on.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

We were ready. Okay. Hi everyone, and welcome to Data Brunch with ICPSR. If you love data, this is going to be food for thought. I'm Dory.

Annalee Shelton:

And I'm Anna. Welcome back to season three of Data Brunch.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

Today we're talking to author Dan Bouk about his new book, Democracy's Data: The Hidden Stories in the U.S. Census and How to Read Them.

Annalee Shelton:

We're really excited to talk to Dan. This book is so up our alley. For all of our OG listeners, you might remember episode three from season one of this podcast where we talked about Census and migration. And Trent Alexander, ICPSR's Associate Director, joined us to talk about a project that was linking every United States Census from 1850 all the way through the present day to learn about how Americans moved or how they stayed put. And we'll link to that episode in the show notes for this episode.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

Thanks, Anna. I remember that episode and I remember seeing my family mentally in the data, they made the great migration from the South to the North.

Annalee Shelton:

Yes, I remember that. Yeah, it was fascinating. It's amazing how these Census stories are the stories of our lives.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

They really are. We have loads of new data releases since you last heard from us, and I'm just going to go over a few highlights. One is the Wellbeing and Basic Needs Survey, and that is from ICPSR's Health and Medical Care Archive. In December 2017, the Urban Institute launched the Wellbeing and Basic Needs Survey, also known as WBNS, a nationally representative internet-based survey of non-elderly adults designed to monitor changes in individual and family wellbeing during a time when policymakers were considering significant changes to federal safety net programs serving low income families. And so the 2020 round of the survey collects information on a broad array of topics related to health, material hardship, and the safety net, including health insurance, housing, food security, employment, family income, program participation, family financial security, disability, school enrollment, childcare, COVID-19 vaccine attitudes, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on family employment and immigration issues. Very timely survey that you can access at ICPSR's website.

Annalee Shelton:

Wow, that's cool.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

Yes.

Annalee Shelton:

I didn't realize all of that was in there. That's amazing.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

I was really excited when I saw this, and when I look at our new releases and I see things that are really impacting us right now. So that's one of those surveys. And then we have two new releases from the COVID-19 High Frequency Phone Survey of Households series. And this study is part of an effort by the World Bank, which launched a quick deploying high frequency phone monitoring survey of households to generate near realtime insights on the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 on households. So the two releases that just came out in October of 2022 are the COVID-19 High Frequency Phone Survey of Households Indonesia for the years 2020 and 2021. And then the second one is the COVID-19 High Frequency Phone Survey of Households in Kenya, also for the years 2020 and 2021. Researchers can archive their data with ICPSR for free, in case you didn't know. Add your data to ICPSR's collection and we will include that link in our show notes. Back to you, Anna.

Annalee Shelton:

Wow, that is awesome. I didn't realize we had those phone surveys. That's really cool. I was just looking at some of our data. There's some new COVID data that's just come in in October of 2022. So we're recording this in October, 2022, and there's brand new COVID data that's just come in this month. So there is some really cool stuff coming through that, again, is impacting people's lives, and that is a pretty cool thing. So there are a few things that are coming up from ICPSR through the end of this year. So the first thing, speaking of COVID, is our Social Behavioral and Economic COVID Coordinating Center, also

called SBE CCC, they have grants that are available for projects, and you do need to apply to those by December 2nd, 2022. So if you're listening before that, please apply. And if you're hearing this in the future, please do reach out to SBECCC. Again, that's Social Behavioral and Economic COVID Coordinating Center. They have ongoing project opportunities, so that's a great group to get connected with.

And then looking forward to 2023, I can't believe I'm saying that, save the date, the Love Data week will start on February 13th. And then the 2023 Summer Program is going to move to three-week sessions. So if you've done the Summer Program before, you might be familiar with our four-week sessions. We are now moving to three week-sessions and they're going to be awesome. The first session is June 19th through July 7th, 2023. And the second session will be July 17th through August 4th, 2023. And you can find all of that information and all of our updates on our website, and of course we'll have that in the show notes.

And then just a couple more, we want to make sure you send in your papers. So if you are an undergrad or a graduate student, we have a research paper competition and you can win up to a thousand dollars. So please apply for that. Send in your papers. If you use data that you found at ICPSR in your research papers that you wrote for class, you can win again up to a thousand bucks. And that is due by January 31st, 2023. I keep tripping on 2023. I can't believe we're saying that already. And then last but not least, our biennial meeting will take place in October 2023. That's kind of like our user conference, if you've heard of user conferences for other big tech companies, kind of a similar thing here. And you are welcome to join us. It's here in Ann Arbor, Michigan, again, October 2023.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

I too can't believe we're talking about 2023.

Annalee Shelton:

It's blowing my mind.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

Well, we want to make sure that our listeners know that we are also hiring. We have open positions for data impact librarian and lots of data engineers and software engineers. So we will include that link to our show notes, if you know someone who'd be perfect for ICPSR.

Annalee Shelton:

There's so much good stuff happening here at work at ICPSR. It's a quite fun time to be here. Now though, onto the book. Dan's book is of course about the Census and about data, but really it's about people and stories that are so human. I really loved Alexandra Jacobs at the New York Times called it, "endearingly nerdy." And that's just so our vibe at Data Brunch. So just a quick note that we've had some tech difficulties during the recording of this episode. Thank you changes in weather. But without further ado, here is the interview.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

Well, today we are thrilled to talk to Dr. Dan Bouk, author of Democracy's Data: The Hidden Stories in the U.S. Census and How to Read Them. Dr. Bouk is an associate professor at Colgate University where he teaches courses like The History of Numbers in America. Coming soon, he'll be teaching The History of Money. Dan describes himself as someone who studies modern things shrouded in cloaks of boringness. His previous work has tackled topics like the life insurance industry and even how we

generated random numbers before we had computers. Dr. Bouk has just come out with Democracy's Data, and here at Data Brunch we're thrilled to talk about this because it's all human stories about data. Welcome Dr. Bouk.

Dan Bouk:

Thank you for having me. I really appreciate this opportunity.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

Okay. And I want to know, and I probably said data and data, I switched back and forth, so I'll try to keep it data for this. That's okay.

Dan Bouk:

I'm totally a data/data pluralist. I feel like we can come in together on that, alternate.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

Okay.

Annalee Shelton:

I love it.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

So I think you're with the ICPSR majority, right? Am I right, Anna?

Annalee Shelton:

You are. So here at ICPSR, we like to run very formal surveys, insert sarcastic tone here, about whether people say data is or data are. And so far the data is camp is just slightly edging out the data are camp. We know it's not correct, but that's how we say it.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

And there you go. A little bit of ICPSR history there. So onto my first question for you. Democracy's Data is described as a story behind the numbers of the US Census, one that explores the collage of messy human stories. What specifically led you to write the story of Democracy's Data?

Dan Bouk:

So I did not set out to write a book about the Census. I, as you noted, like to study the history of modern systems, especially things that seem particularly boring, but which I think we need to understand shape the way we live our lives, that can structure the way in which our societies operate. But I thought that the Census even might be too boring for me, which I know for many listeners is going to sound like heresy on this podcast. But then I was in the archives, I was looking for the story of Alberti Fudre, who was a woman scientist in the 1920s and 1930s in the Census Bureau. Really important to people who became and were big names in the history of demography. People like Alfred Latka, Louis Dublin, who I'd encountered in my last book, they would be writing letters and saying, "I'm going to come into the Census Bureau. I'm going to go talk to Ms. Fudre and try to help understand the work she's doing."

And I knew nothing about her. I thought, "Who is this really important woman scientist about whom I've never read anything?" So I went into the National Archives to go looking for her. And what I found was all of these records from these past Censuses, and I started to see that there's real drama here, that every time we look at these numbers that seem like, to me, often a set of tables that tell the facts about the nation. Behind that was this incredibly large operation, hundreds of thousands of people mobilized in a few months to go across the entire United States asking questions of their neighbors, trying to then figure out from them how they could be counted and how they could be classified in the ways that the state allows them to be classified. And I thought, "This is enough for a book."

Annalee Shelton:

Oh, that is so cool. I want to... Insert dramatic music here, about the Census. Who knew? Okay, so let's just dive right in. I would love to hear what it means when you say that the 1940 Census was weaponized.

Dan Bouk:

All right. Yes. I started with the 1940 Census in large part because it was, at the time I was writing this book, the most recent Census for which all of the manuscript records were available. The Census Bureau is very strict in terms of its rules for confidentiality. When a person answers questions for the Census, the Census Bureau is not allowed to produce any kinds of publications or materials that'll allow any individual's information to be identified for 72 years. And then after 72 years, the National Archives releases to all of us all kinds of materials. And so as I started this 1940 was the most recent material. The thing is, during World War II, that mission of the Census was strained and changed. And in many ways, the Census Bureau, in trying to remain relevant during the war, ended up breaking the promises it had made in terms of confidentiality and it changed the emphasis of its work.

And we can think about that in kind of two ways. One way in which the Bureau shifted its emphasis, its job, the Census's job, usually is to immediately produce aggregate statistics, statistics to describe big groups of people or sometimes small groups of people, but not too small. In doing that, this factory of American facts, as they sometimes call themselves or I like to think about them, had to start producing actually a lot of information about individual people. And they did this legally in a number of ways. Legally, but maybe, particularly in some cases, definitely not ethically.

So one way was during World War II, President Roosevelt and his administration determined that to build this arsenal of democracy, to get all of these American factories into the process of making war material, they were concerned that spies or sabotage might become an issue. And so they wanted to make it so that anyone working in a wartime industry had to be an American citizen. But this was a time before many people had reliable birth certificates. There were very few Social Security cards, because Social Security card had only been rolled out in 1937. And so the question of how you determine that a person is an American citizen is quite complicated. And one of the most favored methods was to use people's past Census records, where they had indicated their citizenship to a neighbor, and to get certified copies of those Census records. So during the war, suddenly the Bureau spends a lot of effort and energy producing certified copies from the 1940 Census of individual records.

Now, because those are individuals asking for this material, it's legal, but it changes dramatically the way in which now this Bureau becomes a part of this war-making apparatus. The more troubling change is that also as the Bureau is trying to figure out how it can become relevant, and its officials are concerned that if they aren't relevant, they're going to lose all of their staff and all of the funding to the larger war effort. And so they start trying to figure out what they're going to do. And one of the key contributions they understand they can make is to make tabulations about enemy aliens, as they would call them,

about people who are considered to be Germans, Italians, or Japanese, either citizens, but also anyone of any kind of Japanese ancestry or Japanese race by Census as well.

And so they produce very fine grain tabulations of that material. And eventually in 1943, once laws have changed that briefly make this legal, they produce localized information, including individual names and addresses of Japanese Americans that facilitate the mass removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans in camps throughout much of the period of World War II. Removal and incarceration that, it's really important to say, was based on concerns that had very little, really no backing to lead people to believe the Japanese Americans were actually a security threat, but which led to this really dramatic and terrible removal in which the West Coast, any Japanese, Japanese Americans living in the West Coast were forced to leave. Which is both an incredible migration and a terrible interruption to people's lives.

Annalee Shelton:

Wow. I had no idea about that connection.

Dan Bouk:

I mean, the other thing which I guess is important to say is hopefully we've learned lessons from this interruption. In particular, the law that briefly allowed the Census Bureau to release information about individuals was repealed in 1947, or it was replaced in 1947. Since then, laws have generally only served to strengthen that protection of confidentiality, that individual information can't be released. And in 2000, the Census Bureau formally apologized for its role in the Japanese incarceration and this entire process. And while it's not perfect, there are now new and better procedures that try to make sure that when the Census Bureau releases information about small groups, that it doesn't release information about vulnerable populations in those materials. But everyone listening to this, this is an important story in part because it means everyone here who's working with and thinking about data needs to think about the way in which that data could possibly be used to the detriment of the people who it describes.

Annalee Shelton:

Yes, totally. The unintended consequence of collecting data and the way... You don't know how someone else will use it. So it is very important that that's part of the conversation as you're collecting data, as you're thinking about how we should be storing data, et cetera, et cetera, which as you know, is right up the ICPSR alley. So that is stuff we want to think about a lot. So kind of following up on that, do you think that the Census is still used in similar ways?

Dan Bouk:

Well, could you specify which kind of similar ways you're thinking about?

Annalee Shelton:

Well, I was thinking about when the Census is released, everybody gets access to this. Are there echoes of these things that you have learned from history that you're seeing now?

Dan Bouk:

I see. Yes. There's a number of ways to think about how these stories might influence the way we look at controversies involving the Census as it has been taking place over the last number of years. So certainly we saw during the 2020 Census, the attempt of the Trump administration to use a citizenship question under the guise of trying to enforce the Voting Rights Act. But as even the Supreme Court

acknowledged, this was a kind of post hoc explanation for what appeared to be an attempt to try to discourage the participation of some people in the Census. And then the Census in the end, we send people out, we to try and find those people who can't be counted. But it requires in the end a lot of trust and support from the population to be willing to answer these questions. It involves also a lot of work with trusted partners and community groups. And the citizenship questions seemed like it was particularly targeted at trying to decrease the participation of migrants and migrant communities, people living around migrants to the United States.

One could see how the story of weaponization could very well be used to try to increase the concern of groups like that. So this is a story which is tricky because we tell it and we need to tell it in order to make sure that people's data is secure and that people are being protected. But it's also really important to recognize that there are these counterbalancing forces, where populations need to be able to be visible in Census statistics in order to then have their needs met, in order to get the funding that they deserve, in order for representation in politics to be made available to them. So that's kind of one factor.

The other factor we could think about is that there has been concern about some of the methods that the Census Bureau has been having to take to try to deal with changing technological challenges as it's thinking about how it produces statistical tables. For quite a long time, actually, for 30, 40, 50 years, the Census Bureau has recognized that if you produced enough kinds of statistical tables and materials, and especially at fine grained levels of detail, it becomes possible to infer, by putting together information, the identity of individuals. And it's strictly not allowed to do this. And so for the 2020 Census, it is for the first time using this disclosure avoidance procedure called differential privacy, which has been controversial particularly among so many data users because of the ways in which it intentionally adds noise to data that could make in some cases possibly too fuzzy some of the material that is being produced at low levels.

But there are strong cases for needing to really ensure that data will be not identifiable, especially when we put it in the context of other kinds of debates about, for instance, trying to add sexual orientation and gender identity questions to the Census. And we think about how those sorts of questions, in light of laws making it quite dangerous to identify as trans, for instance, could make this data, which seems to some people maybe somewhat innocuous, actually quite dangerous if it were released and people could figure out ways to re-identify it from Census records.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

Thank you for that. While you were talking about ways that the Census was designed and might not necessarily have been used as originally intended, that had me thinking about redistricting. Do you touch on that at all in your book?

Dan Bouk:

So I touch only very briefly on redistricting. Maybe for listeners it's useful to just talk about some of these terms. When a Census is taken, the reason there's a Census in the first place is because the Constitution requires it, and requires it so that every 10 years each state will have as many representatives as its share of population would seem to dictate. And so one of the things about the 1940 Census and this entire period from the 1920s through the 1940s is it marks a significant shift in the way in which that first level of representation, the process by which representation is determined, how that worked. This is a process we call apportionment or reapportionment, before we ever get to redistricting. And so after you apportion to each state and say, "This state gets so many representatives in the House or this many votes in the electoral college, this state gets so many..." Then after that states

then take this data and they use that to draw legislative lines to determine who gets to vote for which representative seat in all their states.

So I talk a little bit about redistricting, but talk much more about this process of apportionment. Because it was really between 1920 and 1940 that our modern system of apportionment took shape. And it was really startling to me actually to realize that the times we live in and the system we live in is dramatically different than it was for much of American history. So for most of the time in which the Census existed up until 1920, after every Census Congress would get the state population totals from the Census and then would debate and create a new law that would declare, "The House will have this many seats and this will be how it will be proportioned."

And it would use mathematics to try to figure out how to get the proportions right. And they never work out quite right because if you did it quite right then one state would have 12.75 representatives, which we haven't yet figured out how to do. We require people to behold numbers. And so as a result, that could be kind of complicated. But the House would negotiate this. And one of the kind of traditional solutions was to just keep increasing the House size until no states or very few states lost any house seats. So now we're used to it, that a Census happens and a number of states that either are growing more slowly than others or might even be losing population, they might lose a seat in the House. For most of American history up to 1920, that was not by any means the norm. It was quite the opposite.

The benefit of this was that as the population grew, the number of representatives of that population also grew, not quite in the same line, but to some degree. Beginning in 1920, Congress decided that the size of the House should be frozen at, for least the time being, at 435 seats, which is where it is now. And what they then immediately found out was that it was impossible to pass a law apportioning at 435 seats, because there were just too many states and too many representatives that didn't have an interest in doing this. And so for all of the 1920s, there was a complete failure to do any apportionment law. So they created then a new system as a kind of insurance that said, "If Congress fails to do this, then we'll have this automatic procedure that will use this set algorithm to apportion the seats behind. But we'll give Congress first a little bit of a window to try this."

So 1931, there is a Census in '30, '31, Congress failed to act. And so the automatic procedure kicked in. In 1940, there was a Census in 1941, Congress failed to act, so the automatic procedure kicked in. But then the Democrats who were in power in Congress realized that the automatic procedure that they were using gave a seat to Michigan, which was mainly Republican, instead of to I think Alabama, which was pretty solidly Democratic. And so they said, "Well, if we use a different method, we'll give the seat to Alabama instead of Michigan." So they passed a new law that used that new method, the method we now currently use to do all apportionment, giving the seat to Alabama. And in the process, they kind of removed that window of time for Congress to act. And we since then have this procedure by which there's always an automatic apportionment of seats in the House. The long-term upshot of that for me is that it also froze in place this House at 435 seats, to the point where I, when I first encountered this, just thought that was the natural size of the House of Representatives, couldn't have imagined that there'd be anything different.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

Wow.

Annalee Shelton:

No way.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

That is amazing.

Dan Bouk:

Yeah. I did not expect that I would, as I started this project, end up being a person walking around saying, "We should increase the size of the House of Representatives." Particularly given the way in which we ordinary citizens tend to, and residents and folks, talk about Congress, right?

Dory Knight-Ingram:

Mm-hmm.

Dan Bouk:

Congress. But if you-

Dory Knight-Ingram:

It's in stone tablets and must never be changed.

Dan Bouk:

Yeah. But if we believe in democracy, then we probably should believe in people having more representation rather than less.

Annalee Shelton:

Yes. I had no idea. That is absolutely fascinating. I too thought that the 435 set in stone, this is what we do. And it just goes to show for all the years of history that I had, the things that impact my life I wasn't even aware of. So that is fascinating. If you don't mind, I want to return to something that you started to talk about. So you started to talk about some of the women at the Census and these people coming specifically to meet them. And I think readers, it's no surprise that much of the book is about decisions that are made by men. And also you have some great stories about women and queer folks. And I would love for you to talk about that a little bit. We got to talk about it a little bit before we started recording, and I wish we had been recording that moment. So yeah, dig in there.

Dan Bouk:

One of the interesting things about studying knowledge being made in the 19th and 20th century is that if you look in elite universities, you're likely to find spaces dominated by men, dominated by white men, and even a limited kind of white men even, based on the sense of how the white race was constructed through much of this period. So in my first book when I was talking about life insurance, one of the things that was interesting was how men who were Jewish and who therefore were excluded or had a harder time getting academic jobs, someone like Louis Dublin, could find a place and become a public intellectual through a life insurance company. And similarly there we see a lot of women employed and women able to do work that they otherwise would have a hard time being employed to do in academia at that period, at that time.

Similarly, the government also proves to be a place in which women can have opportunities and would find opportunities that otherwise might be difficult for them to get access to. That does not mean they did not face... There's a lot of negatives there. They did face discrimination in the course of that work. So Alberti Fudre, for instance, about whom I was talking, she almost never had a title that didn't say assistant in it, even as she was very clearly the most talented mathematician at the Census Bureau. The

chief statistician I remember at one point is writing to a colleague and saying basically, "Well, I don't really understand this math, but Fudre does, and so I have her take care of this." And yet, still towards the end of her career, as the 1940 Census is getting started, they end up hiring a guy to be her boss doing the work that she's been doing for 20 years. And so it is both a place in which we can see the really important work being done by women, but we also see the continued way in which sexism limited the possibilities of those women.

Another person I talk about in the book who I find really fascinating in general is Margaret Scattergood. She described herself as doing for the labor unions what the CIA did for the nation. Which is to say that she was an employee of the American Federation of Labor, the AFL. And she was sent as a researcher in the stead of the president of the AFL to this meeting in 1939, when the folk I think of as the question men, when this group of almost entirely white men, just a handful of women, including Scattergood, showed up at the Department of Commerce in the auditorium to go over the questions that were going to be asked in 1940.

So the Census Bureau would then have these slogans later that said things like, "You cannot know your country unless your country knows you." But how your country gets to know you and how you get to know the country is going to be dictated by who's in that room deciding what the questions are. So in that sense, it's really important to think about who gets to be in those rooms, who gets a voice and a say in deciding how people will be represented. So I went in and tried to understand a little bit more of the stories of some of those people in the room.

Now, Margaret Scattergood is interesting because then when she shows up in the 1940 Census, she is living in what appears by all accounts to be a very nice house in rural Virginia. And she's living with Florence Thorn, who is a coworker, I think kind of her boss at the AFL. And then they also have living with them a maid, I think May Stotts, but I'm not entirely sure of that name. I'd have to look that up. I've got my book in front of me, so I will do that. When in doubt...

Annalee Shelton:

Listeners, Dan has literally just picked up his book from a shelf behind him. It's fantastic.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

With a giant smile on his face.

Annalee Shelton:

Yep.

Dan Bouk:

So it was Florence Thorn is listed, and then next to her name is head. Then Margaret Scattergood, and next to her name is partner. And then May Stotts Allen, and next to her name is maid. And this is their household. So one of the things we maybe forget about a Census is that it's not really a count of individuals. It ultimately counts individuals, but it is a count of households. And before a person can be counted, they have to be fit into a household. And sometimes then those relationships are relationships of family. Sometimes they're other kinds of intimacy. And sometimes, as we can see here, they're about status, like a survival status or an employment status.

Now, it was that term partner that got me particularly interested. What is a partner? And somebody else had asked me this question and I thought, "I don't know." I hadn't really run into this. It doesn't show up in most of the instructions given to enumerators. Why did a person call themselves a partner? And this

was one of the questions that I investigated. And I'm tempted to tell readers that I'm not going to tell them too much more about it 'cause I want them to go and find the book to figure this out. But I certainly approached it with this question of, "Does this mean I'm seeing intimate relationships?" And ultimately the answer is maybe, but maybe not.

What we're certainly seeing is queerness in a different sense. We're seeing queer relationships where people are living in family formations and household formations that don't fit the norms that the people in DC expected, that aren't a male head of household with a woman as wife and then children. And instead that can be relationships of people in same-sex partnerships. It can be people who are men and women living together, both married but not married to one another and listing as partnerships. It can be groups of men, groups of women, people living as workers in places. But one of the really interesting trends was the way in which all of these partnerships, they came in clumps, they tended to come in communities and it seemed to be a way in which particular people in kind of marginal communities found a way to make themselves visible to the statistical system.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

[inaudible 00:37:54].

Annalee Shelton:

That is so cool. Sorry, I talked over you, Dory, but I just think it is so interesting to look into how people have been living their lives since there have been people, and then we make these boxes and whether or not the boxes work, people are still living their lives.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

Yep. And I'm sure we still have boxes that don't work and people have to select something.

Annalee Shelton:

Mm-hmm.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

So that's cool. Well looking forward to seeing that discovery about what a partner would've been in 1940. So I think, let's see, I'm looking at the time and I think we're going to go in a little bit of a different direction. So because this is Data Brunch, let's talk about brunch. So Dan, if you had the perfect brunch on your table, what would it be?

Dan Bouk:

The perfect brunch. So I'm going to travel in space and across national lines here for this, because you've allowed me to think in my imaginative space. And so I have a real soft spot. I've lived now for a couple of short stints in Berlin. And my favorite thing to do in Berlin is to wander over to a bakery and then order just a handful of different breads and rolls and sweet breads, more than I could possibly eat on my own. And then I get to go into the office and tear them in pieces and eat pieces of my own and leave the scraps for other folks to then pick up as well. So this is not an elegant brunch, I realize it's only vaguely social and your readers are going to take away the wrong impression about me. But ultimately that with a nice cup of coffee sounds pretty good. And then I'm going to go read some boring stuff. So there you go.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

And then your coworkers get to eat some too. So what's better than that?

Dan Bouk:

Yeah, assuming I don't break my attempt at self-discipline and just eat it all.

Annalee Shelton:

Oh, a hundred percent. I have a lovely memory of being in Berlin and getting this bread that was shaped like a person and fully intending to eat only a leg, but yeah, downed the whole thing. But yeah, and I kind of love the idea you were saying you would go and read something boring. For me when I go to brunch sometimes... It's lovely to go with other people, but sometimes it's just nice to take yourself out to brunch with a really great book. And coming full circle, this is the book that I want to be taking to my brunch so that I can be digging into these stories. It's so cool to get to hear about this. Thank you so much for spending all this time with us.

Dan Bouk:

Thank you. I really appreciate it. This is fun.

Annalee Shelton:

It is fun. Can you tell listeners if they are interested in this book, where can they get it? If they wanted to learn more about the work that you do, where can they find that?

Dan Bouk:

Yes, for sure. So if you want to know more about me, you can of course just use Google. But you can find me at my blog or website shroudedincloaksofboringness.com, which I'm very proud of. And this book is, you can get it from bookshops, you can get it from your local bookstore. Or I happen to know it's in a lot of libraries, and so I encourage you to go and check it out from your library, whether it's at the University of Michigan or at a public library near you.

Annalee Shelton:

We were talking about... Were we talking about this? You were going to go see if you could visit it at your local library. Did you ever get to go visit it?

Dan Bouk:

I did. So I wrote about this in one of my newsletters that... I guess you can follow me in my newsletter.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

Yes. That's what I thought.

Dan Bouk:

You could find that at shroudedincloaksofboringness.com. I did so much work at the New York Public Library on this book, and I spent so much time finding books there. I would just wander in and pick up books. And so the idea that this book was going to be in the New York Public Library sitting there was really exciting to me. And also terrifying, because if you walk in there and it's just sitting there with no

one looking at it, how devastating that is. And so indeed, I walked into my local branch in Inwood at the northern tip of Manhattan, and there were two copies sitting there. And my local librarian had given it a little tag saying that it was a really local author who had written it, as indeed I lived around the corner. And they let me sign and put a little stamp in it that says, "1940 Census cooperate," with the slogan and the stamp that was used in 1940. So I'm happy to report that as of the last time I checked, both those copies have been taken out. So...

Annalee Shelton:

Ah, love it. It is beloved, out in the wild.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

I just added Shrouded in Cloaks of Boringness to our show notes, so that'll be there for our listeners to see. All right. I think that is the end of our interview. Wow.

Annalee Shelton:

Dan, is there anything else you want to mention before we head out?

Dan Bouk:

I can't imagine. I hope people enjoy their brunches.

Annalee Shelton:

With their books and their various pastries.

Dan Bouk:

Indeed.

Annalee Shelton:

And that's the end of the episode. Thank you for being with us.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

And if you aren't already, subscribe now on Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. Also, tell us what you like to hear by filling out the feedback form on our website and share your thoughts on social media using #databrunch.

Annalee Shelton:

Thank you as always to the over 800 members of ICPSR. This podcast wouldn't be possible without the ICPSR members. And a special thank you to our producer, Scott Campbell. Cheers, hooray, cheers.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

And you can get in touch with us by visiting our website, icpsr.umich, U-M-I-C-H, .edu, or emailing us at icpsr-podcast@umich.edu.

Annalee Shelton:

I'm Anna.

Dory Knight-Ingram:

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

Annalee Shelton:

Do you know I nearly said, "I'm Dory." I'll never get it right.