

Research and Publication Practices of Social Science Faculty: A Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract: This paper provides an overview of a dissertation in which I am applying narrative inquiry to study the research practices of social science faculty at US universities classified as “Doctoral Universities – Very High Research Activity” (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education). The purpose of this exploratory study is to better understand the nature of the research and publication practices of social science faculty from the origin of their research problem through the dissemination of their findings. I plan to interview social science scholars about their research practices using an ethnographic approach in which participants are asked a “specific grand tour question” (Spradley, 1979/2016). Each participant will be invited to tell the story of their most recent research project leading to publication. Findings from the study may have significant implications for academic libraries and librarians. Equipped with an improved understanding of the research and publication practices of social science research faculty, academic libraries and librarians will be better positioned to design and deliver more effective services, supply rich and appropriate access to needed materials, hire and develop appropriate staff, and shape the development of library facilities to better meet the needs of faculty.

Keywords: Academic libraries, higher education, narrative inquiry, research practices, social science faculty

1. Introduction

The services and resources provided by academic libraries enable and support the university missions of teaching and research. Traditionally, research libraries have largely existed to support the scholarly endeavor. The services and resources provided by research libraries have changed considerably in the last thirty years. The way in which faculty—and for the focus of this study, social science faculty—engage in the research process has changed as well. The objective of the present study is to gain a better understanding of the research and publication practices of social science faculty at US universities classified as “Doctoral Universities – Very High Research Activity” (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education). Herein I will refer to these schools as research-intensive universities.

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Studies of information seeking, information needs, and information behavior of scholars in a variety of disciplines have been quite common since the 1960s (cf. Case, 2002; Case, 2007; Case, 2012; Case & Given, 2016). Although in recent years many studies of specific aspects of faculty research have been conducted, the process has not been extensively researched at its broadest level (Kyvik, 2013; Falciani-White, 2016). This qualitative study—employing narrative inquiry—aims to explore the entire course of social science faculty research from the origin of the research problem through publication of the findings. The approach used in this study is intentionally broad so as to produce a comprehensive picture of the challenges faced by social science faculty as they conduct research.

This paper will provide an overview of the dissertation, including the background, problem statement, motivation, brief review of the literature, purpose, research questions, research design, scope, and significance.

2. Background

In the preface to *Narrative Analysis* (1993), Riessman wrote, “the construction of any work always bears the mark of the person who created it. So, before formally discussing narrative analysis, I begin by locating myself and the contexts that shaped the volume and authorize its point of view” (p. v).

In this paper, I will do the same. Narrative inquiry allows the author to take a narrative approach to communicating the background and context of the research. In this section, I will attempt to describe—from my point of view—the relationship between academic library staff and research faculty thirty years ago. I will also describe how technology employed in academic libraries has changed during these same years, call attention to the ways in which changes in technology have transformed the ways faculty conduct research, and suggest that—for many of us—the connection between those working in the library and research faculty has been largely lost.

2.1 Personal Narrative

During my senior year of college (1987-1988), I was a student assistant in the Acquisitions Department at the Joseph P. Healey Library at the University of Massachusetts Boston. After graduation, I worked for a year (1988-1989) in the Circulation Department at the Portland Public Library, Portland, Maine.

Following a move to the Midwest, I worked as a staff member in the Mathematics Library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (1990-1992). At that time, the library system at Illinois was still largely decentralized, and many departmental libraries were located in the same buildings as the departments they served. This was true of mathematics. Because of this

adjacency, it was convenient for the faculty to come to the library regularly. At that time, the Mathematics Library was staffed by a math librarian, a library technical assistant (staff), a library clerk (staff), a graduate assistant, and about ten student workers. As the library clerk, one of my duties was to unwrap and process the new journals that came in each day and to have them available for browsing on the new journals shelf by 10 a.m. My staff colleague was responsible for processing the new books that had arrived from cataloguing, and to have those books available for browsing on the new book shelf by 10 a.m.

Members of the Mathematics Department who were not teaching at that hour arrived punctually to browse the new journals and the new books. For the most part, those of us who worked in the library saw, greeted, and perhaps served some members of the mathematics faculty every day. Over time, I learned many of their names, knew their general areas of expertise, and—in a few cases—knew what they were famous for. However, not being a math person, I took no particular interest in their work. I suspect if I had worked in a departmental library serving a discipline of interest to me, I might have been more engaged with the faculty I served. The math librarian, however, was deeply engaged with the math department and certainly knew the current focus of research for many of the faculty. My colleagues at Texas A&M University Libraries who have worked in public services for many years have confirmed that they also once had cordial relationships with individual members of the faculty—and hence, knew their names, knew their areas of expertise, and had some familiarity with their current work.

Following a two-year stint at the Mathematics Library, I worked at Central Circulation in the Main Library at Illinois (1992-1994). I later moved to Carbondale, Illinois to pursue a second undergraduate degree. I worked as a student worker in the Order Department at the Delyte W. Morris Library at Southern Illinois University Carbondale (1995-1996), then as a staff person in the Technical Services Department at the Law Library (1996-1997), and later returned to Morris Library to work in the Database Management Unit (1997-1999).

Upon graduation, I moved to Iowa. I supervised circulation at the Russell D. Cole Library, Cornell College, Mount Vernon, Iowa (2000-2003), during which time I earned a Master of Arts in library science from the University of Iowa (2004). During my final semester, I completed a practicum in the library at Grinnell College, Grinnell, Iowa (2004).

I served in my first professional position as Collection Development Librarian, at the Giesler Library, Central College, Pella, Iowa (2004-2006). I then worked as Access Services Librarian at the Christopher Center for Library and Information Resources at Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Indiana (2006-

2010), and later as Access Services Team Leader, University Library, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (2010-2015). Since 2015, I have been the Director of Public Services, Sterling C. Evans Library, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas. My employment experience—both as a staff member and a professional—has provided first-hand knowledge of how faculty use library resources and services—and how that use has changed over time.

2.2 Changes in Technology

Throughout this thirty-year period, significant technological changes occurred which have had an enormous impact on academic librarianship. A brief overview of these changes is presented to serve as a reminder of the extent to which library services and access to resources have changed.

In the 1980s, bibliographies indexing the journal literature had begun to become available via CD-ROM for direct use by library users, replacing mediated searches conducted by librarians. Initially, each product released on CD-ROM (e.g., SilverPlatter) was available only on dedicated machines—one CD (or set) per machine. In the late 1980s, a system for networking CD-ROMs across local area networks became available (e.g., MultiPlatter). During the time that I worked in the Math Library, *Mathematical Reviews*, the review publication of the mathematical sciences published by the American Mathematical Society, became available as a CD-ROM. The graduate assistant working in the Math Library at that time was responsible for installing and maintaining access to this CD-ROM on a dedicated machine. In the 1990s, database products such as SilverPlatter and Ovid would migrate to the web, as would the CD-ROM version of *Mathematical Reviews*, which would later become MathSciNet.

In the 1970s and 1980s, card catalogues and shelf lists were supplanted by online catalogues. The cards, drawers, and cabinets have since been discarded; the production and distribution of cards by the Library of Congress and commercial suppliers has ceased. When I began working at the University of Illinois, the libraries used a locally-developed catalogue which provided access to the bibliographic and holdings information for the University Libraries' vast collections. I would later work in libraries that used commercial library management systems, namely Millennium (Innovative Interfaces,) Symphony (Sirsi Dynix), and Voyager (Ex Libris Group).

In 1993, the Mosaic web browser, developed at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA), located at the University of Illinois, was released, which made widespread access to the World Wide Web and the Internet possible. Briefly the most popular browser, Mosaic was soon supplanted by Netscape Navigator, which in turn was overtaken by Microsoft's Internet Explorer. Firefox, though popular, never dominated the market. Google's

Chrome browser, which debuted in 2008, became the most popular browser in 2012. Throughout the nineties, a number of search engines which enabled users to search for documents on the World Wide Web were launched, including Lycos (1994), AltaVista (1995), Excite (1995), Yahoo! (1995), Ask Jeeves (1996), HotBot (1996), Northern Light (1997), and Google (1998). Google Scholar, launched in 2004, has enabled scholars to search for content from books, academic journals, conference papers, theses and dissertations, various types of grey literature, and other scholarly literature. The development of browsers, coupled with the development of robust search engines, has entirely changed the process by which people access information. This development has obviously had an enormous impact on librarianship and scholarship.

Cooperative cataloguing and shared catalogues were first developed in the 1970s, beginning with the Ohio College Library Center (OCLC). Today, OCLC and member libraries cooperatively produce and maintain WorldCat, an online union catalogue of OCLC member libraries. The shared catalogue serves as the backbone for the robust interlibrary loan system that most academic and public libraries in the U.S. use to borrow materials from (and lend materials to) one another.

As mentioned above, paper indexes began to shift to CD-ROM in the 1980s, and then later to the web. Over time these indexes began to include the full text of the periodicals they indexed, thus online indexes became online databases. Traditional reference tools exhibited a parallel shift from paper to CD-ROM to web-based versions. Many standard reference tools, not very long ago available only in paper, are now available exclusively as online tools. Some reference tools—most notably Wikipedia (launched in 2001)—were born digital.

We are now in the midst of a transition from books published only in paper to books published in an electronic format. Amazon launched the first of its Kindle readers in 2007. Enormously successful, these devices have proven to be very popular for those reading for entertainment. That said, it is clear that in higher education, the transition from paper to electronic books has not been as successful as the transition of journal content from print to electronic. In 2011, Amazon's e-book sales exceeded print book sales for the first time, however, e-book sales globally has not yet surpassed print book sales. In recent years e-book sales have in fact declined. In higher education, there remains a strong preference among many users of academic libraries for print versions of academic books. Efforts at launching e-only textbooks have fared poorly; though, in the face of soaring textbook costs, it looks as if open education resources are beginning to become a viable option.

Finally, the world of scholarly publishing has changed dramatically. There has been a series of consolidations among the publishers of journal content during the past several decades. In addition, there has been a significant decline in the sales of scholarly books, which has negatively affected some publishers of scholarly books—especially university presses. Well-established (but not particularly efficient) systems for the publication of research have been disrupted by the advent of online systems which have changed methods of submission, production, review, and distribution. New and changing avenues of dissemination have made decisions about publication more complex than they were in the past. Most federal funding of research now generally requires free access to the results of that research which has contributed to the development of campus-based repositories of scholarly output. Similarly, relatively recent changes in funding requirements now dictate that researchers who are seeking grant funding from particular federal agencies must include a data plan in their funding proposals—usually a plan which allows free access to the data generated by the research. This is especially significant as libraries in most research-intensive universities have in recent years developed scholarly repositories and many are now developing data repositories. This has created opportunities for academic libraries and librarians that did not previously exist.

2.3 Changes in How Faculty Conduct Research

The many technological changes which have occurred over the past thirty years—outlined above—have significantly influenced and altered the services and resources offered by the library. Hence, I propose that the way in which faculty conduct research has changed as well. For example, faculty can now search the catalogue remotely—from home, from their office, from the local coffee shop, or from anywhere in the world with a connection to the web. On many campuses, faculty can request delivery of books from the collection to their office; hence, no trip to the library is needed. On some campuses, the same is true for borrowing materials from other libraries via interlibrary loan. Fulltext databases, reference materials, and many newly-published books are now available electronically. Search engines, Google Scholar, and repositories have added to the ways in which faculty can access information. Scholars have an abundance of tools that aid the research and writing process, such as citation management software (EndNote, RefWorks, Zotero), notetaking applications (Evernote, OneNote), and other online tools. Storage options have changed as well. I believe that most scholars are working today in ways that are significantly different than how they would have conducted research thirty, twenty, and perhaps just ten years ago.

2.4 A Lost Connection

For the most part, disciplinary faculty members no longer come into the library on a regular basis. There is little interaction between disciplinary faculty and

librarians or library staff members. Not only do many of us no longer know the names of faculty members, know their areas of expertise, or are familiar with their work—we don't even know them at all. A colleague (a librarian) recently quipped that the only reason she has actually met any disciplinary faculty while working at this university is because they pick up their children at day-care at the same time. I believe that many of us have largely lost our connection with faculty—and hence our knowledge of how faculty conduct their research. Ultimately, a failure to understand current research practices suggests that academic libraries and librarians may not be adequately supporting the University's mission of teaching and research.

3. Problem Statement

Academic libraries strive to provide innovative services and quality resources to facilitate student learning and support faculty teaching and research. Given the degree to which academic libraries have changed in recent years—especially in light of the transition to electronic access to resources—many practicing academic librarians may no longer have an especially clear understanding of how faculty conduct research or how they use the library. There are, of course, exceptions; art and music librarians come to mind—as well as others who work in departmental libraries that have resisted consolidation and remain closely linked to the departments that they serve; these librarians may indeed have an excellent understanding of current faculty work practices.

When libraries and librarians do not fully understand current faculty research practices, they may fail to deliver services and resources that support faculty research. As the ways in which information is made accessible continue to change, so do the ways in which faculty conduct research. With the advent of open access publication options and the development of repositories for scholarly publications (as well as new expectations related to the storage and sharing of data), faculty publication practices have in recent years become a particular area of importance for librarians at research-intensive institutions. Hence, this study is focused on both research practices and publication practices. The two are very closely connected; both areas now intersect with services provided by libraries at research-intensive universities.

4. Motivation

My initial interest in this topic came as a result of my work as an academic librarian and my earlier departmental liaison assignments which included the provision of library instruction, primarily for undergraduate students. I was teaching during a period of time when there was a great deal of interest in how students—especially undergraduates—went about their work. I was particularly intrigued with a number of research projects designed to gain a better understanding of undergraduate work practices and undergraduate use of library

services (cf. Duke & Asher, 2011; Foster, 2013; Foster & Gibbons, 2007; Head & Eisenberg, 2009; OCLC, 2005). I became interested in understanding the work practices and the use of library services by faculty and I began to look for studies similar to those that had been conducted with undergraduates.

5. A Brief Review of the Literature

Palmer, Tefteau, & Pirmann (2009) asserted that in recent years “the literature on scholarly practices and information use has been growing” (p. 3). That said, Kyvik (2013), in a study of the academic researcher role, found it “surprising that there has not been any comprehensive analysis of the various functions that are related to the researcher role” (p. 525), and Falciani-White (2016), in a study of faculty research practices, asserted that “academic research as it is conducted at its broadest level has not been extensively researched” (p. 118). Though the latter two statements seemingly contradict the first point of view, all are arguably correct. There have indeed been many studies of scholarly practices and information use, but it is important to note that the majority of these studies tend to be about specific aspects of the research process, while only a few studies of faculty research and publication practices as an interconnected whole have been published.

Ithaka S+R, a non-profit group offering research and strategic guidance to the academic community, conducts a survey of US higher education faculty members every three years, which tracks “the changing research, teaching, and information usage practices of faculty members since the early days of the digital transformation” (Wolff-Eisenberg, Rod, & Schonfeld, 2016, p. 6). In my own research, I will employ a qualitative approach toward finding answers to the how and why questions that the quantitative approach employed by the *Ithaka Survey* does not address. I found other fairly large studies focused on particular aspects of the work of scholars as both producers and users of research (e.g., Harley, Acord, Earl-Novell, Lawrence, & King, 2010; Palmer et al., 2009).

I also found a number of smaller-scale studies, usually—but not always—focused on a single discipline. Several smaller, more focused studies have looked at the information behaviors of faculty in specific disciplinary areas, including, for example, business (Hoppenfeld & Smith, 2014), engineering (Robbins, Engel, & Kulp, 2011), and education (Rupp-Serrano & Robbins, 2013). Most of these studies have generally used a mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches. However, a study of faculty research and publication practices of education and behavioral science faculty by Zoellner, Hines, Keenan, and Samson, (2015) employed a qualitative approach.

The present study will explore the entire process of faculty research from the origination of the research problem through presentation and/or publication of the findings using a qualitative lens. Particular focus will be on those parts of the research life cycle that intersect with library services and resources.

6. Purpose

The ways in which faculty conduct research appears to vary broadly across disciplines. Many of us who work in academic libraries share a general assumption that humanities scholars are the most frequent and regular users of a library's physical collection, followed by those in the social sciences, depending upon their discipline. Those in the sciences, though infrequent users of the library's physical resources, have high expectations with regard to online access to current journal literature. Use of the library by faculty teaching in the professional schools appears to vary widely.

The primary purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the current practices of social science faculty in order for libraries and librarians to better serve these scholars. More explicitly, it would be useful for academic librarians to have a better understanding of:

- (1) How topics originate;
- (2) Where faculty begin their research;
- (3) How they go about conducting a literature search;
- (4) If and how they use databases provided by the library;
- (5) If and how they use Google Scholar;
- (6) If and how they find information on the open web;
- (7) Preferences for accessing and using scholarly books (i.e., print vs. digital);
- (8) How source material is organized and managed during the research and writing process;
- (9) If and how faculty use tools intended to facilitate the research and writing process (e.g., citation management software or notetaking applications);
- (10) If and how data gathered during research is stored or preserved upon completion of the project;
- (11) The role of collaboration, communication, and consultation; and
- (12) How faculty make decisions regarding research dissemination, specifically how and where they choose to make the products of their scholarly research available.

7. Research Questions

Based on a preliminary consideration of the research problem and a survey of the literature, the following research questions have been developed:

Primary question:

What is the nature of research and publication practices among social science faculty at research-intensive universities?

Secondary questions:

(a) Where and how do elements of the research life cycle intersect with services and resources provided by the library?

(b) Which of those intersections are most challenging for research faculty, and why?

8. Research Design

Qualitative research is an effective way to understand and make sense of the world around us. A qualitative approach is well-suited to this study because I am trying to learn about and understand the various ways that particular individuals both view and participate in the world around them, as well as make sense of their experiences. Subjective and experiential data are needed to build understanding. Beck and Manuel (2008) explained “qualitative research takes a sense-making approach to interpreting data and phenomena. The desired outcome of a qualitative study is to understand how people think about processes” (p. 67).

The narrative approach used in this study is intentionally broad so as to produce a comprehensive picture of the challenges faced by social science faculty as they conduct research. Once a clear picture of that process comes into view, I hope to identify opportunities for academic libraries and librarians to better meet the research needs of these scholars.

8.1 What is Narrative Inquiry?

The method to be applied in this study draws from the literature on qualitative research in general, and specifically from narrative inquiry. The approach to be used in this study has been variously named narrative analysis (Reissman, 1993), narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and narrative research (Creswell, 2013). However, Lewis (2014) contends that “often writers will use the term narrative inquiry almost synonymously with narrative analysis, however the two should not be conflated” (p. 162).

The narrative approach has been variously defined, which makes it somewhat challenging to discuss. A precise definition is especially problematic because methodologists who have written about the approach tend to describe it rather than define it. For example, in the preface to *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) wrote “our approach is not so much to tell you what narrative inquiry is by defining it but

rather to show you what it is by creating a definition contextually by recounting what narrative inquirers do” (p.xiii).

That said, Pinnegar & Daynes (2007) have provided a fairly concise definition, describing narrative research as “a study of stories or narrative or descriptions of a series of events that accounts for human experiences” (p. 4).

Two more expansive definitions enable a broader perspective. Chase (2011) wrote,

Narrative inquiry revolves around an interest in life experiences as narrated by those who live them. Narrative theorists define narrative as a distinct form of discourse: as meaning making through the shaping or ordering of experience, a way of understanding one’s own or others’ actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time (p. 421).

More recently, Lewis (2014) wrote,

The term comes draped in many meanings and is used in myriad ways across disciplines. There is no clear and easy definition that satisfies all utilizations. Broadly speaking, narrative is the everyday practice of storytelling, the teller/speaker uses the basic story structure to organize events and/or experience to bring forward what is perceived as important and significant for the teller and the audience. Narrative research, then, is the exploration of the stories humans tell to make sense of lived experience (p. 161).

With regard to method, Reissman (1993) noted that “there is no single method of narrative analysis but a spectrum of approaches to texts that take narrative form” (p. 25). Similarly, Lewis (2014) wrote, “narrative is a broad term in social science research. Narrative work can involve a number of different methods such as autobiography, auto-ethnography, narrative performance and narrative inquiry. The importance of story is the common thread running through all of these approaches” (p. 162).

8.2 Collecting Data

The approach to be used for data collection has been developed with a focus on having “the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study” (Seidman, 2006, p. 15); in this case, it is the story of the social science scholar’s own research process. Creswell (2013) suggested in the qualitative research process, “researchers keep a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research” (p. 47), and further that data should be

collected “based on open-ended questions without much structure” and without “an agenda of what I hope to find” (p. 52). It is my hope that the participants can provide answers to my research questions without having my biases or preconceptions influence what it is they choose to discuss. The use of an ethnographic approach to interviewing participants—and particularly the employment of a specific grand tour question (described below)—should support this aim.

8.3 Conducting Interviews

Data will be gathered for this study by conducting interviews with social science faculty. Interviewing is a way of finding out what others know, think, and feel about their world. In this case, the focus is on what the participants know and think about the process of conducting research, not about how they feel about it. That’s not to say that how faculty feel about conducting research (especially in relation to the tenure and promotion process) would not be a fascinating study, but that is not the topic of this thesis.

Historically, it was anthropologists and sociologists who refined qualitative interviewing techniques so that researchers engaged participants in conversations as a way to explore and understand a given topic from the point of view of those participants, rather than that of the interviewer. This study is intended to be exploratory and inductive. The focus is on how the participants see and understand their world. The phenomenon under investigation is not universal, but is based on specific practices of a small selection of social scientists.

8.4 Using a Specific Grand Tour Question

Participants will be interviewed using an ethnographic approach in which they are asked a “specific grand tour question” (Spradley, 1979/2016). With a grand tour question, one is ordinarily asked to describe a recent day, a recent series of events, or a particular locale. In this case, participants will be asked to tell the story of their most recent research project leading to publication.

The grand tour approach makes it possible for each faculty member to tell a story and describe the issues that concern them about the research process and allow them to share information that might not be uncovered by a tightly-structured questionnaire. This approach will encourage the participants to talk through a series of practices that are ordinarily hidden from observation and that are generally taken for granted by the persons engaged in the process. The use of a specific grand tour question will also allow themes that are meaningful to the faculty member being interviewed to emerge, rather than the themes I (or other librarians) might have assumed are significant. It is the participants’ stories that

will drive the study, not my own ideas of the challenges researchers face when using library services and resources.

8.5 Analyzing Data

In qualitative research, interpretation and analysis of the data can occur simultaneously; Creswell (2007) noted that “the processes of data collection, data analysis, and report writing are not distinct steps in the process—they are interrelated and often go on simultaneously in a research project” (p. 150). Similarly, Merriam and Tisdell (2009) believe that the best data analysis occurs simultaneously with data collection rather than waiting to analyze the data until the collection process is complete.

In this study, I anticipate data collection and analysis will not occur simultaneously, but (perhaps more precisely) as part of a repeating sequence throughout the data gathering process—prior to a full analysis. Each interview will be conducted, recorded, transcribed, checked for accuracy, and undergo a preliminary analysis before the next interview begins. I expect as the data are being categorized and interpreted—even in the initial phase—concepts may begin to emerge that could have an impact on my analysis of successive interviews. The process will be iterative.

9. Scope

During the planning of this project, I made a number of intentional choices to limit the scope of the study.

9.1 Delimitations

This study is limited to social science faculty who teach at a research-intensive university, which, for the purpose of this study, will be those working at one of the 131 institutions in the US classified as “Doctoral Universities: Very High Research Activity” (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education).

In order to determine what disciplines are included in the social sciences (and hence included in this study), I took direction from the 2015 *Ithaka S+R US Faculty Survey*. For their purposes, the social sciences included the following disciplines (Wolff-Eisenberg et al., 2016, p. 80):

- Anthropology (includes Archaeology)
- Business & Finance
- Economics
- Education (includes Higher Education)
- Geography
- Political Science
- Psychology

- Public Policy (includes Health Policy)
- Sociology
- Women's Studies

I will select my participants from these same disciplines so that the findings from this study can be mapped to the *Ithaca Survey*. I plan to interview social science scholars who have completed a research study that has resulted in an article published in a scholarly journal in the previous twelve months.

9.2 Number of Participants

A preliminary review of studies that have used narrative inquiry as the primary research method suggests there is little attention paid to the number of participants. Lewis (2014) wrote, "The number of participants you choose for your study will depend on the inquiry question itself and can range from a focus on the narratives of one individual or to a larger number. There is no required 'sample size', as might be required in a quantitative research approach" (p. 166). A large group of participants is unnecessary, as this study does not have generalizability of findings as a goal, but it is intended to be exploratory and descriptive. Due in part to the nature of narrative inquiry as well as the likelihood I will have multiple interviews with the each participant (which may have an impact on recruitment), only a small number of interviews will be conducted. The focus of this study will be on generating as much insight as possible from a limited number of cases about the research process, rather than collecting limited insight from many cases.

10. Significance

At the time of writing, many libraries at research-intensive universities are in the process of making significant changes affecting the provision of services and access to resources. Intensive weeding projects have been undertaken so that space currently occupied by bookstacks can be repurposed for other uses, such as the construction of innovative collaborative learning or study spaces incorporating leading-edge technologies. Other changes include a significant growth in the access to e-book collections, the mass digitization of formerly print only materials, and the development of shared off-site collection storage facilities. In recent years, libraries in many (if not most) research-intensive institutions have developed digital repositories intended to provide free access to the research produced by members of the university community. Similarly, many libraries at research-intensive universities are developing data management services units. Given this transitional climate, a study contributing to our knowledge of faculty research and publication practices could have significant implications for both the development of new services and the discontinuance of existing library services.

Beck and Manuel (2008), writing about the persuasive benefits of research, suggested that data presented through research will make a case for informed change. A well-conducted research project provides an opportunity for a researcher to gain in-depth knowledge of the subject matter; this knowledge—in turn—should lead to changes in practice (Beck & Manuel, 2008). Librarians who act in the capacity of liaisons could benefit by developing a better understanding of the research practices of faculty in the disciplines they serve in order to be able to make better decisions in relation to their liaison work. Data and knowledge gained from this research may be cumulative; in combination with other studies of faculty research and publication practices, it could lead to a more comprehensive view of the phenomena (Beck & Manuel, 2008).

11. Conclusion

An insufficient understanding of the mechanics of the faculty research process—coupled with inadequate attention to how changes driven by technology have altered the process—have made it difficult to know what it is that scholars need to support their work. Recent studies that have addressed specific aspects of the research process as well as discipline-specific studies have yielded fresh insight. However, as these findings have not been placed into a cohesive whole, it seems unlikely that these fairly specific findings will convince academic libraries to make changes that support the needs of research faculty. A more comprehensive study is needed. The research process is highly complex, and is, as noted earlier, ordinarily hidden from observation. It is a better understanding of this whole that will aid libraries and librarians in their efforts to support faculty research, and hence support the university research mission.

Equipped with a more comprehensive understanding of faculty research and publication practices—and how the needs and practices vary among social science researchers—academic librarians will be better positioned to support their research, and thus, design and deliver effective services, supply appropriate access to needed materials, hire and develop appropriate staff, and shape the development of facilities to better meet the needs of faculty.

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