

Editorial LIS Extends to the Research Frontier

Advancements in research procedures (research designs and methodologies) and in the development of reliability and validity indicators occur on a cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary basis. Researchers obviously should monitor these developments and, when appropriate, adapt them to their investigations. However, as Jeffrey N. Gatten indicates in a recent C&RL article, "a researcher investigating an interdisciplinary phenomenon . . . [may approach] the topic from a specific research paradigm rooted in a traditional structure of knowledge. The paradigm may force a particular perspective or approach to conducting research."1

Gatten further observes "that low subject dispersion within the professional literature of library science indicates little effort by librarians at looking towards another discipline . . . for theory or methodology."2 A number of library science researchers "adopt unsophisticated analytical techniques and utilize limited theframeworks."3 They oretical may depend exclusively on a mailed or handdistributed questionnaire and either use descriptive statistics, rather than inferential statistics, or forego any statistical analysis.4

Gatten labels library science as an "applied discipline," one that often fails to reference in its literature "relevant research from other disciplines."⁵ The failure of "paradigmatic structures" to "cross the traditional boundaries of established disciplines ... [inhibits] interdisciplinary [and cross-disciplinary] research."⁶ This editorial does not dispute Gatten's findings, the citation patterns of a number of library and information science (LIS) researchers, or the conclusion that LIS as an "applied discipline appears to be more self-contained" than a "research discipline," such as sociology.⁷

Nonetheless, LIS can draw (and has done so) on procedures and indicators of reliability and validity developed in disciplines such as anthropology, education, management, psychology, public administration, public policy, and sociology. Periodicals, such as Public Opinion Quarterly, and treatises produced by Sage and other publishers present procedural discussions, assessments, and investigations. In fact, guides, such as the Handbook of Research Design and Social Measurement,8 offer excellent synopses of procedural alternatives and make it more convenient for neophyte researchers to improve the quality and format of their data collection instruments.

Textbooks, monographs, periodicals, and treatises produced outside LIS apparently infrequently (if at all) reference the procedural, reliability, and validity advancements emanating from LIS. In fact, some readers of this editorial may be surprised to learn that there are such advancements. LIS has made a positive contribution to cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary research relating to bibliometrics, unobtrusive testing, focus group interviewing, and in-person interviewing of ethnic-linguistic gatekeepers,9 to name a few areas. For example, Terence Crowley and Thomas Childers nudged unobtrusive testing in a new direction,¹⁰ while Charles R. McClure and I combined unobtrusive testing with an experimental design and applied twenty-five indicators of reliability and validity to our work." McClure et al. combined focus group interviewing with a quantitative data collection technique, and included measures of reliability and validity.¹² Based on the premise that information is culture specific, Cheryl Metoyer-Duran adapted traditional interviewer training techniques to reveal any non-English language patterns or cultural behaviors that might affect a study's reliability and validity.¹³

With some universities questioning the continuation of LIS schools,¹⁴ there is need for the conduct and reporting of more procedural studies and their inclusion in the published literature. LIS research-oriented journals, as well as funding organizations, ought to be supportive of such research.

What else can be done? We might:

- review research-based books produced in other professions and disciplines, noting the omission of important LIS procedural studies and coverage of the types of evaluations encountered in complex organizations, such as libraries and information centers;
- conduct procedural and other types of research with investigators from other professions and disciplines, thereby altering the self-contained paradigm noted by Gatten;
- expect more LIS faculty directing doctoral students, and the students themselves, to be well versed and experienced in the conduct of different types of research and the use of various theoretical frameworks;
- offer special awards and prizes for such research; and
- attend sessions of professional associations in which researchers present procedural studies.

However, implementation of suggestions such as these will have minimal impact as long as many librarians and library school educators demean or ignore the value of the LIS research literature and prize the literatures of other professions and disciplines more than they do their own.¹⁵ Clearly, it is imperative to attack the prevailing misperceptions about LIS literature if LIS is to mature as a profession and discipline and if we expect others to use and value our literature.

Mary Jo Lynch issued a challenge: change "the connection between research and librarianship . . . from one that is uneasy to one that is firm."¹⁶ To meet the challenge, she stressed that

leaders in the field need to pay careful attention to several factors: to the numerous meanings of the word research and the different ways each kind of research affects librarianship; to educational programs that develop an ability to understand and conduct scientific research; to publications and programming that discuss work in progress and disseminate final results; to increasing the availability of funding; and, finally, to the incorporation of a research perspective into the way librarians think about what they do.¹⁷

An added challenge is to focus on the type of research that makes a procedural contribution or gains recognition for LIS in the research methods literatures of other professions and disciplines.

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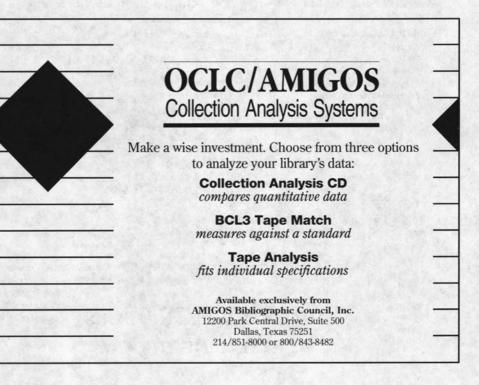
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