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# Qualitative Research and Data Support: The Jan Brady of Social Sciences Data Services?

*Mandy Swygart-Hobaugh*

THOSE FAMILIAR WITH *The Brady Bunch* television show, which aired in the United States from 1969-1974 but lives on via syndicated reruns and streaming services, are likely also familiar with the episode in which middle daughter Jan laments the fact that her older sister always receives accolades while Jan languishes in her shadow: “Marcia, Marcia, Marcia!” she cries in despair.<sup>1</sup> In the world of social sciences, qualitative researchers are often similarly overshadowed by their quantitative colleagues, with “Statistics, Statistics, Statistics!” perhaps echoing through their heads.

The abounding literature spanning various social sciences, continents, and decades points to a continuing divide between quantitative and qualitative research.<sup>2</sup> Despite the politics that often pits quantitative researchers against qualitative ones, many social sciences researchers continue to employ qualitative research methods, as they recognize its merits for nuanced, contextualized study of social life.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, social sciences researchers trying to bridge this divide are increasingly turning to triangulated mixed methods (i.e., a combination of quantitative and qualitative data analysis) as an arguably more robust research approach when contrasted to using one method or type of data in exclusion of the other.<sup>4</sup> The National Science Foundation’s offering a specific grant for “Strengthening Qualitative Research through Methodological Innovation and Integration” and funding the recently launched Qualitative Data Repository illustrates the legitimacy of qualitative research in the United States academy.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, several established and developing European qualitative data archives such as the UK Data Service’s QualiBank, the Irish Qualitative Data Archive, and the Finnish Social Science Data Archive point to a demand for reuse of qualitative data for secondary analysis.<sup>6</sup> Social sciences graduate programs commonly require qualitative methods courses

along with those on quantitative methods, thus ensuring that qualitative research will continue to flourish in academia.

Qualitative research is and likely will remain a core methodology in the social sciences. Consequently, academic librarians providing data services in the social sciences should offer services to qualitative researchers on their campuses as well as quantitative ones. But is this the case in practice? Do social sciences librarians devote their primary attention to quantitative researchers over qualitative researchers? What qualitative data support services are social sciences librarians currently offering? And is there room for expansion of qualitative data support services provided by social sciences librarians?

The current library science literature on data support services reflects a predominantly quantitative focus. The major texts describing data services provisions in academic libraries, *Numeric Data Services and Sources for the General Reference Librarian* and *Data Basics: An Introductory Text*, focus on quantitative/numeric data services.<sup>7</sup> While several articles discuss the challenges of archiving qualitative data for long-term preservation and sharing and reuse, all of these articles are focused on European countries, with Louise Corti of the UK Data Archive, who is to be commended for her dedication to qualitative data, writing several.<sup>8</sup> Fifteen of these articles appeared in a special Fall 2010 issue of *IASSIST Quarterly (IQ)*, a publication of the International Association for Social Science Information Services & Technology (IASSIST), in which the editor noted that while “in the beginning of IASSIST data was equivalent to quantitative data,” more digital archives are beginning to recognize the value of qualitative data for secondary research, thus implying that qualitative has moved out from under the shadows of quantitative data to some degree.<sup>9</sup>

While the present literature is valuable in terms of addressing the challenges of archiving qualitative data for long-term access and reuse, it needs to be buttressed by work describing the current practices and future possibilities for academic social science librarians—particularly those in public services, subject liaison, or dedicated data services positions—to expand qualitative data support on their campuses to span the various stages of the research data lifecycle. This chapter undertakes that task by first giving an overview of the context of qualitative data and the resulting support needs of qualitative researchers at various stages of the research data lifecycle. The current state of qualitative data support services in social sciences librarianship is then explored by reporting on (1) an analysis of social sciences data librarian job postings, (2) a survey of social sciences librarians, and (3) an examination of online research guides describing qualitative data support services presently offered by social sciences librarians. Finally, this chapter concludes with recommendations for how social sciences librarians might embark on the expansion of their qualitative data support services.

## Qualitative Data and the Support Needs of Qualitative Researchers across the Research Data Lifecycle

Demarcating what constitutes qualitative data is not an easy task. Corti offers a “simple definition” of qualitative data as including “any research material that is collected from studying people ... unless it has been transformed into numerical values ... in which case it becomes quantitative.”<sup>10</sup> Corti also lists materials that are likely to first come to mind when thinking of qualitative data in the social sciences: “Such data include interviews—whether in-depth or unstructured, individual or group discussion—fieldwork diaries and observation notes, structured and unstructured diaries, personal documents, or photographs.”<sup>11</sup> The list grows longer when consulting the 2014 *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, which in addition to Corti’s items adds news media, visual and audiovisual representations (still images, video, film/movies), sounds, and virtual/cyberspace data.<sup>12</sup> Denzin and Lincoln offer an “initial, generic definition” that melds both what materials might constitute qualitative *data* as well as the question of what does it mean to *do qualitative research*:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations... At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case study; personal experience; introspection; life story; interview; artifacts; cultural text and productions; observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts—that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives.<sup>13</sup>

Drawing from these definitions, *any* material becomes qualitative data if researchers choose to analyze it as such—using their chosen analytical framework, they interpret and extrapolate nuanced, contextualized meaning from materials to better understand and describe social phenomenon in non-quantified ways.

Given these amorphous definitions of what constitutes qualitative data, delineating distinct, standardized support needs for qualitative researchers across the different stages of the research data lifecycle proves challenging. Using Corti, Van

den Eynden, Bishop, and Woolard's overview of "typical activities undertaken in the research data lifecycle" as a foundation, what follows are proposed qualitative data support services that most readily lend themselves to social sciences librarians' knowledge and expertise.<sup>14</sup>

### *Discovery and Planning*

At this stage of the research data lifecycle, social sciences librarians can support qualitative researchers by collecting and helping them find secondary resources for designing qualitative research studies and collecting original qualitative data. Similarly, librarians can provide instruction to researchers on how to find existing archived qualitative data for secondary analysis (e.g., data from the UK Data Archive's QualiBank, the Qualitative Data Repository at Syracuse University, or other repositories collecting qualitative data), point researchers to library print or digital collections and databases that contain materials for potential qualitative analysis (e.g., special collections, oral histories, newspaper databases, legislation and policy collections, etc.), and assist them in finding and collecting other digital, audiovisual, or print materials for qualitative analysis. In the realm of data management planning, librarians can consult qualitative researchers regarding best practices for documenting their research process (e.g., the parameters for the accession or collection of their data, their coding scheme development,<sup>15</sup> the iterations of their analysis process, developing and generating memos/reports/outputs from qualitative research software programs) to provide the necessary context for reuse of their data for secondary analysis by other researchers but also to gather evidence to strengthen the validity of their own findings.<sup>16</sup>

### *Data Collection*

While traditionally librarians do not have a large role in the data collection stage of the research data lifecycle, there are possibilities for providing support services in this area. For example, librarians can collect or help qualitative researchers find secondary resources for data collection methods and refer them to resources for data collection (e.g., available online survey programs for collecting open-ended qualitative data). Likewise, in addition to consulting qualitative researchers regarding best practices for documenting their research process, librarians can consult on creating keyword/subject term metadata, guided by Data Documentation Initiative (DDI) standards for qualitative data documentation, to facilitate discovery of the data should it be archived for reuse by other researchers.<sup>17</sup>

## *Data Processing and Analysis*

As with data collection, librarians traditionally have not played a large role in the data analysis stage of the research data lifecycle. However, there is potential for librarians to expand their roles in this area. For instance, librarians can pool resources for available transcription services on campus or in the community as well as available transcription software. Librarians with training in using qualitative data analysis softwares (e.g., NVivo, Atlas.ti, Dedoose, etc.) or digitization of textual and visual materials can provide instruction on data entry and digitization of qualitative materials to facilitate ease of analysis. Likewise, librarians with training in qualitative data analysis software can provide training on using it for data analysis and producing research outputs, reports, and visualizations to facilitate interpretation of the data. Similarly, librarians can collect or help qualitative researchers find secondary resources for best practices in data entry, transcription, digitization of qualitative data, and analyzing and interpreting qualitative data. Librarians can assist researchers in finding qualitative research publications that can serve as examples for them to model when writing their methods and findings. If researchers are using secondary sources for analysis, librarians can aid them in properly attributing the origin of the qualitative data used in their research study.

## *Publishing and Sharing*

At this stage of the research data lifecycle, librarians can help researchers identify the best archive or repository in which to deposit their qualitative data and work with them to prepare the data and documentation for deposit to optimize reusability and discoverability, using DDI standards for qualitative data documentation. As qualitative researchers typically do not see the value of their data for reuse by others, librarians can explain to their campus researchers why depositing their qualitative data not only benefits other researchers but also themselves, as reuse demonstrates their own scholarly impact. Moreover, librarians can promote the qualitative data generated by their campus researchers by distributing announcements via listservs, blogs, and social media that encourage others to reuse the data for secondary analysis and for teaching qualitative data analysis.

## *Long-Term Management*

Librarians can consult researchers regarding what file formats they should save or convert their qualitative data to for optimal long-term accessibility. Librarians can also act as mediators between the researchers and the campus information technology units to ensure the backing up and long-term storing of their data. Additionally, libraries with institutional data repositories can store the researchers' data for open-access in perpetuity.

## *Reusing Data*

In this final stage of the research data lifecycle, librarians can promote to faculty and particularly to graduate researchers the merits of secondary analysis of qualitative data (e.g., less costly and less time consuming than collecting own data, applying new perspective to data can produce unique insights).<sup>18</sup> Librarians can help faculty teaching qualitative research methods to find existing qualitative data for teaching students about the kinds of qualitative data that are relevant to their disciplines or for analysis exercises. Librarians with training in qualitative data analysis software can train students on the logistics of coding for their analysis exercises.

As the above examples illustrate, many of the potential support activities for qualitative researchers are similar to those for quantitative researchers. Because many social science librarians are increasingly being tasked with inserting themselves into the various stages of the research data lifecycle to support quantitative researchers, so too is there potential for support across these stages for qualitative researchers. Gauging from the research literature and sessions at conferences addressing social sciences data support, social sciences librarians continue to focus primarily on quantitative data support.<sup>19</sup> But is this definitely the case in practice?

## Current Qualitative Data Support Practices amongst Social Sciences Librarians

This section presents exploratory findings from (1) an analysis of social sciences data librarian job postings, (2) a survey of social sciences librarians, and (3) an examination of online research guides describing qualitative data support services presently offered by social sciences librarians. It concludes with a summary of answers to two questions:

- Do social sciences librarians devote their primary attention to quantitative researchers over qualitative researchers?
- What qualitative data support services are social sciences librarians currently offering?

### *IASSIST Job Postings Analysis*

Content analysis of library job postings is a common methodological approach for assessing characteristics of the library profession.<sup>20</sup> This exploration of qualitative data support expectations in job postings focused on postings from the IASSIST job repository. IASSIST is an “international organization of professionals working with information technology and data services to support research and teaching in the social sciences” and a key professional organization for social sciences li-

brarians tasked with data services support on academic campuses.<sup>21</sup> The IASSIST job postings repository compiles job descriptions posted to the IASSIST members' email listserv (iasst-l) from 2005 to the present and thus provides a logical collection for exploratory analyses.<sup>22</sup> The initial data collection included all the job postings from the years 2005–2014 for a total of 270 job postings; those that were not academic library positions (e.g., government and non-profit positions, academic researcher positions or other academic positions outside of the library, etc.) were then excluded, resulting in a dataset of 148 academic library job postings.

The following information was compiled from the job postings with corresponding fields: Job Title, Posting Year, Required Skills, Preferred Skills, and Job Description. The dataset was imported into NVivo qualitative data analysis software. NVivo was used to analyze the textual data by using word frequency queries and text search queries to mine the textual data for patterns; the qualitative-focused postings were also read and coded at themes (or NVivo “nodes”). The methodological approach of using word frequency and targeted text searching drew in part from Xia and Wang's text mining research method used to explore the competencies and responsibilities of social science data librarians in IASSIST job postings from 2005–2012.<sup>23</sup>

A word-frequency query of the text fields (Job Title, Required Skills, Preferred Skills, and Job Description) was used to count the top 200 words grouped by stemmed endings (e.g., the count for “statistics” included the counts for “statistic,” “statistical,” etc.). Not surprisingly, the top five most frequently occurring stemmed word groupings in descending order were variations of “data” (1641 counts), “library” (1023 counts), “research” (1023 counts), “services” (960 counts), and “managing” (580 counts).<sup>†</sup> No qualitative terms or qualitative software (e.g., qualitative, NVivo, Atlas.ti, etc.) made it to the top 200 most frequent words list. However, the following quantitative terms and statistical software appeared: “statistics/statistical” (127 counts, 58<sup>th</sup> rank); “numeric/numerical” (102 counts, 76<sup>th</sup> rank); “quantitative” (62 counts, 147<sup>th</sup> rank); and “SPSS” (47 counts, 186<sup>th</sup> rank).

Targeted text search queries across the text fields of Job Title, Job Description, Required Skills, and Preferred Skills were used to explore the explicit mentions of qualitative and quantitative expectations in the job postings. The NVivo text search query feature allows for use of Boolean search strategies to find instances of terms in textual data. The following searches were coded into thematic nodes (see Table 11.1): (1) *Qualitative*—postings including qualitative terms, common qualitative data analysis software (NVivo, Atlas.ti, QDAMiner, Dedoose, MAXQDA), and/or abbreviations commonly used to indicate computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) or qualitative data analysis (QDA); and (2)

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† While the context of the frequent occurrences of variations of the word “managing” was not investigated, it is likely that this frequent appearance reflects the increasing expectations of data management amongst data librarian positions, as was found by Xia and Wang when analyzing the IASSIST job postings from 2005-2012.



*Quantitative*—postings including quantitative terms and/or common quantitative analysis software (SPSS, SAS, Stata, R).

| <b>Table 11.1.</b> Text Search Queries and Corresponding Coded Theme Nodes for Quantitative/Qualitative Terms in Job Postings |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Coded Theme Nodes:</b>   | <b>Text Search Queries (Boolean Logic):</b>   |
| <b>Qualitative</b>  | qualitative OR CAQDA* OR QDA OR NVivo OR QDAMiner OR “QDA Miner” OR MAXQDA OR Dedoose OR Atlas.ti OR “Atlas ti” |
| <b>Quantitative</b>   | quantitative OR statistic* OR numeric* OR SPSS OR SAS OR Stata OR “R”   |

After these text search query results were coded as either *qualitative* or *quantitative*, the number of job postings that mentioned qualitative expectations and those mentioning quantitative were tallied. Of the 148 postings, 83 (56.1%) explicitly mentioned quantitative expectations while only 22 (14.9%) mentioned qualitative expectations, and all of the 22 postings mentioning qualitative also mentioned quantitative expectations. The remaining 65 (43.9%) postings did not explicitly mention either qualitative or quantitative expectations.

As a measure of the nature of qualitative data support expectations within the 22 postings, job postings containing qualitative terms were coded based on the different types of expectations using themes informed by Xia and Wang’s synthesized research data lifecycle model of data support services types.<sup>24</sup> The following groupings were created for the 22 postings:

- *Data Analysis*—Fifteen (68.2%) listed desired experience and/or expectations of supporting qualitative data analysis, frequently referring specifically to qualitative data analysis software support and to NVivo and Atlas.ti software most often.
- *Data Discovery*—Seven (31.8%) mentioned data discovery activities.
- *Data Sharing/Preservation/Management*—Six (27.3%) listed expectations for facilitating the collecting, managing, and archiving of qualitative data produced by the academic institution’s researchers for long-term preservation and reuse by other researchers.

### *Survey of Qualitative Data Support Practices*

An online survey of social sciences librarians further explored the current state of qualitative data support in comparison to that for quantitative. The survey asked respondents about (1) expectations regarding their supporting researchers’ qualitative and quantitative data needs; (2) the types and frequency of quantitative and qualitative data support they provide; and (3) their thoughts regarding the relevance of qualitative as compared to quantitative data for the future of data support

services. An invitation to participate in the survey was distributed via eight email listservs targeting academic librarians and social science data services professionals.<sup>†</sup> The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS and Excel analysis software, and the qualitative data again using NVivo qualitative data analysis software.

One hundred and twelve participants completed the survey (see Table 11.2 for the breakdown of participants by job type). Ninety-nine (88.4%) of the participants worked in the United States, eight (7.1%) in Canada, and five (4.5%) in Europe. Sixty-eight (60.7%) reported working in doctoral-granting universities, 23 (20.5%) in master's colleges or universities, fifteen (13.4%) in baccalaureate colleges, two (1.8%) in associate colleges, one (0.9%) in a special focus institution, with the remaining three (2.7%) either not reporting or reporting "not sure" regarding their institution's analogous Carnegie classification.<sup>25</sup>

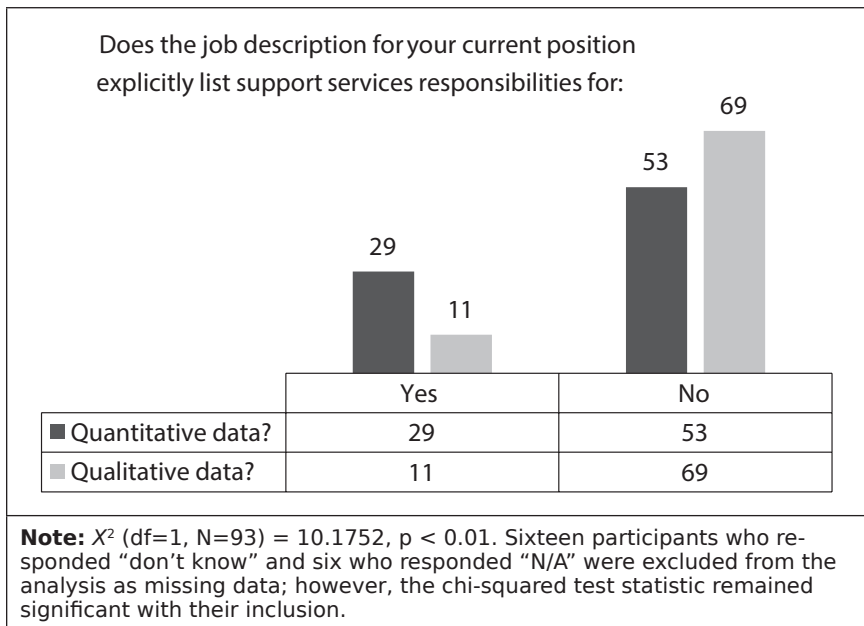
| <b>TOTAL PARTICIPANTS:</b>   | <b>112</b> |
|--|------------|
| <b>Social Sciences Librarians</b>  |            |
| Data Services Librarians with responsibilities to the social sciences                | 23         |
| Social Sciences Librarians with explicitly defined data services responsibilities    | 10         |
| Social Sciences Librarians without explicitly defined data services responsibilities | 60         |
| Subtotal:  | 93         |
| <b>Other Participants</b>  |            |
| Non-librarians with data services responsibilities to the social sciences            | 11         |
| Others (7 non-social sciences academic librarians, 1 PhD Student)                    | 8          |
| Subtotal:  | 19         |

The analysis of the closed-ended questions regarding expectations and type or frequency of data support includes only the 93 participants who indicated that they were social sciences librarians, as the primary aim was to gauge the current data support practices amongst specifically social sciences librarians. The analysis of the participants' open-ended thoughts regarding the quantitative/qualitative divide includes comments by all 112 survey participants, to provide a broader perspective.

<sup>†</sup> Email listservs: IASSIST (iasst-l); Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) Anthropology & Sociology Section (anss-l); ACRL Information Literacy Instruction Discussion (ili-l); ACRL University Libraries Section (uls-l); ACRL Women and Gender Studies Section (wgss-l); American Library Association (ALA) Library and Information Technology Association (lita-l); ALA Reference and User Services Association (rusa-l); and Northern Arizona University's Business Information (buslib-l).

The survey asked participants to report on expectations of supporting qualitative and quantitative data as denoted in their job description for their current position (see Figure 11.1). The majority reported not having explicit expectations for either quantitative or qualitative data support; however, more participants reported expectations for quantitative data support than for qualitative. To examine whether there was a statistically-significant relationship between the type of data services responsibilities (quantitative or qualitative) and its being listed in the participants' job description, a chi-square test of independence was performed using the data displayed in Figure 11.1. A significant relationship<sup>†</sup> was found, indicating that participants were significantly more likely to report expectations for quantitative data support than for qualitative in their current job description.

**Figure 11.1.** Data Support Services Expectations in Job Description



The survey also asked participants to report the frequency in a typical semester of consultations and/or instruction sessions related to seven distinct types of data support activities for both quantitative and qualitative data:<sup>‡</sup>

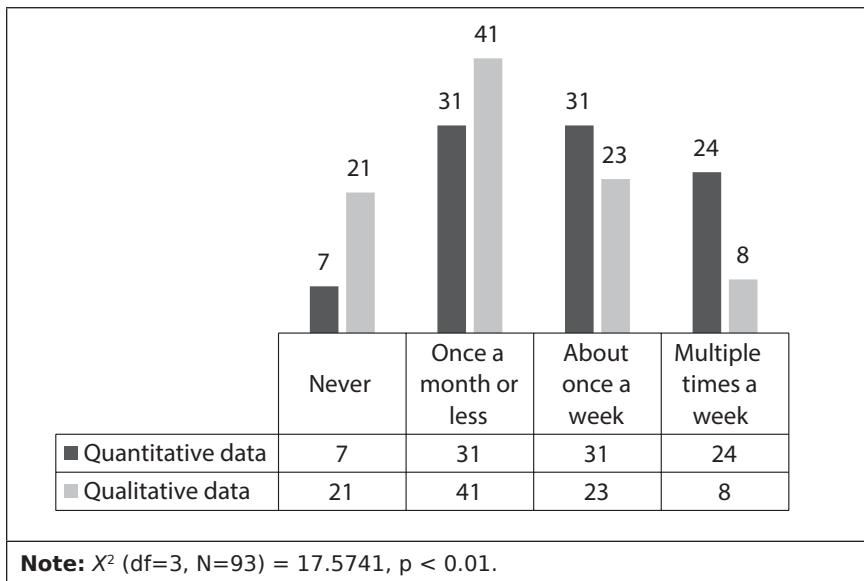
<sup>†</sup> Chi-square value of 10.1752 is significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level for 93 observations and 1 degree of freedom.

<sup>‡</sup> The construction of the above data support activity types was informed by Geraci, Humphrey, and Jacobs's “levels of [data] reference service,” Xia and Wang's synthesized data lifecycle model, the UK Data Archives “research data lifecycle,” and the author's experiences of providing data services support.

- Finding existing data sources
- Software training for analyzing data
- Constructing and/or understanding data files
- Visualizing data
- Collecting new/original data
- Analyzing data
- Data management, sharing, and/or curation of data

Figures 11.2–11.8 reflect the participants’ reported frequency of the seven data support activities. The overwhelming majority of participants reported engaging in finding existing data sources for both quantitative and qualitative data (see Figure 11.2) as compared to all the other types of data support activities (see Figures 11.3 through 11.8), echoing Xia and Wang’s findings that “social sciences data professionals are still performing traditional primary services in the stages of data discovery.”<sup>26</sup> A chi-square test of independence examined whether there was a statistically-significant relationship between the type of data (quantitative or qualitative) and participants’ reported frequency in providing consultations/instruction on finding existing data sources (see Figure 11.2). There was a significant relationship,<sup>§</sup> suggesting that participants were more likely to report providing support for finding existing quantitative data sources than for qualitative.

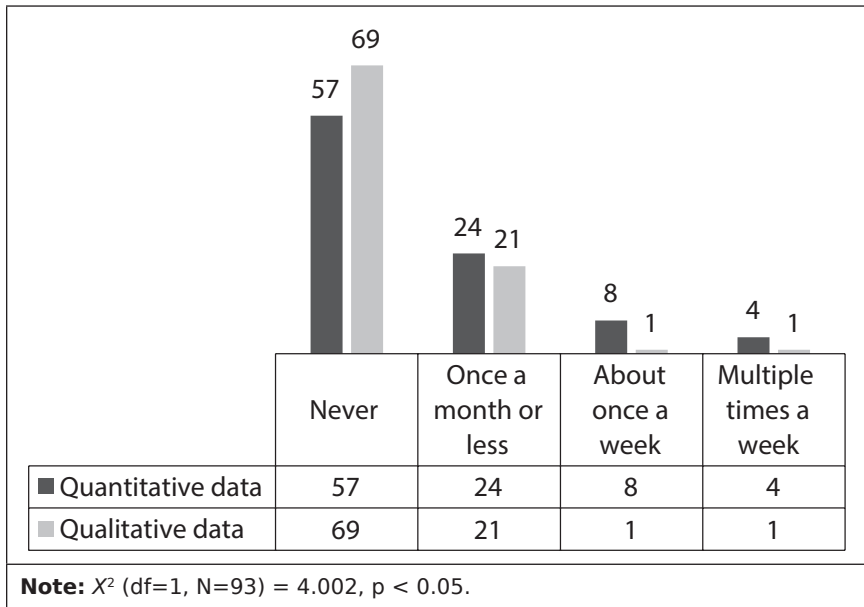
**Figure 11.2.** Frequency of Consultations/Instruction on Finding Existing Quantitative and Qualitative Data Sources



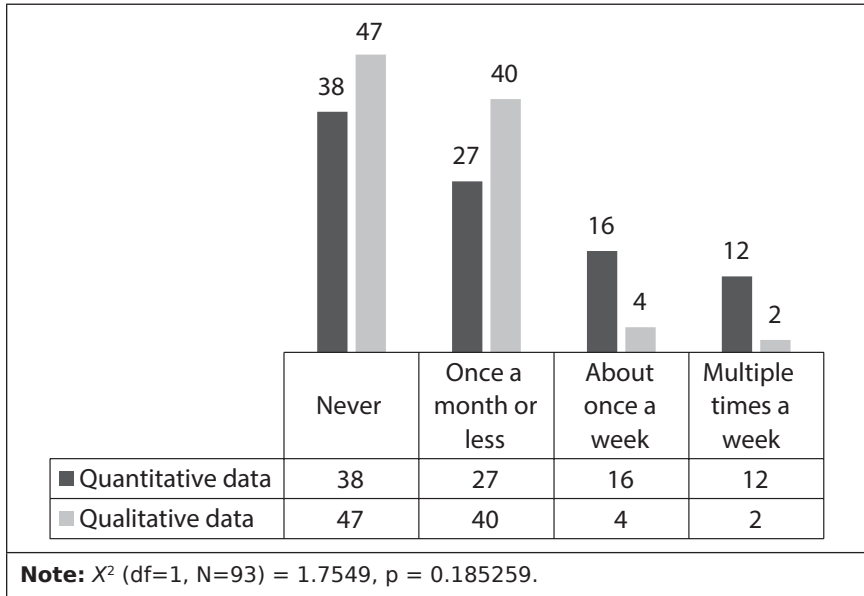
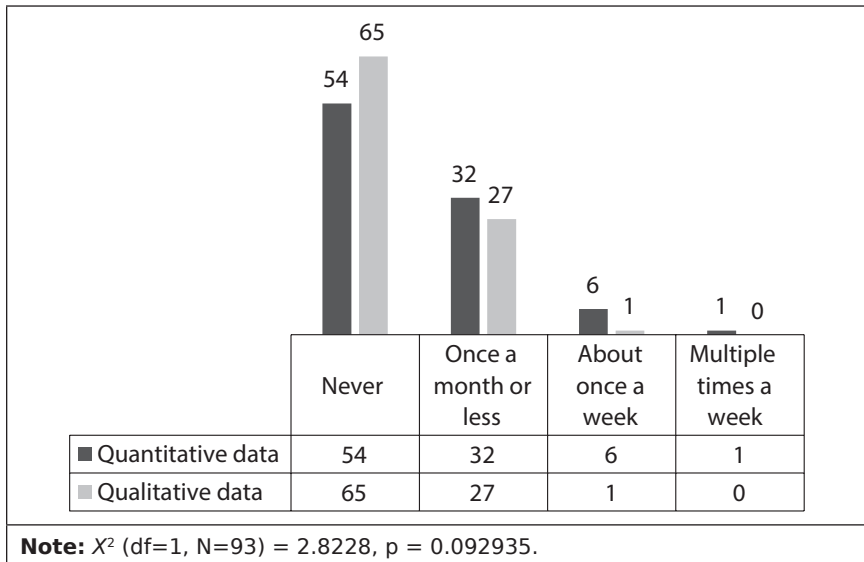
§ Chi-square value of 17.5741 is significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level for 93 observations and 3 degrees of freedom.

To examine whether there was a statistically-significant relationship between the type of data (quantitative or qualitative) and participants’ reported frequency in providing consultations/ or instruction for the remaining data support activities (see Figures 11.3–11.8), the data were collapsed for “once a month or less,” “about once a week,” and “multiple times a week” into one category of “provided support” to perform chi-square tests of independence comparing that collapsed data category with the “never [provided support]” data category.<sup>27</sup> For the software training data support activity, there was a significant relationship,<sup>†</sup> suggesting that participants were more likely to provide support for software training for analyzing quantitative data than for qualitative (see Figure 11.3). No significant relationships were found for the remaining data support activities (see Figures 11.4–11.8 for the chi-square statistics and p values), suggesting there was no significant difference between participants’ providing these data support activities by type of data (quantitative or qualitative).

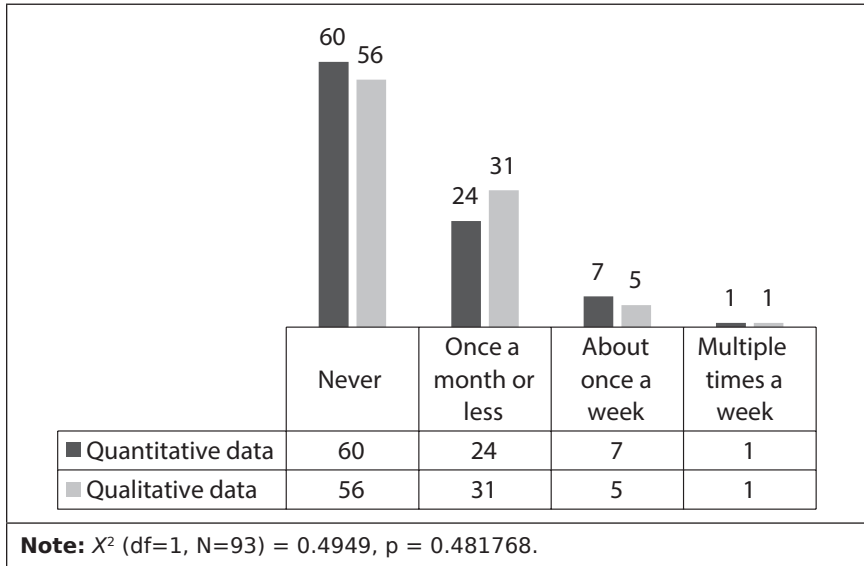
**Figure 11.3.** Frequency of Consultations/Instruction on Software Training for Analyzing Quantitative and Qualitative Data



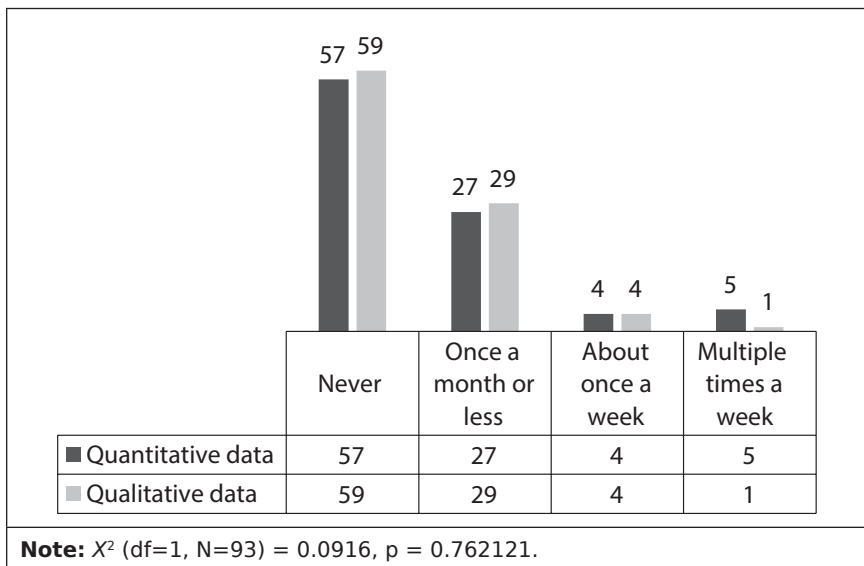
† Chi-square value of 4.002 is significant at the p < 0.05 level for 93 observations and 1 degree of freedom.

**Figure 11.4.** Frequency of Consultations/Instruction on Constructing and/or Understanding Quantitative and Qualitative Data Files**Figure 11.5.** Frequency of Consultations/Instruction on Visualizing Quantitative and Qualitative Data

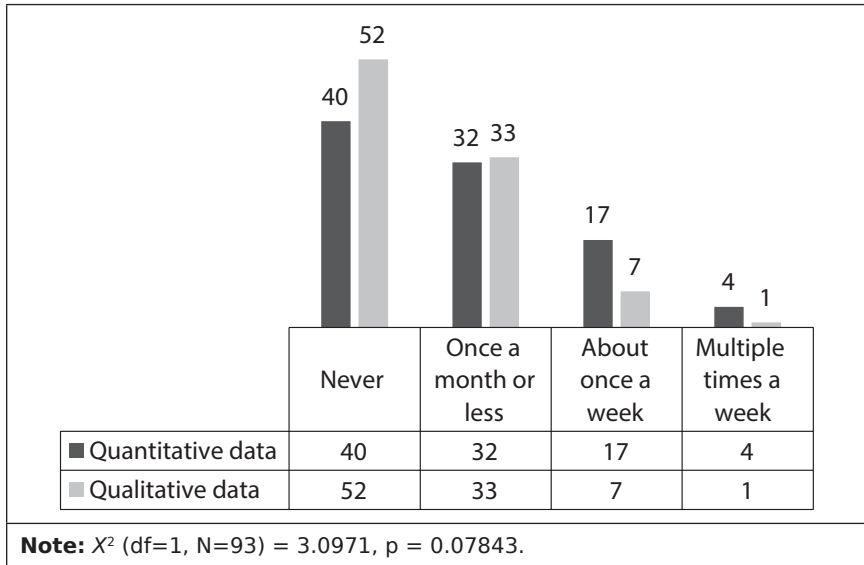
**Figure 11.6.** Frequency of Consultations/Instruction on Collecting New/Original Quantitative and Qualitative Data



**Figure 11.7.** Frequency of Consultations/Instruction on Analyzing Quantitative and Qualitative Data



**Figure 11.8.** Frequency of Consultations/Instruction on Data Management, Sharing, and/or Curation of Quantitative and Qualitative Data



Among the 112 participants' open-ended thoughts<sup>†</sup> regarding the quantitative/qualitative divide, almost all unequivocally stated that supporting both quantitative and qualitative data was important. A recurring theme was that data support services should be guided by the local needs of the institution's researchers, and thus the primary focus for data support should be either quantitative or qualitative, depending on the predominant need. Many of the respondents openly acknowledged that quantitative data probably gets more attention at present, some again indicating that this often reflected the specific needs of an institution. Some alluded to a uniqueness of qualitative data that did not lend itself to or posed specific challenges to traditional roles of data support, as the following excerpts exemplify:

One of the big problems, of course, is the wide divergence in types of qualitative "data" as well as the methodologies used for analyzing them.

Quantitative data has historically been better supported, with systems in place for data collection, analysis, and now sharing,

<sup>†</sup> Respondents reviewed this material and gave consent to include their excerpted answers.



curating, and preserving. Support for qualitative data is not as well developed, largely because it is much more heterogeneous, and setting up systems to de-identify and share it is a difficult task.

My impression is that qualitative research is often less dependent on technology/software than quantitative research, therefore I see less demand for assistance. Further, the use of secondary data/data in archives is more highly developed in quantitative methods, therefore fits in better with the librarian role of providing access to resources, while qualitative data [are] typically not available for secondary analysis, more dependent on researchers to collect their own data, and consequently the librarian is less relevant in a reference/access to data role.

The last excerpt above is particularly revealing of the prevailing assumptions about qualitative data and the presumed support needs of qualitative researchers that advocates are attempting to challenge. Operating under these assumptions, the respondent sees a limited role for librarians to play in supporting qualitative researchers' data needs across the research data lifecycle, while the earlier discussion in this chapter demonstrates a wide array of possible qualitative data support activities.

A few participants' responses reveal a sense that support for quantitative data does indeed hold a "privileged" status and that qualitative data "often gets the short shrift" in comparison, as these excerpts illustrate:

Right now it seems like quantitative services are privileged and I would like to see that change.

Given that my institution ...was established with the conviction that qualitative research often gets the short shrift in the social sciences in terms of explicit methodological and data management training (even though they are the most widely used type of data on their own, not to mention as the underlying information for all quantitative data), I believe that supporting qualitative research is of utmost importance.

Traditional qualitative data projects (such as doing a lot of interviews and reporting on the results) are not valued in many departments, so it's easier to get broader support for quant [*sic*] support/analysis positions.

We have a high demand for both in our social sciences areas but because the STEM [science, technology, engineering, and

math] areas are better funded and focus on the quantitative side we have more software and infrastructure to support quantitative.

Some participants pointed to an anticipated upswing in the need to support qualitative data services as mixed-methods and qualitative research increases on their campuses. A handful of respondents pointed to the increasing digitization of qualitative sources and thus the ability to *quantify* this data for statistical analysis as the impetus for increasing demand for “qualitative” data support services.

Several respondents pointed to the possibility for librarians, given the proper training and provided with the needed resources and infrastructure, to seize the opportunity to fill this dearth of support for qualitative research on campuses and thereby create a particular “niche” for themselves. These excerpts give examples of how this could happen or already is happening in some libraries:

We do have a Data Centre which has always dealt with helping researchers with quantitative data, and they wanted nothing to do with supporting the qualitative tools, so that is why we (Reference dept.) took it on. Our demand has grown to the point where we are going to shortly have 4 people able to offer support.

Hugely important and relevant and, I think, largely unfulfilled. I've seen a lot of people doing this type of work without tools, and that's a big place where libraries/IT groups can have an impact.

Qualitative researchers need just as much if not more support than quantitative researchers. I say this because both undergrad [*sic*] and grad [*sic*] students are being taught qualitative research methods by older faculty who may not be as familiar with and/or actively using various qualitative data software/tools such as NVivo, Atlas.ti, Dedoose, etc. There are also amazing visualization capabilities now available to qualitative researchers, including ArcGIS and other mapping applications. These researchers, who may not be as technologically savvy as quantitative researchers (although this is a gross and perhaps mistaken generalization) may need an introduction to these tools as well as training on how to use them. Moreover, data management is just as important for qualitative researchers, many of whom may not think of their research products as “data” and therefore requiring management and/or planning.

As the above excerpts illustrate, these respondents saw the most potential for librarian-provided support services in the area of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) with one respondent indicating success in filling this gap in support on campus.

## *Online Research Guides Describing Qualitative Data Services*

Online research guides can be examined as virtual indicators of what types of services/resources librarians are offering.<sup>28</sup> Thus, to further explore the current practices of qualitative data support amongst social sciences librarians, online research guides focused on social science researchers' qualitative data needs were examined.<sup>†</sup> Two methods were used to identify guides: (1) a keyword search for "qualitative" in Springshare's *LibGuides Community* database, limiting to academic institutions; and (2) a Google search as follows: qualitative librar\* data OR analysis OR method\* OR research site:.edu.<sup>29</sup> After reviewing results from these searches, 53 relevant guides were collected in a Zotero library to then use the Zotero "tags" feature to tag the guides with the types of qualitative data support activities demonstrated.<sup>‡</sup> The constructed tags were guided in part by the activities and resulting support needs described earlier in this chapter, but new tags emerged from the review of the research guides when warranted.

Of the 53 total guides, eighteen (34.0%) were general qualitative research guides with no discipline specified, fifteen (28.3%) were created for specific qualitative methods courses, eleven (20.7%) were dedicated computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) guides, eight (15.1%) explicitly targeted individual or multiple disciplines, and one (1.9%) was a data management guide with recommendations on managing/sharing qualitative as well as quantitative data.<sup>§</sup> Within the guides targeting specific qualitative methods courses or specific disciplines, the following social science disciplines appeared, listed in descending order of frequency of occurrence: sociology (8); education (7); psychology (4); political science (4); anthropology (3); communications (2); public health (2); social work (1); and criminal justice (1).

Gauging from the types of support activities represented, graduate student and other novice qualitative researchers were the primary target audience of the reviewed guides. Several guides integrated some teaching of concepts related to qualitative research: thirteen (24.5%) provided some basic definition of what con-

† Because survey participation predominantly originated from the United States, the online research guide sample was limited to U.S. institutions.

‡ Zotero (<https://www.zotero.org/>) is an open-source reference management system.

§ See the accompanying web site (<https://databrarianship.wordpress.com/>) for the list of guides.

stituted qualitative research; six (11.3%) contrasted qualitative with quantitative research; and two (3.8%) discussed the typical structure of a qualitative research article. The most popular activity, demonstrated in 33 (62.3%) guides, was linking to secondary resources for qualitative researchers to consult for designing their research and analyzing their data; this manifested often as links to catalog records for print and electronic books, qualitative-focused journals, websites, or video tutorials. Similarly, fifteen (28.3%) guides provided strategies on keyword/subject searching, Library of Congress call number classification searching/browsing, and/or using database search limiters to hone in on books or articles using qualitative research methodologies. While linking to or providing strategies for identifying secondary resources for consultation regarding research design/methods and analysis were common, pointing to existing data source materials for original qualitative analysis was comparably sparse: seven (13.2%) guides linked to newspaper databases, four (7.6%) provided links for film and/or television sources, four (7.6%) provided links to print or digital archives for primary historical sources, three (5.7%) linked to policy, legislation, or government sources, and only three (5.7%) of the guides linked to data repositories. Among the eleven dedicated computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) guides, five (45.5% of 11) indicated that librarians were available for consultations or training workshops on the software, while the remaining six (54.5% of 11) did not explicitly indicate as such. Similarly, among the eight guides that were not CAQDAS-dedicated but did contain links to information or training resources for CAQDAS, only one (12.5% of 8) indicated that consultations and training workshops were available, while the remaining seven (87.5% of 8) did not specify as such.

### *Summary of Findings*

Do social sciences librarians devote their primary attention to quantitative researchers over qualitative researchers? The findings suggest an affirmative answer to this question. The majority (56.1%) of the IASSIST job postings identified expectations for quantitative data support while only 14.9% of the postings mentioned qualitative data support. The survey participants' job descriptions were more likely to include support expectations for quantitative data over qualitative, and the participants were more likely to report that they provided support for finding existing quantitative data sources and for quantitative analysis software training. Why does this predominance of quantitative data support over qualitative persist? A handful of survey participants alluded to quantitative research's "privileged" status on campuses and described qualitative research as "not valued" and possibly "get[ting] the short shrift." Some participants also commented that providing qualitative researchers with traditional support services—namely, assisting with data discovery—was comparatively difficult due to the heterogeneity/diversity of qualitative data and methods and the presumed

lack of availability of secondary data sources. However, several survey participants emphasized that while supporting all researchers was important, the individual institution's needs should drive data support services. For example, if the institution is dominated by qualitative researchers, data support efforts should primarily be focused there.

What qualitative data support services are social sciences librarians currently offering? The findings do not provide a clear-cut answer to this question and sometimes contradict each other. For example, 68.2% of the 22 IASSIST postings mentioning qualitative data listed support of computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) as an expectation. But both the survey results and the online research guides suggest that very few librarians are offering CAQDAS support. As another contradictory example, only 31.8% of the 22 IASSIST postings mentioning qualitative data listed data discovery support expectations, and few online research guides linked to resources for finding existing qualitative data or materials for original data analysis. Yet 77.4% of the survey participants reported providing support on finding existing qualitative data sources, which seems to contradict the other findings. However, it is possible that survey participants interpreted this question to include activities such as helping researchers find secondary resources to consult for qualitative research design and analysis. With this alternative interpretation, 77.4% of survey participants reporting this type of support activity is then echoed by 62.3% of the online research guides providing secondary sources on qualitative research design and analysis.

## Qualitative Data Support— Recommendations for an Expanding Future

Based on these exploratory findings, it appears there is room for expansion of qualitative data support services provided by social sciences librarians. Many of the potential qualitative data support activities across the research data lifecycle discussed earlier in this chapter were not represented in the job postings, survey responses, or online research guides. Therefore, below are some recommendations for key areas in which social sciences librarians might expand their qualitative data support services, drawing from these exploratory findings as well as examples from the author's institution, Georgia State University Library.

### *Qualitative Data Analysis*

There is great potential for social sciences librarians to expand their qualitative data support activities to include support for computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). For example, Georgia State University Library's

NVivo support librarian offers a twice-monthly NVivo workshop series as well as custom workshops for qualitative methods classes across the social sciences, provides one-on-one consultations to graduate and faculty researchers, and maintains an online guide that pools various NVivo help resources and FAQs.<sup>30</sup> In the year 2014, 65 (approximately 74%) of the NVivo support librarian's 88 data services consultations involved NVivo support, thus illustrating that it has become a core part of her data services support activities.

### *Qualitative Data Discovery*

Providing instruction sessions, consultations, and online research guides directing researchers to archived qualitative data for secondary analysis as well as to print and digital resources for potential qualitative analysis is a definite growth area for support. Graduate students are a key target group for these services, as they are often in a position of having little time or funds to invest in collecting original qualitative data in the form of in-depth interviews and ethnographies and thus are searching for alternatives. For example, when the Sociology Librarian meets with the new graduate students each fall in the proseminar course, she introduces them to potential materials for qualitative analysis for their theses and dissertations, including qualitative data archives, relevant Special Collections archives, and library print, audiovisual, and digital collections and databases.<sup>31</sup>

### *Qualitative Data for Teaching and Learning*

Social sciences librarians can provide support for teaching and learning qualitative methods in a variety of ways. As was illustrated in several of the online research guides, social sciences librarians can help students find secondary resources to aid their learning about qualitative methodologies. Likewise, social sciences librarians can assist faculty who are seeking existing qualitative data for source materials to teach students about relevant qualitative data and analysis methods in their disciplines. For example, Walter Giesbrecht, a Data Librarian at York University in Toronto, received such a request from a criminology professor teaching a qualitative methods course: the professor wanted to introduce his students to interview transcripts and other material typical of the kind of qualitative research criminologists might perform.<sup>†</sup> Similarly, a public health professor teaching qualitative methods asked that the Georgia State University Library's NVivo support librarian find qualitative data relevant to public health issues for her students to use for an NVivo coding exercise.

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† Walter Giesbrecht, e-mail message to iasst-l listserv, February 3, 2015.

## *Qualitative Data Management and Sharing*

One survey respondent astutely reflected that “data management is just as important for qualitative researchers, many of whom may not think of their research products as ‘data’ and therefore requiring management and/or planning.” Social sciences librarians could play an important role in promoting awareness to qualitative researchers of the importance of managing their data for potential reuse as well as for buttressing their own findings with thorough documentation of their research process. Just as many social sciences librarians are providing data management support to quantitative researchers in terms of assisting in creating metadata and data documentation for ease of sharing and discoverability and are recommending archives/repositories and file formats for long-term preservation, they should also be ready to offer these services for qualitative researchers. The Georgia State University Library’s Data Management Advisory Team has been approached several times by researchers writing data management plans that involve qualitative data and, as a result, has compiled resources on an online research guide to address archiving qualitative data.<sup>32</sup>

## Conclusion

Is qualitative research support the Jan Brady of social sciences data services? Drawing from the review of the literature and the presented exploratory analyses, at present it very well may be. Before enthusiastically embarking on expanding qualitative data support services to bring it out of the shadows, an environmental scan exploring the following questions will help to gauge if there is, in fact, a *need* for such services:

- Do campus social sciences departments/programs offer qualitative research methods courses?
- Are faculty and graduate researchers engaging in qualitative research?
- Are those qualitative researchers inclined to (or required to) deposit their data in repositories for reuse?
- Is qualitative data analysis software available to researchers on campus, and, if so, is no one providing training/support for those using it?

If the answers to the above questions are affirmative, it likely is safe to conclude that there is a need for qualitative data support services on a campus. Furthermore, as one participant in the survey described, when much of the campus is invested in supporting quantitative researchers, social sciences librarians might carve a successful niche for themselves in serving the qualitative researchers that are perhaps being neglected. And, just as her mom advised Jan Brady to “find out what you do best, and then do your best with it,” perhaps qualitative research support is a particular place for social sciences librarians to shine.<sup>33†</sup>

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† The author would like to thank Jingfeng Xia and Minglu Wang for sharing their 2005-2012 IASSIST job postings dataset.

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