

OPENING REMARKS

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We in Canada find ourselves in a dichotomous situation with regard to the use of administrative records for statistical applications. On the one hand, an array of forces are prodding us to use them as a means of reducing or even eliminating respondent burden and to reduce the cost of direct data collection. On the other hand, still other forces are raising concerns about a massive invasion of privacy and the lack of control over the contents and quality control procedures associated with the administrative source documents.

As an occasional observer, I am only somewhat familiar with the issues concerning the statistical uses of administrative records in the United States. I assume that your concerns and debates are different from ours. In Statistics Canada, for example, we conduct and hold the census records for manufacturing, population, and so on; the monthly records for the Canadian Labour Force Survey; and many other business and household survey records. We also obtain a variety of micro-administrative records -- corporation income tax returns, personal income tax returns, vital statistics records, court records, and so on.

Perhaps some of you may believe that we are fortunate, that we are in a position that many of you might envy. Indeed, that seems to be a

reasonable way to interpret the variety of census, survey and administrative records files that are held by Statistics Canada. It is not, however, so simple. The mere possession of these data and records necessitates that we be highly circumspect in our handling and use of these records, that we neither be seen to be nor be suspected of being other than statisticians plying a noble and honorable profession. Unfortunately, we are not paragons of perfection. So, while you may wish to wear our crown, it is a heavy one but one that we in Statistics Canada are resolved not to forsake. As is so often the case, we are not judged on the basis of past successes but on current excesses and current failures alone.

At the Washington Meeting of the American Statistical Association in 1979, Dan Garnick and Maria Gonzalez reported on the work of the interagency Subcommittee on the Statistical Uses of Administrative Records. They asked the following question: "Where do we go from here?"

From my perspective as an outsider, this morning's panel discussion will again be addressing their rhetorical question. In Statistics Canada, with a centralized statistical agency, we would have difficulty answering this question. I can only assume that, with the decentralized U.S. statistical system, the answer will be as elusive for you to define as it has been for us.